



## **Gender Equity Victoria**

Submission to Victoria's Gender Equality  
Strategy 2022



**October 2021**

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## Acknowledgement of Country

Gender Equity Victoria acknowledges the traditional custodians of land and the waterways across our State and the Nation and we pay our respect to Elders past and present.

We recognise the suffering and injustice that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced as a result of colonisation and generations of discrimination and marginalisation. We express shame and horror at the actions and atrocities that have been perpetrated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We also bear witness to the gendered dimensions of dispossession – acts of sexual violence, familial displacement and the stealing of children and land – which were designed to undermine First Nations relationships and values of care and the nurturing of each other and country.

We particularly acknowledge that the removal of children has and continues to devastate individuals, families and entire communities and that the gendered intention of those policies has been to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and separate them from their mothers. We recognise this as a policy of genocide.

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a sovereign people who have never ceded their sovereignty of this land.

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's human right to self-determination.

We commit to working in solidarity and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – to truth-telling, treaty and justice – and to bringing the Uluru Statement of the Heart to the heart of all that we do.

## About Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC)

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is the independent peak body for organisations, practitioners and individuals promoting gender equity in Victoria. Our Vision is for a gender equal society where all people are free from the harm of gender inequity. We have over 50 organisational members committed to feminist principles who strive for change, along with thousands more individual members and supporters.

GEN VIC is led by a strong Board of Governance and two Special Advisors for women and politics, who lead work to address abuse against women in politics and enhance our democracy by making it gender equal.

We recognise that gender inequity harms everyone – men, women, children, non-binary and gender diverse people - but that special measures are required to particularly address the problem for all people who identify as women in our community.

Gender inequity doesn't affect everyone in the same way. To think so is privileged and dangerous. Culture, language, race, ability, gender identity, sexuality, regionality and social status change the nature, intensity and prevalence of gender inequity. A truly gender equitable transformation of our society must be intersectional and see the whole person.

### **Ending the Harm of Gender Inequity**

Gender inequity is the primary cause and key driver of gendered violence, especially violence against women. Poor attitudes and behaviours towards women, such as sexist jokes, language and the objectification of women, as well as the application of rigid gender roles and stereotypes at home, in the workplace and in community, creates the foundation for threats, abuse, harassment and violence.

Gender inequity leads to poor health consequences for all Victorians, but especially women and gender diverse people, who face sex and gender discrimination at work, at home and in community. Health consequences include both physical and mental health impacts of inequity.

Gender inequity also leads to a persistent gender pay and superannuation gap as well as a higher risk of poverty for women across the life-course, who face economic barriers as a consequence of unequal, gendered beliefs and attitudes towards paid and unpaid work and the sharing of parental responsibilities.

Gender inequity drains the wealth and productivity of women and, in turn, the wealth and productivity of the State of Victoria.

Our role is to champion, coordinate, educate and advise on strategies to end the harm of gender inequity. To do that we have unique ways of working:

- We challenge harmful attitudes, structures and unequal power
- We connect, coordinate, and amplify voices from different sectors

- We provide leadership innovation with new skills, experience and networks
- We collaborate at local, regional, state, national and global levels
- We educate, train and support individual change agents
- We share evidence and best practice informed by our members
- We communicate the cause of gender equity with accessible infographics and data.
- We mobilise resources through membership, training, consultancy, communities of practice and entrepreneurialism.

For further inquiry about this submission, please contact:

Jacinta Masters, Manager Advocacy & Sector Development GEN VIC at  
Jacinta.masters@genvic.org.au

## Executive Summary

*Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* has set Victoria apart from other states and territories in its commitment to gender equality, being an essential and critical guide for gender equity investment and action in Victoria. We commend the Victorian Government for its work to promote and progress gender equality in Victoria and we are grateful of the opportunity to make a submission to the next Gender Equality Strategy.

With the passing of the Gender Equality Act 2020, it is the right time to refresh Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy. As many defined entities are legally required to comply with the Gender Equality Act and develop gender equity action plans, now is the time to be influencing and guiding public sector organisations' strategies and activities. With a revised and stronger Gender Equality Strategy, the Victorian Government can continue to lead innovation and model best practice in the gender equality sector. While we have come a long way under the current Victorian Gender Equality Strategy, we now have new areas that require dedicated investment, as well as ongoing areas of inequality that need to be targeted to make the Victorian community equal for everyone.

In this submission GEN VIC puts forward 71 recommendations to the development of a new Gender Equality Strategy. These recommendations are informed by our membership as experts in gender equality in Victoria. Many of our members have been working to address gender equity as a determinant of health for the last four decades. It is through centring and amplifying our members' voices that we can ensure the Government receives the best advice.

Our recommendations include overarching recommendations, addressing the critical need for an intersectional approach to gender equality inclusive of compounding inequalities experienced by women from diverse backgrounds such as racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. We call for increased investment in special measures for gender equality, to protect and strengthen the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, Respect Victoria and the work of our members. *Safe and Strong* received limited funding for the implementation – less than the State of Victoria's Centre for Excellence in Golf – which was funded double the amount of the strategy in the same year.

Government investment in gender equality is perennially low (see page 16 for a diagram of government expenditure in gender equality across the past 20 years). To begin to remedy this, our strongest recommendation after that of an intersectional approach to gender equality, is Gender Responsive Budgeting. Gender Responsive Budgeting is the only way that the envelope of funding attributed to gender equality will grow and be sustained. Through Gender Responsive Budgeting government can assess the budget before it is expended to ensure its output is benefiting women and men equally.

Finally, this submission focusses on four key themes: economic equity; safety and respect; gender equal health; and gender equal leadership. Across these four themes we have

provided solid recommendations for the creation of a refreshed agenda reflects the expertise of our membership and is based on evidence. We hope that our recommendations for the redevelopment of the strategy will support Victoria to continue to lead in gender equality across Australia.

# GEN VIC's Recommendations

## Overarching Recommendations

### **Adopt an intersectional lens across the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy**

1. Develop strategies to address the compounding inequalities experienced by women from diverse backgrounds such as racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia, and the ongoing impacts of colonialisation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and to prioritise women who currently experience the greatest intersecting inequalities.
2. Adopt a strengths based approach to intersectionality. Contrary to a deficit approach which emphasises on problems and weaknesses, a strength based approach means recognising and respecting the strength, resilience, and resistance of the diverse communities and their expertise gained through lived experience. It supports the communities to tap into their strengths and capabilities and empowers them to make decisions that are in their best interest.
3. Building on a strength based approach, invest sustainably in community development and ensure decision making is located in the communities that are impacted by the policy.
4. Invest in programs and initiatives that promote the leadership of women from diverse cohorts and support their active participation in gender equity policy making to ensure the policies are reflective of their needs and lived experience.
5. Improve data collection relating to gender equity, enabling more disaggregated analysis in relation to discrimination on the basis of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, migration status, and other relevant social markers.
6. Strengthens trans and other LGBTIQ+ inclusivity.

### **Achieving gender equality requires increased, sustainable and dedicated funding**

7. Considers and adopts global best practice in the establishment, implementation and resourcing of gender-responsive budgeting in the State of Victoria.
8. Reforms short term, and ad hoc funding structure and significantly lifts the investment in dedicated special measures for gender equity and women's policy within the State Budget to enable private, public and community sector innovation for gender equity

### **Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

9. Allocate dedicated funding for the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of the refreshed Strategy.
10. Develop an overarching Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy with an intersectional lens.
11. Produces an annual report on the state of Gender Equality in Victoria[
12. Establishes a robust governance structure for the strategy with representatives from the public, private and community sector stakeholders.

## Focus Area 1 - Economic Equity

### **Secure Gender Responsive Budgeting**

13. Following the two-year project pilot, funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the funding of the Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit in Treasury becomes the Department of Treasury and Finance's responsibility as part of its obligations under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* to apply a gender impact analysis on the State Budget.
14. The *Gender Equality Act 2020* embeds the practice of Gender Responsive Budgeting in Victoria.

15. The Office for Women shall be protected from further changes in the machinery of government to enable whole of government oversight of gender equity and gender responsive budgeting.
16. the Department of Treasury and Finance publishes annual gender-disaggregated data on the leadership and representation of the Department, including the representation of women and gender diverse people on the boards of its agencies, affiliates, and entities.
17. the Department of Treasury and Finance establishes a specialist gender economics unit to plan, implement and evaluate gender responsive budgeting, to be supported by the Office for Women. The gender economics unit should:
  - be structured, as other Treasury units are, to withstand changes of government;
  - ensure all economic and fiscal data is collected in a gender-disaggregated way to capture the differential impacts of the Victorian Budget on women and gender diverse people;
  - lead whole-of-government gender analysis across the budget cycle, working closely with the Office for Women, to develop Gender Equality Budget Statements, with high level analysis of the impact of annual budget decisions, outputs and asset investments on Victorian women and gender diverse people.
18. Department of Treasury & Finance's Resource Management Framework shall be updated to include accountability for gender-responsive budgeting.
19. The Treasury Annual Report includes a quality performance measure related to gender equality and gender responsive budgeting in its Revenue Management and Administrative Services to Government.
20. The Department of Treasury & Finance supports the establishment of a Gender Equality Budget Group, bringing together civil society organisations, gender economic experts within government and the academy to inform the development of gender responsive budgeting in Victoria, including greater transparency, accountability and analysis. This group may also assist in the evaluation and monitoring of the project, by independently assessing the effectiveness of the GRB approach on gender equity in the State. An outline of the expenditure required to establish a Gender Equality Budget Group is available on request.

## **Develop a Gender Equal Job Creation Strategy**

### *Create new industries and job markets*

21. Allocate sustained and long-term investments in developing the primary prevention and gender equality workforce in line with *Building from Strength*. The primary prevention and gender equality sector needs five-hundred extra jobs to fulfil the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the *Gender Equality Act (Vic)*. Also see [GEN VIC's State Budget Submission 21/22 Towards a Gender Equal Recovery](#).
22. Secure additional, longer-term employment for marginalised women, including single mothers, migrant and refugee women, women exiting prison, women who have experienced family violence.
23. Invest in a Disaster Prevention and Early Intervention Workforce with specialists in Gender and Disaster to prepare, prevent and respond in community to the increased risk of disaster caused by climate change, natural disaster such as bushfire, erratic storms and floods and the possibility of future pandemic. See [GEN VIC's State Budget Submission 21/22 Towards a Gender Equal Recovery](#)
24. Explore various levers to encourage employers in private and community sectors to provide flexible secure employment. Flexible, and long term employment opportunities will benefit women with caring responsibilities, in particular single mothers, carers of aging family members and of family members with disabilities, resulting in greater employment participation and economic security.
25. Provide recognition and support to stay-at-home carers and educators. This includes increasing maternity and paternity leave provision, a government-funded "carer credit" in the form of superannuation payments or pension top-ups in recognition of savings to the budget delivered by women, and initiatives to encourage shared care between parents.

### *Build a care economy*

26. Develop a Victorian Care Economy Strategy
27. Conduct thorough economic and social research and prepare detailed economic modelling into the future of a Victorian Care Economy.
28. Continue to innovate Early Childhood Education reforms to improve its accessibility and affordability, such as Funded Three-Year-old Kindergarten for all children
29. Increase investment in early childhood education, childcare, and after-school care to enable both parents to share the equal burden of raising children which will increase women's workforce participation
30. Advocate to Council of Australian Governments ("COAG") for fully free and subsidised childcare.

### **Model gender equity within public sector workforces**

31. Secure flexible secure employment within the public services.
32. Allow the public sector workforce to have six-months paid parental leave for each parent with one month to be transferrable between parents.
33. Guarantee superannuation contributions while on maternity and paternity leave and increase superannuation rate for women in Victorian public sector.
34. Expand portable long service leave scheme to more sectors to improve security for casualised workforce that is dominated by women - those who are the most vulnerable of losing jobs during economic downturns and COVID-19 pandemic.
35. Continue to invest in initiatives that prevent gender and race discrimination in workplaces and to promote equity within the Victorian labour force, so that women could participate in safe and respectful workplaces to be free from sexual harassment.
36. Establishes a Special Measures fund to be overseen by the CGEPS to enable defined entities to transform for gender equality

### **Expand the Gender Equality Act to private sector organisations**

37. Mandates private sector corporates to fulfil obligations under the *Gender Equality Act (VIC)*.

## **Focus Area 2 – Safety and Respect**

### **Improve the governance structure and state-wide coordination for primary prevention**

38. Commence a state-wide prevention infrastructure review to map out all Victorian prevention activities, stakeholders relationships, and gaps
39. Improve state-wide coordination for primary prevention activities to maximise the sector impact
40. Refine the roles and responsibilities of Respect Victoria and provide it with ongoing resource and authority necessary to carry out the intended roles

### **Invest in women's online safety**

41. Prioritise women's online safety
42. Invest in further research and initiatives to understand the prevalence and drivers of online abuse against Victorian women and build a stronger evidence base
43. Invest in research and pilot projects to understand what works to prevent and intervene online gender abuse, including bystander actions

### **Adopt a Gender Disaster Framework**

44. Develop a Gender Disaster Framework and provide adequate resources to its implementation
45. Ensure gender-based planning and inclusion of women in disaster prevention, response and recovery.
46. Invest in localised Gender and Disaster work. Each metropolitan and rural, regional and remote area of Victoria needs a Gender & Disaster worker who can work with community organisations to deliver localised health and wellbeing responses, violence prevention initiatives and to support community development. Further resources should be allocated to Gender & Disaster workers who have expertise in taking intersectional approach to disaster prevention, response and recovery.

## **Focus Area 3 – Women’s Health and Wellbeing**

### **Increase funding for ongoing support for women’s health**

47. Mandate investments for ongoing support for women's health through an intersectional lens by ensuring equitable, safe, and appropriate access of health and wellbeing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women, migrant and refugee women, and other women with intersectional disadvantages.
48. Ensure Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have the rights and funding to self-determine health and welfare needs throughout communities.
49. Provide more accessible and equitable health and mental health access to support women living with disability as many of them struggled to access supports throughout the pandemic, or found their necessary services were deemed non-essential during lockdowns.
50. Mandate investments for LGBTIQ/trans/gender identity training needed for health services to ensure appropriate and safe provision of services.
51. Consider women’s health services, in particular, women’s sexual and reproductive health and assisted conception be considered as essential services; and provides such services in line with international standards for health delivery in crises.
52. Continue to invest in public health messaging for promoting health literacy which is responsive to the local context by lifting investment in women’s health services across the regions.
53. Provide outreach multilingual health education to migrant and refugee women, especially those in public and social housing, and scales up regional multilingual health education and promotion workforce.
54. Boost women’s mental health funding and specialist service provision to address the ongoing, significant mental health crisis amongst women as a result of the pandemic.
55. Maintain a focus on maternity services, including mental health support, expanding the role of midwifery and out of hospital care so that women have birthing options during and beyond the pandemic.
56. Increase priority and expand operations of the Victorian Women’s Health Program to support improved gender responsive public health messaging, health literacy, health promotion and primary prevention, with a focus on resilience and recovery from COVID-19 by
  - A. Ensuring place based responses within metropolitan and regional settings are supported appropriately to meet increases in population.
  - B. Boosting statewide services, particularly intersectional gender health responses by ensuring the program funds specialist work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, with from migrant and refugee backgrounds and LGBTIQ+ identifying women.
  - C. Addressing areas of health crisis for Victorian women and gender diverse people (as per recommendation 44 below)

- D. Improving intersectional sex and gender data collection, through the Victorian Women's Health Atlas, to track improvements in health and wellbeing outcomes for all Victorian women.
  - E. Providing outreach multilingual health education to migrant and refugee women, especially those in public and social housing, and scales up regional multilingual health education and promotion workforce.
  - F. Maintaining a focus on maternity services, including mental health support, antenatal care, an expanded role for midwifery and out of hospital care so that women increased health literacy on birthing options during and beyond the pandemic.
57. Prioritises gender equal health work in the following areas of significant ill health for Victorian women:
- A. Gender equal mental health services, funding and specialist service provision to address the ongoing, significant mental health crisis amongst Victorian women both pre and post pandemic.
  - B. Considers women's health services, in particular, women's sexual and reproductive health and assisted conception services, including the inclusion of SRH as an be considered as essential services; and provides such services in line with international standards for health delivery in crises.
  - C. The connection between obesity and weight management and gender inequities in health, sport and recreation in Victoria.

#### **Apply an intersectional gender lens to implement Mental Health System reforms**

- 58. Fund ongoing intersectional women's mental health project and programs as a priority
- 59. Ensure government support payments be made accessible to migrant and refugee women to protect women and their children from poverty and serious mental health issues
- 60. Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to have the rights and funding to self-determine health and welfare needs throughout communities
- 61. Facilitate LGBTIQ/trans/gender identity training needed for health services to ensure appropriate and safe provision of services

#### **Ensure equitable healthcare for migrant and refugee women**

- 62. Address the cost barriers that deter women, in particular women on temporary visa, from accessing timely healthcare including sexual and reproductive health services.
- 63. Mandate strategy and policy to ensure the availability of in-language health and wellbeing services for migrant and refugee women that are culturally appropriate by:
  - o Continuing to support a multilingual women-led workforce that delivers in-language health education across Victoria to communities that have been made more vulnerable due to impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - o Providing training for health professionals in gendered, cross-cultural awareness to improve migrant women's access to GP clinics and other health services.
  - o Providing interpreting services across primary health providers in Victoria, and interpreters have specific training in women's health issues.
  - o Providing additional funding and support for peer-based and community-led, multilingual women's health education and support programs across Victoria.

#### **Renew Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017-2020**

- 64. Prioritise women's sexual and reproductive health and review and renew *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017- 2020*.

## Focus Area 4 - Leadership and Representation

65. Set policy initiatives and strategy to lift women's representation in leadership positions and commits to sustained and long-term investments in improving women's leadership and representation
66. Improve women's leadership and representation data collection that enables a more disaggregated analysis in relation to the barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women as well as migrant and refugee women to reach leadership positions.
67. Invest in initiatives that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women as well as migrant and refugee women to participate in decision making meaningfully.
68. Mandate quotas and other policy initiatives to increase women's representation in State politics.
69. Address gendered violence within Victorian Parliamentary Workplaces to enable safe and dignified workplaces for women.
70. Utilise opportunities created by the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)*, and by the workplace sexual harassment reforms, to provide ongoing investment to prevent workplace gender discrimination and promote equity within the Victorian public sector.
71. Embed core support to Victoria's peak gender equality organisation, GENVIC, to enable growth in private and community sector commitment to gender equality.

## Submission Methodology

GEN VIC relies on its membership to identify priorities for the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy and gaps in *Safe and Strong 2016* in its submission. We prioritise our members' voices in the development of our policy and advocacy as they are the experts in gender equity across Victoria, and many of them have been working for over four decades in this space. Centring and amplifying our members' voices is essential to our core work and ensuring the Government receives the best advice.

We collected quantitative survey responses, where we asked members to reflect on the priorities and gaps in *Safe and Strong 2016*, and hosted focus group discussions with members online. The recommendations submitted below are informed by such in-depth responses and exchanges.

In addition, this submission builds on the following GEN VIC submissions and publications:

- [WOMHEn Project Report, "Left behind": Migrant and Refugee Women's Experience of COVID-19](#)
- [GEN VIC Submission to the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children](#)
- ["This Conversation is Not Over": Women's Mental Health During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- [GEN VIC Submission to the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces](#)
- [GEN VIC Submission to the Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women](#)
- [GEN VIC Submission to the Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting](#)

As a peak body for gender equity in Victoria, we're continuously advocating for gender-equal economics, safety and respect, gender-equal decision-making, and gender-equal health.

## Overarching Recommendations

GEN VIC's work is driven by our commitment to building a gender equal society where all people, and especially women, are free from the harm of gender inequity. Underpinning this submission are the following principles shared by our membership:

### **Adopt an intersectional lens across the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy**

Gender inequity does not affect everyone in the same way. From employment to family violence and sexual harassment, there is considerable evidence that for women from disadvantaged communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, women and gender diverse people from LGBTIQ communities, that intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage increase inequities.

GEN VIC supports the Victorian Government to commit to centring women with lived experience, especially those experiencing intersecting disadvantages, in the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy. For the refreshed Strategy to consider and address the most disadvantaged groups of women, it is critical to embed intersectionality into policy making as part of the overarching policy logic and design and use its principle understand how diverse groups of women experience policies and program.

GEN VIC is a trans-inclusive organisation, focussed on ensuring women and LGBTIQ+ people benefit from the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy. GEN VIC submits that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy should be strengthened for trans and other LGBTIQ+ inclusivity.

### **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

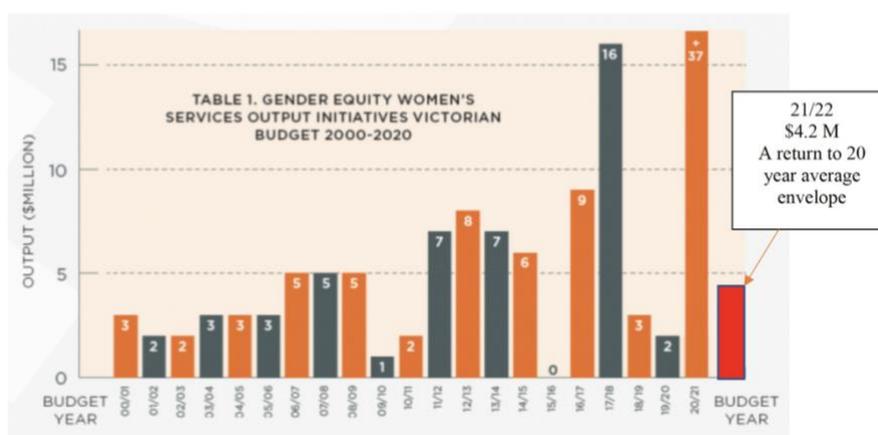
1. Develops strategies to address the compounding inequalities experienced by women from diverse backgrounds such as racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and to prioritise women who currently experience the greatest intersecting inequalities.
2. Adopts a strengths based approach to intersectionality. Contrary to a deficit approach which emphasises on problems and weaknesses, a strength based approach means recognising and respecting the strength, resilience, and resistance of the diverse communities and their expertise gained through lived experience. It supports the communities to tap into their strengths and capabilities and empowers them to make decisions that are in their best interest.
3. Building on a strength based approach, invests sustainably in community development and ensures decision making is located in the communities that are impacted by the policy.
4. Invests in programs and initiatives that promote the leadership of women from diverse cohorts and supports their active participation in gender equity policy making to ensure the policies are reflective of their needs and lived experience.
5. Improves data collection relating to gender equity, enabling more disaggregated analysis in relation to discrimination on the basis of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, migration status, and other relevant social markers.
6. Strengthens trans and other LGBTIQ+ inclusivity.

### **Achieving gender equality requires increased, sustainable and dedicated funding**

Achieving gender equality requires dedicated investment in gender equality special measures or targeted women's policy projects and programs. To date, investment in such projects and programs has been historically low, without basis in evidence or alignment with the vision of the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy, the expectations of women or the gender equality and women's sectors.

GEN VIC has been tracking the Victorian government’s investment in women’s policy and targeted gender equality across the last twenty years, and investment has suffered from the absence of focused analysis and advocacy. With the exception of recent investments in family violence prevention and to support the implementation of the Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020, programs and services seek to address women’s economic insecurity and the health consequences of inequality have been exceptionally modest.

Furthermore, the government’s funding in the gender equality sector tends to be short term and ad hoc. For too many years gender equity and women’s organisations have had to advocate for ongoing funding to support their projects past a term of even 12 months. Short term funding is at odds with the nature and objectives of gender equality policies and initiatives which aim to create lasting, intergenerational change



The above diagram shows us that the investment in gender equality has been modest for the past 20 years. Except for investment in family violence response and prevention in 17/18 and a boost for COVID19 recovery, the special measures gender equality investment lurks at an average of four million per year. This investment is vastly inadequate to implement the Gender Equality Strategy in a way that meets the needs of all Victorian women and gender diverse people. Furthermore, the historical underinvestment and the funding nature in special measures supporting gender equality has been detrimental to women’s leadership, safety, health, and economic justice and has created a significant hurdle for Victoria to attain the shared vision of gender equality.

Further, it has contributed to pay inequity in the gender equality, gendered violence and community sector, by artificially capping the investment in this work and forcing gender equity organisations to work for less pay and with less resources than in comparable sectors. If the workforce designed to *address* gender inequality is affected by funding inequity, what hope is there of making lasting, intergenerational change in other settings? An essential measure to ensure equal allocation of funding between genders is the practice of gender responsive budgeting (GRB). GRB is a fundamental tool for responsible financial management. By addressing the economic and fiscal impacts of the State Budget on women and gender diverse people, GRB ensures that the Victorian economy is serving and

benefiting everyone. GEN VIC believes that the Gender Equality Strategy would benefit significantly if Treasury makes a commitment to gender responsive budgeting. See 1.1 below for further information on GRB.

### **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

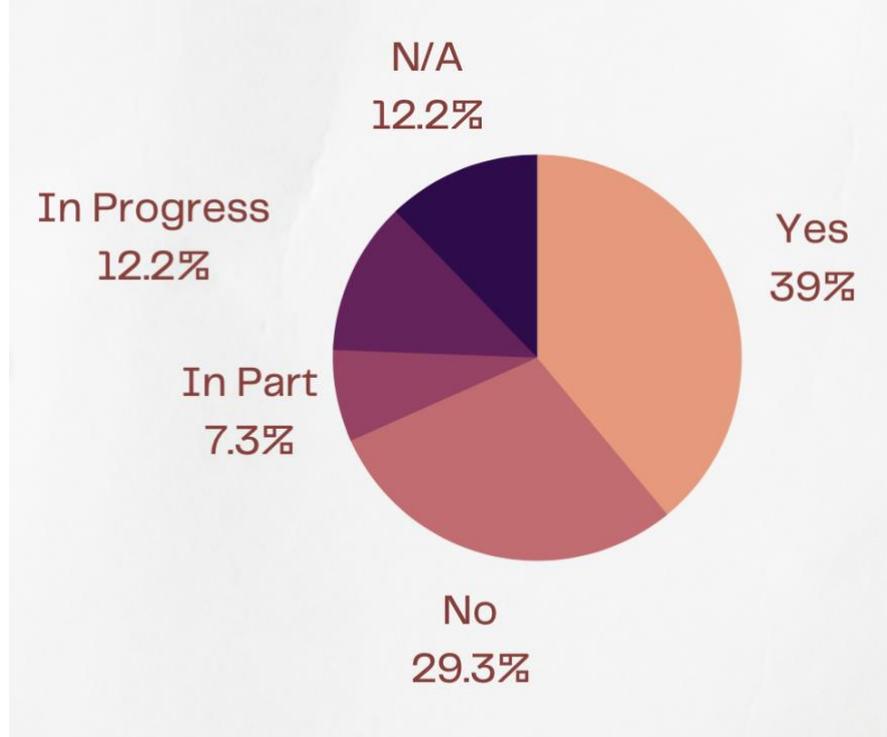
7. Considers and adopts global best practice in the establishment, implementation and resourcing of gender-responsive budgeting in the State of Victoria.
8. Reforms short term, and ad hoc funding structure and significantly lifts the investment in dedicated special measures for gender equity and women's policy within the State Budget to enable private, public and community sector innovation for gender equity

### **Develop a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

Another direct consequence of the lack of dedicated investment in gender equality as above mentioned is insufficient monitoring and reporting.

Being the first Gender Equality Strategy, *Safe and Strong 2016* sets out a promising set of founding reforms and new standards for actions required to deliver gender equality. Unfortunately, the governance structures to monitor performance of foundational reforms and early actions, was not robust enough to drive excellence in performance. Although there have been incredibly strong developments – such as the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)* – only 39% of the 44 Foundational Reforms are fully complete. There is still considerable work to do to achieve the outstanding reforms.

## Safe & Strong – Status of Foundational Reforms



While the gender equality baseline and targets set out by *Safe and Strong 2016* are a great start, the first published baseline data report examined only a limited set of gender equality indicators. It also failed to paint a picture of the overall impact the Strategy has created and how much we have progress towards the shared outcomes stated in *Safe and Strong 2016*.

To enable a transparent approach to measuring the collective impact and progress in achieving gender equity, there is a need to increase investment in gender equality monitoring and reporting, and particularly the development of an overarching Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy with an intersectional lens. A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework allows gender equity practitioners and organisation to adopt a consistent approach to understand the effectiveness of their work and how their work contributes to the big picture strategy. It is also critical for the gender equity sector to continuously develop an evidence base and build on our learning.

Further, the delivery on the strategy and its monitoring and evaluation framework should be informed and supported by a strategy advisory committee made up of internal government and external stakeholders including gender equity advisors, workplace gender equality experts, representatives from Victorian business, trade unions, peak bodies.

This forum should also bring together an opportunity for senior officials from the:

- Office of Women
- Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector
- Office for Women in Sport and Recreation
- Respect Victoria
- Family Safety Victoria

To come together with key stakeholders on how to ensure collective delivery of the strategy and to share common objectives.

## Recommendations

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

9. Allocates dedicated funding for the monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of the refreshed Strategy.
10. Develops an overarching Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy with an intersectional lens.
11. Produces an annual report on the state of Gender Equality in Victoria.
12. Establishes a robust governance structure for the strategy with representatives from the public, private and community sector stakeholders.

## Focus Areas under the Refreshed Gender Equality Strategy

### 1. Economic Equity

Gender inequality manifests itself in a range of ways, including entrenching economic inequities experienced by women. Recently, numerous international and national research studies and reports have suggested that the economic impacts caused by COVID-19 pandemic have hurt women far more than men, which means women's economic insecurity has been further exacerbated.

At the global level, McKinsey Global Institute found that the COVID-19 pandemic and associated economic fallout have resulted in women's jobs being 1.8 times more vulnerable to this crisis than men's jobs<sup>1</sup>. Statistically, Women make up 39 percent of global employment but account for 54 percent of overall job losses. It suggests that one reason for this greater effect on women is that the pandemic and the public health measures such as lockdowns have significantly increased the burden of unpaid care, which is disproportionately carried by women. This, among other factors, means that women's

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<sup>1</sup> McKinsey Global Institute (2020). COVID-19 and gender equality: Countering the regressive effects. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/covid-19-and-gender-equality-countering-the-regressive-effects#>

employment is decreasing faster than average, even considering the gender segregated workforces.

In Australian context, Grattan Institute put forward a number of factors that explain why COVID-19 pandemic has hurt women more financially<sup>2</sup>. These factors include:

- women were more likely to work in the hardest hit industries, such as hospitality, healthcare, education and retail;
- women were more likely to be in the hardest-hit occupations since about two thirds of hospitality workers and personal service workers are women;
- Women were more likely to be in part-time and insecure work as according to the ABS women makes up 67 per cent of part time workers;
- Women were more likely to miss out on government supports because of their casual employment.

Echoing the global and national trends, the effects of COVID-19 pandemic have intensified the economic insecurity experienced by Victorian women. As at March 2021, there were over 30 000 more underemployed women than men. As at May 2021, the gender pay gap in Victoria has increased to 12.2%, compared to 9.6% at May 2020<sup>3</sup>.

COVID-19 pandemic highlights the economic inequities between men and women and the lasting and damaging impacts caused by such entrenched inequities. GEN VIC supports the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy for prioritising women's economic equity. We believes addressing the systemic gender economic inequities should be at the heart of the Victorian gender equality strategy.

Also see: [GEN VIC Submission to the Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women](#)

### **1.1 Secure Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)**

The establishment of a Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit within the Victorian government is an important first step towards gender economic equity. However, GEN VIC remains concerned that the funding of this entity is through the Minister for Women and Family Violence Prevention's portfolio and not through the Department of Treasury. State Budget 21/22: Creating Jobs for Victorians, Caring for Victorians, Budget Paper 3 makes it clear that GRB is funded only until 2022-23, making it a short term project.

GEN VIC has repeatedly called for an embedded approach to GRB that secures the practice within the state government, protecting it from changing political whims and priorities.

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<sup>2</sup> Grattan Institute. (2021). Women's Work: The Impact of the COVID crisis on Australian Women. Available at <https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Womens-work-Grattan-Institute-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2021). Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics. <https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-pay-gap-statistics>

Gender responsive budgeting is made problematic by the lack of women represented within Treasury itself. Firstly, there have been no women office holders of the Treasury or Finance portfolios in the history of the State of Victoria. There has also never been a female head of the Victorian Treasury either and while there has been progress in female appointments in the department, only 33% of its Deputy Secretaries are women.

In Victoria, the commitment to GRB has also become problematic because of the perennially oscillating location for the Office of Women in the machinery of government. Even within the last six years, the Office of Women has gone from being within the Department of Premier & Cabinet (DPC), operating with a whole of government strategic lens, to being cast as a service delivery office placed in the Department of Human Services, back into DPC and then into the new Department of Families, Fairness and Housing. While the changes within the government are inevitable, GEN VIC submits that the frequent changes for the Office of Women is a serious inhibitor to its general effectiveness across government and in the development of gender responsive budgeting in particular.

GRB, without structured, regular capability building of public policy professionals, will always be at risk of failure. This is why when Sweden introduced gender mainstreaming in its Budget Bill 2017, the Minister for Gender Equality announced that in addition to gender equality impact analysis a “step by step guide on how to conduct a gender equality analysis in the budget was developed and trainings provided for officials in the Government Offices. Policy statements and formal requirements are important, but we must also provide hands-on, operative support to people in our organisations.”<sup>4</sup>

Lastly, if a gender lens on the Victorian economy is to be sustained beyond election cycles and the whims of political parties, it needs accountability both within and outside government. Only parallel, independent reporting, preferably protected by some form of gender equity legislation, will ensure women’s interest stays at the heart of Victorian economic modelling. This is critical if there is to be any chance of changing the fortunes and futures of Victorian women.

## **Recommendation**

GEN VIC submits the following recommendations:

13. Following the two-year project pilot, funded by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, the funding of the Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit in Treasury becomes the Department of Treasury and Finance’s responsibility as part of its obligations under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* to apply a gender impact analysis on the State Budget.
14. The *Gender Equality Act 2020* embeds the practice of Gender Responsive Budgeting in Victoria.

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<sup>4</sup> Speech by Sweden’s Minister for Gender Equality about gender budgeting at OECD meeting, 9 June 2016

15. The Office for Women shall be protected from further changes in the machinery of government to enable whole of government oversight of gender equity and gender responsive budgeting.
16. the Department of Treasury and Finance publishes annual gender-disaggregated data on the leadership and representation of the Department, including the representation of women and gender diverse people on the boards of its agencies, affiliates, and entities.
17. the Department of Treasury and Finance establishes a specialist gender economics unit to plan, implement and evaluate gender responsive budgeting, to be supported by the Office for Women. The gender economics unit should:
  - be structured, as other Treasury units are, to withstand changes of government;
  - ensure all economic and fiscal data is collected in a gender-disaggregated way to capture the differential impacts of the Victorian Budget on women and gender diverse people;
  - lead whole-of-government gender analysis across the budget cycle, working closely with the Office for Women, to develop Gender Equality Budget Statements, with high level analysis of the impact of annual budget decisions, outputs and asset investments on Victorian women and gender diverse people.
18. Department of Treasury & Finance's Resource Management Framework shall be updated to include accountability for gender-responsive budgeting.
19. The Treasury Annual Report includes a quality performance measure related to gender equality and gender responsive budgeting in its Revenue Management and Administrative Services to Government.
20. The Department of Treasury & Finance supports the establishment of a Gender Equality Budget Group, bringing together civil society organisations, gender economic experts within government and the academy to inform the development of gender responsive budgeting in Victoria, including greater transparency, accountability and analysis. This group may also assist in the evaluation and monitoring of the project, by independently assessing the effectiveness of the GRB approach on gender equity in the State. An outline of the expenditure required to establish a Gender Equality Budget Group is available on request.

## 1.2 Develop a Gender Equal Job Creation Strategy

Creating a gender equitable workforce that lasts beyond government stimulus investment, we need to create strategy, policy change, pathways and pipelines that enable equality in the workforce for women. GEN VIC and its members prioritise the following tasks to create a gender equitable workforce in Victoria:

### *Create new industries and job markets*

Victoria has to date had limited success in gender-based industry planning. The Royal Commission into Family Violence recommended and necessitated the large upscaling of specialist workforces to address family violence and violence against women. [Building from Strength: 10-Year Industry Plan for Family Violence Prevention and Response](#) (“Building from

Strength”), while promising, is yet to deliver the increased job opportunities or the training and education pathways necessary to sustain them.

The siloing of systemic job creation activity – which is supposed to be a collective effort by Jobs Victoria, TAFE and Tertiary Education and other units within Departments – hampers success.

A stalemate of inaction occurs, which has the dual impact of pressure on women’s services to do more with less (with associated pay inequity consequences) and a lack of training, development and job opportunities for women who want to work in these emerging sectors.

## **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

21. Allocates sustained and long-term investments in developing the primary prevention and gender equality workforce in line with *Building from Strength*. The primary prevention and gender equality sector needs five-hundred extra jobs to fulfil the recommendations from the Royal Commission into Family Violence and the *Gender Equality Act* (Vic). Also see [GEN VIC’s State Budget Submission 21/22 Towards a Gender Equal Recovery](#).
22. Secures additional, longer-term employment for marginalised women, including single mothers, migrant and refugee women, women exiting prison, women who have experienced family violence.
23. Invests in a Disaster Prevention and Early Intervention Workforce with specialists in Gender and Disaster to prepare, prevent and respond in community to the increased risk of disaster caused by climate change, natural disaster such as bushfire, erratic storms and floods and the possibility of future pandemic. See Section 2.3 *Adopt a Gender Disaster Framework* of this Submission and [GEN VIC’s State Budget Submission 21/22 Towards a Gender Equal Recovery](#)
24. Explores various levers to encourage employers in private and community sectors to provide flexible secure employment. Flexible, and long term employment opportunities will benefit women with caring responsibilities, in particular single mothers, carers of aging family members and of family members with disabilities, resulting in greater employment participation and economic security.
25. Provides recognition and support to stay-at-home carers and educators. This includes increasing maternity and paternity leave provision, a government-funded “carer credit” in the form of superannuation payments or pension top-ups in recognition of savings to the budget delivered by women, and initiatives to encourage shared care between parents.

*Build a care economy*

Building a caring economy in Victoria has two aspects – supporting professional caring sectors to thrive and addressing the unequal burden of voluntary, unpaid labour in the home. The relationship between the two tasks is complex and requires research, innovation, pilot projects and ultimately scale up investment.

*Macklin Review of Victorian Future Skills*<sup>5</sup> found that one of the key future workforces for Victoria is the care sector. Through a combination of public, private and community based investment, Victoria should centre future plans for growth around the establishment of a care economy. Such a strategy would also deliver benefits for a largely feminised workforce.

Further, COVID-19 pandemic highlights that the jobs that keeps our society functioning – those that we came to understand as essential during lockdowns – are predominantly undertaken by women in caring professions and more particularly women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. A care economy would recognise these jobs as “essential and not expendable” and address workforce shortages and poor remuneration and work conditions, while also reducing the primary barrier to women’s workforce participation - volunteer caring labour.

At GENVIC’s [Defining Equity Conference 2021](#), Brynhildur Heiðar- og Ómarsdóttir, Secretary General, Kvenréttindafélag Íslands / Icelandic Women’s Rights Association (IWRA), advised attendees that the single biggest contributor to Iceland securing #1 Status on the World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report, was its commitment to shared parental care and the workplace and legislative protections mandating private, public and community sectors to provide shared and equal care between partners.

## Recommendations

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

26. Develops a Victorian Care Economy Strategy
27. Conducts thorough economic and social research and prepares detailed economic modelling into the future of a Victorian Care Economy.
28. Continues to innovate Early Childhood Education reforms to improve its accessibility and affordability, such as Funded Three-Year-old Kindergarten for all children
29. Increases investment in early childhood education, childcare, and after-school care to enable both parents to share the equal burden of raising children which will increase women’s workforce participation
30. Advocates to Council of Australian Governments (“COAG”) for fully free and subsidised childcare.

### 1.3 Model gender equity within public sector workforces

The Victorian government, as one of the biggest employers in the state, has a critical role in modelling gender equal employment practices and lifting gender economic equity. GEN VIC

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<sup>5</sup> Macklin J (2020) *Future Skills for Victoria, Driving collaboration and innovation in post-secondary education and training*, Victorian Government, Melbourne.

welcomes the establishment of the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, but calls for dedicated and enduring funding for the institution to ensure that it can maintain its intergenerational, long-term work with security in its funding.

The implementation of the *Gender Equality Act* is likely to reveal significant parts of the public sector that needs to improve its gender equality outcomes. While mandated Gender Equality Action Plans will assist with this improvement, there are areas of sector wide improvement which would benefit all public sector employees.

Further, strategies and measures to achieve gender equality in the public sector need to be supported with a pool of funds for special measures investment. This may be used for data and technology upgrades to improve workplace gender audit data collection, strengthened reporting from People Matters Surveys and to enable defined entities to seek a contribution to their change work when required. The Special Measures fund should be to overseen by the CGEPS.

## **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

31. Secures flexible secure employment within the public services.
32. Allows the public sector workforce to have six-months paid parental leave for each parent with one month to be transferrable between parents.
33. Guarantees superannuation contributions while on maternity and paternity leave and increase superannuation rate for women in Victorian public sector.
34. Expands portable long service leave scheme to more sectors to improve security for casualised workforce that is dominated by women - those who are the most vulnerable of losing jobs during economic downturns and COVID-19 pandemic.
35. Continues to invest in initiatives that prevent gender and race discrimination in workplaces and to promote equity within the Victorian labour force, so that women can participate in safe and respectful workplaces to be free from sexual harassment.
36. Establishes a Special Measures fund to be overseen by the CGEPS to enable defined entities to transform for gender equality

### **1.4 Expand the Gender Equality Act to private sector organisations**

Gender Equity Act (Vic) and its requirements provide a robust reporting system for the public sector to account for its progress to achieve workplace gender equality and to continuously identify gaps for improvement. GEN VIC submits that the same accountability should apply to private sector, as is modelled in Iceland, where non-public sector entities with more than 20 employees must comply with legislation and complete gender audits and action plans.

## **Recommendations**

37. GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy mandates private sector corporates with more than 100 employees to fulfil obligations under *the Gender Equality Act*

## 2. Safety and Respect

*Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women* makes it clear that gender inequality drives violence against women. It sets the necessary social context in which violence against women occurs and continues to prevail<sup>6</sup>.

Over the past six years since the Royal Commission into Family Violence handed down its final report making 227 recommendations for reform, we witnessed significant efforts taking place across the state to reduce violence against women. In particular, GEN VIC commends the Victorian government for putting primary prevention at the heart of reforms.

Nevertheless, violence against women remains a significant challenge in Victoria and Australia more broadly. As of October 2021, 41 women were allegedly killed as a result of murder, manslaughter or neglect<sup>7</sup>, which means on average one woman is killed every week. Domestic violence has increased at a record rate across Australia, in particular Victoria, during COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. Victoria Police's recorded crime trends show that the reported number of family violence incidents was significantly higher in every month during 2020 than 2019<sup>8</sup>. In public sphere, #March4Justice rally and the waves of sexual harassment disclosures by former political staffers reveal that Australian Parliament, like many Australian workplaces, are not safe for women.

Prevention of violence against women is an intergenerational project which requires ongoing funding and support for changes to take place and sustain. GEN VIC emphasises that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy needs to continue the investment in primary prevention and gender equality, with a focus on emerging settings that are highly relevant to current socio-political context, such as online and disaster/post disaster setting.

### 2.1 Improve the governance structure and state-wide coordination for primary prevention

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<sup>6</sup> Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia.

<sup>7</sup> SBS (2021) *Calls for more action to end domestic violence as 41st woman allegedly killed this year*. See: <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/calls-for-more-action-to-end-domestic-violence-as-41st-woman-allegedly-killed-this-year/dbd09d08-2c5d-4fa0-b966-5f6787372759>

<sup>8</sup> Crime Statistics Agency (2020) *Police-recorded crime trends in Victoria during the COVID-19 pandemic: update to end of December*. See <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/research-and-evaluation/publications/police-recorded-crime-trends-in-victoria-during-the-covid-19-1>

Following the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government has drastically increased the investment in the development of primary prevention policy infrastructure and funding allocation, which has built a solid foundation for state-wide prevention activities to take place. Over the past years, we have witnessed primary prevention activities gain traction across multiple settings and communities.

As the field of primary prevention practice grows rapidly and more diversely, there is an increasing need to map out and assess the Victorian primary prevention infrastructure, systems and gaps. There is also a need to improve coordination across primary prevention activities to maximise the sector's collective impact. GEN VIC welcomes initiatives within Government and Respect Victoria to capture the Victorian primary prevention infrastructure, no review has ever been completed or published.

A dedicated prevention agency, Respect Victoria, was established under *Safe and Strong 2016* and *Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence strategy* to strengthen the focus on prevention of family violence. While it delivered several promising awareness raising campaigns with more research projects underway, it is understood that Respect Victoria was not given the authority and ongoing resource necessary to carry out its coordination and monitoring role for *Free from Violence* as intended in *Safe and Strong 2016*. There also seems to be a missing governance piece that delineates the remit of Respect Victoria's coordination and advisory roles, and its relationship with other government departments including the Office for Women.

## **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends that refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

38. Commences a state-wide prevention infrastructure review to map out all Victorian prevention activities, stakeholders relationships, and gaps
39. Improves state-wide coordination for primary prevention activities to maximise the sector impact
40. Refines the roles and responsibilities of Respect Victoria and provide it with ongoing resource and authority necessary to carry out the intended roles

### **2.2 Invest in women's online safety**

GEN VIC shares the vision of the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy to reduce violence against women, and we believe it is critical to address all forms of violence against women including the online space.

Since 2018, GEN VIC has been leading work to address online violence against women. This started with addressing violence through an active bystander approach, creating community

capability to support women when they are abused online and calls out violence and abusive behaviour. In our report [\*Don't Read the Comments: Enhancing online safety for women working in the media\*](#), we highlighted media industry's responsibility to keep online space safer for women. The report also finds female journalists are concerned about harms caused by defamatory statements online.

We made several recommendations to create a safe online space for women journalists including:

- a whole-of-organisation approach to addressing online violence;
- training on implicit bias and bystander intervention;
- treating gender based abuse against women journalists on social media and websites as an issue of workplace health and safety;
- Moderation guidelines and training that explicitly address gendered and other identity-based abuse as a subset of abuse;
- a comprehension quiz;
- Requiring media organisations to provide specific support for freelance journalists.

In 2019, GEN VIC was funded to implement the recommendations of the *Don't Read the Comments* report.

Building on *Don't Read the Comments*, GEN VIC further identified two other critical cohorts of women who experience significant levels of abuse: women in sport and women in politics. To understand the prevalence and impact of online abuse on women in sport and women in politics, and to create strategies for change, GEN VIC was funded by the Office for Women to develop industry based research and recommendations for ensuring women are safe online. In relation to this work, GEN VIC has been working with GEN VIC's Advisors for Women in Politics and has developed a project plan for addressing the online abuse against female politician and staffers. The two reports and recommendations will be released in 2022.

## **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

41. Prioritises women's online safety
42. Invests in further research and initiatives to understand the prevalence and drivers of online abuse against Victorian women and build a stronger evidence base
43. Invests in research and pilot projects to understand what works to prevent and intervene online gender abuse, including bystander actions

### **2.3 Adopt a Gender Disaster Framework**

GEN VIC's membership has a strong, award-winning expertise in Gender and Disaster, built from experiences of the Black Saturday Bushfires.

During disasters and recovery, including the COVID-19 pandemic, people often retreat to gender norms and gender stereotypical behaviours. People are under increased pressure to meet unrealistic binary expectations of heroic saviour (men) and carer (women). The rigid gender binary denies women's input, experiences, and strengths in supporting their family and communities during disasters. They also hinder effective response and management to and prevention of disasters— one that is based on evidence rather than the constructed saviour/carer gender binary.

Further, women's safety is often conditional upon the stress and loss men faced during and post-disaster. The 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) found that one in five Australian believed domestic violence is a normal reaction to stress and frustration<sup>9</sup>. People tend to sympathise with the 'heroic' men who work in rescue and recovery, leading to an expectation that violence against women at the times of heightened stress and loss can be excused and condoned. We have seen a parallel trend during COVID-19 pandemic where domestic violence drastically increased in Victoria.

For more research and resource on Gender and Disaster, [visit Gender & Disaster Australia's website](#)<sup>10</sup>.

## Recommendations

GEN VIC recommends that the refresh Gender Equality Strategy:

44. Develops a Gender Disaster Framework and provide adequate resources to its implementation.
45. Ensures gender-based planning and inclusion of women in disaster prevention, response and recovery.
46. Invests in localised Gender and Disaster work. Each metropolitan and rural, regional and remote area of Victoria needs a Gender & Disaster worker who can work with community organisations to deliver localised health and wellbeing responses, violence prevention initiatives and to support community development. Further resources should be allocated to Gender & Disaster workers who have expertise in taking intersectional approach to disaster prevention, response and recovery.

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<sup>9</sup> Webster, K., Diemer, K., Honey, N., Mannix, S., Mickle, J., Morgan, J., Parkes, A., Politoff, V., Powell, A., Stubbs, J., & Ward, A. (2018). Australians' attitudes to violence against women and gender equality. Findings from the 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) (Research report, 03/2018). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

<sup>10</sup> Gender & Disaster Australia is a partnership between two GEN VIC members' Women's Health Goulburn North East and Women's Health In the North), and the Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative.

### 3. Women's Health and Wellbeing

GEN VIC has been working to support and coordinate gender equitable health and wellbeing of women in all regions across Victoria through its Secretariat and Research support of the Women's Health Services Council ('WHSC'). Through our work, we have continuously highlighted and provided critical assessments the impacts of gender inequities, and more recently the impact of inequities exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic, on women's health and wellbeing outcomes.

#### 3.1 Increase funding for ongoing support for women's health

Unequal health opportunities threaten physical, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of people in Victoria, especially women and gender diverse people. COVID-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated such inequities, with abundant research and data clearly indicating that women and gender diverse people are disproportionately impacted.

Women's healthcare has been sidelined during COVID-19 pandemic. We witnessed cancelling or reallocating funding and resources dedicated for women's health services, including essential sexual and reproductive health services and acute maternity care services. There is also a risk that budgets for key women's specific health services and processes will be further diverted in the face of reduced health system capacity following the easing of COVID-19 health restrictions.

Further, GEN VIC highlights the mental health consequences of COVID-19 on women in its recent work. In partnership with all 11 women's health services, GEN VIC has led a research project that interviewed over 115 women and gender diverse people across every region of Victoria to ask them about their experiences of COVID-19 and the impact this has had on their mental health and wellbeing.

The research report, *This conversation is not over*, found that women have taken on a greater share of additional care responsibilities for children, other family members and at-risk community members during self-isolation. It has been observed that women are carrying a 'triple load' during the crisis, which includes paid work, care work, and the mental labour of worrying. Other forms of inequality and discrimination – in particular, racism, ageism and economic inequality – are compounding these mental health impacts for women.

All these factors lead to emotional, social and financial stress and anxiety, and can exacerbate existing mental health conditions, trigger new or recurring conditions, and impede recovery. At the same time, limited availability of gender-specific or gender-responsive services means women and gender diverse people may not be able to access the support they need.

For more findings, see full *This conversation is not over: Women's Mental Health During COVID-19 Pandemic* report: <https://www.genvic.org.au/focus-areas/genderequalhealth/this-conversation-is-not-over-womens-mental-health-during-the-covid-19-pandemic/>

## Recommendations

GEN VIC recommends the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

47. Mandates investments for ongoing support for women's health through an intersectional lens by ensuring equitable, safe, and appropriate access of health and wellbeing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women, migrant and refugee women, and other women with intersectional disadvantages.
48. Ensures Victorian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have the rights and funding to self-determine health and welfare needs throughout communities.
49. Provides more accessible and equitable health and mental health access to support women living with disability as many of them struggled to access supports throughout the pandemic, or found their necessary services were deemed non-essential during lockdowns.
50. Mandates investments for LGBTIQ/trans/gender identity training needed for health services to ensure appropriate and safe provision of services.
51. Considers women's health services, in particular, women's sexual and reproductive health and assisted conception be considered as essential services; and provides such services in line with international standards for health delivery in crises.
52. Continues to invest in public health messaging for promoting health literacy which is responsive to the local context by lifting investment in women's health services across the regions.
53. Provides outreach multilingual health education to migrant and refugee women, especially those in public and social housing, and scales up regional multilingual health education and promotion workforce.
54. Boosts women's mental health funding and specialist service provision to address the ongoing, significant mental health crisis amongst women as a result of the pandemic.
55. Maintains a focus on maternity services, including mental health support, expanding the role of midwifery and out of hospital care so that women have birthing options during and beyond the pandemic.
56. Priorities increased priority and expanded operations of the Victorian Women's Health Program to support improved gender responsive public health messaging, health literacy, health promotion and primary prevention, with a focus on resilience and recovery from COVID-19 by
  - G. Ensuring place based responses within metropolitan and regional settings are supported appropriately to meet increases in population.

- H. Boosting statewide services, particularly intersectional gender health responses by ensuring the program funds specialist work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, with from migrant and refugee backgrounds and LGBTIQ+ identifying women.
- I. Addresses areas of health crisis for Victorian women and gender diverse people (as per recommendation 44 below)
- J. Improves intersectional sex and gender data collection, through the Victorian Women’s Health Atlas, to track improvements in health and wellbeing outcomes for all Victorian women.
- K. Provides outreach multilingual health education to migrant and refugee women, especially those in public and social housing, and scales up regional multilingual health education and promotion workforce.
- L. Maintains a focus on maternity services, including mental health support, antenatal care, an expanded role for midwifery and out of hospital care so that women increased health literacy on birthing options during and beyond the pandemic.

57. Prioritises gender equal health work in the following areas of significant ill health for Victorian women:

- A. Gender equal mental health services, funding and specialist service provision to address the ongoing, significant mental health crisis amongst Victorian women both pre and post pandemic.
- B. Considers women’s health services, in particular, women’s sexual and reproductive health and assisted conception services, including the inclusion of SRH as an be considered as essential services; and provides such services in line with international standards for health delivery in crises.
- C. The connection between obesity and weight management and gender inequities in health, sport and recreation in Victoria.

### **3.2 Apply an intersectional gender lens to implement Mental Health System reforms**

In 2019, the Victorian government announced a Royal Commission into the mental health system in the state. The Premier alongside advocates and people with lived experience of the system described it as “broken”. The Commission handed down its report and recommendations in February 2021, having heard evidence and conducted analysis of the system for two years.

The recommendations, which are extensive and wide-ranging, are being considered through a intersectional gender lens by the Victorian Women’s Mental Health Alliance<sup>11</sup>. This

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<sup>11</sup> For more details on the Women’s Mental Health Alliance’s Gender analysis of recommendations from the Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System, see: <https://whv.org.au/resources/whv-publications/gender-analysis-recommendations-royal-commission-victorias-mental-health>

alliance, led by Women's Health Victoria, comprises 31 member organisations, including GEN VIC, and three Associate Members. While the Alliance welcomes and commends the Commission for its work, it remains concerned that the recommendations may not deliver outcomes for those most in need without an intersectional feminist analysis.

GEN VIC echoes the Alliance's concern. *This Conversation is not over* highlights that inequities and discriminations exacerbated by COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns have led to emotional, social and financial stress and anxiety on women and severely affected their mental health and well-being. Without a gender responsive approach, the recommendations from the Royal Commission risk missing the opportunity to deliver reforms to the communities that need them the most.

## Recommendations

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

58. Funds ongoing intersectional women's mental health project and programs as a priority
59. Ensures government support payments be made accessible to migrant and refugee women to protect women and their children from poverty and serious mental health issues
60. Supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to have the rights and funding to self-determine health and welfare needs throughout communities
61. Facilitates LGBTIQ/trans/gender identity training needed for health services to ensure appropriate and safe provision of services

### a. Ensure equitable healthcare for migrant and refugee women

*Safe and Strong 2016* recognises women require better access to reproductive health services. While work has been done to improve access to local health services and female GPs in regional and remoted locations, further supports are needed. Cost remains a substantial barrier for many women to access necessary sexual and reproductive health services. In particular, international students and other women on temporary visas who are not eligible for Medicare are often deterred from seeking healthcare due to financial barriers<sup>12</sup>. Other access issues for migrant and refugee women include language barriers, lack of culturally appropriate services, and more<sup>13</sup>.

The barriers for migrant and refugee women to access healthcare have been exacerbated during COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns. In joint efforts by Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Gender Equity Victoria, and Women's Health Services, the Workforce of

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<sup>12</sup> Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (2021), Data Report: Sexual and Reproductive Health 2021. Melbourne. ISBN: 978-0- 6451608-2-6

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

Multilingual Health Educators (WOMHEn) Project released *Left behind: Migrant and refugee women's experiences of COVID-19* report which highlights the multifaceted impacts of COVID-19 on migrant and refugee women's health and wellbeing.

The WOMHEn project was funded by the Victorian Government as part of the Working for Victoria fund, building a regional health promotion workforce to meet the COVID-19 information needs of migrant and refugee women. The project employed 50 women across 10 metropolitan and regional services, with a linguistic diversity of 20 different languages, interviewing women about their experiences of COVID-19 and assisting them to navigate vaccination services.

Migrant and refugee women participated in the interviews consistently reported that they faced multiple challenges in accessing healthcare services during COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns due to lack of access to appropriate services, safe transport options, and interpreters. They also reported that cost remains a key barrier for them to access timely healthcare, especially those on temporary visa which excludes them from Medicare benefits and government support such as JobKeeper and JobSeeker. Below are the relevant quotes from the project interviewees:

*"Since I don't have Medicare it was really hard for me to book in, this barrier existed prior to COVID but was worse during the pandemic. Really struggled with access to mental health services during lockdowns, I had to wait months to see a psychologist" – A migrant woman*

*"Since we are on a temporary visa, we can't access the Medicare benefits. Private check-ups cost a lot even buying medicine." - Maria (38) who moved to Australia seven years ago and on a temporary visa.*

On the other hand, the WOMHEn project serves a case study on what works to improve the health and well-being outcome for migrant and refugee women through the employment of multilingual health educators. Over the past 12 months, these multilingual health educators have reached out to local communities and delivered in-language public health messages and advice, including COVID-19 vaccination and vaccine choices at various stages of sexual and reproductive life. The community outreach by the multilingual health educators directly contributed to increased community uptake in vaccination bookings and services and ensured migrant and refugee women were not left behind in COVID-19 health responses.

Read the full *Left behind: Migrant and refugee women's experiences of COVID-19* report here: <https://www.genvic.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/LeftBehindWOMHEnReport61021FINAL.pdf>

## **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

62. Addresses the cost barriers that deter women, in particular women on temporary visa, from accessing timely healthcare including sexual and reproductive health services.
63. Mandates strategy and policy to ensure the availability of in-language health and wellbeing services for migrant and refugee women that are culturally appropriate by:
  - o Continuing to support a multilingual women-led workforce that delivers in-language health education across Victoria to communities that have been made more vulnerable due to impacts associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - o Providing training for health professionals in gendered, cross-cultural awareness to improve migrant women's access to GP clinics and other health services.
  - o Providing interpreting services across primary health providers in Victoria, and interpreters have specific training in women's health issues.
  - o Provide additional funding and support for peer-based and community-led, multilingual women's health education and support programs across Victoria.

#### a. *Renew Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017-2020*

Sexual and reproductive health is both affected by, and contributes to, gender equity. In 2017, the Victorian Government launched *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017- 2020*, the first ever Victorian sexual and reproductive health strategy and provides direction for the coordination of partnership efforts at a state wide, regional and local level. However, it is understood that the strategy is currently under review and is critically needed to provide a vision for sexual and reproductive health reforms and measures in Victoria

#### **Recommendation**

64. GEN VIC recommends the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy prioritise women's sexual and reproductive health and review and renew *Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key Priorities 2017- 2020*.

## 4. Leadership and Representation

Women are underrepresented in key decision making roles across almost all sectors in Australia. Workplace Gender Equality Agency ('WEGA') in its most recent report found that while there has been substantial progress in women's representation on governing boards

over time, women remain under-represented as Board members or Chairs relative to their workforce representation in every industry (except mining)<sup>14</sup>.

Further, the women leadership and representation data presented by WGEA has its own limitations. The data does not provide disaggregated analysis in relation to discrimination on the basis of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, age, disability, race, ethnicity, gender identity, religion, sexual orientation, migration status, and other relevant social markers, and how these other forms of discriminations affect women leadership and representation. The lack of disaggregated data results in a lack of tailored response and investment to lift the representation of women with diverse lived experience in leadership positions. In order to strengthen the relevant policy initiatives and strategy and achieve more meaningful representation of women at decision making roles, a gender intersectional lens is needed for comprehensive data collection and analysis.

Further, women, who do take on a leadership position, particularly in traditionally male-dominated/ masculine spheres such as politics, face substantial treats and challenges. GEN VIC's *Submission to the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces* highlights the prevalence and forms of gendered violence, both within the Australian Parliamentary workplaces and the political parties, experienced by women in politics. This hostile, misogynist environment deters women from participating and/or staying in politics – where the most high-level decision-making takes place.

Currently, women in parliament make up only 39.8 per cent, falling far behind equal representation. This problem particularly impacts the Coalition whose representation is currently 28 per cent women, while Labor has currently 44 per cent women, nearing party parity. Before the 2019 federal election, Australia was 48th in the world in terms of women's lower house representation, falling below other countries such as Rwanda, Nepal and Ecuador. Australia is now ranked 50th in the world<sup>15</sup>. While Labor made history with the first cabinet that is 50 per cent gender equal, at a federal level the ministerial cabinet only 30 per cent of cabinet is occupied by women, and 70 per cent occupied by men. The underrepresentation of women in politics is, partly, due to the hostile, misogynist environment, and this unequal representation, in turn, continues to maintain the status quo and undermines potential positive changes.

## **Recommendations**

GEN VIC recommends the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

65. Sets policy initiatives and strategy to lift women's representation in leadership positions and commits to sustained and long-term investments in improving women's leadership and representation

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<sup>14</sup> Cassells R and Duncan A (2021), *Gender Equity Insights 2021: Making it a priority*, BCEC|WGEA Gender Equity Series, Issue #6, March 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union. (2016). *Sexism, harassment and violence against women parliamentarians*. Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union.

66. Improves women's leadership and representation data collection that enables a more disaggregated analysis in relation to the barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women as well as migrant and refugee women to reach leadership positions.
67. Invests in initiatives that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women living with disabilities, LGBTIQ+ women as well as migrant and refugee women to participate in decision making meaningfully.
68. Mandates quotas and other policy initiatives to increase women's representation in State politics.
69. Addresses gendered violence within Victorian Parliamentary Workplaces to enable safe and dignified workplaces for women.
70. Utilises opportunities created by the *Gender Equality Act 2020 (Vic)*, and by the workplace sexual harassment reforms, to provide ongoing investment to prevent workplace gender discrimination and promote equity within the Victorian public sector.
71. Embed core support to Victoria's peak gender equality organisation, GENVIC, to enable growth in private and community sector commitment to gender equality.

## Appendix A: Safe & Strong – Victoria’s Gender Equality Strategy 2017-2021 Foundational Reforms Report Card

Foundation Reform	Status
<p><b>Reducing violence against women</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prevent family violence by implementing the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence in full and through a Statewide Family Violence Action Plan and Primary Prevention Strategy.</li> <li>Create a state wide behaviour change advertising campaign and continue to support the Victoria Against Violence public awareness campaign.</li> </ul>	<p>In Progress</p> <p>Yes</p>
<p><b>Develop our gender equality baseline and set gender equality targets</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review the full range existing data sources and data sets available to inform gender equality in Victoria.</li> <li>Establish Victoria's gender equality baseline.</li> <li>Set additional targets, drawing from our baseline analysis</li> </ul>	<p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>Measure progress against preliminary Gender Equality targets to lift women's leadership</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Victorian Public Service</b>-Appoint 50 per cent women executives.</li> <li><b>Local government</b>-50 per cent women councillors and Mayors by 2025.</li> <li><b>Paid public boards</b>-50/50 representation of women in new appointments.</li> <li><b>Courts</b> (including VCAT)-50/50 representation of women in new appointments.</li> <li><b>State sport and recreation organisational boards</b>-40 per cent women by 2019.</li> <li><b>Private and not-for-profit boards-voluntary target</b> of at least 40 per cent women in new appointments</li> </ul>	<p>??</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>??</p> <p>??</p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>Embed strong governance structures</b></p> <p>Establish a Prevention Agency with dedicated funding to strengthen our focus on prevention of family violence. For too long we have focused on a crisis response at the expense of a long-term approach to prevention. The Prevention Agency, supported by enduring funding, will:</p>	<p>In part (dedicated, but not protected by legislation)</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinate and oversee activities under the Primary Prevention Strategy.</li> <li>• Monitor and provide advice on the achievement of prevention outcomes.</li> <li>• Commission research into prevention methods and activities.</li> <li>• Fund, coordinate and support Local Prevention Alliances, and work with Australia's national primary prevention organisation, Our Watch and other organisations working in the field of prevention to change the attitudes and behaviours that lead to family violence in Victoria.</li> </ul>	<p>No</p> <p>In progress</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>In Part, (PVAW Local Prevention Partnership funding insecure)</p>
<p><b>Commit to legislative change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enact a Gender Equality Act to embed strong governance structures and to promote and improve gender equality across government functions. This will be developed in consultation with relevant policymakers and stakeholders.</li> <li>• Explore legislative and complementary measures (such as workplace education and training) to better protect against gendered discrimination.</li> <li>• Review laws relating to gender-based hate speech and sexist advertising, including on public transport assets.</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>In part</p>
<p><b>Model gender equality in public sector workforce</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progressively introduce gender auditing to Victorian Government departments to measure performance in five key areas: equal pay for comparable work; recruitment and promotion; leadership development and mentoring; flexible working; and organisational culture. This will occur initially through pilots and be the subject of evaluation (including cost-benefit analysis).</li> <li>• Continue to support flexible work arrangements in the public service, with all government departments to adopt a policy of all roles are flexible with a requirement to justify 'if not why not'.</li> <li>• Annual reporting by agencies on progress to improve gender equality, including reporting on the gender pay gap; uptake of flexible work; gender equality in recruitment and promotion; and access to training and development.</li> <li>• Introduce targets to achieve equity in employment, building on the commitment to 50 per cent women in executive roles and all roles as flexible.</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>

<p><b>Progressively introduce gender impact analysis in policy, budgets and service delivery</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commence work on Gender Budget Statements, from the 2017-18 Budget.</li> <li>• Develop and pilot gender impact analysis tools in policy, service delivery and budget development. Evaluation outcomes, including cost-benefit analysis, will inform wider roll-out. This will include sharing learnings with the private, not-for-profit and community sectors.</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p>
<p><b>Leverage purchasing and funding power to influence change</b> Progressively introduce gender ethical procurement policies in relation to contracted organisations, suppliers and funded agencies, to encourage and promote:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitments to family violence leave.</li> <li>• Progressive work towards gender equality in their own workplaces.</li> <li>• Where relevant and appropriate to reflect gender equality considerations in procurement contracts.</li> </ul> <p>These policies will apply only to larger contracts and to organisations with 200 plus employees. They will be developed in consultation with the relevant policy setters across all government procurement frameworks, including the Victorian Government Purchasing Board, Health Purchasing Victoria, Construction Policy and with stakeholders.</p> <p>Explore undertaking gender audits for major transport projects.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>??</p> <p>??</p>
<p><b>Address the economic dimensions of gender inequality</b> Establish a Ministerial Council on Women's Equality to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide expert advice on the identification of opportunities for quality ongoing and secure job creation, particularly through the Jobs Victoria employment network.</li> <li>• Research the accessibility of out of school hours care and work place childcare initiatives.</li> <li>• Consider strategies and research to address poverty, experienced by senior women, single mothers and women in caring professions.</li> <li>• Consider strategies to close the gender gap in a range of policy areas, including the economic independence of women.</li> </ul> <p>Establish an Equal Workplaces Advisory Committee (EWAC). The Committee will:</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>No</p> <p>Yes</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify government action that will promote the achievement of gender equality including addressing gendered occupational segregation.</li> <li>• Identify, promote and publish good practice examples of where initiatives are working to promote gender equality in the workplace, across the private sector and Victorian Public Service (VPS).</li> <li>• Consider issues and linkages relating to pay equity, equality and productivity, building human resources capacity and achieving equitable outcomes for men and women.</li> <li>• Develop a model for valuing unpaid work and care and its impact on the Victorian economy.</li> <li>• Create a series of business cases with key partners on employer-sponsored early childhood education and care and flexible work arrangements.</li> </ul>	<p>In Progress (for defined entities only via the CGEPS)</p> <p>As above</p> <p>As above</p> <p>Yes (NFA taken on the Deloitte’s report)</p> <p>No.</p>
<p><b>Advocacy to the Commonwealth</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advocate to the Commonwealth on the economic benefits of gender equality through early childhood education and care subsidies, the tax system, the retirement income system, paid parental leave, media regulation reform, and investment in aged care, education and other relevant areas.</li> <li>• Leverage the Commonwealth's National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, specifically the key actions related to gender equality.</li> <li>• Advocate for Family Violence Leave provisions to be included in the National Employment Standards.</li> </ul>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p>