

MEDIA RELEASE  
13 October 2020

### **Victorian women need a Gender Equal Budget for COVID19 recovery.**

Gender Equity Victoria has written to the State Treasurer Tim Pallas today calling for the State Government to deliver a gender equal recovery from COVID19 for the Victorian budget.

As Australia's largest public health crisis hits Victoria the hardest, Victorian women have been harshly affected. Health, economic and social inequalities are at risk of becoming further entrenched. While Federal government investment in women has been meagre, the Victorian government has a chance to make sure Victorian women are not left behind this budget.

*"This is a she-cession. We need money for women's health services, gender equal jobs and innovations in economic thinking which don't sideline women's needs for work, pay equity and recognition of all they have given Victoria while schooling their children and caring for loved ones during lockdown" said Tanja Kovac, CEO of GEN VIC.*

*"We're hopeful Treasurer Pallas recognises, as the Premier has done, that Victorian women have been disproportionately impacted by the virus here. Women may have been forgotten by the Federal Government, but we can fix that in Victoria and demonstrate national leadership."*

This call for action builds on [GEN VIC's joint statement](#) calling for State and Federal Governments to recognise the gendered impacts of COVID-19 signed by 106 Australian organisations commitment to a gender equal recovery.

To read the full letter, please see below.

–ENDS

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES.** Tanja Kovac, CEO GEN VIC, Ph. Mob 0419 910 577, [genvic@genvic.org.au](mailto:genvic@genvic.org.au)

13 October 2020

To the Hon Tim Pallas  
Treasurer  
Parliament of Victoria  
By Email: treasurer@dtf.vic.gov.au

### **Victorian women need a Gender Equal Budget and COVID19 Recovery**

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We refer to previous correspondence on behalf of our members and the women of Victoria to once again call for gender responsive budgeting in the 20/21 and 21/22 budgets and beyond.

Last week, the Federal Treasurer delivered the national budget for Australia, allocating \$240.5 Million over four years to women's economic security. At a time when economists have labelled the impact of the pandemic on Australia a "she-cession" the decision to invest less than 1% of total national budgetary expenditure on women has been rightly met with condemnation across the community. GenVic has been vocal, along with women's organisations and media, about the lack of investment, innovation and priority given to delivering a gender equal budget at a national level.

We don't want the same mistake to be repeated in Victoria.

In November last year, we wrote to you about the importance of gender responsive budgeting (GRB) with our strong view that it has not been occurring in Victoria with any rigour. We sought a number of commitments from Treasury, including the establishment of an expert advisory group, bringing together gender economists, academics and experts in gender-based productivity and job creation, to provide independent advice to Treasury on GRB. **The Budget submission for this work – which predates COVID19 – was a modest \$1.05M a year**, which would enable GenVic to bring together individuals and groups to support Treasury officials to improve economic outcomes for Victorian women. We also made a submission to the PAEC inquiry into GRB. To date, we have had no response from Treasury about this proposal. We remain open to developing it further with your department, linking you to gender economic experts. It is clear to us that there is a need for infrastructure both within and outside of government to drive gender responsive budgeting, job creation and stimulus.

Further, we have been saying for some time that the envelope for gender equity investment across all portfolios is too low. It is especially low for special measure gender equity initiatives led by DPC's Office of Women, with an average investment over the last 20 years of only \$4 Million. In a \$57 Billion budget that's less 0.007% of expenditure on gender equity initiatives. It was not enough when we wrote to you about this in November 2019. It is not enough now. Especially with the Gender Equity Act coming into force in March 2021

In a few weeks time, you will present the most important budget in recent Victorian history. It is a budget that must lift Victoria out of a recession and prepare it for a post-COVID19 world. With international travel and global trade restricted, you must create hundreds of thousands of jobs for Australians through a self-sufficient program of infrastructure building, manufacturing and service delivery on shore.

But if the Victorian economy is to really recover from the pandemic and have any chance of growth over the next decade, it needs to ensure that its economic strategies are gender equal. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) has found that countries that close the gender gap can expect a 35% increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Best economic practice demands that the Victorian Budget delivers a gender equal recovery.

Even without the pandemic, Victoria has a large economic gender gap, with women receiving less pay, less superannuation and less employment than they would like. The poorly constructed childcare system is only one of the disincentives to women's work and entrepreneurialism. The bias towards investing in male dominated industries and large and small businesses also plays its part.

You have a chance to build back better and put gender equality at the centre of the delayed Budget 20/21 and beyond.

You also have an opportunity to correct the gender unequal nature of COVID19 expenditure so far. As we set out in our PAEC submission, the Parliamentary Budget Office's excellent independent tracking of COVID19 expenditure at the time of our submission, recorded \$9.4Billion of announcements of public funding for COVID19, with only 0.46% spent on special measures connected to gender, women and family violence. Less than 1% targeted investment is not enough.

Attached to this letter is a summary of submissions that have been made by our members and the broader gender equity and women's movement across Victoria for the 20/21 year which can help lift targeted investment above 1%. These initiatives pre-date COVID19 but remain no less important.

Since March, 106 organisations have joined Gender Equity Victoria in calling for the Victorian Government to deliver a gender equal recovery from COVID19. On budget day we will be looking out for evidence of:

1. Gender-equal economic decision making. We will be looking at the investment envelope allocated to gender equity in total and especially the Gender Equality Act. This is important legislation creating gender equity in the public sector – including within Treasury and associated economic institutions. If the GE Act funding is not adequately provided for we have little confidence in the government's capacity and commitment to maintain a gender lens on anything, but especially on economic outcomes. We would expect to see investment in the range of a minimum of **\$16M for this initiative**.
2. Investment decisions made on the basis of gender-disaggregated data. Job losses show that women in Victoria are losing employment in far greater numbers than men. We want to see announcements which recognise the gendered impact of the COVID19 disaster and a gendered nuanced response. **We would expect to see an explanation of the steps that will be taken to ensure gender equal job creation and practical initiatives, such as the creating a new workforce of statewide gender and disaster workers. We expect to see \$6.7M in investment into this project to create regional jobs for women to help address the gendered consequence of all disasters such as pandemic, bushfire and climate change.** Our Budget submission for this was submitted to you during the establishment of the Bushfire Recovery Agency. The workforce remains important.
3. A return to GRB so investments in recovery do not worsen or entrench gender inequality. We will be looking for evidence that you have heard us on the need to lift gender economic analysis in Treasury. **We would expect to see funding for the Gender Equal Budget Group initiative of \$1.05M as a starting point.**
4. Investment in women's health. Women's Health Services, which provide essential health information, promotion and prevention asked for a \$16.8M before the pandemic. Their workload has increased since COVID19 meaning they do even more with less resources. **We expect to see \$16.8M in funding for the women's health services program.**
5. Economic recovery and jobs growth based on an intergenerational commitment to health, wellbeing, climate justice and a just transition.
6. Increased funding for preventing and responding to gender-based violence in crises and emergencies. **We would expect to see an incremental lift in violence prevention**

**investment from its current state at less than 3% of response expenditure to best practice levels of 9-12%. We also expect to see a lift in expenditure for legal assistance to women experiencing violence of \$19M.**

7. Invest in affordable and accessible large-scale public and social housing as part of broad based economic recovery and stimulus investment. **Prior to COVID19, our members and the broader housing movement advised that \$1B per annum was required to bring Victoria in line with other state/territory public and social housing investment.** We'd like to see homes, not just roads, be part of Victoria's economic recovery.

As expected by our members, Gender Equity Victoria will be marking the Victorian Government's performance against each of these criteria on Budget Day. We hope to be able to report positively to our members and wider community on how Victoria is once again leading the nation on gender equity.

Yours faithfully



Tanja Kovac  
CEO  
Gender Equity Victoria

cc. Premier; Minister for Women & the Prevention of Family Violence; Minister for Health