

ADVOCATES AND MOVEMENT MAKERS



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Why prevention?

Over the years, community-based sexual and domestic violence programs have established impressive movements dedicated to providing effective victim-centered services and raising issue awareness.

As a result of this good work, huge strides have been made – and continue to be made – in leveraging policy, securing funding, and developing coordinated community responses to violence. However, despite what progress has been made, the demand for services continues to grow. In response to this increased need, anti-violence programs have begun, over the course of the past 15 years, to consider what has been referred to as “the best form of victim service” (Gariglietti, 2007): Preventing violence before it ever occurs.

“Violence can be prevented and its impact reduced, in the same way that public health efforts have prevented and reduced pregnancy-related complications, workplace injuries, infectious diseases, and illness resulting from contaminated food and water in many parts of the world. The factors that contribute to [violence]...can be changed.”

(Dahlberg & Krug, 2002)

Prevention offers a proactive means of improving responsiveness to communities, creating visions for change, and moving from meeting the immediate needs of survivors to an integrated, holistic approach that combines services and social change. Successful prevention efforts reflect a social change model that promotes a thriving culture where all relationships are built on respect, equality, and peace.

Investing in prevention supports intervention and service delivery.

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A synergy exists between prevention and intervention programming. One cannot exist without the other and when a balance is struck, they serve to strengthen each other. So if you have strong prevention programming, you have stronger intervention services.

Working to prevent IPV means getting at the root causes of violence and building ongoing, community defined solutions to address these. By virtue of taking a community level approach, prevention leads us to identify trends in victimization and to developing a better understanding of why and how violence occurs in any given community.

This can be a powerful tool.

Understanding the contextual factors which lead to victimization serves to not only enhance service delivery strategies for survivors but also to provide crucial leverage for changing environmental and systemic factors that may be contributing to victimization. For example, if revictimization is closely associated with economic insecurity, this may lead an agency to consider programmatic and policy efforts that work to meet these specific survivor needs. It's all about how you use the information to reinforce and build upon the important work already being done.

Engaging in prevention also requires that traditional service delivery agencies support a strategic visioning process with communities – whereby the agency itself becomes more deeply rooted within the community it serves and develops a more robust understanding of the unique needs and resources that exist there. Prevention firmly places the agency or program at the center of any social change efforts within the community. This undoubtedly leads to new and strengthened partnerships (sustainability), innovative and informed agency practices (improved cultural relevance), and heightened visibility within the community (proactive engagement efforts). Prevention is a vital piece of the victim services continuum, contributing not only to long-term success of an agency, but also to the health and wellbeing of survivors and their communities.

Where to start

The first place to start is within.

The following considerations may be helpful in assessing to what degree your agency is willing and ready to engage in efforts to prevent IPV.

- An agency's aspirations and strategies will convey a lot about the willingness and ability to engage in mission-driven efforts to prevent violence. Is prevention embedded within the agency mission statement? Is prevention mentioned in strategic plans?
- Are there agency-wide opportunities to learn about prevention? Cross-sectional capacity building is not only crucial to building commitment for prevention but it is also crucial to supporting agency-wide health.
- Do human resource and program managers understand the knowledge and skill sets necessary for prevention positions and accurately reflect this in recruitment?
- Is the agency willing to make room for a different kind of work that may require different supervision habits and staff development strategies?


- Does the agency culture support social change work or does it view itself primarily as a service delivery organization? If prevention work is devalued within the agency, building and sustaining prevention efforts will be difficult.

Now consider the readiness and willingness of your partners and community.

Building prevention capacity from within is essential, but having an understanding of the prevention landscape and opportunities for engagement is also important.

- Who within your community is already engaging in prevention and how? Are there other victim services agencies in the area that are invested in prevention? To what degree do your agency mission and efforts overlap?
- What other services and social change agencies exist within the community? What work are these agencies doing and who are they serving? Having an understanding of who your potential allies are will help you design and sustain relevant prevention efforts.
- Ask those around you. Many service delivery agencies have long-standing partnerships within the community. Assess to what degree your partners and other potential allies are receptive to and in need of prevention. In order for your efforts to be successful, they need to resonate with and be impactful for the community you work with. A community assessment will help you determine the who, where, and how.
- Consider what is realistic and tangible for your agency. Eliminating racism in public schools might not be attainable, but building empathy and increasing social cohesion among youth in schools just might be.
- Consider what role your agency can and will play. To what degree are the agency's prevention efforts able to be initiated, coordinated, and facilitated by the community itself? What ongoing structures are needed to ensure your level of involvement and support is possible?

This list is intended to serve as a launching point, a tool to facilitate initial dialogue around engaging in prevention. By no means is it exhaustive. If you seek further guidance around where to start, there is an extensive library of tools and resources housed by VAWnet.org and within the [PreventIPV Tools Inventory](#).



For more information about the Intimate Partner Violence Prevention Council, or to join us in advancing a unified national prevention agenda, visit PreventIPV.org.