

Victorian Government Gender Equality Strategy Consultation

TFER Partner Tip Sheet

The Victorian Government is developing a Gender Equality Strategy. This Strategy will consider the barriers faced by Victorian women throughout their lives in order to guide actions and priorities to promote women's leadership, economic security, safety, health and wellbeing, and civic participation across all areas of society.

To develop the Strategy the Victorian Government are conducting a consultation process seeking input regarding the key challenges and opportunities that gender equality presents.

This tip sheet has been developed by WHE for use by Together For Equality & Respect (TFER) partners. It draws on partner feedback provided during the regional consultation forum on 3rd February.

How you can get involved:

- As a TFER partner your organisation will be identified on the regional response being developed by TFER in conjunction with the Regional Family Violence Partnership.
- Submit your own response. The more the better!
- Host a Gender Equality Forum in your organisation or community to discuss ideas about the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy

This is a great opportunity to advocate for an integrated Victorian approach to building gender equality and thus will contribute to the prevention of violence against women. We hope to encourage as many submissions as possible to strengthen the case for a long-term investment in gender equality.

Follow this link to access [the consultation paper](#). This may help guide your responses, however you are NOT required to address all the questions or to address the questions at all. There is no particular length or format required for a submission, it can be as long or as short as you wish! The submission methods are outlined [here](#).

Date for submission: 18th March 2016

Benefits of a Gender Equality Strategy for Victoria

Feel free to use any of the suggested reasons below to support the case for a Victorian Gender Equality Strategy. It is not an exhaustive list; there may be other reasons why Victoria should have a Gender Equality Strategy that you wish to include in your response.

1. Gender Equality is key to the prevention of violence against women

While family violence impacts everyone, evidence has clearly established family violence and sexual assault as gendered issues. International research has identified that the underlying cause or necessary conditions for violence against women is gender inequality (Our Watch et al 2015). A focus on building gender equality needs to be central to any efforts aimed at preventing violence against women.

2. Gender Equality as a human right

Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights identifies the right to be free of discrimination on the grounds of sex (UN General Assembly 1948).

3. Improved Health Outcomes

Many of the health outcomes experienced by women are a result of societal norms and gender roles, which can have a profound impact on the mental and physical health of women and girls (World Health Organisation 2008). How we understand gender is defined by prevailing norms, institutions, expectations and behaviours and positions women and men in particular ways in society (AWHN 2013). This different social positioning gives rise to the unequal distribution of power, prestige and resources which influences other determinants of health, such as living and working conditions, and food availability (WHO 2010).

The National Women's Health Policy states that *"gender can contribute to differences between and among women and men in financial security, paid and unpaid caring work and experiences of violence... resulting in different and sometimes inequitable patterns of exposure to health risk, in unequal access to and use of health information, care and services, different help-seeking behaviour and, ultimately, different health outcomes* (Department of Health and Ageing 2010).

4. Diversity = better decision making

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2016) recognises that diversity in the workplace promotes improved decision making, creativity and innovation and leads to better overall performance. Diverse groups of people bring a greater variety of experience and different views to the decision-making process and then make better decisions (Peach 2015).

5. Economic Benefits

The Victorian community stands to gain substantial economic benefit from building gender equality. Healthy women and children contribute to economic growth, and building gender equality has been identified by the WHO (2016) as a key mechanism for driving economic development. Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for the next generation (United Nations Population Fund 2016).

Individual businesses and organisations also stand to benefit; gender equality supports increased productivity and better organisational performance. *"Considerable rewards can be attained by businesses which successfully attract both women and men to their workforce"* (WGEA 2013).

A recent study commissioned by Our Watch and VicHealth, conducted by PricewaterhouseCoopers, outlines the potential economic benefits to the economy via a reduction in violence against women. It estimates that violence against women costs \$21.7 billion a year, including \$7.8 billion a year in direct costs to governments. It notes *"If a similar reduction in violence against women were achieved as has been achieved in other community mobilisation programs the benefits would range from \$35.6 million to \$71.1 million over a lifetime."* (PwC 2015 pg 4)

Key principles that should underpin a Victorian Gender Equality Strategy:

These principles are informed by the TFER partner consultation on 3rd February and reflect the themes that arose from discussion of the question *"What do you think the fundamental elements of a Gender Equality Strategy should be?"*

The full list of comments is provided as an attachment to this paper.

1. Commitment to a long term, multi-partisan, coordinated approach across whole-of-government and whole-of-community

Long term work demands long term commitment. Given the long-term nature of the work to achieve gender equality, we believe that what could have the biggest positive impact on such work going forward is assured government commitment for the long haul.

A stand-alone, long-term and evidence-informed Strategy policy is needed to guide Victorian gender equality programming and partnerships. It requires multi-partisan commitment to withstand successive governments, and adequate long-term funding commensurate to the scale and scope of its implementation.

2. Structures, norms and practices

The Strategy needs to support work that challenges established structures, norms and practices across society at the system and institutional, organisational, community, individual and relationship levels (Our Watch et al 2015). Work addressing attitudes held by individuals and within communities need to be accompanied by institutional and policy reform to support sustained change and to prevent backlash.

3. Gender equity principles must underpin the Strategy

Gender equity is the process of being fair to people regardless of their gender. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field

Equity denotes the series of actions needed to be taken to overcome identified disadvantage before equality can be achieved. Gender equality, the absence of discrimination based on a person's sex, is attained through gender equity. It is the result of men and women having access to equal opportunities, resources, and access to services and being equally represented in all aspects of public and private life (TFER Strategy 2013).

4. Recognise the importance of process

How the Strategy is developed will be important to the outcome. The process adopted has the potential to influence engagement, ownership and ultimately success of the Strategy. Key elements of the process identified by TFER partners are:

- a. The importance of women's voices as central to expressing the vision
- b. Diversity of engagement - people from across the community should be involved in developing the Strategy

5. The Victorian Government should be a role model for gender equality through applying a gender lens to all government:

- a. Policy, and processes
- b. Audit and reporting processes
- c. Funding models

As the driver of the Strategy, the State Government should also use their influence to build these in other organisations wherever possible.

6. Recognition of a gender spectrum

Gender is socially determined; it refers to behaviours, activities and attributes that a society thinks is an appropriate expression of biologically determined sex. Understanding of gender varies across cultures and time. Although often understood as being male or female, gender is not a binary construct but rather exists on a spectrum which spans feminine to masculine with infinite expression in between (WHV 2013).

7. Recognise the intersection of different forms of discrimination with gender, such as Aboriginality, age, sexual orientation, level of ability, ethnicity and class

The Women's Health Association of Victoria (2016) notes that true universality means inclusivity: it means everyone must be reached by our actions to achieve gender equality. We must therefore work from sound intersectional understandings of society and strong community development and cultural competency principles, to be appropriately tailored so actions resonate in culturally safe ways with the gendered realities of all Victorians. No one must be left out of our gender equality efforts. As identified in Change the Story (Our Watch et al 2015) greater intensity of effort and resources will be required to address gender inequality in communities or groups affected by multiple forms of disadvantage.

8. Adopt an approach that is gender transformative

A gender transformative approach not only takes gender into account, acknowledging different experiences, expectations, pressures, inequalities and needs of women men, transgender and intersex people (a gender

sensitive approach), it also seeks to examine and challenge the structures, norms and behaviours that have enabled and perpetuated these different experiences.

For example, a gender transformative approach to addressing the challenges of accessing appropriate childcare includes consultation with men to identify and ultimately address the barriers they face in contributing equally to fulfilling childcare responsibilities. This approach addresses the barriers women face in accessing appropriate childcare to enable workforce and other community participation, but it also challenges the notion that childcare is largely a problem faced by women (Women's Health Victoria 2012).

9. Articulate a clear vision and be accompanied by a monitoring and evaluation framework

It is important the Strategy state clearly what it hopes will be achieved and present this picture to the Victorian community at the outset. Monitoring and evaluation will be critical to understanding whether the Strategy is being implemented as intended and whether the Strategy has been effective in achieving the vision.

Other ways to contribute:

We understand that direct community consultation will be occurring across the State. TFER partners could support community members participate in these consultations. At this stage the details of this process is not known.

Stay abreast of developments via the [Consultation website](#).

TFER partners can also join the conversation on twitter using the #vicforwomen

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