

WOMEN'S HEALTH LODDON MALLEE

GENDER EQUALITY BILL SUBMISSION



Q1: What do you think are the critical actions necessary for the success of gender equality legislation?

Recommendations:

- Education and awareness raising are the key to the success of gender equality legislation. Organisations will need to be educated on topics such as merit, unconscious bias, equality/equity.
- As part of this education and awareness raising, the government will need to put forward the case for change using not only statistics but case studies and local examples.
- The education and communication of the case for change should be tailored to different audiences and at different levels (e.g. Managers, employees etc)
- Small organisations (such as small rural shires) will need resourcing and support over the long term. These smaller organisations should also be supported before the legislation is introduced so that they may prepare for the change.
- The gender equality action plans need to be contextualised to the local area/setting, and the development of these plans should be supported.
- An existing body should govern the reporting of the Gender Equality Indicators (rather than the Office of Women). Suggestions for the existing body including the Victorian Auditor General's Office or Respect Victoria.
- The body governing the reporting should supply feedback to organisations on their plans and targets, and state-wide reporting should be share including disaggregated data (e.g. Geographically and across the life span).

Q2: What other activities should the government undertake to support this legislation?

Recommendations:

- The sharing of case studies/examples of what practices/approaches have worked for other organisations.
- The development of state-wide guidelines and tools that reflect best practice (e.g. tips and tricks for success).
- State-wide shared resources for making change.
- Develop and utilise existing regional infrastructure to support the development and implementation of Gender Equality Action Plans (e.g. Women's Health organisations).

Q3: What do you think is best practice in measures to support implementation of legislation that drives lasting social change?

Recommendations

- Ensure strong leadership incentives including awards processes and the sharing of positive stories widely.
- Ensure that resources and training are provided to all organisations especially smaller organisations.
- Strong linkages with family violence services.
- Develop, resource and maintain communities of practice where organisations can share successes, challenges and troubleshoot. These communities of practice may be sector based, generalised or specific to geographical location.

Q4: Do you agree that these are the critical principles and actions that should underpin the legislation? What should be added, or needs to be changed?

Recommendations:

- The actions should recognise Victorian Government departments, public sector entities and local government can positively affect and reach other stakeholders.
- The actions should define what it means to take an intersectional approach including the consideration of rurality, age, childbearing/pregnancy and economic disadvantage.
- The actions should recognise the barriers to gender equality such as privilege, unconscious bias and racism.

Q5: What else should be included in Gender Equality Action Plans to support demonstrating compliance to the principles?

Recommendations:

- Training/tools for evaluation of indicators, outcomes and processes.
- Organisations need to be supported with Gender Equality tools such as a staff survey. These tools need to be tailored to each organisation.
- A diversity of approaches and strategies, tailored to each organisation's needs.
- There needs to be a minimum standard for indicators and outcomes, but with flexibility for different organisations.
- Some organisations will be more ready/prepared than others to develop and implement a Gender Equality Action Plan. We suggest that organisations are externally analysed for their readiness and then provided Gender Equality Action Plan template that will be suitable for the organisation's needs, with the goal of progressing to the higher-level tasks in the future.

This process may be supported by mentoring from other organisations who are more experienced in this area (with an acknowledgement that change is uneven).

Q6: What preparation, guidance materials or training is needed to support organisations to develop Gender Equality Action Plans?

Recommendations:

- The Women's Health sector needs to help design and deliver the training and materials that will support organisations.
- All materials should be developed with a gender lens. The Women's Health sector can advise on this.
- Training must be accessible and not cost prohibitive
- Communities of practice should be developed, resourced and maintained.

Q7: What kinds of public sector targets should be included in the regulations of the Gender Equality Bill?

Targets need to be contextual and a blanket policy of targets or quotas is not realistic at present. For smaller organisations or in rural and regional areas, we recommend other strategies such as blind recruitment. We also recommend developing pathways that will assist women into leadership positions, such as working with young people to ensure they have opportunities to join boards.

Q8: What is needed to ensure representation of women from diverse backgrounds?

Recommendations:

- Develop a robust plan for support that will enable participation for all women. This will include an investment in quality childcare, amongst other things.
- Partner with other organisations and peak bodies to learn about women of diverse backgrounds
- Use examples and case studies of what intersectionality in practice looks like.
- Consider changing the message of gender equality change depending on the audience/population group.

Q9: What frequency or volume of reporting would strike a balance between transparency and accountability, whilst minimising regulatory burden?

Recommendations:

- Develop a plan or goal for the data collected and share this with participating organisations. Organisations should see what their data is contributing to.
- Organisations need to have ownership over the indicators and need to understand how the indicators benefit them. This may mean there is a set of generic indicators but also sector-tailor processes to develop their own indicators.
- Different size organisations have different reporting mechanisms.
- Pressures or challenges in smaller rural/regional areas need to be acknowledged and addressed.

Q10: How can the Victorian Government leverage procurement and funding practices to promote gender equality in the wider community?

As a rural and regional voice, we are cautious about the adoption of procurement and funding practices and have the following recommendations:

- The procurement policy should apply to companies supplying goods, services and construction with 100 or more employees.
- Consider a robust framework for training contractors on how to meet the requirements of the Social Procurement Framework.
- Consider the unintended effects in rural and regional areas where choices can be limited. For example, organisations may be forced to procure outside of local areas if those in the local area are unable to meet the guidelines, and this may have negative consequences for the financial health of local families and women.
- A useful step towards implementing gender ethical procurement guideline, is educating organisations and councils about improved ways to assess tenders.

Q11: Do you think that the proposal for monitoring and compliance of the Bill is fair and balanced?

Recommendations:

- Different sized organisations have different accountability arrangements.
- Scaled approach should to be taken into account
- Minister should highlight positive examples rather than naming organisations that have not complied. There should be a robust process to support organisations that require assistance to comply.
- Reporting should be aligned with an existing reporting mechanism. The body that oversees reporting should be different to that which supports development of plans.

Q12: It is clear that the impact of gender equality is compounded by the way that gendered barriers interact with other forms of disadvantage and discrimination. What is needed to ensure that the advice of the Ministerial Council is considered in other policy areas that may compound or contribute to gender inequality?

Recommendations:

- Rename from the Ministry of Women to the Ministry of Gender Equality
- Develop mechanisms for conversations between organisations implementing action plans and other Ministries.
- Link to the charter of human rights

Q13: Do you think this timeline is appropriate for the proposed roll out?

We agree that this time is appropriate if it is supported by resources, trainings and community of practices.

Q14: What preparations are needed to ensure readiness of impacted organisations before legislation takes effect?

We recommend sharing the indications early so organisations can start making changes as soon as possible.

Q15: What should be done to encourage or incentivise broader sectors or organisations to voluntarily comply with the principles, even if they are not obliged to do so?

Recommendations:

- Implement as system of awards and recognition for positive work being undertaken.
- Mainstream these awards and recognition into existing awards programs. For example, adding a gender equality category to local business awards.