

## Policy and Practice Development

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## Policy and Practice Development for the Male Family Violence Sector

In the previous edition of *NTV Notes*, I outlined some of the challenges facing the time-pressured, reactive aspect of NTV's policy work, and some of the submissions and other policy work I've been focusing on in this respect. I emphasised that while this work is important in terms of advocating on behalf of members to governments and other stakeholders, and is very interesting as it covers a diverse range of issues, it can have the feel of jumping from one thing to another without anything substantial or coherent to show at the end for it.

In this article I seek to convey the more proactive aspects of NTV's policy development work. This is intended to provide a transparent indication of the broad direction of our proactive policy work in the years to come, and to seek your feedback concerning whether this might be of benefit to the field. Comments and suggestions are warmly welcome.

It's important to note at the outset that policy development does not operate in a vacuum. Obviously, there are a range of contextual and 'social field' issues that influence policy direction, such as values and belief systems, philosophical frameworks and political / structural analyses of power, government reforms, and very importantly the views and perspectives of members and other stakeholders.

However, policy work is also situated in relation to a number of other important areas of work that NTV is responsible for contributing towards. These include:

- practice development in the male family violence sector
- professional development for members and other family violence workers on engaging men
- opportunities for male family violence workers to network (beyond the boundaries of the men's services partnership group or consortium of which they are a part) and to share skills, innovations and different and creative approaches to various aspects of the work
- consultation and liaison with members to inform policy development and NTV's advocacy efforts to governments and other stakeholders on behalf of members (see the next edition of *NTV Notes* for an important article and request for feedback concerning this)
- efforts to maintain and nurture a sustainable workforce where male family violence workers receive reasonable pay and conditions (issues that are common across the social and community services sector) and have sufficient access to supervision.

Proactive policy development that transforms knowledge, reflectivity, innovation, creativity, carefulness and passion into practice involves a weaving together of all of these aspects of NTV's work as a peak body. One of my aims as policy co-ordinator is to co-create policy that has a sense of liveliness and usefulness for the sector – policy that helps to enable spaces and opportunities for male family violence workers to enhance their existing reflections and careful innovations.

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Proactive policy work, therefore, is multi-dimensional and (hopefully) produces positive spin-offs in a range of other areas. A second key feature is the use of formalised processes and systems for co-creating policy that involves more than downloading any given person's thoughts and biases onto a policy document. Consultation processes and stakeholder input are vital in this respect, and we certainly intend to use whatever opportunities possible to consult with members. In addition, NTV is working towards the creation of an ongoing Policy Working Group that will deliberate on and provide advice to NTV on a range of policy issues, with representation from many parts of the broader family violence sector.

A third feature concerns the need to be strategic and priority-focused in determining which policy issues to work on. Given the complexities and evolving nature of the work, there is no shortage of issues that NTV could focus on. The following list outlines just a sample of them, to provide a sense of some of the major issues that we believe the male family violence sector is grappling with, or is on the cusp of grappling with:

- Bringing in the voices, human rights and needs of children more intensely into the work.
- Increasing our awareness of and focus on the sexual, physical, emotional and other forms of abuse *intentionally* directed towards children by men who participate in men's behaviour change programs and other male family violence services – in addition (though not separate from) the abuse that children suffer from their father's use of violence against their mother or other father.
- The most ideal structural features of court-mandated men's behaviour change programs, including how to balance strong behaviour change and criminal justice accountability functions. Related to this are the ways that the sector is evolving to encompass the rising proportion of referrals to voluntary programs from courts.
- The role that men's services and male family violence workers can play in helping to transform integrated intimate partner violence service systems into true integrated family violence service systems – and what this means for how we respond to adolescent boys' violence against family members, gay men's use of family violence, elder abuse, etc.
- Case management for men who use family violence, both for men participating in men's behaviour change programs who have particularly complex needs or represent immediate or elevated risk for family members, and also for those with relatively little treatment readiness who encounter one or more aspects of an integrated family violence service system but do not wish to engage in a men's behaviour change program.
- Related to the above point, the use of supplementary individual sessions to the group process to assist with the ongoing risk assessment and behaviour change process.
- Tailoring men's behaviour change programs to fit the different situations of different men and their families. In particular, whether some men require a more intensive process ('MBCP deluxe') in order to give a reasonable chance of behaviour change, and whether for some accountability and monitoring are going to be more realistic goals.
- Addressing sexual violence more thoroughly in male family violence work, including through the group process, and developing stronger relationships with the sexual assault services sector.
- Enhancing our responsiveness to men from CALD backgrounds at different points of the service system, including enhanced intake, case management and men's behaviour change group processes.

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- Quality practice when engaging networks of men in primary prevention initiatives to prevent men's violence against women before it occurs. This includes how to balance the need to enthusiastically encourage and open spaces for men to participate in this work, while guarding against any tendencies for men's involvement to reinforce the very social determinants that the work is designed to address.

This is by no means a "top ten" list of potential policy issues – on a different day, I might come up with a somewhat different list, and the decision as to which issues to prioritise needs to be made thoughtfully and through consultation. Furthermore, some of the above issues have obvious resource implications; policy development work in these areas is closely related to long-term advocacy work with governments to secure the resources required to turn policy into practice.

Scanning through this list it is apparent how closely entwined policy development and practice development can be in some circumstances. Most of the issues outlined in this list have clear practice development implications.

Indeed, next year NTV is looking to initiate a combined policy and practice development process that weaves together policy development, practice development, opportunities for consultation and liaison with members, and professional development and skill-sharing events. Inputs and outputs of this process could include practice forums, sector consultations, research to investigate what is being done interstate and overseas on the issue in question, and practice development papers that outline initiatives occurring from outside Victoria but which also highlight creative innovations by male family violence workers within Victoria. My intent here is not only to research and write, but also to help enable workers across programs to discuss and share what is already being done, and what they think could be done both within current resource levels and system capacity and with the injection of additional resources.

The male family violence sector has come a long way from the courageous pioneering efforts of the late 1980's. As a sector, it is important both to celebrate the fundamental and (almost) unchanging bedrocks and practices of this work, and to reflect on how this work is continuing to evolve and the over-the-horizon issues that we are approaching.

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