GENVIC

GENDER EQUITY VICTORIA

Victorian Budget 2025-2026

GEN VIC SUBMISSION

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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. Our Equal State

- Establish an independent Gender Equality Budget Advisory Group modelled on the United Kingdom Women's Budget Group.
- Articulate the total government investment across all departments to deliver Our Equal State actions.
- Continue sustained funding for delivery of Our Equal State actions to align with the entirety of the strategy's duration and beyond.

2. Connecting the gender equality ecosystem

- Support GEN VIC to coordinate and establish existing and potential Communities of Practice focused on advancing gender equality
- Invest in an annual gender equality practice sharing show case event

3. Innovation leadership models

- Support GEN VIC to design, deliver and coordinate of a program dedicated to supporting a pipeline of diverse women to fill Board vacancies within and beyond the public sector.
- Fund GEN VIC & VCOSS the design and testing of a model of co-leadership and part time work.
- Extend funding for the Women of Colour Executive Leadership Program

4. Gender equality services and obligations

- Maintain funding provided to gender equality services with a CPI increase to reflect increased expenses.
- Provide at least 6 months' notice to any services with funding due to lapse of their likely continuation to allow for forward planning.
- Grant additional funding to all defined entities to meet their Gender Equality Act obligations.

5. Investment across all ages and genders

- Ensure there is equal investment in gender equity initiatives across all ages – particularly younger and older years.
- Boost funding for gender equity initiatives that engage men and boys.

Gender Equity Victoria

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is an independent membership organisation representing over 50 organisations and 80+ individuals across Victoria who are dedicated to achieving intersectional gender equality. We represent a growing gender equity movement across industries, communities and sectors. Our vision is for a gender equal society where all people can thrive.

GEN VIC has prepared a submission to the Victorian Government for the 2025/26 budget to provide a collective reflection of our members' own budget submissions. Our submission build on issues included in our Submission for the Victorian State Budget 2024-25, member feedback via surveys and discussions in addition to opportunities to close identified gaps.

Introduction

Gender Equity Investment in Victoria

It is widely recognised that gender equality is a pathway to prosperity and well-being not only for women but also for society at large. Benefits include economic growth, reduced poverty and increased financial well-being and security, improved health outcomes, reduced gendered-based violence and death, better legal protections and increased opportunity for participation across all areas of society. When we invest in gender equity, everyone benefits[1].

Victoria's gender equality strategy *Our Equal State*[2] uses the terms 'gender equality' and 'gender equity' interchangeably but recognises their distinct differences. Gender *equity* recognises that differences in gender-related needs and power should be identified and addressed in a manner that fixes any imbalances. Gender *equality* is when people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities, and opportunities. Simply put, we must invest in gender equity if we are to achieve gender equality. To do this, we must consolidate our efforts, rather than duplicate, fragment or compete.

We know that there is no one size approach that will benefit all people. We know that gender inequities are experienced differently by everyone – and compounded for people of colour, with disabilities, gender diverse identities and sexualities.

A report released by Deloitte in collaboration with Australians Investing in Women and Minderoo Foundation describes changes that are needed to achieve gender equity in Australia with the following 6 key actions identified in their Remaking the Norm report[3]:

- Engage children and young people in discussions about gender norms
- Enable men to play a bigger role at home
- Eliminate stereotypes in language and culture
- Embed intersectionality across gender initiatives
- Create accountable and transparent institutions
- Create structured processes to reduce embedded bias

Groundbreaking foundations have been laid in former and existing Victorian policy, legislation and strategies with gender responsive budgeting now enshrined in Victorian law. However, without ongoing resources and a willingness to embrace change, the desired outcomes will remain out of reach.

Gender equality can only be achieved when there is a collective approach that encompasses government, not for profit and private industry working together towards common goals.

Ongoing, consistent funding that grows to meet needs is essential if we truly want to achieve a gender equal state. Invest in long term transformational change that utilises a whole of government approach looking beyond services is required to disrupt the systems that act as barriers to our aspiration to achieve gender equality.

[1] UN Women (2024) Five things to accelerate women's economic empowerment | UN Women – Headquarters
[2] Victorian Government (2023) Our equal state: Victoria's gender equality strategy and action plan 2023–2027
[3] Remaking the norm: Six actions to achieve gender equity in Australia - Australians Investing In Women (AIIW)

Priority Investments

1. Our Equal State

The Victorian Government's 'Our Equal State' strategy, with its 110 actions, is a landmark initiative that builds upon previous and existing work. GEN VIC and our members welcomes the strategy, however, new and ongoing funding to realise the ambition of this plan is required, particularly given it is touted to be a whole of government responsibility.

The 2024/25 budget aligned with a nation leading initiative to embed gender responsive budgeting into policy and program design however ongoing structures and processes are needed to ensure it delivers what is intended. We echo the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) call to establish an independent Gender Equality Budget Group.

The previous budget was also silent on the total investment in delivery of Our Equal State which also saw the overall investment in women's policy reducing from previous years.

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.

GEN VIC through Put Her Name On It are proud to be a partner to deliver Action 1 of the strategy:

Geographic Names Victoria will work with naming authorities, including local government, to increase the commemoration of women in place naming, by setting a level of 70% of new requests for commemorative naming of new roads, placenames and landmarks to be achieved within the lifetime of the Strategy.

However like many of the well intentioned strategy actions, Put Her Name On It is only funded for 2024-2025. In order to achieve the 70% target, sustained funding that aligns at a minimum with the strategy's timelines is required.

Recommendations:

- Establish an independent Gender Equality Budget Advisory Group modelled on the United Kingdom Women's Budget Group.
- Articulate the total government investment across all departments to deliver Our Equal State actions.
- Continue sustained funding for delivery of Our Equal State actions to align with the entirety of the strategy's duration and beyond.

2. Connecting the gender equality ecosystem

GEN VIC's core work is building the skills and capacity of members to engage in coordinated, evidence-informed, intersectional practice in the areas of gender equity, economic justice, sustainability and other areas such as leadership.

One way we do this is by facilitating shared expertise and good practice, bring organisations and individuals together to collaborate and coordinate work across the state.

Communities of Practice (CoP) also known as networks, special interest groups and other terms like alliances play a critical role in bringing organisations and individuals together to share their challenges as well as their achievements.

State-wide bodies including Safe and Equal and the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector currently facilitate several CoP.[4][5] The Commission works with CoPs to support the implementation of the Gender Equality Act 2020 whilst Safe and Equal's primary prevention CoP bring together those working in primary prevention to explore challenges and opportunities, strengthen policy and practice and build the capabilities and skills of those working in prevention.

These platforms, whilst extremely beneficial for participants can also be resource intensive and often run voluntarily in addition to regular responsibilities. Further to this, the networks often work in silos within their own industries with little opportunity to connect with other sectors focused on gender equality.

There remains an opportunity for the Victorian Government to invest in collaboration and coordination of efforts to advance gender equality. As a state-wide independent association, GEN VIC is well placed to provide secretariat support to existing volunteer run networks as well as establishing new ones to meet sector needs and offer opportunities for cross collaboration, connection and practice sharing.

The proposed initiative builds on the following actions from Our Equal State:

Action 91: Deliver the WorkWell Respect Fund and the WorkWell Respect Network to support employers to prevent work-related gendered violence including sexual harassment in Victorian workplaces.

Action 93: Continue implementing Respect and Equality in TAFE to strengthen the TAFE network's approach to prevention of gender-based violence and gender equality.

Recommendations:

- Support GEN VIC to coordinate and establish existing and potential Communities of Practice focused on advancing gender equality
- Invest in an annual gender equality practice sharing show case event

[4] Primary prevention communities of practice | Safe and Equal
[5] Communities of practice | genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au

3. Innovative leadership models

There have been significant gains in women's leadership across various sectors and more specifically representation on boards. However more work is needed to increase the diversity of women appointed to boards and leadership positions, ensuring they reflect Victorian communities. Access to ongoing capacity building and resources to support evidence informed good governance also supports long term sustainability of organisations.

To support gender equity on boards and increase diversity, GEN VIC proposes to build on the previous Women's Board Leadership Program[6] and design, deliver and coordinate a program dedicated to supporting a pipeline of diverse women to fill board vacancies within and beyond the gender equality sector. It is anticipated the program will include education, observation training amongst our membership organisations, alumni networks and access to supporting resources.

Leadership support for all career levels is also needed through targeted programs in addition to exploring specific projects such understanding co-leadership models and their impact. Shared leadership is little understood, and workplaces may not don't have the resources to build organisational or individual capacity. Few models of good practice exist in the sector.[7]

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 keep working at a senior level. By having more diverse senior leadership, the performance and impact of organisations would be enhanced.

Supporting the proposed initiatives aligns with the following Our Equal State actions:

Action 4: Maintain gender parity on Victorian boards and courts and increase the diversity of women on boards.

Action 13: Support women from diverse backgrounds and gender diverse people to take on leadership roles and be represented in decision-making spaces through targeted programs.

Action 45: Explore new ways to support leadership roles and representation for women from diverse backgrounds and gender diverse people in the private sector.

Action 96: Reach gender parity in senior leadership positions in each portfolio across the Victorian public sector within 5 years.

Recommendations:

- Support GEN VIC to design, deliver and coordinate of a program dedicated to supporting a pipeline of diverse women to fill Board vacancies within and beyond the public sector.
- Fund GEN VIC & VCOSS the design and testing of a model of co-leadership and part time work.
- Extend funding for the Women of Colour Executive Leadership Program

[6] Women's Board Leadership Program | vic.gov.au
[7] VCOSS-2024BudgetSub-Final.pdf

4. Gender equality services and obligations

GEN VIC's members are part of an expanding gender equity movement spanning various industries, communities, and sectors. They vary in focus and communities but with underlying common goal to advance gender equality. From regional women's health services to state-wide legal support and national programs to support women return to work, many share the challenge of meeting growing demand for their services – or worse, closing their doors.

In the 2024-25 State Budget, many organizations were relieved to maintain their current funding levels. However, with funding set to lapse, rising delivery costs, and staff shortages, there is a critical need for increased investment. This investment is essential not only to meet the basic needs of Victorians but also to enhance their future prospects.

Another part of Victoria's gender equality ecosystem requiring support is government itself.

The *Gender Equality Act 2020* requires defined entities[8] to complete 5 key tasks to meet their obligations under the Act:

1. Promote gender equality
2. Conduct gender impact assessments
3. Undertake a workplace gender audit
4. Create a Gender Equality Action Plan
5. Report on progress

This applies to almost 300 organisations including government departments, statutory authorities, local councils, universities and health services however little to no funding is provided to meet these additional requirements.

Targeted funding specifically designed to empower all defined entities to conduct these activities can provide crucial insights, drive innovation and gender equality across Victoria.

Recommendations:

- Maintain funding provided to gender equality services with a CPI increase to reflect increased expenses.
- Provide at least 6 months' notice to any services with funding due to lapse of their likely continuation to allow for forward planning.
- Grant additional funding to all defined entities to meet their Gender Equality Act obligations.

[8] Defined entities under the Gender Equality Act | genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au

5. Investment across all ages and genders

Australia's national gender equality strategy – Working for Women recognises that gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing the rigid attitudes and stereotypes that affect people over their lifetime. Gender stereotypes see girls and boys treated differently from when they are babies. They shape the career aspirations of school-aged children, relationship dynamics for young people and adults, and can lead to women and men taking on roles at home and at work that flow through to economic security at retirement. These attitudes can be produced and reinforced in households and institutions and are experienced differently across communities and cultures.[9]

Yet despite this logic, investments in gender equality tend to be concentrated on intervening during the middle years – when women often face disparities due to caring responsibilities, career changes and life cycle related health issues. The World Economic Forum predicts that it will be 131 years to achieve gender equality[10], and unless we re-focus on emerging generations and ALL genders, this will likely remain true.

In 2024, Victoria added to its lists of firsts by introducing a new government position focused on how men contribute to gender inequities by appointing Tim Richardson as Parliamentary Secretary for Men's Behaviour Change. Whilst this move was widely applauded there is an opportunity to further expand this by investing further to support men and boys.

If we are to remain focused solely on women and girls, we reinforce that gender equality is a problem or challenge only for one side. Gender relations are an interactive system of connections and distinctions among people (and groups of people) – what happens to one group in this system affects the others[11][12].

Recommendations:

- Ensure there is equal investment in gender equity initiatives across all ages – particularly younger and older years.
- Boost funding for gender equity initiatives that engage men and boys.

[9] Gender equality in Australia | Working for Women
[10] Gender Equality Is Stalling: 131 Years to Close the Gap > Press releases | World Economic Forum
[11] The Role of Men and Boys in Achieving Gender Equality
[12] How men and boys can push for gender equality - UN Women Australia

Conclusion

Investing in gender equity ensures that *all* people are provided with the resources they need to lead equal futures.

In order to advance gender equality we need to ensure that resourcing levels are at a minimum maintained but expanded where demand is needed. We need to ensure that all parts of the ecosystem are involved and platforms are provided to facilitate collaborations, coordination and communication.

Consistency is key but so is the need to continue to explore new ways of doing things. If we keep doing what we have always done, we will continue to get the same results.

Now is the time for change – and support – to create a gender equal society where all people can thrive.