2026-27 Victorian Budget

GEN VIC SUBMISSION

GENVIC

GENDER EQUITY VICTORIA

About Gender Equity Victoria

Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) is the independent peak body for individuals and organisations working to advance gender equity across our state.

GEN VIC Is a truly unique organisation, being the only peak body of its kind in Australia. GEN VIC was founded in 1994 as the Women's Health Association of Victoria, and has since evolved to coordinate and support a growing gender equity movement across our state's diverse sectors, industries and communities.

Our member organisations include leaders in women's health, legal services, justice, employment support and gendered violence prevention, representing every region across Victoria.

Acknowledgement of Country

GEN VIC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country across Victoria, and pay our respect to their Elders past and present.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have never ceded sovereignty of this Land, and walk alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the path to justice, Treaty and self-determination. We also acknowledge that the removal of First Nations children has and continues to devastate individuals, families and communities.

GEN VIC is committed to working in solidarity with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve the health, safety and wellbeing of all women and gender diverse people.

Contents

Foreword 1

Summary of recommendations 3

Overview 4

Women's leadership 5

Gender equity in sport 7

Sustainable funding 8

Commemorative justice 9

Foreword

Investing in gender equity is not a discretionary choice - it is an economic and social imperative.

As Chief Executive Officer of Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC), I am proud to present our submission to the 2026-27 Victorian Budget in support of sustained, long-term government funding to advance gender equity across our state, communities, services and workplaces.

Victoria has made important progress toward gender equality, yet systemic disparities persist. Women and gender diverse people continue to experience lower workforce participation, unequal pay, higher rates of insecure employment, and disproportionate exposure to violence and economic hardship.

These inequities are not only unjust; they impose significant and measurable costs on our economy through lost productivity, increased demand on health and social services, and intergenerational disadvantage.

Short-term and fragmented funding models are a critical barrier to meaningful progress. Gender equity requires sustained investment because the drivers of inequality are structural, entrenched and cumulative.

Programs that prevent gender-based violence, support economic participation, strengthen leadership pathways, and enable care and flexibility cannot be switched on and off with budget cycles. When funding is unstable, organisations are forced to divert resources from impact and into survival - undermining outcomes, workforce capability, and accountability.

Evidence consistently shows that investing in gender equity delivers strong returns. Increased workforce participation and leadership diversity drive productivity and innovation.

Preventative approaches reduce long-term expenditure on crisis responses in health, justice, and social service systems. Communities with greater gender equity are more resilient, safer, and better positioned to adapt to economic and social change.

Sustainable funding is therefore not a cost to be managed, but a valuable investment in our collective prosperity.

As a member-based organisation, GEN VIC represents a variety of organisations that are at the frontline of this challenge. We see every day how stable funding enables long-term planning, rigorous evaluation, and deep collaboration with communities, employers, and service systems.

It allows our sector to attract and retain skilled professionals, build evidence-based programs, and scale what works. Conversely, uncertainty erodes impact and weakens the infrastructure needed to deliver government priorities.

This Budget calls upon the state government to commit to multi-year, indexed funding for gender equity initiatives; to embed gender-responsive budgeting across portfolios; and to recognise prevention and systems change as core economic strategies.

Such an approach not only align with state productivity goals, but will also strengthen social cohesion, and reflect our shared commitment to fairness and opportunity.

Gender equity is foundational to a strong, inclusive economy.

With sustained and strategic investment, the state government can accelerate progress, reduce long-term fiscal pressures, and ensure that people of all genders can thrive and fully contribute to Victoria's future.

Micaela Drieberg
Chief Executive Officer

Summary of recommendations

Sustainable funding

- Maintain funding provided to gender equality services with a CPI increase to reflect increased expenses.
- Support continued 'uplift' funding for Women's Health Services.
- Invest in long-term funding to support established member programs including the Victorian Disability Advocacy Program, Flat Out's Family Violence Justice Project, Victims Legal Service, and Neighbourhood Houses Victoria's place-based programs.

Commemorative justice

Create supportive settings that demonstrate gender equity in public places and recognise women's history by:

- Continuing funding for the Put Her Name on It initiative to increase public visibility of women's achievements.
- Supporting the built environment sector to introduce gender sensitive design, planning provisions and guidelines to create places that meet the needs of women, girls and gender diverse people.
- Providing further investment for the Victorian Women's Public Art Program.

Gender equity in sport

- Work in partnership with the gender equity and sports sectors at all levels and across all codes to identify sector needs to promote gender equity.
- Support initiatives that prevent gendered violence and foster the participation of girls and women in sports.

Women's leadership

Provide supportive leadership programs and ongoing engagement opportunities for women and gender diverse people by:

- Reinstating funding to deliver statewide women's leadership programs such as the PACE Leadership Program, ECHO First Nations Women's Leadership Program, Joan Kirner Emerging Leaders Program, Women's Board Leadership Program and Women Leading Locally.
- Providing ongoing engagement and support for graduates of women's leadership programs.
- Continuing to recognise women and gender diverse contributions to Victoria through the Victorian Honour Roll.
- Supporting the design and evaluation of co-leadership models used in the public and community sectors.

Ensure government foundations are strong to support the gender equity sector and the delivery of the Our Equal State strategy by:

- Continuing to sustainably fund the delivery of Our Equal State actions for the strategy's duration and beyond.
- Maintaining resourcing levels for key statutory bodies and departments that support the gender equity sector, including Respect Victoria, the Office for Women and the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector.

Overview

GEN VIC's submission to the 2026-27 Victorian Budget is a broad reflection of the needs of our members, sector partners and communities.

Our submission builds on issues highlighted in previous year's submission as well as feedback from our members throughout the year, and information gathered at a roundtable held with the Treasurer's office in November 2025.

The Victorian Government's 2023-27 Our Equal State gender equality strategy, with its plan for 110 actions, is a key policy document that articulates how Victoria will reduce gender inequality over a four-year period.

As we near the end of the Strategy's lifetime, however, GEN VIC and our members look forward to an update on its progress, including details on what funding has been invested to deliver the plan.

The 2025-26 Victorian Budget demonstrated continued support for recognising the work and achievements of women through the Victorian Honour Roll.

Despite this, funding for key gender equity initiatives such as the Preventing Violence Through Sport Grants Program, Women's Leadership Programs and the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation were all cut.

This has been a cause of concern for the sector, especially when these cuts occurred at the same time as a reduction in funding for the Office for Women, Respect Victoria and the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector.

We echo the call made by the Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS) to ensure strong foundations are in place to achieve Our Equal State and ensure Respect Victoria, the Office for Women and Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector are protected from further Budget cuts.

We also call on the government to reinstate investments in leadership programs for women and gender equity in sports with ongoing opportunities for engagement and support.

Women's leadership

There have been significant gains in women's leadership across various sectors and more specifically representation on boards. But 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.

Participation of women in the workforce has risen significantly compared with pre-COVID levels, and even reached a new record high in September 2025[1]. However, data on women in leadership positions tells a different story:

- 22% of CEOs are women (no change in 12 months), 39% of key management personnel are women (up 2%) and 43% of managers are women (1% increase)
- Two-thirds of employees work in an organisation dominated by one gender
- Women hold 33% of Board seats (up 1%) and 21% of Chair roles (up 1%) but 24% of Boards still have no women

Leadership support for all career levels is also needed through targeted programs in addition to exploring co-leadership models and their impact. Shared leadership is little understood, and workplaces may not have the resources to build organisational or individual capacity.

Few practice models exist in the sector[2] and those that do exist are unknown. An opportunity exists to identify what co-leadership models exist, their enablers, barriers and impact.

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.

[1] 2025-26 Budget Update
[2] VCOSS-2024 BudgetSub-Final.pdf

Recommendations

Provide supportive leadership programs and ongoing engagement opportunities for women and gender diverse people by:

- Reinstating funding for statewide Women's Leadership programs for the ongoing delivery of programs including PACE, ECHO, Joan Kirner Emerging Leadership Program, Women's Board Leadership Program and Women Leading Locally
- Providing ongoing engagement and support opportunities for Women's Leadership program graduates
- Continuing to recognise women and gender diverse contributions to Victoria through the Victorian Honour Roll
- Supporting the design and evaluation of co-leadership models used in the public and community sectors

Ensure government foundations remain strong to support the gender equity sector and the delivery of the Our Equal State strategy by:

- Continuing to sustainably fund the delivery of Our Equal State actions to align with the strategy's duration and beyond.
- Maintaining resourcing levels for key statutory bodies and departments that support the gender equity sector, including Respect Victoria, the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector and the Office for Women

Gender equity in sport

Sports participation levels among women and girls in Victoria are at the highest level ever recorded, and this is an opportunity for our state to continue leading nationally.

The improvement in participation is likely linked to the increase in state government initiatives focused on engaging women and girls in recent years and the growth in opportunities for them to participate at the grass-roots level[3].

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

- Action 33: Continue to level the playing field for all women and girls in sport and active recreation, including in the suitability and access to infrastructure, leadership, participation and in closing the visibility gap through the Office for Women in Sport and Recreation, the Change Our Game initiative and other related programs
- Action 85: Implement the Free from violence: second action plan 2022–2025 to ensure Victorian women are safe and free from violence by investing in community-led gender equality and primary prevention projects across the state, from sports clubs to TAFEs, to local government and women's health services.

Recommendations

- Work in partnership with the gender equity and sports sectors at all levels and across all codes to identify sector needs to promote gender equity.
- Support initiatives that prevent gendered violence and foster the participation of girls and women in sports.

[3] Sport+Participation+Research+Project+Summary+040425.pdf

Sustainable funding

GEN VIC's members are part of an expanding gender equity movement spanning our state's diverse industries, communities, and sectors. They vary in focus and reach but united in the common goal to advance gender equality.

From regional women's health services to statewide 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 last Victorian Budget, many organisations were relieved to maintain their current funding levels. However, limited 12-month commitments do no provide ongoing certainty to clients or critical staff and 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. This financial year, $4,4 billion was pledged for gender equality initiatives across the state. This is $1.7 billion less than the last budget.

Workforce challenges are also affecting service delivery, with recruitment and retention adding to the already high pressure that services face due to rising level of demand and the growing complexity and severity of cases[4].

Research commissioned by Family Safety Victoria also acknowledged factors such as relatively low pay, short-term contracts and a lack of support for workers as barriers to recruitment or retention[5].

Recommendations

- Maintain funding provided to gender equality services with a CPI increase to reflect increased expenses.
- Support continued 'uplift' funding for Women's Health Services.
- Invest in long-term funding to support established member programs including Victims Legal Service, Flat Out's Family Violence Justice Project, the Victorian Disability Advocacy Program, and place-based programs run by Neighbourhood Houses Victoria.

[4] WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard | Latest results employer reporting
[5] SGI 2024 | Australia | Economic Sustainability

Commemorative justice

You can't be what you can't see, and right now, women and gender diverse people can't see themselves reflected in public places.

Stand on any street corner in Melbourne's CBD, and you'll see men's names on most of the signs. But initiatives like GEN VIC's Put Her Name On It are challenging the notion that only men's achievements matter.

In 2022, a survey of local government areas in Victoria highlighted that women were under-represented in commemorative place naming.

In 2025, however, we saw more gazetted places named after women than men and with continued funding for projects like Put Her Name On It, Victoria can exceed the target to have 70 per cent of new commemorative places named after women by 2027.

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

- Action 1: 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.
- Action 75: Undertake a gender impact assessment on the Victoria Planning Provisions and guidelines to create places designed with the needs of women and girls in mind.
- Action 105: Explore embedding gender design principles in public space development

Recommendations

Create supportive settings that demonstrate gender equity in public places and recognise women's history by:

- Continuing funding for the Put Her Name on It initiative to increase public visibility of women's achievements.
- Supporting the built environment sector to introduce gender sensitive design, planning provisions and guidelines to create places that meet the needs of women, girls and gender diverse people.
- Providing further investment for the Victorian Women's Public Art Program.

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