

Victorian Gender Equality Strategy

Consultation paper for Engage Victoria

Overview

Safe and Strong 2016: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy, set out a framework for progressively building the attitudinal and behavioural change required to reduce violence against women and deliver gender equality. While *Safe and Strong 2016* delivered incredible successes, there is much more to be done to progress toward the ambitious but achievable goal of a gender equal Victoria.

Building on *Safe and Strong 2016*, the Victorian Government is developing the next Gender Equality strategy for our State. The strategy will outline a commitment to continue to strive for gender equality across four priority areas; **Safety, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Equity**, and **Leadership and Representation**. To support the development of the new strategy, we are seeking feedback across these four key priority areas.

To share your thoughts on the proposed direction and scope of the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy, please read this consultation paper and provide feedback as outlined below. If you have any questions, please contact the Office for Women at women.victoria@dffh.vic.gov.au.

Context

Safe and Strong 2016

Safe and Strong 2016 established a framework for action that has guided the Victorian Government's gender equality agenda for the past five years. A number of significant achievements and reforms were made under *Safe and Strong 2016*.

From this strong foundation, the Victorian Government was able to take an all of systems approach, utilising all levers including policy, legislation, governance structures, employment practices, budget, procurement, funding decisions and advocacy to the Commonwealth Government to further meaningful change for women in Victoria. These achievements would not have been possible without the crucial contribution of, and partnership with, the gender equality sector and other stakeholders who drive gender equality in the Victorian community.

Safe and Strong 2016 was the result of significant consultation with the sector. The invaluable feedback and expertise informed the scope and lens of *Safe and Strong 2016* and will continue to drive the Victorian Government's approach to gender equality.

Key achievements under *Safe and Strong 2016* include:

- Enactment of the *Gender Equality Act* in 2021, obliging public entities and local councils to embed strong governance structures to improve and promote gender equality, and subsequent establishment of Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector to oversee implementation.
- Establishment of Respect Victoria as a statutory body in 2018 with dedicated and enduring funding to strengthen Victoria's focus on prevention of family violence.

- Launch of the Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment 2020, promoting women's safety in the workplace.
- Release of Victoria's first Gender Budget Statement in 2017-18, which has continued to be released annually.
- More equal representation of women on government boards achieved, with 55% in 2021, up from 38% in 2015.

External feedback is crucial in carving out the next stage of gender equality reform and in informing areas of improvement for the new Strategy. As we outline our vision, the Victorian Government is committed to continue working collaboratively with and learning from the gender equality sector. The Victorian Government is committed to placing the lived experiences of Victorians, particularly those with intersecting identities, at the centre of our work.

Rationale

Achieving gender equality requires sustained, generational change. While *Safe and Strong 2016* achieved significant change, we know there is more progress to be made. The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic exacerbated existing structural inequalities and entrenched disadvantaged, with women bearing the brunt of economic insecurity, additional caring responsibilities, and being disproportionately represented in industries which are disrupted by COVID-19. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) found that 79.6% of employees in Health Care and Social Services are women, and that 72.3 % of the Preschool and School education workforce are women. With the landscape shifting drastically, now is the time to outline a forward plan on how we can continue to drive gender equality in Victoria.

The new Strategy will closely align with other significant reforms in Victoria. *Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence*, developed in response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2016, set out a 10-year plan for how Victoria will break the cycle of family violence and all forms of violence against women through the implementation of three rolling action plans.

Alongside these strategies, the Victorian Government implemented the *Gender Equality Act 2020*. The Act requires the Victorian public sector, local councils, and universities to take positive action towards achieving workplace gender equality, as well as requiring organisations to consider and promote gender equality in their policies, programs and services. As part of its legislative commitments, the Victorian government appointed the Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner to provide education, support implementation and enforce compliance.

The Victorian Government has an ongoing commitment to gender equality. This new strategy will play a key part in shaping a more equal Victoria by addressing the legislative and structural barriers to gender equality.

Proposed approach

The Strategy will provide a foundational, evidence-based framework for targeted gender equality investment and reform over the next five years. The framework is a whole of government approach to gender equality, ensuring that existing initiatives across all Victorian government portfolios are being leveraged to drive gender

equal outcomes. By drawing on the foundations and achievements already delivered, the Strategy will provide scaffolding for the Government's policy, legislative and programmatic work in advancing gender equality, in partnership with the sector. The renewed strategy will spotlight key areas of progress and work, with a focus on four key pillars: **Safety, Health and Wellbeing, Economic Equity, and Leadership and Representation.**

This work will be underpinned by a number of important cross-cutting principles including: Aboriginal self-determination, intersectionality, lived experience, and an emphasis on data transparency and evidence based cross-Government solutions. Each pillar will complement the *Gender Equality Act 2020* in improving gender equality in public sector workplace settings, as well as family violence prevention and reform under *Free from Violence*. The renewed Strategy is an opportunity for government to reconvene with the sector and community, capturing our current and future whole-of-government gender equality initiatives. Further, the Strategy will allow collaboration and alignment with the wider sector, allowing core thematic priorities to shape further work in gender equality.

Feedback

We are seeking feedback on our proposed approach for the renewed Gender Equality Strategy. Feedback will take place in two streams:

- **Internal feedback** – engagement with departments within the Victorian Government to determine the key initiatives, levers and priorities helping to drive gender equality and will inform a whole-of-government statement of priorities.
- **External feedback** – engagement via Engage Victoria with stakeholders and individuals to determine the impact and priority areas of *Safe and Strong 2016*. Contributors are asked to read this consultation paper and fill out the accompanying survey or provide a written submission.

Response to the consultation paper

The Victorian Government invites you to make a submission to inform the design and scope of the refreshed Strategy detailed in this consultation paper. To provide a response, please fill out the survey questions attached to this consultation paper on Engage Victoria. Alternatively, you may wish to submit a written submission via email. Please submit written submissions to women.victoria@dffh.vic.gov.au and incorporate answers to the following questions/key themes:

- Which organisation are you representing? (if submitting on behalf of organisation – this is not necessary if submitting as individual)
- Outline your/your organisation's key priorities/what you think the Government's key priorities should be under each relevant pillar outlined above (economic security, safety, health and wellbeing, leadership and engagement)
- Provide feedback on whether other key priority pillars should be considered
- Any additional information you wish to be considered.

We acknowledge that people reading this paper may have lived experience relating to issues detailed in the consultation paper. Whilst this consultation paper asks for feedback and input to inform initiatives that relate to gender equality, for your own privacy and protection we ask that you please do not include personal

information about yourself, other people or identifying details of your lived experience in your response or feedback.

Should this paper cause you any distress, the following helplines are available for support:

- Call Lifeline on 13 11 14
- Call 1800RESPECT (national sexual assault hotline) on 1800 737 732

To receive this document in another format, phone 03 9500 5132 , using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email women.victoria@dffh.vic.gov.au.

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