



25 September 2018

Gender Equality Unit
Office for Women
Department of Health and Human Services
50 Lonsdale Street
Melbourne Victoria 3000

To whom it may concern:

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission about the proposed Gender Equality Bill.

Firstly, on behalf of the City of Greater Bendigo, I would like to commend the Victorian Government for its leadership in promoting action for gender equality.

The City of Greater Bendigo has been working to drive gender equality across our community since 2010 when we developed our first Prevention of Violence against Women Strategy. Our Community Plan 2017 – 2021 (Council Plan) includes a goal focused on improving wellbeing and fairness. This is complemented by our Greater Bendigo Health and Wellbeing Plan 2017 – 2021 which continues our priority of preventing violence against women and children as well as promoting the need to apply a gender lens to all of our work.

Recent initiatives we have been involved in include:

- Rural Challenge – a partnership with Macedon Ranges Shire, AFL Central Victoria and the CFA focused on supporting local football / netball clubs and CFA branches to develop and implement actions that improve gender equity
- An ongoing program of updating sporting pavilion change rooms to support increased participation by women and girls
- Formation of a Coalition for Gender Equity with membership of more than twenty local leading organisations such as Bendigo Health, Bendigo Community Health, Bendigo and Adelaide Bank, Centre for Non-Violence, the Department of Education, AFL Central Victoria, Sports Focus, the CFA, Loddon Campaspe CASA and Women Health Loddon Mallee. The focus of the Coalition is on improving gender equity in the workplace using the Our Watch Workplace Equality and Respect resources.

In 2017 Council endorsed the development of a Gender Equity Strategy for the City of Greater Bendigo. Consultation regarding this strategy puts us in a strong position to respond the questions in the Gender Equality Bill Discussion Paper. Please find our responses attached.

Yours sincerely,

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

- Social marketing campaign that continues to promote the call to action and addresses some of the issues being discussed across the community e.g. merit based appointment, unconscious bias etc.
- Establishment of clear governance, accountability, reporting and evaluation frameworks.
- Investment in ongoing education and capacity building strategies targeted at different sectors and levels within impacted organisations.
- Resourcing of smaller organisations to establish systems and processes and undertake capacity building for the first few years.
- Strengthening of collaborative relationships with Our Watch and ANROWS to support implementation and evaluation of outcomes from the legislation and advocate for change at a national level.

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

- Development of guidelines and tools that demonstrate best practice. These could be complemented with a range of case studies.

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

- We know from other social change initiatives that a multi-faceted approach is required. The legislation needs to be supported by strong leadership, incentives e.g. awards, recognition, resources to support establishment and training, particularly for smaller organisations and ensuring there are strong linkages between entities impacted by the legislation and family violence support service providers.
- There also needs to be support for evidence informed community development and place-based approaches. Safe and Strong (p.4) acknowledges “gender inequality does not impact on all people in the same way”. Lasting social change can be most effectively driven where scope exists to develop and implement approaches that are appropriate to local community contexts.
- There also needs to be facilitated platforms at a regional level for sharing learnings, showcasing innovation and for celebrating successes. Additional investment in established partnerships such as the Primary Care Partnerships or Women’s Health Services may be the best approach for this.

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?

- Additional action: recognition of the potential to influence other community stakeholders. (This would build on the shared responsibility principle).

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

- As well as reporting against targets and indicators, Plans need to build in opportunities to evaluate the process and impacts of initiatives to inform future planning.
- Action Plans need to demonstrate the outcomes of auditing of current policy, programs and services that informed the choice of initiatives in the plan.
- Action Plans need to incorporate a range of actions including:
 - Policy development
 - Creating supportive environments
 - Strengthening community action
 - Developing staff and stakeholder skills
 - Strengthening linkages with support agencies.

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

- Training and capacity building that is accessible, appropriate and not cost prohibitive for different stakeholders recognising that smaller organisations such as rural Councils will not have resources and budget to respond.
- Ongoing investment in communication, education and capacity building strategies as part of the legislation's implementation.
- Facilitated platforms for sharing learnings, for showcasing innovation and for celebrating successes.
- Focus on learning about the process of change not just the outcomes achieved.
- Clarity regarding minimum standards.

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

- Need both lead and lag indicators to demonstrate achievement on the pathways to gender equality.
- Targets need to recognise the diversity of experience of gender equity across the community.
- Need clear participation targets for sectors that research indicates can have the most impact on gender equality e.g. university graduates, advisory boards, governance groups.

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

- Diversity and inclusion resources / training to complement the legislation's introduction and to support action plan engagement / development.

- Legislation that provides scope for (evidence informed) community development and place-based approaches. Safe and Strong (p.4) acknowledges “gender inequality does not impact on all people in the same way”. Lasting social change can be most effectively driven where scope exists to develop and implement approaches that are appropriate to local community contexts.
- The requirement for all government departments to apply a gender lens to strategic work.

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

- Reporting should be aligned with other organisational planning and reporting requirements which in most cases is annual.
- Where possible reporting should use available data sources however this may be a challenge for smaller organisations that don't generally have sophisticated software.
- Putting reports together should create an opportunity to reflect and learn which in turn should drive continuous improvement.
- Whatever indicators are chosen, the organisations collecting them need to have ownership and belief that they are the correct indicators that will truly add value in informing their work.

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

- Procurement requirements should be limited to organisations with staff greater than 100 employees similarly to the application of this legislation. Other avenues should be explored for smaller organisations.
- Important that the requirements of this Act do not clash with other legislation e.g. Local Government Act.
- Potential to run some trials with local government in partnership with LGV and MAV.
- Funding guidelines can be modified to include minimum standards for gender equality e.g. Gender balanced governance, Family Violence Leave for staff etc.

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

- Concerned that this approach indicates that gender equality is a women's issue only. We think that reporting should be to the Premier.
- Concerned about naming and shaming approach. Perhaps this could be introduced after a few years and initially utilise an incentive and recognition approach.
- Important that mechanisms are built in to provide feedback to organisations rather than just a tick off process.

- Propose that VAGO do the tick off whilst the regional facilitation platform proposed in response to Q3 can provide feedback and mentoring.
- The Office for Women should be focused on research, capacity building and promoting best practice, perhaps running an awards program.

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?

- Suggest the formation of an Interdepartmental Committee that facilitates the application of a gender lens to all government policy development.

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

- Yes.

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

- Investment in communication, education and capacity building strategies as part of the legislation's implementation.
- Consideration of resourcing within local community contexts.

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?

- Investment in a comprehensive social change media campaign that highlights why gender equality is good for everyone, socially and economically, and how everyone has the capacity to make a difference. This could incorporate real life examples of existing gender equality champions and the benefits they have reaped (e.g. CFA Brigades and Football / Netball Clubs involved in the Rural Challenge Partnership).