



# Executive Summary & Key Findings: Evaluation of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne's Preventing Violence Against Women Program

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The *Preventing Violence Against Women Program* (the program) implemented by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne (the Diocese) is a leading initiative for preventing and responding to violence against women and family violence within an Australian faith community. The program provides a wide range of activities and resources for faith leaders, parishes, and colleges across the Diocese and within five churches involved in an intensive 'whole-of-church' pilot project.

The purpose of the evaluation was to understand the impact of the program for bringing about positive culture change in the Diocese through strengthening faith leaders' capacity to effectively respond to family violence and violence against women and contribute to addressing the underlying gendered drivers.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY FINDINGS

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## Methodology

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The evaluation used a participatory, mixed methods approach. This included reviewing program documents for background information, conducting qualitative interviews and focus groups with key informants across the Diocese and pilot sites, and administering quantitative pre, post and follow up surveys with participants in the program's training sessions. Analysis was informed by research on implementation science and the violence prevention evidence-base, including within faith communities. An assessment of the program logic against internal monitoring process and impact indicators established by the Diocese was also provided.

## Summary of findings

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The evaluation found that the program demonstrated a range of promising outcomes that contributed to shifts in culture, attitudes, and practices within the Diocese by supporting faith leaders to understand and take action to prevent and respond to violence against women and family violence. Indeed, the program made progress to address the gendered drivers of violence against women and put the best practice actions described in prevention research to good use (Our Watch et al., 2015). The program also demonstrated strengths with respect to emerging evidence-based principles for preventing violence against women in faith communities (Vaughan et al., 2020).



### The promising outcomes include the following:

- Faith leaders' *confidence* to prevent and respond to violence against women and family violence increased significantly;
- There were emerging signs that faith leaders are *building relationships and referral pathways* with specialist family violence services;
- The program contributed to strengthening the Diocese's *commitment to gender equality* and women's leadership in the Anglican Church;
- The program contributed to developing a *culture of safety and care* where people feel they can openly discuss issues relevant to violence against women;
- The Anglican colleges have *expressed commitment* to educating staff and students about violence against women;
- Partnerships with Anglican agencies showed early signs of a *two-way learning process* about preventing and responding to violence against women;
- The Diocese is *perceived as a leader* in faith-based prevention work by external stakeholders;

- The Diocese developed a *family violence policy package* to support employees at the Anglican Centre experiencing family violence, and will soon have similar resources available for parish communities; and
- Contributions were made to the *prevention evidence-base* through documenting and *sharing resource and learning* with the prevention sector and other faith communities in Australia and internationally.

These promising outcomes are *reinforced* by a capacity-building package of training, coaching and peer learning combined with resources that make the program visible, engaging, and safety-focused within the Diocese.

Overall, the findings are underpinned by a range of *implementation enablers and barriers* that operate in tension with each other. These shape implementation outcomes related to the program's *reach* across the Diocese, faith leaders' perceptions of the program's *acceptability* and *feasibility* and their willingness to *adopt* the program at the parish or college level.



### The main implementation enablers are:

- *Holistic strategies* that supported faith leaders to engage with and participate in the program;
- The *authorising environment*, which included an internal mandate for change within the Diocese and the influence of broader external social changes pertaining to violence against women;
- Productive *governance, advisory and staffing structures* that enabled program funding, program design and implementation, and combined expertise in Christian faith and violence against women;
- Messaging that connected *Christian beliefs and values* with socially transformative prevention work; and
- Flexible support and coaching that enabled parishes to *take ownership* of program implementation.





## The main implementation barriers are:

- *Competing demands* faced by busy clergy and volunteer lay leaders;
- Challenges engaging *socially and culturally diverse communities* within the Diocese;
- *Opposition* by some constituents who feel confronted by, or deny, the prevalence of violence against women and/or who are concerned about stigmatisation; and
- Challenges *navigating theological tensions* pertaining to differing interpretations of the Bible's stance on gender equality and the roles of men and women.

Notably, the impact of COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions on places of worship and in-person gatherings disrupted program implementation during 2020, however, these circumstances were also time-sensitive and not unique or specific to the program. As such, the impact of COVID-19 is considered as contextual to the implementation enablers and barriers described above.

The evaluation also describes various areas for improvement intended to enhance the quality of the program, such as making changes to the training format and content, systematising the delivery of activities and resources, and further developing evaluative capacity. Recommendations are provided in the full report to address the areas for improvement and implementation barriers.

## Conclusion

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This program contributed to a range of positive changes emerging from the concerted efforts of the Diocese and its partners. After several years of laying the foundations with limited resources, followed by a more intensive period of expansion and piloting, the program is now on the precipice of generating even greater impact. This signifies the importance of continued long-term, sustainable investment in this program to enable its reach to a large population of people across the Diocese and to grow its influence as a national and global leader in preventing violence against women within faith communities.

## References

Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS), & VicHealth. (2015). *Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Prevention of Violence Against Women*. Our Watch.

Vaughan, C., Sullivan, C., Chen, J., & Vaid Sandhu, M. (2020). *What works to address violence against women and family violence within faith settings: An evidence guide*. University of Melbourne.