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Australian state appoints official for ‘Men’s Behavior Change’ as outcry over violence against women grows

By Antoinette Radford, CNN
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Demonstrators take part in a national rally against violence against women in Sydney on April 27, 2024
Lisa Maree Williams/Getty Images

(CNN) — As Australian women push for action on domestic violence – a problem described by the country’s prime minister as a “national crisis” – one state has appointed a special official charged with improving men’s behavior.

Victoria Premier Jacinta Allan announced Wednesday that state MP Tim Richardson would serve as the inaugural Parliamentary Secretary for Men’s Behavior Change – the first position of its kind in the country.

Richardson said he would focus on the influence the internet and social media have on male attitudes towards women, and on building respectful relationships. It would not be “easy work, but it is important,” he added.

“We must make Victoria a safer place for women and children and work to end the tragedy of deaths of Victorian women at the hands of men,” Richardson [wrote on X](#).

Gender-based violence is plaguing Australia – 31 women have been killed across the country so far this year, [according to](#) the Counting Dead Women project. Last year, 64 women were murdered, the group said.

Last weekend, a woman and her daughter were shot dead in Perth, Western Australia, by a man who was allegedly trying to find his ex-partner and daughter. In a [statement](#), the man’s daughter said that, “when my father couldn’t find us he murdered her best friend and her best friend’s daughter.”

The country was rattled by multiple violent incidents in April, including when five women were killed by a man armed with a knife at a [shopping center in the suburb of Bondi in Sydney](#). Police said CCTV footage showed it was “obvious” the man targeted women. In another violent incident, a 28-year-old mother was allegedly murdered by her partner, who was already facing charges of raping and stalking her but had been released on bail.

Tarang Chawla, who founded the non-profit Not One More Niki after his sister Nikita Chawla was murdered by her partner in 2015, told CNN he hopes the new parliamentary position will make a “tangible difference” to addressing male violence in Australia.

“This role gives me some semblance of hope that the focus is shifting away from this being a women’s problem to solve and instead is a men’s issue that we can take leadership for,” he said.

“But it also requires the Parliamentary Secretary to consult and collaborate on solutions with those working on the ground, with men, to understand their attitudes, the drivers of their actions and work to change their behaviors,” he told CNN.

However, not all Australians had a positive reaction to the news. Jane Hume of the opposition Liberal Party, who represents Victoria in the national Senate, questioned the efficacy of the appointment.

“It does sound to me like a little bit of window dressing around a really important issue that involves genuine cultural change,” she told Sky News.

Within hours of announcing the position, Richardson took to X, writing: “Some pretty hectic reactions here to an important role and Australian first. It will be about modelling positive role models for boys and men and ensuring we break away from gendered based stereotypes and building respectful relationships. As boys and men we need to lead this.”

While the new Parliamentary Secretary for Men’s Behavior Change now exists at a state level, Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese also [announced](#) in May a rapid review into the prevention of domestic violence after calling the problem a “national crisis.”

“We recognize that governments need to act, but we also recognize that this is an issue for the whole of society. Women should not be responsible for ending violence against women,” he said at the time.

CNN’s Hilary Whiteman contributed to this report.

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