THE VICTORIAN PEAK BODY FOR GENDER EQUITY, WOMEN’S HEALTH AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN
VISION
Equality, wellbeing and freedom from violence for every woman and girl, in every community of Victoria.

PURPOSE
To advocate, influence and collaborate to improve outcomes in gender equity, women’s health and in the prevention of violence against women.

WHO IS GENDER EQUITY VICTORIA?
Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is the Victorian peak body for gender equity, women’s health and the prevention of violence against women.

We work with organisations across Victoria to advance a shared vision of gender equality, health and freedom from violence for every woman and girl in every community across Victoria.

WHAT DOES GEN VIC DO?
We advocate for equality for all women, including those living in rural locations, living with disabilities or with HIV, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, immigrant and refugee women as well as women from LGBTI communities.

Our first priority is to identify and change systems and structures that place women at risk of disadvantage and poor health. To do this, we value and build on the leadership of women and women’s organisations, and work together to reduce all forms of discrimination that intersect with gender inequality.
OUR ROLE

In line with our vision we will:
- ensure women’s voices are integral to policy, legislation, and services
- deliver and support coordinated and evidence-informed women’s health promotion activities
- facilitate collaboration and partnerships.

WHO WE REPRESENT

GEN VIC represents organisations across Victoria who advance gender equity and hold values that align with feminist principles.

We welcome as members any organisations and individuals who support GEN VIC’s vision for the equality, health and freedom from violence for every woman and girl in Victoria.

OUR APPROACH

GEN VIC recognises that health and wellbeing are more than the absence of disease, illness or injury. Many broader social, cultural, political, environmental and economic factors affect women’s health, and so we work collaboratively to redress these factors.

Gender equality is a core determinant of health. We take a gender equitable and feminist approach to our work, advocating for resources and services to be directed towards those most in need, to ensure equal outcomes for all. We recognise gender equality as a human right and a necessary precondition for the prevention of violence against women and women’s sexual and reproductive health. Gender equality is essential to economic prosperity and delivers significant social benefits to Victorians.

WHY IS GEN VIC DIFFERENT?

GEN VIC is the only Victorian peak body for gender equity, women’s health and the prevention of violence against women.

GEN VIC has specialist expertise, state-wide reach and a local focus.

Through our membership, we bring diverse, specialist women’s expertise and unique perspectives of rural and metropolitan regions.

WHO DOES GEN VIC WORK WITH?

GEN VIC works with government, peak bodies and a wide range of public, community and private organisations to advance Victorian gender equity, women’s health and the prevention of violence against women. GEN VIC will work in close partnership with Victoria’s prevention agency, Respect Victoria, ensuring that our strategic priorities complement and support the work of the agency.

Our members have established partnerships across every region of Victoria with local governments, primary care partnerships, community health services, community organisations and regional integrated family violence committees. Other partners include, but are not limited to, Victoria Police, Department of Health and Human Services, Department of Education and Training, Indigenous Family Violence Regional Action Groups, LGBTI networks, sporting clubs, businesses, legal services, family violence and sexual assault services, ethno specific organisations and associations, universities and neighbourhood house networks.

OUR HISTORY

GEN VIC has evolved from a long history of successful advocacy for gender equity undertaken by women’s health services. From 1978, women’s health services first brought a feminist framework to the table, bringing women’s health into women’s hands and highlighting the impact of gendered violence and discrimination on women’s health in Victoria.

In 1994 a group of women’s health services formed the Women’s Health Association of Victoria (WHAV) in recognition of the need for structural, political and economic change to improve women’s health. The new peak body strengthened the voices of women and women’s services in Victoria.

In 2017, Victoria saw unprecedented social and political investment in addressing gender inequality and its health impacts on women, particularly in the area of preventing violence against women. WHAV recognised a need for a united peak body to represent a rapidly advancing and growing gender equality sector and to ensure that the voices of women and women’s organisations continue to be central in policy implementation and development.

Today GEN VIC is proud to represent a broad array of members who provide leadership and expertise in the areas of gender equity, women’s health and the prevention of violence against women.
WHY IS GENDER EQUITY A PRIORITY?

The World Health Organisation identifies gender as a factor most likely to dictate position or status in society and therefore one of the most powerful drivers of health inequality. Gender discrimination influences all areas of women’s health and wellness.  

Social, political and economic structures continue to limit women’s equal participation in society. For instance, not only is there a gender pay gap in every industry and occupational category in Australia, but employees in female-dominated industries such as health care and social assistance are paid significantly less than employees in male-dominated industries. This shows that work within female-dominated industries is undervalued and its significance minimised. Gender inequality significantly affects Victorian women’s wellbeing and is a major cause of poverty and poor mental and physical health. It is the key driver of violence against women.  

Achieving gender equality will provide numerous benefits to the Victorian community, including greater social inclusion, safer neighbourhoods, improved women’s health status, a healthier community and increased productivity.  

GEN VIC recognises that in order to improve women’s health, safety and wellbeing, it is vital that we transform the structures, norms and practices that perpetuate gender inequality. This is a long term goal requiring leadership, expertise, coordination and a range of tailored strategies. It cannot be done in isolation and will demand cross-government, multi-sector, community and business partnerships.  

GEN VIC member organisations provide leadership, expertise and coordination in advancing gender equity at a state-wide, regional and rural level. Together, GEN VIC members support innovation, share resources and avoid duplication of effort as we advocate for social change and bring the benefits of gender equality to Victoria.

WHY IS WOMEN’S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH A PRIORITY?

Sexual and reproductive health is a key determinant for women’s broader health and wellbeing and for their ability to participate fully and equitably in society.  

Sexual and reproductive health includes women’s ability to:  
- understand and control decisions about their fertility, including safe access to abortion and contraception  
- have safe and pleasurable sex  
- access key information and services that women require over the life course in relation to menopause and conditions such as polycystic ovarian syndrome.  

Key factors impacting women’s sexual and reproductive health outcomes include exposure to violence (including reproductive coercion), health literacy and body image. The intersection of gender inequality with discrimination on the basis of race, ability or sexuality shapes women’s experiences and outcomes.  

Achieving optimal sexual and reproductive health for all women in Victoria requires that women are able to access appropriate, affordable and timely sexual and reproductive health services where and when they need them and that comprehensive sexual and reproductive health literacy exists across the community for all life stages.

Our strategic priorities for 2018-2021

1. ADVANCE GENDER EQUITY  
2. PROMOTE WOMEN’S SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH  
3. PREVENT VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN  
4. BUILD AN INFLUENTIAL AND SUSTAINABLE PEAK BODY
WHY IS PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN A PRIORITY?

In Australia, intimate partner violence is the leading cause of death, disability and injury for women between the ages of 18 and 44. On average, one woman a week is killed by a partner or former partner in Australia. Current estimates are that one in three Australian women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15 years and one in five has experienced sexual violence since the age of 15 years. Intimate partner violence creates a significant impact on the overall health and wellbeing of Victorian women and girls.

It is imperative that we prevent violence against women from occurring in the first place.

Gender inequality is the key driver of violence against women and particular expressions of gender inequality consistently predict higher rates of violence against women, including:

- Condoning of violence against women
- Men’s control of decision-making and limits to women’s independence in public and private life
- Rigid gender roles and stereotypical attitudes to masculinity and femininity
- Male peer relations that emphasise aggression and disrespect towards women.

GEN VIC is committed to redressing the drivers of violence against women in our state and we support our members in working to prevent violence using a coordinated, evidence-based approach.

WHY IS BUILDING AN INFLUENTIAL AND SUSTAINABLE PEAK BODY A PRIORITY?

Victoria is undergoing momentous change with individuals, organisations and institutions investing in women’s equality, health and the prevention of violence against women.

GEN VIC provides a united voice to these individuals and organisations, advocating for gender equity, women’s health and the prevention of violence against women across policy contexts, within legislation and services.

GEN VIC is committed to building collaboration, partnerships and capabilities, to ensure that community investment in gender equity is strengthened and sustained.

To do this, GEN VIC will be an influential and sustainable peak body, modelling accountable and transparent leadership and implementing good governance principles.

GEN VIC will ensure that its leadership is informed by specialist intersectional gender equity knowledge and capabilities required to represent the diversity of women in Victoria.
CASE STUDY 1  
Gender Equity Training

In 2016, GEN VIC* introduced the Gender Equity Training Manual to build good practice gender equity training across Victoria. Our members developed this Manual collaboratively, after recognising that it would be beneficial for government and non-government organisations to receive gender equity training that is consistent, practical and informed by a strong evidence base.

The Manual is built on the shared expertise of our women’s health and advocacy services, developed over three decades of gender equity training. Since 1987, Victorian women’s health services have worked with a diverse range of organisations and communities to improve women’s overall health, providing gendered data, resources and training as part of this work.

WE HAVE:

- developed a consistent, good practice gender equity training resource that is built on GEN VIC members’ three decades of expertise
- strengthened our members’ role as leading providers of gender equity training for organisations throughout Victoria.
- provided governments, communities and health services with gender equity tools they can use to shape planning, policies and programs to benefit communities

CASE STUDY 2  
Victorian Rural Women’s Access to Family Planning Survey Report

In 2012, five rural Victorian women’s health services delivered a ground-breaking survey on access to family planning services in rural Victoria enabled by GEN VIC. This report was designed to help the government develop a baseline and work to improve rural Victorian women’s overall health and access to family planning.

Women in rural Victoria face a range of barriers in accessing family planning services. These include everything from difficulty accessing condoms and non-judgmental sex education, to finding GPs willing to support or refer women seeking abortion services. Added to this are uniquely rural barriers including: the weather affecting ‘fly in-fly out’ services, health care providers often being friends or relatives, and even a lack of accessible transport to the nearest major town. As a result, rural Victorian women continue to experience poorer health than those living in metropolitan areas.

WE HAVE:

- brought together the expertise of five rural Victorian women’s health services to produce a ground-breaking report on rural women’s health
- reached 225 respondents across rural Victoria from the areas of community health, local government, school nursing, family support services and general practice
- provided government and healthcare providers with comprehensive data and a framework to overcome barriers and improve rural Victorian women’s family planning access.

GEN VIC’s survey report gathered data from all five rural regions of Victoria, covering everything from access to contraception, pregnancy options counselling and abortion services, to privacy, travel, cost and community attitudes to family planning.

This report has been used across Victoria to support state and local governments, primary care partnerships, hospitals and community health centres to improve rural women’s access to family planning and provide timely, accurate, confidential and respectful services.
CASE STUDY 3
Regional Action Plans to Prevent Violence Against Women

In 2013, GEN VIC secured government funding to support the work of women’s health services who have led the way on planning for the prevention of violence against women in each region of Victoria.

As of October 2016, all communities in Victoria now have a regional action plan to prevent violence against women and their children.

GEN VIC members are taking a coordinated approach to regional and state-wide action planning by working with established regional prevention of violence against women committees, additional regional partners, community leaders, organisations and individuals.

This involves changes to policy, practice and culture across a broad range of organisations, including schools and sports programs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, local councils, emergency services and the domestic violence response sector.

WE HAVE:

- utilised established networks, partnerships, infrastructure and expertise to work towards the prevention of violence against women and their children at regional and local levels
- implemented a Prevention of Violence Against Women Community of Practice for women’s health services staff to ensure practice-sharing, learning and knowledge transfer
- developed a state-wide web-based planning hub for leading regional action, Action to Prevent Violence Against Women*, with information, tools, resources and best-practice examples to support action planning and results measurement
- delivered forums and events on the prevention of violence against women, such as Intersectionality In Action: A two-day forum for prevention of violence against women and gender equity practitioners in women’s health services.

*GEN VIC’s Action to Prevent Violence Against Women can be found at www.actionpvaw.org.au
“DIVERSE VOICES ARE VALUED.”

“EQUITY EQUALS TEAM STRENGTH.”

“GROWING STRONG RESILIENT WOMEN.”

“We need equity to achieve equality.”

GEN VIC

MEMBERSHIP

GEN VIC welcomes as members any organisations and individuals who support our vision for health, equality and freedom from violence for every woman and girl in Victoria.

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REFERENCES

Gender Equity Victoria acknowledges the traditional custodians of country across Australia and we pay our respect to Elders past and present. We recognise and apologise for the human suffering and injustice that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced as a result of colonisation and generations of discrimination and marginalisation. We acknowledge that the removal of children has and continues to devastate individuals, families and entire communities and that the intention of those policies has been to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a sovereign people who have never ceded their sovereignty of this land and we acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s human right to self-determination. We are committed to working in solidarity and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve women’s health, safety and wellbeing.
