



Gender Equity Victoria Budget Submission 2024-2025



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*Gender Equity Victoria acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waters and skies
across Victoria where we live, work learn and play.
We pay respect to Elders, past, present and emerging.*

Recommendations

1. Provide adequate funding to support delivery of the Our Equal state
2. Strengthen gender-responsive budgeting practices.
3. Provide funding to enable the diversity of gender equality focused organisations to come together, to share information and develop partnerships to build impact
4. Provide funding to support public entities to undertake and implement gender equality plans, gender impact assessments and reducing the gender pay gap.
5. Maintain funding with CPI indexation for Women Health Services.
6. Maintain and enhance funding to support victim-survivors of family violence and eradicate the gender inequality that normalises and validates gendered violence.
7. Increase funding to enable more Victorian women and gender-diverse people and their children to have long-term housing security
8. Build and promote innovative leadership models that support women taking on positions of power and influence within all facets of the Victorian community
9. Enable more Victorians to access safe and dignified birthing support.

Gender Equity Victoria

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is an independent membership organisation representing over 40 organisations and 80+ individuals across Victoria who are dedicated to achieving intersectional gender equality. Our members are deeply committed to the vision, purpose and focus areas of the work that is needed to address gender equity.

GEN VIC has prepared this submission to provide a collective reflection of our members' own budget submissions. As an independent voice for gender equity, we have a role in collegiality with and support for our members to bring a broad range of budget asks to government. What these member organisations have in common is a commitment to working alongside some of the most marginalised women, gender diverse and non-binary people in Victoria. It is important that their voices are heard and acted upon to create a gender equal society.

Introduction

The Imperative of Investing in Gender Equity in Victoria

Gender equality is a fundamental human right and a cornerstone of a prosperous, sustainable society. In Victoria, a state renowned for its progressive policies, investing more in gender equity can yield significant social, economic, and cultural benefits.

The fallout of this inequity is not just an abstract concept but a harsh reality that manifests in both physical and mental health consequences. Gender inequity leads to poor outcomes for all Victorians, but especially women and gender-diverse people who face sex and gender discrimination at work, at home and in the community. The health and economic consequences of inequity impact both physical and mental health and women's safety.

Victoria stands as a beacon of progress in gender equity, leading the nation with groundbreaking initiatives and laws. The Family Violence Royal Commission into Family Violence, Gender Response budgeting and the introduction of the Gender Equality Act in 2020 are significant milestones in this journey. These milestones and the government prioritisation and expenditure that accompanied these milestones have resulted in a 'superior performance across a range of outcomes'.¹

However, the battle is far from over. Too many women are still being left in the shadows. Research funded by the Victorian Gender Equality Commission for the Public Sector in 2023 revealed alarming wage gaps of up to 35% within the Victorian public sector. These disparities were most pronounced between non-Indigenous men and First Nations Women. Furthermore, significant wage gaps were identified among women with disabilities and women from culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) backgrounds.²

In addition, men's violence against women continues to cast a dark shadow over Victoria, underscoring the urgent need for action. In the 2022/2-23 financial year, Victorian Police attended 93,115 family

¹ Return on Equity: Health and Economic Dividends from Investing in Women's Health Services

² Intersectionality at Work, [Executive Summary | genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au](https://genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au)

violence incidents. 571,000 Victorian women and girls have experienced sexual assault, with an annual prevalence rate in the financial year 2021/2022 of 2.1 % of the population ³

It is imperative that we channel more funds into primary prevention measures and gender equity so that Victoria can continue to address the gender inequities that negatively impact so many Victorian women in a multitude of devastating ways. In doing so, the Victorian government will continue paving the way for a more equitable Victoria. The time for action is now. Together, we can ensure that no woman is left behind.

Our call for increased government funding is not just a request but an urgent necessity required to sustain and amplify gains so far achieved. This investment is not a cost. It is a catalyst for economic growth. By improving the health and well-being of women and gender-diverse people, we are not just enhancing the quality of life for individuals but also fuelling the economic engine of the State of Victoria.

The time to act is now. The future of Victoria hangs in the balance. Let's invest in gender equity and build a society that values and respects all its members.

The case for increased funding

Building the economy

Investing in gender equity is a moral imperative and a catalyst for economic growth. Women, a significant demographic in Victoria, are an untapped economic powerhouse. Their full participation in the workforce can supercharge the state's productivity. Yet, gender-based barriers often stifle this potential. By championing equal pay, fostering career advancement opportunities, and nurturing women entrepreneurs, Victoria can unlock this dormant economic dynamo.

The Women's Economic Taskforce starkly quantifies this potential: 'In the crudest economic terms, \$128,000,000,000 is the value to the Australian economy that can be realised by purposefully removing the persistent and pervasive barriers to women's full and equal participation in economic activity.'⁴ This staggering figure underscores the billions of dollars of revenue that Victoria is forfeiting due to persistent gender inequity.

Beyond revenue generation, gender equity can also curtail government expenditure by enhancing women's well-being and safety. The 'Return on Equity: Health and Economic Dividends from Investing in Women's Health Services'⁵ report provided a calculation of the annual cost of violence against women in Victoria to be 7,741 million dollars to the economy; this cost over a lifetime equates to 102,440 million dollars.⁶ The Victorian government's strategy to reduce and eliminate Family violence underscores the economic dividends of gender equality funding:

- Victoria's proactive stance against violence towards women prevents nearly 22,000 incidents annually, translating to annual savings of \$600 million and a lifetime saving of \$8 billion.
- Victoria's effective management of STIs (chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis) among women resulted in healthcare cost savings of \$1.4 million in 2022.⁷

³ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/recorded-crime-victims/latest-release#victoria>

⁴ Women's taskforce 10 year plan p. 6

⁵ Return on Equity: Health and Economic Dividends from Investing in Women's Health Services

⁶ Return on Equity: Health and Economic Dividends from Investing in Women's Health Services p.21

⁷ Return on Equity: Health and Economic Dividends from Investing in Women's Health Services p. 4 – 5

In essence, investing in gender equity is a win-win proposition for Victoria, promising both economic prosperity and social progress.

Social Benefits

Gender equity can foster a more inclusive, harmonious society. Inequity breeds a lack of respect, opportunity and safety for women and gender-diverse people. By contrast, societies that embrace gender equality tend to exhibit higher levels of mutual respect and cooperation. Therefore, by investing in gender equity, Victoria can enhance its social fabric.

In the 22/23 financial year, Victoria's police recorded 93,115 family violence incidents.⁸ The National Community Attitudes Survey found in 2021 that Victorians were 4% more likely to have an advanced rejection of violence against women compared to the national percentage. But there is still work to do results from the same survey found that 63% of Victorians still do not reject all forms of violence against women.⁹ 'Overall, Australia invests significantly less in primary prevention than comparable countries'¹⁰, with Victoria's current spending well below the Respect Victoria's recommendation of prevention spending requiring 9.5 – 12% of total family violence spending.¹¹

Victoria prides itself on its diverse, vibrant culture. This culture is enriched when all voices, regardless of gender, are heard and valued. By investing in gender equity, Victoria can ensure that its cultural narrative reflects the experiences and perspectives of all its inhabitants.

⁸ [Victoria Police Data Tables \(2023\).xlsx \(live.com\)](#)

⁹ [NCAS-2021-States-and-Territories-Report-2023.2.pdf \(cdn-website.com\)](#) P. 107

¹⁰ Preventive health: How much does Australia spend and is it enough? P.6

¹¹ Respect Victoria Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022, P. 18

Priority Investments

1. Provide adequate funding to support delivery of Our Equal State

The Victorian Government's 'Our Equal State' strategy, with its 110 actions, is a commendable initiative that builds upon the work already undertaken. The sector has warmly received this strategy, including Gender Equity Victoria and our members. However, the lack of new funding to realise the ambition of this plan is deeply concerning.

No matter how comprehensive or well-intentioned, a strategy is only as effective as the resources allocated to it. Without sufficient funding, the potential impact of 'Our Equal State' is significantly undermined.

We have observed a reduction in services providing employment support to Victorian women. This increases the difficulty for actions like Action 63 of 'Our Equal State' to be successfully undertaken and threatens the overall objective of gender equity.

We urge the Victorian Government to recognise the urgency of this situation—the success of 'Our Equal State' hinges on adequate funding. We cannot afford to let this opportunity slip through our fingers.

2. Strengthen gender-responsive budgeting practices.

VCOSS and Gender Equity Victoria are one in our call to strengthen gender-responsive practices. We applaud Victoria's leadership Gender Responsive budgeting, which sets a strong example for the nation.

Victoria's commitment to gender-responsive budgeting enables better policy and program design decision-making and helps ensure that government expenditure is more transparent and accountable. We believe that the Victorian Government can build on this solid foundation in the 2024 Budget by:

- **Accelerating the introduction of legislation** to enshrine gender-responsive budgeting in law, as recommended by the Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting.
- **Rolling out further training** on gender impact assessments and gender-responsive budgeting across the Victorian Public Service to build staff knowledge and skills.
- **Establishing an independent Gender Equality Budget Group**, modelled on the United Kingdom Women's Budget Group. This group, comprising gender economic experts from civil society and the academic sector, would work with the Gender Responsive Budgeting unit in the Department of Treasury and Finance to embed gender-responsive budgeting practices better and undertake an annual gender equality needs assessment of government initiatives.

3. Provide funding to enable the diversity of gender equality focused organisations to come together, to share information and develop partnerships to build impact

A core part of Gender Equity Victoria's work is building the skills and capacity of member organisations to engage in coordinated, evidence-informed, intersectional practice in the areas of gender equity, economic security and other areas such as leadership.

One way we do this is by facilitating Communities of Practice to share expertise and good practice, bring organisations together to collaborate and coordinate work across the state and support organisations to engage in effective regional planning.

Many other state-based or membership organisations also provide opportunities for connection and practice sharing such as the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector who work with Communities of Practice to support implementation of the Gender Equality Act 2020. Such groups can also be referred to as networks, special interest groups and other terms like alliance.

These platforms, whilst extremely beneficial for participants can also be resource intensive and often run voluntarily in addition to regular responsibilities. To support establishment, sustainability and expansion of existing and potential Communities of Practice, Gender Equity Victoria recommends funds are allocated to provide dedicated resources to facilitate the ongoing opportunities for connections.

4. Provide funding to support public entities to undertake and implement gender equality plans, gender impact assessments and reducing the gender pay gap.

We call on the government to allocate necessary resources to the public sector, enabling them to fully execute and incorporate their Gender Equality Action Plans, as outlined by the Gender Equality 2020. This includes fulfilling all reporting obligations.

The Victorian government is aware of the significant gender pay gap for women across the Victorian public sector. These pay gaps are demonstrably higher for CARM women and First Nation Women. Ongoing funding must be made available to address these gaps.

Moreover, we advocate for targeted funding specifically designed to empower all public sector entities to conduct comprehensive gender impact assessments. The insights derived from these assessments are crucial and, if funded appropriately, will drive innovation and gender equality across Victoria.

5. Maintain funding with CPI indexation for Women Health Services.

Women's Health Services are essential for promoting good health and well-being to Victorian women. Through their independent evaluation report, Return on Equity, Health and Economic Dividends from Investing in Women's Health Services, Women's Health Services have demonstrated that ongoing investment in their services provides value for money outcomes that drive gender equity and safer Victoria for women.

Women's Health Services apply an intersectional lens to health issues and systems to improve outcomes for women, especially those who face multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage. They proactively prevent the underlying causes of ill health and harm for women in Victoria. Women's Health Services work collaboratively for a fairer, safer and healthier Victoria, addressing the social determinants of health, such as gender inequality, violence, poverty and discrimination.

In order to continue delivery of these vital services and information the funding uplift provided 2 years ago must be maintained with a CPI increase to reflect increased expenses.

6. Maintain and enhance funding to support victim-survivors of family violence and eradicate the gender inequality that normalises and validates gendered violence.

Whilst we acknowledge the positive strides made in addressing family violence in Victoria, it remains a devastating reality for hundreds of thousands of Victorian women and gender-diverse people. People are still being killed each year, and the physical harm and emotional trauma inflicted by this pervasive issue is far-reaching and deeply concerning.

We ask the Victorian government to fully fund all measures outlined in the Safe and Equal State Budget submission for 2024 – 2025. The funding asks outlined by Safe and Equal are critical to creating a safer and more equitable Victoria:

1. **Sustainable Funding:** We urge the government to fund the specialist family violence response sector sustainably. These dedicated professionals are on the front lines, providing critical support to those affected by family violence.
2. **Safe and Affordable Housing:** Increase the availability of safe and affordable housing to facilitate recovery from family violence. A secure living environment is a fundamental step towards healing and rebuilding lives.
3. **MARAM Framework:** Continue funding to embed the Multi-Agency Risk and Assessment Management (MARAM) Framework across prescribed workforces. This integrated approach is critical to effectively managing and mitigating the risks associated with family violence.
4. **Primary Prevention Work:** Maintain the crucial work of primary prevention. By addressing the root causes of family violence, we can work towards a future where such violence is a thing of the past.

Further to this, we call on the Victorian government to, in addition to maintaining primary prevention funding, increase to the levels recommended by Respect Victoria, 9.5 – 12% of total money spent on family violence.¹² This will enable a response across the community to counter backlash, enable evaluation that expands informed practice, and grow the primary prevention workforce, enabling communities that experience marginalisation to have fit-for-purpose primary prevention interventions.

7. Increase funding to enable more Victorian women and gender-diverse people and their children to have long-term housing security

Housing security is increasingly becoming a precarious issue for women and gender-diverse people in Victoria. The escalating housing insecurity crisis is not just an individual problem but a societal issue that requires immediate attention and substantial investment.

Due to the scarcity of affordable rentals and escalating housing and living costs, a significant additional financial commitment is required to house Victorians. Without this funding, the grim reality is that more Victorian women, gender-diverse individuals, and their children are at risk of homelessness. This is a potential future scenario and a pressing concern that demands immediate action.

Therefore, we strongly advocate for increased funding to support the funding of women and gender-diverse people. Providing long-term housing security to more Victorians can prevent the devastating consequences of homelessness. This is not just a matter of social justice but a crucial investment in the well-being of our communities.

¹² Respect Victoria Strategic Plan 2019 – 2022, p 18

8. Build and promote innovative leadership models that support women taking on positions of power and influence within all facets of the Victorian community

We share VCOSS's call for the Victorian government to fund VCOSS and Gender Equity Victoria to design and test a co-leadership and part-time work model. This initiative would encourage more women and gender-diverse people into leadership roles. The result would be improved economic security and better career progression, access to better pay, and more super. It would enable more women with caring responsibilities to continue working at a senior level. By having more diverse senior leadership, the performance and impact of community sector organisations would be enhanced.ⁱ

9. Enable more Victorians to access safe and dignified birthing support.

Women and gender-diverse birthing people experiencing financial and social disadvantage face systemic discrimination and barriers in the public maternity system. This may affect their engagement with clinical care services and their ability to navigate public health systems. Limited financial resources can restrict the public maternity system's capacity to provide equitable access to continuity of care and culturally sensitive and respectful care. Less than 10% of Australian women receive the WHO-recommended model of maternity care. People experiencing intersecting forms of structural inequality, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds, face the most significant barriers to accessing maternity support, perpetuating maternal-child health inequality, social isolation, and limited access to relevant care.

Gender Equity Victoria supports Birth for Human Kind's call for more funding to support the sustainable delivery of the current community-based volunteer Doula model and funding enhancements to the program that will allow an employed community-based Doula program.ⁱⁱ

Conclusion

Investing in gender equity is not just a moral imperative for Victoria—it's strategic. The economic and social dividends of such an investment could be immense for the individual, community and state. Gender Equity Victoria recognises the positive and ground breaking initiatives the Victorian government has funded and the inroads they have made. The times is right to use the gains achieved to make further inroads that will improve the lives of Victorian women and gender diverse people and truly create a gender equal Victoria. As such, it's incumbent upon Victoria to maintain existing resources and allocate new resources towards achieving gender equity to benefit all Victorians and the state's prosperity.

ⁱ [VCOSS-2024BudgetSub-Final.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱ <https://birthforhumankind.org/latest-news/gender-equity-victoria-budget-submission-2023-2024>