PREPARED DAD FOUNDATION

POLICY SUBMISSION

Preparing Fathers, Preventing Violence

Recognising the Transition to Fatherhood as a Missing Developmental Window in Australia's Prevention and Early Intervention Architecture

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SUBMISSION TO
The Consultation on the Second Action Plan

NATIONAL PLAN
National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

SUBMITTED BY
Prepared Dad Foundation

> *"The perinatal period represents a rare and time-limited window in which many men are motivated, present, and reachable."*

MOVEMBER, 2026

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Executive Summary

Australia has made significant progress in addressing domestic, family and sexual violence through investment in prevention, early intervention, response and recovery initiatives. The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 provides an ambitious framework for creating a future free from violence and strengthening the safety and wellbeing of women and children.

The Prepared Dad Foundation supports the objectives of the National Plan and welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of the Second Action Plan.

This submission proposes that Australia has overlooked a significant opportunity within its prevention and early intervention architecture: **the transition to fatherhood.**

110,000

Australian men become first-time fathers each year (approx.) — one of the most profound developmental transitions of their lives, involving significant changes in identity, relationships, responsibilities and emotional awareness.

They are reconstructing identity, redefining masculinity, renegotiating intimate relationships and establishing patterns of caregiving and family participation that may endure for decades (Machin, 2018).

Despite growing evidence regarding the importance of fathers to maternal wellbeing, child development, gender equality and family functioning, perinatal fatherhood support remains largely absent from Australia's violence prevention strategy.

Current prevention efforts predominantly engage men before adulthood through education, or after harmful behaviours have emerged through intervention and behaviour change programs. Comparatively little attention has been directed towards engaging men during one of the most significant developmental transitions of their lives, when motivation for change and aspirations for learning are high.

The Prepared Dad Foundation submits that the transition to fatherhood may represent one of the most significant and underutilised developmental opportunities available for strengthening the protective factors associated with healthy relationships, gender equality and the prevention of violence against women and children.

The transition to fatherhood involves both psychological and biological transformations. We now know that hormonal and neurological changes can increase men's responsiveness to caregiving, attachment and family relationships. This makes fatherhood not only a social transition but also a biologically significant developmental window.

It is our view that fatherhood provides a unique opportunity to strengthen the emotional, relational and caregiving capacities that contribute to safe, respectful and healthy family relationships. These capacities include:

- Perinatal maternal, infant and self support
- Emotional regulation

- Emotional literacy
- Secure attachment
- Healthy masculinity
- Personal responsibility and accountability
- Respectful communication
- Conflict-management skills
- Caregiving confidence
- Anger management
- Relationship competence
- Social connection
- Help-seeking behaviour

The Prepared Dad Foundation has developed the Prepared Dad Program to operationalise this opportunity. The program is designed as a developmental, relationship-centred and gender-transformative intervention that supports men to become emotionally safe partners, engaged fathers and positive male role models.

To be clear, we do not suggest that preparing men for fatherhood will prevent all forms of violence, nor that it can address entrenched patterns of abuse that require specialist intervention. Rather, we propose that the transition to fatherhood creates a unique opportunity to strengthen empathy, emotional literacy, relationship skills, caregiving capacity and social connection at a time when many men are highly motivated to learn and grow. These protective factors are themselves associated with healthier relationships and lower future violence risk.

To our knowledge, no existing national violence prevention framework has formally conceptualised the transition to fatherhood as a universal developmental intervention point for transforming masculinity, strengthening relational capacity and preventing intergenerational violence.

The Second Action Plan presents an opportunity to begin addressing this gap.

> *"The pathway to fatherhood provides opportunities to engage, inform and prepare men for the transition to fatherhood and the many challenges and impacts it will have in their lives."*
>
> HEALTHY MALE, 2020

Introduction

The Prepared Dad Foundation is an Australian health promotion charity dedicated to redefining fatherhood by making active, informed, loving and affectionate involvement the cultural masculine norm from conception onward.

We prepare fathers to show up — calm, confident, and capable — through expert-led education, targeted resources, real stories, and a supportive community. We are transforming how men engage during pregnancy, birth, and early parenting with the aim of normalising equal partnership and mutual support between first-time parents.

> *"The perinatal period represents a point at which capability, motivation, and openness to change align in ways that are rarely replicated at other points in a man's life."*
>
> **MOVEMBER, 2026**

The Foundation exists to prepare fathers for the transition to parenthood by inspiring them to reach their full perinatal potential and strengthening health and resilience for the whole family.

The Foundation was established after founder Steven Kennedy's experience of the life-threatening birth of his son in 2017. Steven recognised first-hand how unprepared many fathers are for childbirth, the realities of early parenthood and the important support role they can play during one of the most significant phases in a family's life.

What began as a response to a personal experience has evolved into a broader mission: to prepare fathers for the transition to parenthood and strengthen family wellbeing through education, support and cultural change.

Over recent years, the Foundation has developed the Prepared Dad Program, a father-focused online education and support intervention designed to improve fathers' preparedness for childbirth, early parenting and family life. Through this work, the Foundation has become increasingly aware of a broader policy application and potential prevention and early intervention opportunity.

While substantial attention has rightly been given to improving outcomes for women and children during the perinatal period, comparatively little attention has been given to the developmental opportunities created by men's transition to fatherhood. This submission seeks to explore that opportunity.

Specifically, we propose that fatherhood should be recognised not only as a parenting issue, but also as a potential prevention and early intervention opportunity within Australia's broader strategy to prevent violence against women and children.

The Opportunity: The Developmental Window of First-Time Fatherhood

Australia has invested significantly in helping children and young people develop respectful relationships and in intervening with men after violence has emerged.

The Prepared Dad Foundation recognises that domestic, family and sexual violence arises from a complex interaction of individual, relational, community and societal factors. Many people who use violence are not fathers, and many fathers never use violence. This submission does not suggest that fatherhood preparation alone can prevent violence. However, it does propose that the transition to fatherhood represents a significant and underexplored opportunity to strengthen protective factors associated with healthy relationships, gender equality and family wellbeing.

Current prevention efforts predominantly engage men:

- before adulthood through education;
- after violence has occurred through intervention; or
- when harmful behaviours have already become established.

Relatively little investment has been directed towards engaging men during periods of major identity transition when beliefs and behaviours are more adaptable than at other times. The transition to fatherhood represents precisely such a period.

Becoming a father is one of the few times in adult life when many men actively reflect on who they are and who they want to become. As they prepare for the responsibilities of parenthood, men are often more open to learning, personal growth and new ways of thinking about relationships and family life (Machin, 2018). This makes the transition to fatherhood a valuable opportunity to strengthen the foundations of healthy relationships before problems arise.

Research increasingly suggests that fatherhood is associated with substantial changes in male psychology, emotional functioning, caregiving behaviour and identity formation (Machin, 2018). During this period men commonly experience:

- increased motivation to learn;
- heightened concern for family wellbeing;
- greater openness to and aspiration for behavioural change;
- increased attendance at health care services;
- changing social priorities;
- emotional vulnerability; and
- re-evaluation of values and identity.

> *"There is a crucial opportunity here: many fathers struggle when adjusting to parenthood, yet they are more motivated than ever to look after their health for the benefit of their families."*
>
> MOVEMBER, MORE THAN PROVIDER, 2026

These characteristics create a potential opportunity to engage men before harmful attitudes and behaviours become entrenched.

The Prepared Dad Foundation therefore submits that the transition to fatherhood should be recognised as a critical developmental window within Australia's prevention and early intervention architecture.

This developmental opportunity coincides with a documented period of elevated risk. The Australian Government's 2024 Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches to End Gender-Based Violence found that approximately 34,500 women reported experiencing violence from a current partner while pregnant, and a further 325,900 reported experiencing violence from a previous partner during pregnancy. Reviews of child death cases in Australia have similarly found that a father's violence towards the mother during pregnancy significantly increases risk to the child.

The Rapid Review identified general practice, antenatal clinics, community child health, mental health services and emergency departments as key intervention sites for domestic, family and sexual violence — the very touchpoints at which fathers are present but, as this submission has argued, are rarely engaged. The same perinatal period this submission identifies as a critical developmental opportunity is therefore also recognised, from a risk perspective, as a critical protective window. Investing in father-focused prevention during this window addresses both an opportunity and an urgent protective need.

Again, this is not an argument that fathers are inherently problematic or that preparing for fatherhood itself prevents violence.

The Prepared Dad Foundation recognises that entrenched patterns of violence require specialist responses and that many people who use violence will require targeted intervention beyond the scope of fatherhood education. However, by strengthening empathy, emotional literacy, relationship skills and caregiving capacity during a critical life transition, fatherhood preparation may contribute to reducing the likelihood that some men develop harmful relationship behaviours in the first place.

THE CENTRAL PROPOSITION OF THIS SUBMISSION

Australia should recognise the transition to fatherhood as a critical developmental opportunity for prevention and early intervention and develop strategies that support men to become emotionally safe partners, engaged fathers and positive male role models.

> *"The historically dominant construction of the father as only a detached provider is gradually giving way to contemporary models that foreground relational engagement, emotional availability, and active co-parenting."*
>
> **MOVEMBER, 2026**

Fatherhood as a Biological and Developmental Transition

One reason the transition to fatherhood deserves greater policy attention is that it involves measurable biological, neurological and psychological adaptation that prepares men for caregiving and family life. These changes can be initiated during pregnancy given the right environment and involvement.

–30%

Studies have identified reductions in testosterone of up to 30%, alongside increases in hormones associated with attachment and caregiving, including oxytocin and prolactin (Gettler et al., 2011; Feldman et al., 2010; Storey et al., 2000).

Emerging neuroscience has also identified changes in brain regions associated with empathy, attachment, emotional processing and parental responsiveness (Mascaro et al., 2014; Abraham et al., 2014).

These findings suggest that fatherhood should not be understood solely as a social transition. It is also a period of biological adaptation and neuroplasticity that may increase men's capacity for caregiving, attachment and relational engagement.

From a prevention perspective, this is highly significant. Periods of biological and psychological adaptation are often characterised by increased openness to learning and behavioural change. The transition to fatherhood may therefore represent a unique developmental window during which interventions aimed at strengthening empathy, emotional literacy, healthy relationships and caregiving skills may be particularly effective.

Why Fatherhood Matters

A substantial body of international evidence demonstrates that fathers play an important role in the wellbeing of children, mothers, families and communities. It follows then that this role is strengthened if fathers themselves are provided with targeted support to undertake these roles.

Research consistently shows that children benefit when fathers are positively involved in their lives. A systematic review by Sarkadi et al. (2008) found that father involvement is associated with improved social, emotional and cognitive outcomes for children. Positive father involvement has also been linked to improved educational achievement, stronger social development and better long-term wellbeing.

The American Academy of Pediatrics has identified father engagement as an important contributor to child wellbeing, maternal wellbeing and family functioning (Yogman & Garfield, 2016). International evidence from the *State of the World's Fathers* reports similarly highlights associations between involved fatherhood, improved maternal health, greater gender equality and stronger family relationships (Equimundo, 2026).

The National Fatherhood Initiative (US) has synthesised decades of fatherhood research and concluded that children with involved fathers are more likely to perform well at school, avoid substance misuse, develop positive social and emotional skills and thrive economically and socially later in life. Conversely, father absence and poor-quality father-child relationships have been associated with a range of negative outcomes, including behavioural difficulties, poorer educational outcomes, increased substance use and greater involvement in delinquent behaviour.

The benefits of father involvement extend well beyond children. Evidence suggests that engaged fathers contribute to lower maternal stress, stronger co-parenting relationships, improved communication between parents and a more equitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities. These outcomes strengthen family resilience, improve maternal wellbeing and create conditions that support healthier, more stable family environments.

Fatherhood may therefore be one of the few periods in adult male life where biology, psychology and social responsibility converge in ways that naturally support caregiving, attachment and relational growth. Could this also be a violence prevention pathway?

Taken together, this evidence suggests that fathers are not peripheral participants in family life. They are influential contributors to family wellbeing. With targeted intervention, this influence could be magnified.

For this reason, fatherhood should not be viewed solely as a parenting issue. It should also be understood as a public health issue, a family wellbeing issue and, potentially, an important opportunity within Australia's broader violence prevention architecture.

Affectionate Perinatal Fathering as a Protective Factor

The Consultation Paper identifies healthy father figures and positive male role models as protective factors against future violence perpetration.

Findings from the Australian Institute of Family Studies' *Ten to Men* study demonstrated that men who grew up with positive father figures expressing affection were significantly less likely to become perpetrators of family violence in adulthood.

If positive fathering contributes to reducing future violence risk, then supporting men to become positive fathers represents a legitimate prevention strategy worthy of greater attention and investment.

> *"Supporting the health of new fathers is not in competition with prioritising the care of mothers and children; the evidence indicates it is integral to it."*
>
> **MOVEMBER, 2026**

This aligns with broader evidence regarding attachment, emotional regulation and child development.

Research consistently demonstrates that children exposed to nurturing, emotionally available caregivers are more likely to develop healthy emotional regulation, secure attachment and positive relationship skills.

Conversely, exposure to family violence, emotional neglect and adverse childhood experiences increases the likelihood of poor mental health outcomes, relationship difficulties and future involvement in violence (Haslam et al., 2023).

By supporting fathers to become emotionally responsive, engaged and nurturing caregivers, Australia has an opportunity to strengthen protective factors not only for current families, but for future generations.

The implications extend beyond fatherhood itself. They speak to the possibility of reducing intergenerational cycles of trauma, emotional disconnection and violence.

> *"There is a clear shift towards the active and equal involvement of men in parenting."*
>
> **HEALTHY MALE, 2020**

PART TWO

The Missing Father in Australia's Perinatal System

The Missing Father in Australia's Perinatal System

Over the past several decades, Australia has made significant progress in recognising the importance of women's experiences during pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting. This progress has been both necessary and beneficial.

However, while maternity systems have become increasingly focused on women-centred care and improving maternal outcomes, fathers often remain peripheral within the perinatal health landscape.

Australian reports such as *More Than a Provider* (Movember, 2023) and *A Case for Change* (Plus Paternal, 2024) highlight a recurring theme: fathers are frequently present but insufficiently engaged.

> *"The whole system squeezes men out. There are no universal structures within the system to engage men."*
>
> HEALTHY MALE, 2020

Many men attend antenatal appointments and childbirth education classes, yet receive little direct support or preparation for their own transition into parenthood. As a result, fathers often report feeling uncertain about:

- their real-life experience and role during pregnancy, birth and early parenting;
- how to support their partner, baby and themselves effectively;
- the physical, emotional and practical realities of parenthood;
- relationship changes and parental identity shifts following birth;
- neonatal and infant development;
- perinatal mental health;
- looking after their own wellbeing; and
- the practical realities of caregiving.

This lack of intentional preparation is not simply a service gap. It represents a missed prevention and early intervention opportunity. Men are ready to engage and be more involved across the perinatal period, however, the lack of targeted resources and guidance means they feel undervalued and invisible.

> *"Evidence suggests that openness to intervention and help-seeking do exist at this point, with new fathers who have used violence indicating support for a dedicated program to assist them in navigating the transition to fatherhood."*
>
> RAPID REVIEW OF PREVENTION APPROACHES, 2024

The transition to parenthood is one of the most significant periods of adjustment a family will experience. Research by John and Julie Gottman has demonstrated that the birth of a first child is often

accompanied by declines in relationship satisfaction, increased conflict and reduced emotional connection for many couples (Gottman & Gottman, 2007). Alongside sleep deprivation, changing identities and the demands of caring for a newborn, parents are required to renegotiate their roles, expectations and ways of relating to one another. While these challenges are common, they are not inevitable predictors of poor outcomes. The Gottmans' work suggests that couples who develop strong communication, emotional awareness and teamwork skills are better able to navigate this transition and maintain healthy, supportive relationships. This highlights the importance of preparing fathers not only for parenting, but also for the relational changes that accompany the transition to family life.

When fathers are poorly prepared for these challenges, the capacity of the family system to adapt is more likely to be reduced. Conversely, when fathers are knowledgeable, emotionally available and actively engaged, families are better positioned to navigate the demands of early parenthood.

The Prepared Dad Foundation submits that first-time fathers should be recognised as individuals undergoing a significant developmental transition that warrants intentional support and preparation.

Fatherhood as a Transformative Opportunity

The National Plan recognises that violence against women is shaped by gender inequality, social norms and harmful constructions of masculinity.

The Prepared Dad Foundation strongly supports this analysis. Further, we submit that the transition to fatherhood could represent one of the most powerful opportunities in adult male development to influence these factors positively.

Becoming a father involves more than preparing for a baby. For many men, it is also a period of identity transition. As mentioned, research suggests that fathers often reflect on their values, relationships, responsibilities and understanding of masculinity as they adapt to the role of parenthood. Questions about caregiving, partnership, emotional expression and the type of role model they wish to become frequently emerge during this period.

> *"Many men are consciously trying to do fatherhood differently to how it was done to them."*
>
> MOVEMBER, 2026

Studies exploring men's transition to fatherhood describe it as a process of "becoming a father" rather than simply having a child, involving ongoing reflection about identity, responsibility and relationships (Fägerskiöld, 2008; Månsson et al., 2024).

Researchers have also observed that many men actively renegotiate traditional ideas of masculinity as they seek to balance providing, caregiving and emotional connection within family life (Habib & Lancaster, 2010). Other studies have found that fatherhood commonly prompts men to reconsider what matters most, their responsibilities to others and the kind of man they want their children to see and emulate (Månsson et al., 2024; Fägerskiöld, 2008). Collectively, this research suggests that the transition to fatherhood is not merely a change in circumstances but a period of personal development and identity formation that may create opportunities for positive behavioural and relational change.

This period of reflection is not only significant, it presents an opportunity unlike other violence prevention strategies.

> *"Fatherhood gave their life greater meaning (84%) and helped them express love and vulnerability more openly (77%)."*
>
> MOVEMBER, 2026

Intentionally preparing for fatherhood is not primarily a corrective intervention but a growth opportunity that many men are ready to embrace. If provided with targeted information and guidance on the perinatal roles of fatherhood, they are more likely to be compelled to try and adopt the version of fatherhood that is normalised by that guidance.

They are not being asked to stop being something — they are being invited to become something.

AWAY FROM

- Emotional restriction
- Stoicism
- Dominance
- Self-reliance at all costs
- Disconnection from caregiving

TOWARDS

- Empathy
- Emotional responsiveness
- Nurturance
- Shared responsibility
- Taking responsibility and accountability for their actions
- Relational openness and competence
- Parental partnership

This transformation aligns closely with the goals articulated in Our Watch's *Change the Story* framework.

Importantly, it does so through a strengths-based lens. Rather than engaging men primarily through risk, blame or correction, the transition to fatherhood allows us to engage men through aspiration, purpose, responsibility, accountability, care and love.

This may represent one of the most constructive and scalable opportunities available for promoting healthy masculinity in Australia.

> *"One of the changes I have experienced since becoming a father is the vulnerability that follows it... I care more for my child than I ever cared for myself."*
>
> MOVEMBER, 2026

Why Now?

The case for recognising the transition to fatherhood as a prevention and early intervention opportunity has never been stronger. Australia is currently confronting a range of interconnected social challenges that directly affect the wellbeing of women, children and families. These include:

- persistent rates of domestic, family and sexual violence;
- increasing concern regarding online misogyny;
- growing influence of harmful online male subcultures;
- social isolation among men;
- declining social connection;
- increasing psychological distress; and
- growing concern regarding the experiences of boys and young men.

The Consultation Paper identifies the importance of engaging men and boys earlier, before harmful attitudes and behaviours become entrenched. It also highlights the need to create healthy alternatives to harmful online influences and strengthen pathways that support positive male identities.

These challenges are often discussed separately from fatherhood. We believe they are deeply connected.

Questions of violence prevention are ultimately questions about relationships. Questions about relationships are often questions about identity. And questions about identity become particularly important during major life transitions.

First-time fatherhood represents one of the few periods in adult life where many men voluntarily engage in profound self-reflection. Men begin asking questions such as:

- What is my perinatal support role?
- What kind of father do I want to be?
- What kind of partner do I want to be?
- What values do I want to pass on?
- How do I create a safe and loving family?
- What does masculinity look like to me?

Modern fathers want answers to these questions but have nowhere to ask them. Previous generations of fathers can rarely provide meaningful guidance and their peers are often in a similar position.

Importantly, new fatherhood allows men to engage with these questions through aspiration rather than correction. The transition is driven not by fear or punishment, but by love, knowledge, confident responsibility and a desire to contribute positively to the lives of their families.

This creates a unique opportunity to strengthen the protective capacities that make healthy relationships possible.

Australia has invested significantly in helping children develop respectful relationships and in intervening with men after violence has emerged. Yet we have largely overlooked one of the most important opportunities to influence men's attitudes, behaviours and relationships before harm occurs.

Public policy has not yet fully recognised the transition to fatherhood as a violence prevention opportunity.

The Prepared Dad Foundation believes it is time to do so.

The Prepared Dad Program: Prevention and Early Intervention

The Prepared Dad Program was developed in response to a simple observation: most men are expected to support pregnancy, childbirth and early parenting without ever being intentionally prepared for the role.

The increase in the perinatal expectations placed on modern fathers has not been met with a requisite level of support to allow them to undertake the role effectively. This has been a theme of academic literature on this topic for the last two decades.

While society prepares individuals for careers, financial responsibilities and numerous other life transitions, relatively little attention is devoted to preparing men for the most important transition of their lives.

The program seeks to address this gap, not as a men's behaviour change program in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a developmental prevention and early intervention program that is strengths-based and delivered during a period of heightened motivation, identity reconstruction and family formation.

The program supports fathers to develop knowledge, confidence and relational and emotional literacy across the perinatal period.

The Prepared Dad Foundation does not claim that participation in the program prevents violence. However, the Foundation does submit that strengthening these protective factors is consistent with the objectives of prevention and early intervention and worthy of further investigation and investment.

The program represents one practical example of how the transition to fatherhood can be operationalised as a developmental intervention point within Australia's broader prevention architecture.

Importantly, it demonstrates that fatherhood is not merely a topic for parenting policy. It may also represent a valuable opportunity for public health policy, men's health policy, family wellbeing policy and violence prevention policy.

The Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches highlighted the need to work with men and boys to promote healthy masculinities. Recommendation 6(c) states:

> *"The Commonwealth Government, with states and territories, to develop a national, coordinated and co-designed approach to engaging with men and boys on healthy masculinities and violence prevention. This should include: (c) developing or expanding DFSV-informed program responses across sectors, focusing on healthy relationships and masculinities throughout men's life transitions… new fathers, separation/relationship breakdown…"*
>
> RAPID REVIEW OF PREVENTION APPROACHES, 2024 — RECOMMENDATION 6(C)

PART THREE

Independent Evaluation

Independent Evaluation

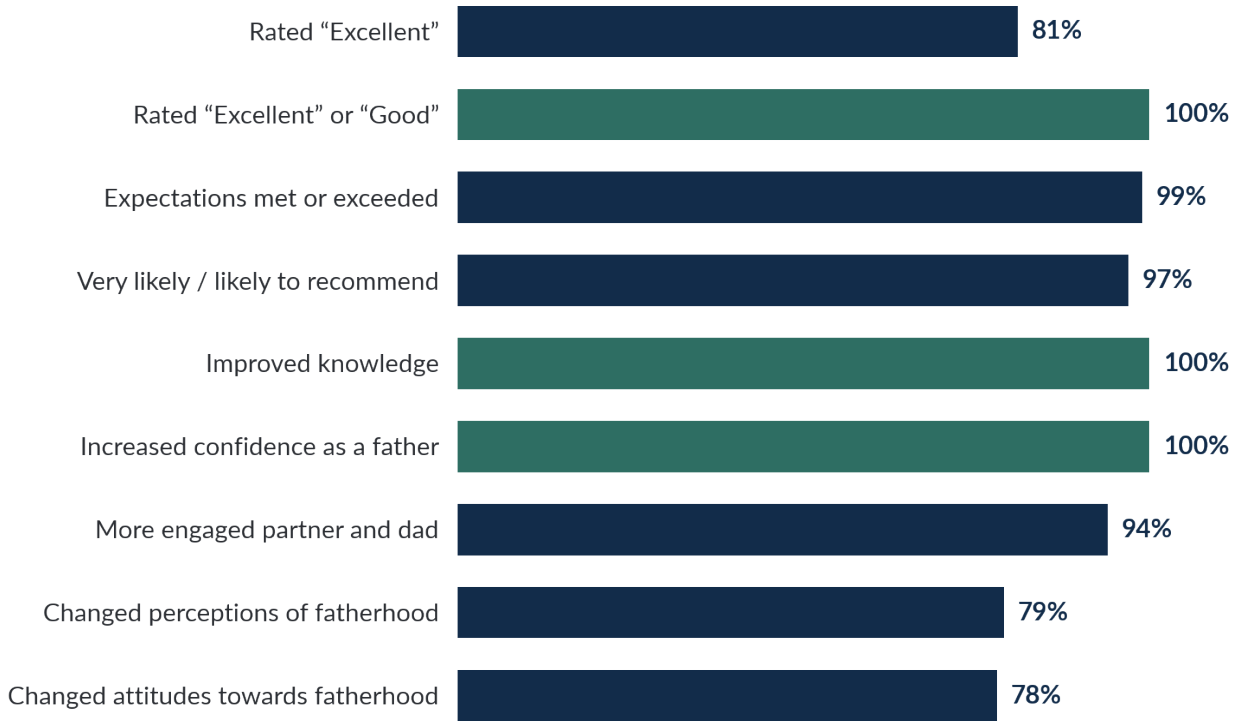
The Prepared Dad Foundation has partnered with Curtin University to undertake an independent evaluation of the Prepared Dad Program.

The study is examining participants' experiences of the program and exploring changes in knowledge, confidence and preparedness for the transition to fatherhood.

While longitudinal research is required to determine impacts on violence-related outcomes, early evaluation data suggests that expectant fathers are highly receptive to interventions that strengthen empathy, confidence, relationship skills and caregiving identity during the transition to fatherhood.

Early Evidence from the Prepared Dad Program

The Prepared Dad Program has now been delivered to hundreds of Australian expectant fathers nationally. Participant satisfaction data (n=67) demonstrates consistently high levels of engagement, satisfaction and perceived behaviour change.



The above results are from the satisfaction survey only. A more formal and rigorous pre- and post-questionnaire academic analysis will inform a clearer picture of the transformation in knowledge, perceptions and attitudes that result from attending this program.

Another potentially more powerful measure of the success of this course is what men have said immediately after attending the course. A short video of some of these testimonials can be found here: youtu.be/Kqr861QawZw, and more quotes from the video testimonials are shown below.

General

"You get so much about the birth and the mother and the baby. But you don't really know what your role is in that."

"This new paradigm of parenthood or masculinity... this is a completely different view."

"This course has really prompted some beautiful conversations between my partner and myself."

"It still feels like at all the doctor's appointments you're still an afterthought."

"This course has well and truly exceeded expectations."

"It really changed the game."

"We're being proactive in our approach, whether it's about communication or how we actually want to parent."

"This is really setting up a really strong platform for what fatherhood can look like in the future."

"You are already doing great things by doing this. You're a step above."

"This course has really prompted some beautiful conversations between my partner and myself. It's ultimately reinforced our strengths and acknowledged our areas of improvement."

"The program has actually exponentially increased my knowledge... and it nurtured the relationship with my partner as well."

Identity & Masculinity

"For me, it's the first time that I have the possibility to be around this brotherhood... other men talking about important things."

"It's kind of nice to know there's other men out there at the exact same time as me. And I'm not alone in this journey."

"Makes you feel less alone in the process."

"This new paradigm of parenthood or masculinity... this is a completely different view. I find it really complete not only in the skills, also in how to show up in a healthy masculine energy."

"It really opened up my eyes on being a father or being a father-to-be."

"It's been eye-opening a bit. I suppose I came in not knowing much about the whole process and my role in the whole journey to fatherhood."

> *"I thought I was, you know, had a pretty good handle on it. But talking to some other guys, I was like, I need to actually level up even more."*

> *"I do find it a safe space for guys. We're in this together to talk about this with other guys who are going to be fathers."*

> *"This is for guys and I feel very privileged to actually be able to open up and share it with guys."*

Relationship Strengthening

> *"It actually helped me a lot and I started communicating effectively with my partner."*

> *"I've always been talking to my wife after this, a bit of a debrief about a couple of things that I've learned, and it's helped build our own bond as well."*

> *"She wasn't feeling like I was connecting to her a lot and talking about the topics around the pregnancy. This helped our relationship talk about what is relevant to her."*

Confidence & Preparedness

> *"It really built up the confidence. I think after this course she sees more confidence in what I can actually provide."*

> *"I've found it super useful... I felt a lot more prepared, a lot more comfortable."*

> *"This has just been so good for my confidence."*

> *"It gave us confidence to actually have a bit of a plan in ourselves and back ourselves and trust our instincts."*

> *"Come away with a lot more tools than where I started."*

Understanding their Perinatal Support Roles

> *"You get so much about the birth and the mother and the baby. But you don't really know what your role is in that. And I feel from this, I really understand what I should be doing."*

> *"I came in not knowing much about the whole process and my role in the whole journey to fatherhood."*

> *"There's lots of stuff I can do and stuff that you don't really see in social media or online readily."*

> *"How much is there to know about birth?... But I've ended up with heaps of pages of notes."*

These findings and testimonials suggest that expectant fathers are not only willing to engage in father-focused education but are receptive to changes in knowledge, attitudes and self-perceived behaviour. Importantly, these are the mechanisms that prevention and early intervention approaches seek to influence before harmful behaviours become established.

The significance of these findings extends beyond program satisfaction. Prevention programs frequently struggle to engage adult men before problems emerge. The Prepared Dad Program demonstrates that pregnancy may represent a rare period during which men actively seek guidance, engage in reflective learning and report meaningful changes in attitudes, perceptions and behaviours.

This supports the proposition that the transition to fatherhood should be recognised as a strategic intervention point within Australia's prevention and early intervention framework.

The Prepared Dad Foundation recognises that policy innovation must be accompanied by rigorous evidence generation. While the proposition advanced in this submission — that fatherhood represents a significant developmental opportunity for primary prevention — is grounded in existing evidence relating to father engagement, healthy masculinities, attachment, child development and violence prevention, further research is required to better understand how father-focused interventions contribute to long-term family outcomes.

Further, while these findings should not be interpreted as evidence of violence prevention outcomes, they do suggest that fathers are willing to engage with structured education and support during the transition to parenthood. Importantly, they demonstrate that fathers value opportunities to prepare for their role and develop the skills required to support their families.

The Prepared Dad Foundation believes that future longitudinal research should investigate whether father-focused interventions influence:

- relationship quality;
- maternal wellbeing;
- family functioning;
- paternal mental health;
- help-seeking behaviour;
- emotional regulation;
- child development outcomes;
- adverse childhood experiences; and
- indicators associated with the prevention of domestic and family violence.

The Foundation welcomes opportunities to contribute to this emerging evidence base.

Recommendations

The Prepared Dad Foundation recommends that the Second Action Plan:

1

Integrate father preparation into maternity, perinatal and early childhood systems.

Fathers should be recognised as important participants in the transition to parenthood and provided with opportunities to develop the knowledge, skills and confidence required to support their families effectively.

2

Fund a pilot of the Prepared Dad Program and commission an independent study of its effectiveness as a prevention and early intervention model.

The Australian Government should fund a structured pilot of the Prepared Dad Program across a representative sample of expectant fathers, paired with an independently commissioned longitudinal study measuring its impact on the protective factors associated with the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence, including emotional regulation, relationship skills, caregiving confidence and help-seeking behaviour. Findings should inform whether father-focused perinatal programs warrant broader investment as a recognised prevention and early intervention pathway.

3

Invest in innovation, research and evaluation.

The Australian Government should support further research examining the relationship between father preparation, family wellbeing and violence prevention outcomes. Particular attention should be given to longitudinal evaluation and implementation research.

4

Support the development and scaling of evidence-informed father engagement initiatives.

The prevention system should encourage innovative approaches that strengthen the protective capacities of fathers and promote healthy, respectful and equitable family relationships.

Conclusion

Australia has made significant progress in understanding the drivers of violence against women and children. The next challenge is to identify opportunities to intervene earlier. This submission proposes that the transition to fatherhood represents one such opportunity.

The evidence is clear that fathers matter. Engaged fathers contribute positively to maternal wellbeing, child development, family functioning and gender equality.

The evidence also suggests that positive father figures and positive male role models are protective factors against future violence perpetration. Yet despite these findings, fatherhood remains largely absent from Australia's prevention architecture.

The Prepared Dad Foundation submits that this represents a missed opportunity.

Each year, over 110,000 Australian men voluntarily enter a period of profound identity transformation characterised by heightened motivation to learn, increased concern for family wellbeing and significant openness to behavioural change.

Public policy has not yet fully recognised this transition as a prevention opportunity. We believe it should.

This submission does not argue that fatherhood alone prevents violence. Nor does it claim that father-focused interventions are a substitute for existing prevention efforts. Rather, it proposes that fatherhood may represent a significant and underutilised developmental window through which Australia can strengthen the protective factors associated with healthy relationships, family wellbeing and the prevention of violence.

Australia has invested significantly in helping children develop respectful relationships and in intervening with men after violence has emerged. Yet we have largely overlooked one of the most important opportunities to influence men's attitudes, behaviours and relationships before harm occurs.

The transition to fatherhood.

If Australia is serious about ending violence against women and children within a generation, we must not only respond to violence after it occurs. We must also invest in the developmental opportunities that make violence less likely in the first place.

Preparing fathers may be one of those opportunities. The Prepared Dad Foundation believes the time has come to explore that possibility.

About the Prepared Dad Foundation

The Prepared Dad Foundation is an Australian health promotion charity dedicated to creating a culture of partnership and mutual support between first-time parents.

Our mission is to prepare fathers for childbirth and early parenthood by equipping them with knowledge, practical skills and emotional tools, inspiring them to reach their full perinatal potential and strengthening health and resilience for the whole family.

The Foundation delivers father-focused education, resources, peer support and advocacy initiatives designed to improve fathers' preparedness for childbirth, parenting and family life.

The Foundation's work is grounded in the belief that informed, involved and emotionally engaged fathers contribute positively to maternal wellbeing, child development, relationship quality and family resilience.

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