Submission to the
Victorian Gender Equality Strategy
March 2016

This submission has been prepared by Women's Health East on behalf of Together for Equality and Respect (TFER), and the Eastern Metropolitan Region Regional Family Violence Partnership (EMR RFVP). These two partnerships comprise a broad range of organisations across the EMR and are further described below.

We congratulate the Victorian Government for committing to the development of a Gender Equality Strategy and welcome this opportunity to contribute to its development.

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About Us

Together for Equality & Respect (TFER): A Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women in Melbourne's East 2013-2017 was developed in 2012/3 with the input, enthusiasm and commitment of a large number of contributors from the Eastern Metropolitan Region of Melbourne (EMR). Led by Women's Health East, TFER partners include Local Government, Community Health Services, Primary Care Partnerships and the Regional Family Violence Partnership. The TFER vision is:

> "*A society where women live free from men's violence – where every girl and boy grows up to be equally valued, heard and respected, and with equal access to opportunities*" (Women's Health East 2013).

To work towards this vision, the strategic directions outlined in the TFER strategy are to:
- Lead and achieve change
- Contribute to the evidence base
- Invest in workforce development
- Strengthen partnerships

The strategy and the accompanying action plan are implemented by partner organisations across the EMR working together to enable evidence based primary prevention efforts to prevent men's violence against women across the EMR to be prioritised, coordinated and integrated. TFER partners work on a range of initiatives that address the causes of violence against women and thus work to promote gender equality, equal and respectful relationships and the reduction of adherence to rigid gender stereotypes.

Based on the principles of Developmental Evaluation to enable engagement of partners from diverse sectors, the TFER Evaluation Plan identifies shared objectives, indicators of success and evaluation tools for use by participating organisations. This approach engages partners in local data collection which is then integrated to provide a regional perspective thereby enabling the effectiveness of the work to be evaluated at a regional level.

The **EMR RFVP** was established in 2007 as part of the state-wide family violence reform process. It is a partnership of organisations committed to working together to address family violence in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. Our goal is to build an integrated and coordinated family violence response system to support women and children's safety and accountability of perpetrators.

This transcends the human services sector, and brings together membership from across the human, health and justice sectors. Our membership includes representation from Victoria Police, the Magistrates Court, women's services, men's services, child and family services, housing providers, Child Protection, Aboriginal services, disability advocates and sexual assault services. Together, we work to continually refine the integrated family violence system in our region to achieve our mission. Our work is premised on well-established evidence that most family and sexual violence is perpetrated by men, and women are most commonly the victims of family violence and sexual assault.

The principles that guide the RFVP are:
1. Safety of women and children; ensuring the needs and independent rights of children who live with or experience family violence are upheld
2. Women's right to access information enabling them to make informed decisions; providing choice, control and agency over their lives and future
3. Strengthening risk management and accountability mechanisms for perpetrators
4. Acknowledgement and recognition of the distinctive rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; the importance of cultural safety and the right to work within culturally relevant frameworks
5. Recognition of the diversity of individuals and communities; promoting inclusion and cultural safety
6. Recognition of a human rights approach including a gendered analysis
7. Preventing violence before it happens; including a commitment to applying a prevention lens to all elements of our partnership's work
8. In the spirit of partnership; collaborating to achieve a coordinated response to family violence and sexual assault

Gender Equality is key to the prevention of violence against women

Men's violence against women is pervasive in our society and has serious impacts for the health of women, children and communities. Across Australia, more than one woman is killed each week by a partner or former partner and intimate partner violence contributes to more death, disability and illness in women 15 – 44 than any other preventable risk factor (VicHealth 2004). Women also experience violence outside the home; each year over 300,000 women experience violence, often sexual violence, perpetrated by someone other than a partner (ABS 2013).

TFER and the RFVP are working together towards the prevention of violence against women and a vision of "*a society where women live free from men's violence – where every girl and boy grows up to be equally valued, heard and respected, and with equal access to opportunities" (*Women's Health East 2013).

While family violence affects everyone, evidence has clearly established family violence and sexual assault as gendered issues. International research has identified that the underlying cause or necessary condition for violence against women is gender inequality (Our Watch et al 2015). While there are reinforcing factors such as alcohol and socio-economic inequality that contribute to gendered violence, these do not drive violence in and of themselves; the evidence is clear that gender inequality sets the necessary social context that allows violence against women to occur (Our Watch et al 2015). A focus on building gender equality must therefore be central to any efforts aimed at preventing violence against women.

Gender Equality as a human right

Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights. Human rights recognise the inherent value of each person, regardless of background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect, which are shared across cultures, religions and philosophies (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016).

Adopted by the United Nations in 1948, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a foundation document that sets out the basic rights and freedoms that apply to all people. Australia was a founding member of the UN and was one of eight nations involved in drafting the Universal Declaration. Article 2 of the Declaration identifies the right to be free of discrimination on the grounds of sex (UN General Assembly 1948).

Human rights are about being treated fairly, treating others fairly and having the ability to make genuine choices in our daily lives (Australian Human Rights Commission 2016). Historical and entrenched structural, attitudinal and societal norms place expectations and limitations on individuals based on sex, constraining fair treatment and reducing capacity to exercise genuine choice.

Improved health outcomes

Many poor health outcomes experienced by women are a result of unequal 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, which position 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 between men and women. Women's lower status in our society in turn influences other determinants of health, such as living and working conditions, and food availability (WHO 2010).

Gender biases in power, resources, entitlements, historical norms and values around the role of women in society, and the way in which organisations are structured and programmes are run, negatively impact the health of girls and women. These biases can also affect women's capacity to access resources such as income, education and employment, which themselves promote health (World Health Organisation 2009).

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).

Gender equality will lead to improved health outcomes; this will not only benefit individuals but will deliver an economic benefit to Victoria through improved productivity and a slowing in the growth in use of health services.

Diversity leads to better decision making

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (2016) recognises that diversity in the workplace promotes improved decision making, creativity and innovation, and leads to better overall organisational 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). Studies have shown a connection between organisational performance – both financial and non-financial – and greater numbers of women in positions of power (WGEA 2013).

The Strategy has the potential to create the conditions for improved decision making in entities across the state from the parliament to local governments, from corporate and not-for-profit boards, to sporting club committees, school councils and body corporate committees.

Economic benefits

The Victorian community stands to gain substantial economic benefit from building gender equality. As previously noted healthy women and children contribute to economic growth, and use fewer health services. 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).

Recommended Key Principles

TFER and the EMR RFVP believe there are fundamental elements that should underpin the development and content of the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy. We hold the view that acting according to these principles will contribute to the long term sustainability and ultimate efficacy of the Strategy.

These principles are informed by a consultation with TFER partner organisations on 3rd February 2016 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?"*

For the Strategy to be successful we believe it must:

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

Given the historical and entrenched nature of gender inequality, bringing about a change will be a long term process and long term work demands long term commitment. We believe that an assured government commitment could have the biggest positive impact on this work and the likelihood of positive outcomes in the long term.

A stand-alone, long-term and evidence-informed Strategy is needed to guide Victorian gender equality programming and partnerships. It requires multi-partisan commitment to withstand successive governments, and a transparent and independent governance structure. All of this will require adequate long-term funding commensurate to the scale and scope of its implementation.

The Strategy must demonstrate a co-ordinated long term, multi-partisan, whole-of government, whole-of – community approach.

2. Address structures, norms and practices in an integrated and concurrent fashion

Effective long term social change, such as that required to promote gender equality, needs to be based on approaches that address the societal context which impact on individuals (Turrell and Kavanagh 2004). The Strategy must support work that challenges established structures, norms and practices across society at the system and institutional, organisational, community, individual and relationship levels.

The Strategy must integrate work addressing attitudes held by individuals and within communities with institutional and policy reform to support sustained change and to prevent backlash.

3. Be underpinned by gender equity principles

Gender equality is the absence of discrimination based on a person's sex. It is the result of men and women having access to equal opportunities, resources, and services and being equally represented in all aspects of public and private life.

Gender equity is the process of being fair to people regardless of their gender. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that currently 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 (TFER Strategy 2013).

Therefore it is vital that a gender equity approach be taken in the development of the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy.

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 process identified by TFER partners are:

   a. A genuine and robust consultation process
   b. Women's voices as central to expressing the vision
   c. Diversity of engagement - people from across the community should be involved in developing the Strategy

The Strategy must focus on process as well as outcomes.

5. Emphasise the Victorian Government as a leader and role model for gender equality

As the owner and leader of the Strategy, the Victorian Government will need to demonstrate the Strategy in practice. This will involve applying a gender lens across all government departments to all

- policy, procedures and processes,
- audit and reporting,
- frameworks, funding models and streams,
- awards and other recognition processes.

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

6. Recognise that gender exists across a 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).

The Strategy needs to recognise the gender spectrum and be clear about how equality is promoted across diverse expressions of gender. This may be through creating links with other Strategies.

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. Women's experience of gender inequality is magnified by intersection with other forms of discrimination, such as racism, ageism and discrimination based on varying ability. We must therefore work from sound intersectional understandings of society and strong community development and cultural competency principles. Initiatives need 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.

The Strategy must acknowledge that 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 as well as women to identify and ultimately address the barriers they face in contributing equally to fulfilling childcare responsibilities. This approach assesses and 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).

The Strategy must contribute to creating a society that transforms structures, norms and behaviours that reinforce gender stereotyping.

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

It is important the Strategy state clearly what it sets out to achieve 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 its vision. Processes for reporting achievements against the Strategy intent to the Victorian people should be described at the outset.

The Strategy must articulate clearly what it sets out to achieve and the processes for monitoring and evaluating progress.

This is not an exhaustive list of recommendations; it represents the outcome of a consultation forum held with TFER partners on February 3rd 2016.

1. How should Government partner with the community, corporate sector, not-for-profit sector and other stakeholders to advance gender equality?

Government should display leadership by demonstrating what can be achieved and how to go about making change. As noted above, the role of Government as a leader and role model will be critical to engaging with other sectors and building credibility for the required change. Examples of how Government could do this include:

- Implement and evaluate policy and practice to promote gender equality across all Government departments
- Publish case studies of how gender equity has been progressed in Government and other sectors
- Host Forums to share learnings
- Convene an advisory group for the Strategy that includes broad representation to build partnerships around gender equity. Membership should be broad and diverse and include Government, business and community representatives.
- Allocate specific resources to progress this work
- Linking this work to other key Strategies for example, A Right to Respect and A Right to Safety and Justice. Activities across the range of Strategies should be mutually reinforcing at all levels

2. How do we address the pay and superannuation gap for women in Victoria?

Initiatives that the Victorian Government could consider to address the pay and superannuation gap for women are:

- Increase the low pay rate particularly evident in jobs that are traditionally more female dominated. This would also serve to increase superannuation for women as contributions are linked to total income.
- Require Victorian Government funded agencies not required to report under the Workplace Gender Equality Act to report to the Victorian Government
- Promote transparency around income so women can identify where people are earning more for the same role.
- Advocate for changes to parental leave to promote greater uptake by fathers and to include the inclusion of superannuation in parental leave payments

We recognise that many initiatives around superannuation would require Federal, not State Government action however call on the State Government to promote the importance of change.

3. What is the role of men in a gender equality strategy?

To address gender equality a whole of community response is needed and everyone has a role to play. Men need to be involved in the development and implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy so that all Victorians can recognise the benefits of Gender Equality for our society. Men need to be specifically engaged to ensure that they have an appreciation of the importance of the issue and that they are active participants in change. This will require men to have a deep understanding of gender equality and the discrimination and disadvantage faced by many women, and be prepared to recognise, question and challenge their own privilege and status. It is important that men can also see that there are potential benefits for them in gender equality such as the ability to take a more active role in parenting.

In the process of engaging men the principle of gender equity should be considered, and efforts made to ensure that gender inequality is not reinforced by raising the role and profile of men working in this area above that of women. Women's leadership potential should be highlighted and role modelled in gender equality strategies. Men in leadership roles need to not only present the benefits of gender equality and challenge societal attitudes and norms in relation to gender roles, they also need to model this behaviour.

Men working to promote gender equality have a role in engaging other men in the debate; however this needs to be done alongside women in order to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes and to demonstrate gender equity.

4. What needs to be done to promote women's health and wellbeing?

As identified above, gender inequality is a major contributor to poor health outcomes for women, so addressing this inequality will promote women's health and wellbeing.

Specific initiatives that should be considered are:
- Require all Government and funded agency programs to apply a gender lens to planning
- Recognise and support the Women's Health sector as leaders in the understanding and responding to the intersection between gender and health and wellbeing
- Continue to invest in prevention and response to violence against women, noting the gaps in existing work, particularly in relation to Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, refugee and immigrant women
- Include gender as a determinant of health in the Health and Wellbeing plan as an overarching structural determinant, thereby acknowledging the influence it has in the expression of other social determinants

The Strategy should also facilitate implementation of the recommendations from *Priorities for Victorian Women's Health* (Women's Health Association of Victoria, 2014):
- Develop a state-wide sexual and reproductive health strategy
- Invest in the primary prevention of violence against women
- Research and take action on women in a changing society and the impacts of ageing and climate change on Victorian women
- Develop a gendered mental health and wellbeing plan
- Increase funding for the Victorian Women's Health Program

5. What are the most urgent areas of gender inequality that Victoria should tackle first?

For the Strategy to be successful in the long term, it will require the broader community to understand and support for the need for gender equality. So whilst gender inequality is having a negative impact on the lives of many Victorians, it is important to foster an explicit understanding of this, and to build engagement and support and to develop a considered whole of community plan for addressing the issue broadly.

It is also important that the structures, norms and practices are addressed concurrently within any setting in which action is taken. For example, there is limited value to introducing policies and procedures if people do not support them and there are no sanctions for not following them.

However there are some settings that make sense as priorities for action given to build on the work that has already been initiated in these settings for example:
- Education – the respectful relationships program is already being implemented. Further support for this program to enable all schools to adopt a whole of school approach is recommended.
- Sporting Clubs – The Strategy can build on the work that has already been undertaken in Victoria such as the promotion of women on sporting club management committees, the Respect, Responsibility, Equality project run by VicHealth, the Richmond Football Club Gender Equality Program and the Sports Engagement program funded by Our Watch.
- Faith communities – Some momentum towards gender equality has started within faith communities that are committed to addressing family violence, such as the CHALLENGE project in Melbourne's South, the Northern Interfaith Respectful relationships project and the work by the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.
- Workplaces – there is significant work underway to build gender equality in many workplaces in Victoria. Women's Health Services across the State are working with workplaces in their regions to consider gender equality, via programs such as Act@work (WHG 2015), workplace survey and audits. Workplaces have been engaged in campaigns to promote bystander action against violence and sexism in programs developed by

Women's Health Victoria and VicHealth and there is currently a broader focus on male dominated workplaces such as the military, police and firefighting services

By paying attention to specific settings the Strategy could build on the momentum already created in these settings.

6. How do we ensure we meet our objectives over the long term?

The following are important in order to meet objectives over the long term:
- There needs to be a clearly stated vision e.g. that describes what life will be like in Victoria in 50 years as a result of the Strategy
- There need to be clearly stated objectives, which relate to the vision
- The objectives represent step by step changes required to reach this broader vision
- The objectives are measurable, each objective has targets
- Resources are allocated to implementing and evaluating the Strategy
- Consideration is given to monitoring and evaluation from the outset
- A robust state-wide Governance structure that can withstand changes in the political process is established.
- The Governance structure should link work occurring across the continuum to ensure
- A transparent process for reporting progress against the stated objectives to Victorian people

7. How can we improve access to childcare?

Accessible childcare is essential to building women's participation in workplaces, leadership roles, and is an important consideration for this Strategy. Two major impediments to accessibility are the availability of vacancies and the cost.

Some suggestions for making childcare more accessible include:
- State Government support for childcare centres located at workplaces/shared workplaces.
- State Government departments could include childcare facilities and make them open to others, thus ensuring ongoing clientele and sustainability
- State Government could fund childcare under a universal access model that already operates for primary and secondary education

It is important that these approaches do not undermine the need for improved pay rates for childcare workers, who are overwhelmingly female. Despite the enormous responsibility and opportunity they hold to influence our society in the future, childcare workers are some of the lowest paid workers in our community.

In developing approaches to improving access to childcare, consultation should be undertaken with women and men regarding what would assist them to fulfil their childcare responsibilities. The view that childcare is primarily a problem for women to solve must be challenged.

8. How do we encourage women and girls to take up leadership roles?

To support more women in leadership it is important that this be viewed as a systemic issue, not one which individual women should be solely responsible for addressing. As well as providing support and encouragement to women, such as the availability of better childcare, and mentoring and sponsorship programs, the barriers to women's participation need to be addressed. These barriers include:
- Inflexible work hours and lack of consideration of part time management roles Job flexibility needs to be mainstreamed at all levels of management (CEDA 2013).
- Unconscious bias - unconsciously, we tend to like and trust people who we perceive are like us, who look like us, who think like us, who have similar backgrounds. In leadership roles this tends to mean that we think we need leaders who are like the current leaders, and predominantly leaders are men. Human resource policies and practices (eg in areas of recruitment , performance appraisal, promotion) that do not address unconscious bias work to preference men over women for leadership roles
- Expectations that women will take on caring roles, of children and elderly parents, even if working full time.
- Rigid expectations about what is required from a good leader.

- Poor media treatment of women in public leadership roles.

It is important to set targets for women's participation in leadership roles, and reporting against these targets should be a requirement for Government funded agencies.

9. How do we get women to participate in non-traditional careers, in particular STEM?

The fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics are traditionally male dominated due to a number of social, cultural and structural factors that prevent women from engaging in these career fields. Some strategies for engaging more women in non-traditional careers include:

- Working in the early years education sector to break down gender stereotypes, and promote diverse and varied careers for girls and boys to aspire to
- Promoting female leadership/leaders in STEM sectors
- Using diverse media and advertising images that present men and women doing diverse jobs/roles not based on stereotypes
- Addressing gendered barriers, such as workplace inflexibility
- Encouraging and promoting men in other female dominated career areas, such as nursing or teaching
- Addressing sex discrimination and sexual harassment within STEM industries

10. How should we celebrate and recognise women's achievements?

There is a circular relationship between what we value and what we celebrate that serves to reinforce the status quo; we celebrate what we value, and we value what we celebrate. This applies to celebration and recognition of masculinity and who we celebrate as the heroes of contemporary Australian society.

Some strategies for breaking this nexus include:

- Review all public awards and establish quotas to ensure for gender balance
- Require a gender balance for the VCE reading list
- Showcase the achievements of women in diverse fields in Government publications
- Develop women's achievement awards in partnership with the Women's Health Sector

11. What strategies do we need to ease the strain of balancing work and caring responsibilities?

The strain of balancing work and caring responsibilities arises from the prevailing view that caring responsibilities are primarily the domain of women.

Initiatives that could ease the strain include:

- A state-wide public campaign challenging the attitude that caring belongs in the women's domain
- Strategies across our community that challenge concepts of masculinity and femininity and rigid gender stereotypes and roles
- Flexibility of how hours are worked across a week
- Training and promotion opportunities not linked to the hours worked, this would also assist to encourage women in leadership roles
- More senior/flexible part-time roles and job share arrangements within Government and role modelling of senior management
- Flexible workplace practice that encourage men to take a more active role in caring
- Advocacy to federal government to make changes to the paid parental scheme to encourage more men to use the scheme eg portion of leave only available to men (unless single parent)

Partnerships with unions will be important to the success of these initiatives

12. What is the role of business in addressing gender equality?

For this Strategy to succeed, business cannot be left out. The private sector employs a significant proportion of Victorian workers. It is also responsible for generating and promoting messages that influence our thinking every day. Thus engagement of the business sector is critical.

There is compelling evidence that business stands to gain from addressing gender inequality. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2013) states that businesses that promote gender equality:
- Attract the best employees
- Reduce the cost of staff turnover
- Enhance organisational performance
- Improve access to target groups
- Minimise legal risks
- Enhance reputation
- Engage men

Initiatives that engage business and promote change to structures, norms and practices within businesses must be included in the Strategy.
Workplaces could
- Develop a whole-of –organisation Gender and Diversity and Strategy
- Develop policy and procedures that build gender equitable and diverse workplaces. Particular opportunities arise in HRM via:
  - Performance review processes for managers, with opportunity to link gender and diversity capability with performance standards
  - Recruitment and exit processes
  - Flexible workplace arrangements
  - Promotion pathways for women
- Provide regular training in:
  - contemporary equal opportunity and human rights law
  - the impact of sexual harassment and discrimination on victims
  - unconscious bias

Consultation is vital to understanding the best way to engage with business and to understand the barriers and enablers of their involvement.

13. What are the barriers to creating more flexible workplaces?

Flexible work arrangements are critical to progressing gender equality in the workplace, however a study conducted by Chief Executive Women (CEW) and Bain and Company in 2015 revealed that less than 50% of Australian organisations have a workplace flexibility policy and that even where these policies exist there are barriers to uptake.

Barriers to creating more flexible workplaces include:
- Entrenched practices and beliefs
- Workplaces not reflecting the technology capabilities now available
- Other social structures that reinforce working hours
- Lack of strong role models

Bain and CEW (2015) have identified several key actions to promote workplace flexibility.
They note that "*organisations must:*
- *Actively encourage and role model the uptake of flexible work arrangements*
- *Ensure flexible arrangements are supported and working successfully for both genders*
- *Create the right culture and support employee priorities of career progression, visible support from the CEO, leadership team and colleagues, and respect of boundaries*

- *Create clear policies around promotion and compensation when working flexibly*
- *Ensure technology and an agile work environment are in place and working well*"

14. How do we address inequality among the most diverse and disadvantaged groups of women?

The Strategy should be inclusive of all women and therefore should be underpinned by an understanding of the intersection of gender with other forms of discrimination, and strong community development and cultural competency principles. The voices of women from diverse backgrounds, and women who are subjected to other forms of discrimination with society that renders them at a comparative disadvantage, must be privileged in the consultation. Their views must be central to the forming the Strategy directions and actions to ensure the appropriate tailoring of culturally safe responses.

Responding to the needs of diverse and disadvantaged groups should be a priority focus and should inform other initiatives.

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