



Take a Stand against Domestic Violence: It's Everyone's Business

What is *Take a Stand*?

Take a Stand against Domestic Violence: It's Everyone's Business is an award-winning workplace-based program for the prevention of violence against women.

Developed by Women's Health Victoria and piloted between 2007 and 2011, as of 2017 *Take a Stand* has been delivered to more than 4500 employees in over 25 workplaces across Victoria. *Take a Stand* has been delivered in a diverse range of workplaces, including large corporations such as Linfox and Aurizon, not-for-profits such as Oxfam Australia, and government agencies, including local councils and Victoria Police. In 2016-17, Women's Health Victoria developed a tailored version of *Take a Stand* focused on sexual harassment, which is now available.

Take a Stand was the first program of its kind in Australia, taking a whole of workplace approach that engages all levels of the organisation and trains staff in active bystander approaches to prevent violence against women before it occurs.

The program recognises that we all have a role in addressing the culture that allows violence to occur and confront the attitudes, beliefs and distorted values that justify, excuse and minimise violence against women.

Did you know?

- On average, one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner in Australia. (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2017)
- 1 in 3 Australian women has experienced physical violence from a current or former partner since the age of 15. (ABS, 2017)
- 1 in 5 Australian women has experienced sexual violence. (ABS, 2017)
- Violence by an intimate partner is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness for Australian women aged 18-44, outstripping other known risk factors like smoking, obesity and high blood pressure. (ANROWS, 2016)
- 85% of Australian women have been sexually harassed since the age of 15. In the last five years, 39% of women have experienced sexual harassment at work. (AHRC, 2018)
- Domestic violence and other forms of violence against women are estimated to cost the Australian economy \$21.7 billion per year. (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2015)
- A national survey of Australian union members in 2011 found that approximately a third had experienced domestic violence. (University of New South Wales, 2011)
- Half of those people who experienced domestic violence said the violence affected their capacity to get to work, and almost 20 per cent said the violence continued at their workplace. (University of New South Wales, 2011)



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Why is violence against women an issue for your workplace?

Take a Stand recognises that workplaces are significantly affected by violence against women and can also play a key role in changing the culture that allows it to occur.

The program aims to partner with workplaces to encourage staff to 'take a stand' against violence against women and create long lasting cultural change. The active bystander training provides participants with the knowledge, confidence and practical tools to promote respectful relationships between men and women. Some examples include challenging sexist jokes and comments, discrimination based on gender, condoning violence against women and degrading images.

Workplaces are directly impacted by family violence and other forms of violence against women. Whether the employee is a victim or perpetrator, the workplace is impacted through absenteeism, staff turnover, distraction and lost productivity. Acts of domestic violence can also occur at work, and colleagues are also affected. Nearly two thirds of Australian women who report violence by a current partner are in paid employment.

Workplaces play a key role in influencing the behaviour of individuals and groups. They can reinforce or challenge social norms and beliefs and model equitable and respectful gender relations. Workplaces may also provide opportunities to reach individuals affected by violence who may not otherwise come into contact with information about support services. Research suggests that 45 per cent of women affected by domestic violence discussed the violence with someone at work, primarily co-workers or friends rather than supervisors, HR staff or union representatives (McFerran, 2011).

Costs to employers related to family violence can include victims taking time off work because of injury, emotional distress or attendance at court, and perpetrator absenteeism due to stalking or criminal justice processes. The effects of family violence on employees might include poor concentration leading to the inability to safely operate equipment or concentrate on tasks because of psychological stress, distraction, depression and anxiety.

What can workplaces do?

Businesses can work with Women's Health Victoria to build a safe, respectful and supportive workplace that takes a stand against family violence and the attitudes and behaviours that support and condone it. Implementing the organisation-wide *Take a Stand* program helps businesses to prevent violence against women before it occurs, and to support staff who may be experiencing or using violence.

Women's Health Victoria works with business to implement the three elements of *Take a Stand*:

1. **LEAD** – The workplace is supported to establish the infrastructure, supports, policies and procedures needed to encourage bystander action and assist staff affected by violence.
2. **TRAIN** – Staff across the workplace gain an understanding of violence against women, and the skills and confidence to speak up against violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours as positive bystanders, and to support colleagues affected by violence.
3. **PROMOTE** – Key program messages are promoted across the workplace, and staff are encouraged to actively participate in violence prevention activities and campaigns for gender equality.

Together, these three elements can create a workplace that does not tolerate violence.



Potential benefits for workplaces

Evaluation shows that *Take a Stand* delivers results:

- It helps workplaces to have the right policies and procedures in place to prevent and respond to violence against women.
- It helps managers and HR staff to support employees affected by violence.
- It increases employees' understanding and confidence to discuss family violence with their colleagues and managers.
- It provides employees with the knowledge and skills to act as positive bystanders so they can take a stand against sexist jokes, comments and other behaviours that support violence against women.

Other potential benefits include:

- Reduced staff turnover, absenteeism and distraction at work.
- Improved safety of employees through the introduction of relevant workplace policies and opportunities for perpetrators, potential perpetrators and victims to seek assistance.
- Avoidance of potential OH&S risks by providing a safe environment for employees experiencing violence.
- Assistance to meet industry or quality standards through responsible business practice and investing in staff and the community.
- Promotion in WHV *Take a Stand* resources and through the media as good corporate citizens and community-oriented leaders in the prevention of violence against women, potentially leading to improved community perceptions and public relations.

About the active bystander approach

The active bystander approach is based on the notion that violence against women is a social issue and preventing it is a shared responsibility across the community, and not just the responsibility of perpetrators or victims.

Bystanders have the potential to influence the drivers of violence against women, such as the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men, sexist and discriminatory attitudes towards women, and rigid gender roles in communities and organisations. In this way, rather than intervening in violent incidents or potentially harmful situations, bystanders can intervene in the social conditions that lead to violence occurring in the first place.

Whilst physical and verbal forms of violence against women and sexual harassment are seen as unacceptable by the majority of Australians, for a significant proportion of the community sexist comments and attitudes are seen as more acceptable, particularly when they occur in social settings. For example, nearly one quarter of Australians see no harm in telling sexist jokes (National Community Attitudes Survey, 2017).



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Encouragingly, recent research by Our Watch showed 79% of people surveyed wanted practical tips about ways to safely intervene when witnessing disrespect towards women and girls. The survey also found that people found messages around the social approval of speaking up the most motivating, like:

- It's OK to speak up or show disapproval when witnessing disrespect towards women and girls (78% thought this message was somewhat or very motivating).
- It's likely that other people around you also disapprove of disrespect towards women and girls (74% thought this message was somewhat or very motivating).
- If you don't take responsibility in situations of disrespect towards women and girls, then who will? (74% thought this message was somewhat or very motivating). (Our Watch, *Bystander research snapshot report*, no date)

In the workplace context, a study conducted by VicHealth (2012) found that respondents were more likely to act if they perceived that certain conditions were in place to support their action, namely: their individual confidence in knowing what to do; their personal confidence that their employer would take the matter seriously; and the perceived level of support they would receive from their colleagues (VicHealth, 2012).

Overall these findings point to the importance of creating community and organisational cultures and conditions that support and encourage bystander behaviour, especially in response to the more subtle and more accepted forms of violence or the behaviours that contribute to violence-supportive attitudes and culture, such as sexist jokes.

Comments from employers and employees

"[It was useful to] realise that it's all up to us. We can all play a part in change. By stopping and taking a stand for the little things... it can prevent more serious scenarios."

- Participant, Victoria Police

"The program showed me that there are simple ways to call out things that perpetuate violence against women."

- Participant, Oxfam Australia

"It made me realise that I was in an abusive relationship...I need to get help."

- Female participant, Loddon Mallee region

"It is a good idea that [the company] is doing this. There are people that know people that do it [domestic violence] and they might learn something from this and as a friend can say something. I've said to a friend, 'why are you talking to your wife like that?'"

- Male participant, Linfox

"It made me uncomfortable and, as a bloke, I think that's a good thing."

- Male participant, Loddon Mallee region



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“This organisation espouses socially acceptable values...but there are still unwritten expectations and prejudices... that you have to have real [courage] to challenge.”

- Female participant, large workplace in Loddon Mallee region

“Having this type of program available... shows that as a company we stand up against violence in the workplace and against domestic violence, that we are a caring employer. Employees can discuss stories with each other, ways to help each other out, bring everyone together and work together as a team.”

- HR Officer, Linfox

“To me, the most amazing part has been [Women’s Health Victoria’s] openness to suggestions and flexibility around how you have done it. Not all groups will do that. You’ve got your expertise but you can’t impart that knowledge without fitting in with the world you’re in and I think that has been an amazing attribute that you have.”

- Manager, Linfox.

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