

8.1 NOTICE OF MOTION: BUILDING COUNCILLOR UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Submitting Councillor/s:	Cr Rebecca Paterson and Cr Anjalee de Silva
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RECOMMENDATION

That Council

1. Commits to develop and implement a training program for councillors to build capacity on understanding family violence and all forms of violence against women (including responding to disclosures of family and sexual violence, and sexed/gendered harassment, links to sex and gender equality and primary prevention); and
2. Writes to relevant Ministers to advocate for a mandatory component on gender equality/primary prevention as part of the Councillor induction under the Local Government Act. In addition, support the continuation of the Free From Violence Local Government Program in future.

INTRODUCTION

Monash Council was successful in gaining funding under the Victorian Government's Free from Violence (FFV) Local Government Program for 3 years (2022-2025).

The key objective of the FFV program is to take a whole of council approach to the primary prevention of family violence (as defined in the *Family Violence Protection Act 2008*: any behaviour that is sexually, emotionally, psychologically or economically abusive, coercive or threatening, or any behaviour by a person that causes a child to hear or witness or otherwise be exposed to the effects of behaviours described previously) and all forms of violence against women (as defined by the United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women: any act of sex- or gender- based violence that causes or could cause physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts or coercion, in public or private life). This approach means everyone has a role to play in preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women, including councillors.

In the Free from Violence Local Government guide, the role of councillors is outlined as community leaders, decision makers and the public face of the council. They have the opportunity to shape their community by role-modelling behaviours that address the drivers of family violence and violence against women, such as reducing forms of discrimination and marginalisation. Councillors should strive to understand the issue of family violence and violence against women in their community. In council chambers they can advocate for the consideration of primary prevention and gender equality in the council's formal decisions, including budgets. Councillors can also connect directly with the community and engage them about primary prevention.

ISSUES AND DISCUSSION

The final evaluation report for the FFV project outlined that the project significantly advanced the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women and the promotion of sex and gender equality across Council operations, policy frameworks, staff culture, and community engagement. A number of recommendations have been proposed to support the sustainability, institutionalisation, and continued impact of the Free from Violence work across Monash Council.

This is so important because we know that family violence and all forms of violence against women is, unfortunately, common in all communities - including in Monash. We know that in Australia:


- Almost 1 in 4 women, have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15. This is in comparison to under 1 in 14 men.
- Almost 1 in 5 women have experienced sexual assault since the age of 15. This is in comparison to under 1 in 20 men.
- 94% of women (and 95% of men) who experienced violence since the age of 15 did so at the hands of a male perpetrator.
- 3 in 5 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have experienced physical or sexual violence from a male intimate partner.
- Almost 2 in 5 women with disabilities have experienced intimate partner violence since the age of 15.

Unfortunately, violence also affects councillors. For example, the recent Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA) *Victorian Councillor Census* found that 21% of women who are councillors (or more than 1 in 5) have experienced sexual harassment in their role. This is in comparison to 6% of men who are councillors.

And 80% of councillors – 90% of women as compared to 70% of men – have experienced threatening or intimidating behaviour in their role.

According to the VLGA, "The biggest challenge faced by a very large majority of councillors is the degree of hostility, bullying and harassment they have experienced in the role, largely from other councillors and members of the public. Women were particularly impacted by experiences of bullying and harassment."

One of the key recommendations to strengthen leadership accountability is to strengthen Councillors' capacity and skills in primary prevention through training and networking opportunities.



Council's Gender Equity Advisory Committee (GEAC) have been closely involved in the Free From Violence program at Monash including regular consultation and updates. In June, GEAC advocated for a notice of motion to Council relating to the Free From Violence program.

CONCLUSION

Family violence and violence against women is an issue everywhere in Australia and affects the communities that we, as councillors, represent. Violence and disrespect have no place in our local communities. Councillors have an important platform from which to influence community culture, attitudes and behaviours which reinforce this message.

ATTACHMENT LIST

1. Officers Response to NOM [8.1.1 - 2 pages]

OFFICER'S REPORT

BUILDING COUNCILLOR UNDERSTANDING OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

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MOTION

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BUDGET IMPLICATIONS

Part 1 of the motion will require funding to engage appropriate trainers/consultants. Community Strengthening does not have budget for this item.

Part 2 of the motion has no budget implications and can be supported within existing resources.

IMPACT ON INTERNAL RESOURCES

Council's Primary Prevention Officer and Gender Equity Partnerships Officer have responsibilities to continue the sustainability of the Free From Violence Project now that the funding period has ended.

COUNCIL PLAN AND COUNCIL POLICIES

The Notice of Motion is consistent with the Council Plan (priorities include "deliver and advocate for programs and initiatives that strengthen gender equity, support the prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women and children". It is also consistent with the Health and Wellbeing Plan (objective 2.1 "strengthening gender equity and prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women and children") and the Gender Equity Framework which includes recommendation 7, that "training is provided for Councillors in gender equity and prevention of violence against women and family violence".

RELEVANCE TO WORK ALREADY UNDERTAKEN BY OFFICERS OR COMMITTEES

This Notice of Motion directly relates to significant work that has been undertaken by officers under the Free From Violence (FFV) Program. This 3-year Victorian Government funded project took a whole of Council approach to primary prevention of family violence and all forms of violence against women. The FFV Program significantly advanced this work across Council operations, policy frameworks, staff culture, and community engagement.

As part of this work, Responding to Family Violence Disclosures training was highly successful when delivered to staff of different genders right across the organisation. There was an overwhelming positive response to the training and all participants reported an increase in confidence and knowledge after the training. For example, knowledge and confidence when recognising and explaining what family violence represents increased by an average of 33%; and knowledge and confidence when responding to family violence disclosures increased by an average of 52%. Participants found the training important, engaging, informative, and safe.

This Notice of Motion was supported by the Gender Equity Advisory Committee.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Nil.