

7 October 2021

Submission: Safe and Strong 2022: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy Consultation

Building on *Safe and Strong 2016: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy*, the Victorian Government is developing the next Gender Equality Strategy.

This submission provides feedback to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's Office for Women on the proposed four priority areas of Safety, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Equity, and Leadership and Representation. The submission been developed by the Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) in consultation with the Victorian Health Organisations Gender Equality Network (VHOGEN).

About the VHA

The Victorian Healthcare Association (VHA) is the peak body supporting Victoria's public health services to deliver high-quality care. Established in 1938, the VHA represents Victoria's diverse public healthcare sector, including public hospitals, aged care, and community health services.

About VHOGEN

The Victorian Health Organisations Gender Equality Network (VHOGEN) is a peer-led network to support health services deliver on the requirements of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (the Act). The network was established by The Alfred, the Royal Women's Hospital and the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre in 2020 and has expanded to support public health services across the state. It is designed to provide peer support to practitioners within health services who are directly responsible for implementing the requirements of the Act.

Consultation questions:

Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy will identify new and existing gender equality priorities across four thematic pillars: Safety, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Equity, Leadership and Representation, with the understanding that each of these pillars are interrelated and interdependent.

Please select which pillar/s you'd like to comment on

- Safety
- Health and Wellbeing
- Economic Equity
- Leadership and Representation

Response to Question 1:

Question 1: What features and considerations would make the renewed gender equality strategy most valuable or useful?

- A more integrated approach to primary prevention with a clear line of sight between the State Government's gender equality, family violence, LGBTIQ+ and health strategies as well as funding models and evidence (such as the [Change the Story framework](#)).
- A stronger commitment to fund the gender equality initiatives that have been introduced and legislated by the Victorian Government, such as the *Gender Equality Act 2020*.

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- Increase funding for the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector (CGEPS) and provide grant programs for individual organisations within the healthcare sector.
 - Commit to funding gender equality initiatives for three to five years. Currently, program funding is mostly short term and contract-based. This work is predominantly undertaken by women who are impacted financially due to insecure work.
 - Invest in the collection, analysis and distribution of sex and gender disaggregated data by Victorian government bodies to support the development of gender-sensitive policy and strategy, and to enable gender impact analysis across sectors.
 - Invest in research through universities and peak bodies. Include funding for research into health conditions where women and gender diverse people are disproportionately impacted or often omitted (e.g. endometriosis, heart disease).
 - Invest in research and modelling on the future of flexible work, particularly in frontline roles (e.g., nursing) where women dominate.
 - Fund leadership initiatives and scholarships across a variety of sectors.
 - Expand the state government's targets on gender diversity on public sector boards to include other forms of diversity.
 - Consider ways to broaden the scope of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* to ensure a holistic approach to workplace gender equality. In the context of health, include the medical colleges within the list of defined entities to ensure gender equitable processes, systems and cultures are embedded early.

Response to Question 2:

Question 2: What do you think the Victorian government needs to do to make sure we seek, hear and respond to issues affecting Victorian women and to help advance gender equality?

- Work directly with women, with a focus on diverse communities and trusted community members to capture their stories, and to embed programs that have been shown to impact these communities positively.
- Involve women, gender-diverse people and men in co-designing the programs and initiatives that impact them.
- Invest in a sufficiently resourced engagement plan that considers and responds to how gender, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability or age, can interact on multiple levels to create overlapping forms of discrimination and power imbalances.
- Employ women and gender-diverse people that have a lived experience of intersectional discrimination within the Department.

Response to Question 3:

Question 3: If you could change one program, initiative or policy in Victoria to advance gender equality, what would you change?

- Invest in networks and communities of practice (such as VHOGEN) to ensure that the sectors that are responsible for enacting gender equality legislation and policy are well connected, resourced, informed, have opportunities to share best practice and are supported in this challenging and important work.
- Make funding for proven, evidence-based, state-wide programs, such as Baby Makes 3 and the Strengthening Hospital Responses to Family Violence (SHRFV) initiative, ongoing to ensure their longevity and maximise their reach into the community.

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- The strategy should include investment in initiatives that create pathways for women into leadership positions in the public health sector and to support existing leaders.



For further information contact

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