

# Lessons from implementing community-based primary prevention

AN EVALUATION OF WHITE RIBBON AUSTRALIA'S  
"ENGAGING COMMUNITIES IN SEXUAL VIOLENCE  
PRIMARY PREVENTION" PROJECT: KEY FINDINGS

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*to Reduce Violence against Women & their Children*

## Purpose

The purpose of this document is to share the knowledge generated from ANROWS's evaluation of White Ribbon Australia's "Engaging communities in sexual violence primary prevention" project. This summary of key findings highlights lessons from the evaluation that can be used by organisations and prevention practitioners who are funding, designing or delivering community-based primary prevention initiatives.

## The White Ribbon Australia project

**Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence against Women in Australia** recognises "community mobilisation and strengthening" as one of five key techniques for delivering primary prevention interventions (Our Watch, 2021). The role of primary prevention is to address the underlying drivers of violence against women (VAW) by changing the social norms and practices, power structures and imbalances that give rise to and normalise violence, as well as reforming the institutions and systems that excuse or justify violence (Our Watch, 2021).

Under the *Fourth Action Plan (2019–2022)* to the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, the Australian Government provided funding to White Ribbon Australia (White Ribbon) to deliver the "Engaging communities in sexual violence primary prevention" project (Council of Australian Governments, 2019). Between 2021 and 2023, White Ribbon established 17 Community Action Groups (CAGs) in local communities across Australia, aiming to address gender inequality and prevent all forms of VAW, including sexual violence.

## The Community Action Group (CAG) model

The White Ribbon Australia (White Ribbon) Community Action Group (CAG) model is premised on the primary prevention approach of community mobilisation. Community mobilisation seeks to mobilise local communities to coordinate and deliver multiple, mutually reinforcing intervention initiatives that address the drivers of VAW. This approach is intended to be a highly participatory process that builds on the existing strengths and relationships of grassroots communities, using this as a mechanism for change over an extended period of time (Michau, 2012).

The White Ribbon CAG model is designed to support communities to undertake activities such as:

- advocacy and awareness-raising
- developing tools and resources
- training and capacity building
- reflective practice
- media campaigns
- local events.

Under the CAG model, White Ribbon is the "implementing organisation". The implementing organisation is responsible for providing ongoing technical support to the CAGs in the form of:

- **resources**, including funding, governance documentation, and guiding information and tools in relation to major campaigns and activities
- **planning**, including attending meetings in a supporting role and support to create safe space, activities and events
- **training**, including leading CAG training, community partner training and reflective practice, webinars, information and additional resources
- **networking opportunities** by promoting the CAGs and connecting CAGs with community partners

## What did the White Ribbon CAGs deliver?

### CAGs delivered community activities in:



South Australia  
New South Wales  
Australian Capital Territory  
Tasmania  
Western Australia  
Northern Territory

### CAG membership comprised of:



Community clubs and groups including sporting clubs, cultural associations and student groups



Not-for-profit community organisations such as domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) services



Local governments



Individual community members including young people

### Activities engaged various community stakeholders, including:



Sporting clubs



Youth and schoolchildren



Families



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities



Culturally and linguistically diverse communities

### CAGs delivered activities aimed to increase awareness and understanding of DFSV and its drivers and to foster discussion about healthy relationships and gender roles. The activities that were delivered by CAGs included:



Educational workshops



Podcasts



Community events



Educational resources



Performance-based education sessions

*The Australian National Research Agenda to End Violence against Women and Children (ANRA) 2023-2028* calls for creating space for evaluations of community-led interventions (Lloyd et al., 2023). In December 2021, White Ribbon commissioned ANROWS to evaluate their CAG model.

## The evaluation approach

The evaluation adopted a mixed methods approach, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data sources to develop findings about the implementation and short-term effectiveness of the CAG model. The evaluation included:

- a survey of 29 CAG members from 12 out of the 17 CAGs
- a survey of 46 community members from 5 out of the 17 CAGs
- interviews with 6 White Ribbon staff
- review and analysis of White Ribbon and CAG documentation.

[Read more about the evaluation here](#)

## The role of community-led approaches in primary prevention of violence against women

The evaluation found that in places where the White Ribbon CAG model was delivered, there is an appetite among communities for community-led primary prevention projects to be funded and supported. While the data samples were small and not representative, community member and CAG member respondents reported a range of positive outcomes arising out of their participation in the project. Community-led approaches, including the activities delivered under the CAG model, showed some promise in:

- enhancing community awareness and understandings of the prevalence, drivers and different forms of VAW, including sexual violence
- increasing community knowledge and shifting self-reported attitudes towards VAW and gender equality
- fostering a shared commitment to ending VAW, including through increased connection between community members who already support gender equality.

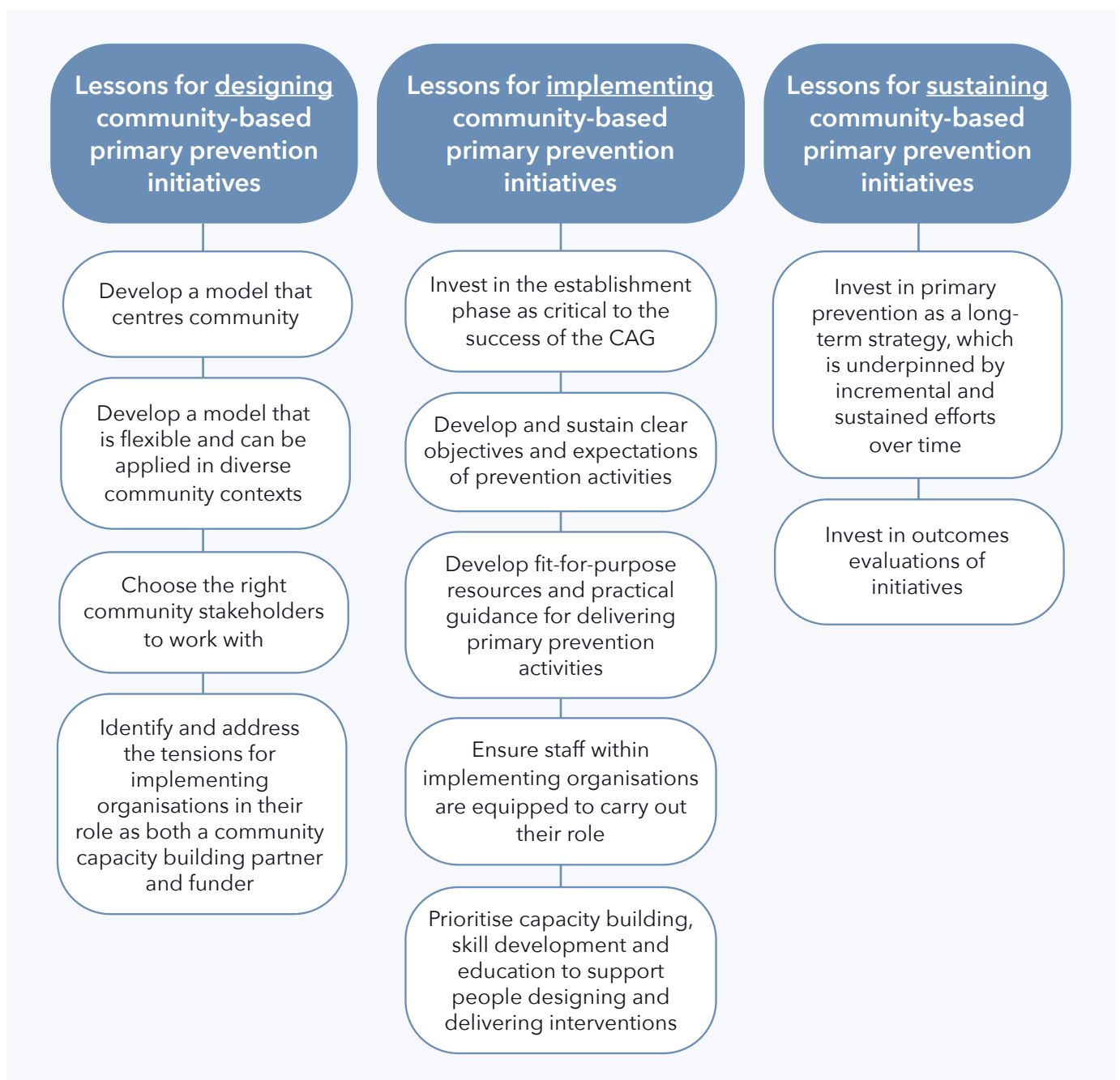
The evaluation highlighted factors that affect the success of community-led interventions:

- The use of educational approaches, subtle messaging to challenge gender norms and stereotypes and tailoring content for the context of the community were found to enable positive outcomes.
- There is a need for communities to recognise that primary prevention is a long-term strategy. It aims to achieve structural and systemic change to prevent VAW by addressing the drivers of such violence. This means that action may not always result in clear or measurable short-term outcomes. Instead, community-led primary prevention should be underpinned by gradual and sustained action over time.

## Lessons learnt: The Community Action Group (CAG) model

The key takeaways for designing, implementing and sustaining community-based primary prevention initiatives by using the CAG model are outlined in Table 1, and further expanded upon below.

**FIGURE 1: SNAPSHOT OF LESSONS LEARNT FOR DESIGNING, IMPLEMENTING AND SUSTAINING COMMUNITY-BASED PRIMARY PREVENTION INITIATIVES USING THE WHITE RIBBON CAG MODEL**



## Lessons for designing community-based primary prevention initiatives

### Develop a model that centres community.

The CAG model is founded on the concept of community-led action. In this context, it is important to ensure CAG members maintain ownership and control over the planning and delivery of activities through the CAG. However, when funding is being provided by an external organisation, for example, rigid reporting timelines and funding requirements can create time pressures that reduce opportunities for community involvement. Community groups, implementing organisations and funders need to work together to strike a balance between community-driven initiatives and ensuring practical project delivery.

### Develop a model that is flexible and can be applied in diverse community contexts.

Formalised guidance and procedures for implementing the model are beneficial for CAGs to understand both the objectives of activities and the distinct roles of community groups and implementing organisations under the model. Implementing organisations should take proactive steps to ensure this formalised structure is translating effectively in the specific community context. This means that implementing organisations recognise the importance of place-based expertise and ensure the use of the model is adapted to local or community-specific needs, where necessary. This might include developing a deep understanding of the particular context that CAGs are working in and support groups to design activities to meet that context (further discussed to the right).

## IN FOCUS

### *Working with diverse communities in primary prevention*

It is important that the unique needs of the community are taken into consideration from the outset to ensure that the various and sometimes intersecting drivers of violence are being addressed by activities delivered by the CAG. This is critical to working effectively with culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Directly supporting culturally and linguistically diverse communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to lead community-led primary prevention requires specialised expertise. Where possible, this support may be best provided by agencies led by these communities, such as Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). Standardised primary prevention resources need to be adapted for these groups, with input from appropriate cultural experts. Other tips include the following:

- Develop an **informed understanding** of the existing knowledge about what works in primary prevention in Australia to ensure interventions are evidence based. This includes interventions with marginalised communities where different approaches to primary prevention might be required, for example, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote contexts (Brown et al., 2021).
- Draw on existing guidance for working safely and appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by referring to ***Changing the Picture: A National Resource to Support the Prevention of Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and their Children*** (Our Watch, 2018).
- Refer to ANROWS's **best practice principles** to implement an intersectional and culturally safe approach when working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities in addressing VAW (ANROWS, 2021).
- Use existing resources for engaging multicultural communities in primary prevention efforts, for example, ***Engaging Men from Multicultural and Faith-Based Communities in Primary Prevention***, developed in partnership between Safe and Equal and the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health.

**Choose the “right” community stakeholders to work with.** Finding the “right” group of community stakeholders to engage in community-led primary prevention is no easy task. Community-led action needs community members to have both a commitment to ending VAW in their communities and a willingness and ability to engage, often voluntarily. As such, there is a need to undertake consultation and due diligence when seeking to establish a CAG within a community. CAG membership should consist of community members as individuals or members of existing grassroots community groups, rather than entirely made up of established organisations or services that can access funds through more traditional grant mechanisms.

**Identify and address the tensions for implementing organisations when their roles include being both a community capacity building partner and funder.** Under the White Ribbon CAG model, implementing organisations play two distinct, yet critical roles that both contribute to the success of the model. On one hand, implementing organisations need to ensure that robust systems and processes are in place to manage the administrative and financial responsibilities of distributing and accounting for the use of funds by CAGs. At the same time, implementing organisations need to take on a supportive, capacity building

role by providing training and guidance on primary prevention and community mobilisation approaches to CAGs. To navigate the tensions between these two roles, implementing organisations can:

- build trust, credibility and a good reputation within communities as an essential aspect of CAG establishment. This can be supported by prioritising relationship building, conducting a transparent and formalised CAG selection process, and ensuring the organisation has the necessary skills and capacity to work with diverse communities
- develop clear, simple guidelines delivered with clear communication for CAGs to support them in understanding the funding rules for engaging in the project
- clearly identify and communicate expectations, roles and responsibilities between implementing organisations and CAG members. The implementing organisation should not “own” the CAG but rather support and transfer knowledge to the CAG
- consider the benefits of alternate or more fit-for-purpose funding and governance models for community-mobilisation approaches that clearly differentiate between the roles of capacity building partner and contract or funding manager.

## Lessons for implementing community-based primary prevention initiatives

**Invest in the establishment phase as critical to the success of the CAG.** There is a need to prioritise comprehensive planning to support the establishment of the community groups, ahead of any activity delivery. This could include step-by-step procedures for recruiting and engaging potential CAG members, implementing appropriate screening and on-boarding procedures, alongside developing a shared vision and clear objectives. Supporting group formation in the early planning stage to build a strong network of community members may improve the likelihood of the groups continuing after initial funding ceases.

**Develop and sustain clear objectives and expectations of prevention activities.** Implementing organisations should support CAGs to clearly understand the focus and scope of their primary prevention activities. Implementing organisations need to support groups to understand how primary prevention activities aim to address the drivers of VAW and how the activities they undertake could lead to change. This includes providing clear guidance on the focus and expected outcomes of activities, where those are required by external funding bodies. Implementing organisations should provide clear processes and simple guidelines for people receiving funding to deliver activities to help them understand the expectations and requirements related to receiving that funding.



### **Develop fit-for-purpose resources and practical guidance for delivering primary prevention activities.**

Continuity and sustainability of CAGs can be supported by implementing organisations providing practical support and resources, including useful resources for CAGs to learn from and continue to use over time. Workbooks or other guidance material for community groups should contain practical, actionable guidance specific to the needs of CAG members and should be accessible and user-friendly. Resources should be adapted to be appropriate for community groups comprised of diverse people and groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This may include engaging appropriate experts to develop culturally responsive resources.

**Ensure staff within implementing organisations are equipped to carry out their role.** It is important that staff tasked with delivering capacity building initiatives to CAGs have the necessary skills, training and resources to do so. Supporting people to implement the CAG model could include:

- articulating the skills required for particular roles through position descriptions
- creating training and capacity building plans specific to individual roles, for example, a focus on building a detailed understanding of domestic, family and sexual violence, knowledge about primary prevention techniques, community training and engagement skills, project management skills or financial management
- providing comprehensive inductions and ongoing professional development opportunities for capacity building and support staff within implementing organisations including peer-level and manager-level support
- creating an authorising environment that promotes and resources ongoing skill and knowledge development
- developing staff knowledge and skills in working safely with culturally and linguistically diverse community groups, using trauma-informed approaches.

**Prioritise capacity building, skill development and education to support people designing and delivering interventions.** Supporting community members in the complex task of changing attitudes towards gender equality and VAW in their communities requires specialised knowledge and skills, including skills in supporting community members to build a nuanced understanding of VAW and its drivers. Implementing the CAG model successfully requires prioritising capacity building activities for CAG members, for example, by:

- providing targeted training on key concepts related to primary prevention of VAW.
- working with appropriate experts to provide mandatory training on cultural safety and trauma-informed approaches for all community-facing volunteers
- ensuring CAG members possess knowledge and details of available family, domestic and sexual violence support services, through training and/or practical guidance.

#### **IN FOCUS**

### ***The importance of trauma-informed community engagement***

CAGs interface directly with community members and therefore require the skills to deliver culturally safe and trauma-informed practice. It is important to manage the risks and potential for harm to victims and survivors of violence by implementing a trauma-informed approach in the design and delivery of community-based activities.

People with lived experience may be delivering, participating in or witnessing CAG activities, and may experience re-traumatisation, be emotionally impacted or make disclosures when engaging with activities. There is a need to develop contingency plans and support structures to ensure the wellbeing of all participating community members. Guidance and training on best practice approaches should be provided to CAG members, for example, through up-to-date resources that include guiding principles and concrete actions for ensuring activities are psychologically safe.

Importantly, those delivering activities should be prepared to respond to disclosures of violence, which includes being aware of, and connecting participants to, specialist domestic, family and sexual violence support services and/or **helplines**.



## Lessons for sustaining community-based primary prevention initiatives

**Invest in primary prevention as a long-term strategy, underpinned by incremental and sustained efforts over time.** Evidence suggests that community-led prevention activities should be delivered across a minimum 18-month period and ideally across a number of years (Kerr-Wilson et al., 2020). Funding bodies should prioritise sustainability and longevity by supporting community-led activities with longer-term funding. Such funding recognises the complexities of community engagement work and allows greater flexibility in project schedules for adapting to changing community needs.

**Invest in outcomes evaluations of initiatives.** It is important to fund and undertake evaluations of community-based primary prevention initiatives to understand their effectiveness and to support continuous improvement. Evaluating the outcomes of these types of initiatives to determine their effectiveness can be best done where primary prevention initiatives are well established and have been operating over an extended period. Outcomes-focused evaluations require significant resourcing and specialist capability for delivery, which should be acknowledged and planned for accordingly.

### SUGGESTED CITATION

Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety. (2024). *Lessons from implementing community-based primary prevention: An evaluation of White Ribbon Australia's "Engaging communities in sexual violence primary prevention" project: Key findings* [Fact sheet]. ANROWS.

### FURTHER ANROWS RESOURCES

**Building Safe Communities for Women and their Children project** that includes summaries of primary prevention projects conducted across Australia.

**Digital stories** that feature empowering and culturally responsive messages about prevention and pathways to support from community leaders.

**Project stories** that provide insight into 26 action research projects with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, outlining key learnings and recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

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