

## Responses to Questions on Notice to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee Inquiry into current and proposed sexual consent laws in Australia

August 2023

### Summary

Our Watch appeared before the Committee on Wednesday 26 July at 2:15pm. The two witnesses who appeared and provided evidence on behalf of Our Watch were Ms Patty Kinnersly, Chief Executive Officer, and Ms Genevieve Sheppard, Senior Policy Advisor. Our evidence was based on the [Our Watch submission](#) made to the Inquiry in March 2023 (Submission 55). Below are the responses to the questions taken on notice by Our Watch representatives during the evidence hearing.

### Responses to Questions on Notice

Senator Waters: Could you take on notice when that mandating (of RRE in Victoria) happened and what quantum of funding was associated with that? It would be useful for us to know the ballpark figure that is required to do a good job of respectful relationships education. (p. 52)

In March 2016, the Royal Commission into Family Violence made 227 recommendations for change. The Victorian Government committed to implementing all 227 recommendations.

The Victorian Royal Commission identified the critical role played by schools and early childhood education in creating a culture of respect and equality to change the story of family violence for future generations. Recommendation 189 mandated the introduction of respectful relationships education in every government school in Victoria from prep to year 12, and delivered through a whole school approach. This includes the introduction of respectful relationships education content into the school curriculum to support students to learn how to build healthy relationships, understand global cultures, ethics and traditions, and to prevent family violence.

Following the release of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government significantly strengthened the delivery of a respectful relationships education program across Victorian schools and early years services with an investment of \$21.8 million in the 2016/17 Budget. The Victorian Government have continued to commit to respectful relationship education in schools in subsequent state budgets. The following table outlines Our Watch’s understanding of the financial commitment by the Victorian Government to support the implementation of the whole school approach to respectful relationships education.

Victorian budgets	Budget commitment
2016-2017 State budget	\$21.8 million
2017-2018 State budget	\$22.8 million to
2020-21 State Budget (4 year commitment)	\$37.5 million
TOTAL	\$82.1 million <sup>1</sup>

Senator Waters: You mentioned your Educating for Equality resources. Has Our Watch been consulted by Universities Australia regarding the resources that it was developing for on-campus education? (p. 54)

In February 2016, Universities Australia (UA) began the Respect. Now. Always. initiative. This program of work across the sector sought to prevent sexual violence in university communities and improve support for those affected. As part of Respect. Now. Always., in February 2019-2020 UA partnered with Our Watch and the Victorian Government to develop a whole-of-institution model to prevent violence against women at and through universities.

In March 2021, Our Watch and Universities Australia, in partnership with the Victorian Government, launch Educating for Equality, a world-leading holistic model to help universities prevent gendered violence. Drawing on national and international evidence, Educating for Equality includes comprehensive tools to support a whole-of-university approach to preventing gender-based violence. The sector-wide model builds on work already underway at universities to prevent violence and aims to challenge the behaviour, culture, norms and structures that drive this kind of violence.

Building on this work, between June 2021 - June 2022, Universities Australia engaged Our Watch to provide technical support and expertise in implementing and embedding the whole of university approach. Implementation support was offered to each Australian university, to promote and embed a whole-of-organisational approach to the prevention of gender-based violence.

In 2021, Our Watch was invited be a member of the expert advisory group for the development of Universities Australia’s sexual violence prevention campaign. Our focus as members of the advisory group was on ensuring the campaign was developed in a way that aligned well to evidence in terms of what drives gender-based violence and best practice in social marketing for young people. As a member of the advisory group Our Watch were advised that the campaign was placed on hold for review in November 2021. Our Watch was not involved in the development of the UA Good Practice Guide released in July 2023. However, Our

Watch is undertaking a range of work in relation to universities, which we anticipate will involve ongoing engagement and collaboration with UA.

Documents provided on notice:

Senator Waters: The department gave us quite a lot of information yesterday, but that was a good reinforcement of what they were telling us. I'm pleased that there's what sounds like a fairly rigorous process. Ms Sheppard, I think it was you who mentioned there were seven core elements that indicated the success or otherwise of a sex and relationships program? Can you, on notice, provide what those seven elements are? (p. 51)

Our Watch has prioritised respectful relationships education as a key plank of its prevention work since its establishment in 2013. This commitment reflects the importance of respectful relationships education as part of work to prevent violence against women. Respectful relationships education has one of the most robust and long-established evidence bases which demonstrates efficacy in the prevention of gender-based violence.

In 2021, Our Watch released two key papers on respectful relationships education:

- [Respectful relationships education in schools: Evidence paper](#)
- [Respectful relationships education: A brief for policy makers](#)

These papers contribute to the growing evidence base for effective approaches to violence prevention work in schools.

They outline the seven core elements of best practice of respectful relationships education (graphic below, more information available on page 8, [RRE Policy brief](#)), drawing on the findings of pilot projects in Australian primary and secondary schools, as well as the national and international literature.



<sup>1</sup> Australian Government. (2021). Respectful Relationships. National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children: Fourth Action Plan actions. <https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/initiative/respectful-relationships/>