



Valuing Sport and Recreation



**Submission prepared by
Women's Health Victoria**

Women's Health Victoria submission in response to submission Paper

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This submission is endorsed by:



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Introduction

Women's Health Victoria is pleased to make this submission in response to the Victorian Government's *Valuing Sport and Recreation* Discussion Paper. Active living and social inclusion are key determinants of the health and wellbeing of women and girls. Our goal is to not only to support improved health outcomes for individual women, but to see women and girls participating fully and equally in all aspects of community life, including sport and recreation.

We congratulate the Victorian Government on the development of Victoria's first Gender Equality Strategy, and its acknowledgment that 'as a highly visible part of our state's culture and identity, sport has the capacity to challenge gender stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes and to promote core values of fairness and respect.' We also congratulate the Government on recent positive initiatives, such as:

- the creation of the Women's Australian Football League
- the *Changing Our Game* program aimed at raising the profile of women in sport, and
- \$10 million in funding for building female friendly change rooms at grassroots sport clubs.

WHV shares the Government's vision for a gender equal Victoria, where women participate equally in the social, civic and economic life of our society. However, women and girls in Victoria experience several significant and ongoing barriers to equal participation in sport and recreation, including a long tradition of prioritising and celebrating men's sport, facility design, perceptions of safety, and a lack of funding and promotion for women's sport.

About Women's Health Victoria

WHV is a statewide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service based in Melbourne. We work collaboratively with women, health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence systems, policies and services to be more gender equitable to support better outcomes for women.

As a statewide body, WHV works with the nine regional and two other statewide services that make up the Women's Health Association of Victoria (WHAV).¹ The women's health services network offers a unique approach to women's health across the state by providing an infrastructure which focuses solely on gender equality, health promotion and improving women's health outcomes.

Defining the problem

As acknowledged in the Discussion Paper,

- 39% of Victorians are not involved in any form of sport or active recreation
- twice as many men as women participate in sport, and
- participation in sport falls significantly in the late teenage and young adult years.

Aboriginal Victorians, people with a disability, people with poor health and those with little or no English all have significantly lower levels of participation and people with low incomes or living in areas of relative socio-economic disadvantage are also much less likely to engage in sport or active recreation.

¹ The three statewide services are *Women's Health Victoria*, the *Multicultural Centre for Women's Health* and the *Royal Women's Hospital*. The nine regional services are *Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West*, *Women's Health Grampians*, *Women's Health Loddon Mallee*, *Women's Health Goulburn North East*, *Gippsland Women's Health Service*, *Women's Health West*, *Women's Health in the North*, *Women's Health East* and *Women's Health in the South East*.

There is therefore enormous opportunity, and imperative, for the government and community to focus on engaging these groups in sport and active recreation. However, removing the barriers these groups experience will include challenging our assumptions of what healthy, active people look like, and what they need, from their environments, clubs and from the broader community, in order to increase their participation. Drawing on our expertise in health and gender equity, this submission will:

- **briefly summarise key evidence** for women and girls' lower participation in sport and recreation and the barriers they face to increasing their participation, including gender norms and gender unequal structures
- **provide a broad framework** that can be used by Government and its community partners in order to create gender equitable policy, programs and environments in relation to sport and recreation
- **provide a suite of examples of promising initiatives** aimed at increasing women's and girls' participation in sport and recreation, and examples of how sport and recreation programs can be used to promote a broader social agenda of fairness, inclusion and equality.

The best, most efficient way for Government to support sport and recreation bodies to create more inclusive participation in their activities is to invest in, build on and expand the gender equitable sport and recreation programs and initiatives that have already been developed across the state through partnerships between women's health services, local governments and local communities. Some of these initiatives and partnerships are described in more detail below.

1. Summary of key evidence for women and girls' lower participation in sport and recreation and the barriers they face to increasing their participation, including gender norms and gender unequal structures.

As the Gender Equality Strategy and the *Valuing Sport and Recreation* Discussion Paper suggest, the benefits of active living are manifold. Benefits for individuals include improved physical and mental health, social connection and self-esteem, as well as enjoyment and relaxation. The government also benefits if women and other groups currently excluded from/underrepresented in sport and recreation increase their participation, including through reductions in chronic disease and health care costs, enhanced community connection, increased productivity and importantly a fairer, more harmonious and safer Victoria. Fairer, not only in the sense that the significant amount of resourcing and community effort and celebration associated with sport and recreation in Victoria would be more equally distributed, but also because sport and recreation is at the heart of community life, and therefore has huge potential to help shape and express community values – specifically in relation how we talk and think about the role and value of women.

1.1 How does gender inequality relate to sport and recreation for women and girls in Victoria?

Gender inequality is a social condition characterised by unequal value afforded to men and women and an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunity between them. Gender inequality permeates all aspects of society, including government and public policy, media and entertainment, our social and private lives, and sport and recreation. Expressions of gender inequality in one sphere are interrelated with inequality in other spheres.

Men's sport is valued and celebrated in Australian society over and above women's sport. Men's sport receives far more sponsorship and endorsements, with male athletes often extremely well remunerated at the professional level, whilst many professional female athletes often have to balance part-time work with their professional sporting career. Male sports also receive significantly more media coverage than female sports. The *Towards a Level Playing Field: Sport and Gender in Australian Media* report confirmed that men's sport occupied 81% of television news reporting, while coverage of women in sport made up 9% of all sports coverage in Australian television news media.²

In 2015, Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth released *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*. *Change the story* brings together the international research, and nationwide experience, on what works to prevent violence against women and children. It clearly identifies gender inequality as the primary driver of violence

² Australian Sports Commission (2014) *Towards a Level Playing Field: Sport and Gender in Australian Media*. Available from: [URL](#)

against women, and identifies key settings where there is significant practice expertise and /or evidence that demonstrates their potential for impact. Importantly, sport and recreation is identified as a key 'setting' for action to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women:

Sports, recreation and leisure settings are highlighted because they provide an opportunity to reach large groups and communities and exert a powerful influence on gender relations, impacting attitudes, behaviours and social norms.³

1.2 Girls' participation in sport declines dramatically at and after puberty and young Australian women are twice as likely to be sedentary or less active than their male counterparts.⁴

When we unpack the evidence about why girls' participation in sport declines around puberty, it becomes clear that the decline is closely associated with/driven by pressures and expectations about what it means to be a girl.

Gender norms refer to values, attitudes and beliefs that construct masculinity, femininity and gender difference. Gender norms are deeply engrained, learned and imposed on us from early childhood. Gender norms construct certain traits, behaviours and values as more female or more male. Children and adults are provided with incentives to conform to traditional gender norms, and disincentives (including exclusion, bullying and discrimination) if they fail to conform.

Gender norms have a profound impact on girls' and boys' relationships with sport and recreation. Whereas traits like strength, competitiveness and aggression, sweatiness and practical clothes are closely associated with masculinity, the opposite gender norms and expectations apply to girls. Gender norms associated with femininity dictate that a woman's or girl's value is closely tied to beauty and desirability, and in how she cares for others.

The onset of puberty can change the way young women feel about their bodies, as well as how they are treated by others, impacting their health and wellbeing. In addition to gender norms, physical symptoms of puberty also impact boys and girls very differently. The symptoms and stigma associated with menstruation, including cramps, nausea, heavy bleeding and lethargy can limit young women's participation in physical activity. For girls, self-consciousness about their skills and appearance when exercising are heightened through puberty, and compounded by body image issues and gender norms, which limit young women's interest and confidence in physical activity.⁵

However, despite these well-known sex and gender differences, we still take a 'gender-blind' approach to physical education in schools and community sport.⁶

Young women also report feeling concern about the presence of males when exercising and worry about being judged and humiliated.⁷ Sexualisation through uniform design can also make girls feel uncomfortable playing sport.⁸ A real or perceived lack of skill can lead to young women disliking physical activity and also lead to bullying and exclusion.⁹ Social norms around what physically active people look like, namely "thin" and conventionally "attractive", can be unattainable for some and reinforce that physical activity is not for them.¹⁰

Gender norms are internalised by individuals, groups and institutions and become **gender practices**. Gender practices are behaviours that express and reinforce gender inequality, for example, situations where girls are excluded from certain team sports, but are able to support the team as cheer leaders.

Alongside gender norms and practices, **structural gender inequalities** (laws and institutions that formalise gender inequality and the way power and wealth is shared (or not) in society) reinforce

³ Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth (2015) Change the story : a shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, p. 38-39. Available from: [URL](#)

⁴ TNS Social Research (2016), 2016 Physical activity and sport participation campaign: Insights Report, p. 3. Available from: [URL](#)

⁵ Ibid. p. 5.

⁶ This will be explored in more detail in Case Study 1 below.

⁷ TNS Social Research (2016), 2016 Physical activity and sport participation campaign: Insights Report, p. 7. Available from: [URL](#)

⁸ [Teaching girls to prioritise function over form for better body image](#) The Conversation, 2013

⁹ TNS Social Research (2016), 2016 Physical activity and sport participation campaign: Insights Report, p. 8. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁰ Ibid. p.3.

women's exclusion from organised sport and recreation. The under-representation of women in key sports bodies, the under-coverage of women's elite sport in the media, the sports gender pay gap, lack of sponsorship, unequal access to sport and recreation facilities, including change rooms, all contribute to disincentivising women's involvement – except as supporters and enablers of men's participation.

Striving towards gender equality in sport and recreation means the realisation of equal and measurable outcomes for women, men and gender-diverse people. Depending on the context, what constitutes gender equal outcomes may differ. In some contexts, we may be aiming for 'sameness', for example the addition of change rooms for women at public sport facilities. Other contexts will require 'difference' – for example, providing girls with a wider range of community sport and recreation options in recognition of the different sex and gender-based pressures that they face.

The concept of gender equality has evolved over time: initially, gender equality was concerned with treating everyone the same. Treating everybody the same, however, perpetuates existing inequalities. By acknowledging and addressing different needs, interests and values, health services and professionals can work to overcome these inequalities and arrive at equitable outcomes.¹¹

The case study below provides a hypothetical example of how gender norms, practices and structures interact to limit young women's inclusion in sport.

Case study 1: Olivia

Olivia is 12 years old and likes sport. She has always been called a tom-boy and, increasingly, gender norms, practices and structures are influencing her choices and health. When Olivia starts high school

Gender norms influence Olivia's choice of sport. The soccer and football teams are for boys only. At lunch, the boys play sport on the oval, and the girls sit around the outside of the oval and watch. When Olivia tries to join in with boys' sport, she is called a flirt and a show-off.

Gender practices mean that Olivia's school uniform is a knee-length dress, while the boys wear shorts and pants. Olivia gets in trouble when a teacher notices she is wearing bike shorts under her school dress. The girls around her start wearing make-up, shaving their legs and going on diets.

Olivia misses sport and starts running by herself after school, but her parents tell her to stop because it's not safe for her to be out alone. Olivia begins to feel anxious about how she looks and begins skipping meals.

Gendered structures mean that when Olivia gets her first period, she feels like she can't bear changing into her PE uniform in front of the other girls, but there are no private change rooms. Olivia becomes more anxious and starts visibly losing weight.

When Olivia's mum tries to get some help from the school's Health and PE teacher, Olivia's symptoms and experiences are minimised. The PE teacher tells her mother that it's normal for girls to drop out of team sport at this age.

For many girls and women, their lived experience of gender inequality is compounded by the way that gender-based discrimination interacts with other experiences of inequality. How would Olivia's experience in the case study above differ if her family was unable to afford sports uniforms and equipment, or couldn't drive her to practice? Or if she was subjected to racist comments and harassment from team mates or coaches? If Olivia had a disability, whether physical or cognitive, would she ever have been given the opportunity to be involved in team sport?

The case study below provides a hypothetical example illustrating some of the structural barriers to participation in sport and recreation faced by girls and women in rural communities.

¹¹ New South Wales. Health Department (2000) Gender equity in health. Available from: [URL](#)

Case study 2: Rosa

Rosa is 12 years old and likes sport. Rosa lives in Gannawarra.

According to the [Victorian Women's Health Atlas](#), men in Gannawarra are 23 per cent more likely than women to engage in sufficient physical activity.¹²

Rosa is a keen and accomplished netballer, but her brother is also showing promise as a footballer. As there are more opportunities for her brother to join an elite pathway for his sporting ability, the family prioritises his sporting activity over hers.

When Rosa reaches her teen years, her concerns about changing in front of everyone in the car park (there are no female change rooms at her sporting ground) makes her uncomfortable and she drops out. She notices that when the ground is upgraded, no provision is made to improve the netball facilities, despite millions of dollars being spent on the football facilities in the same precinct.

Rosa's parents only have one car and rural sporting activities require travel over hundreds of kilometres over the week. Lack of alternative transport for her activity – mainstream or not – mean that she is not able to participate in competitions elsewhere in the region.

Increasing the participation and inclusion of women and girls in sport and recreation will require complementary strategies that challenge the norms, practices and structures that have contributed to women's exclusion. Such strategies should include women-specific initiatives, and tailored approaches for different cohorts including people with disabilities, Aboriginal Victorians, people from migrant or refugee backgrounds and women and girls in rural communities.

2. A broad framework for creating gender equitable policy, programs and environments in relation to sport and recreation

The Victorian community has inherited sport and recreation environments, policies and organisations that have generally been designed around men's preferences and requirements. Increasing the participation of women and girls will take a new mindset, one that puts the needs of women and girls at the centre to redress this longstanding imbalance. Advancing gender equality and women's human rights is not simply a matter of including women's voices or removing barriers to women's participation. It also requires the adoption of positive measures to bring about a transformation in the institutions and structures that cause or perpetuate discrimination and inequality.¹³

Case Study 3: Planning inclusive environments to support women's physical activity

Less leisure time and feeling unsafe are key barriers for women's participation in physical activity and sport. In addition to paid employment, women spend considerably more time on housework and care giving than men, leaving them less leisure time overall. Most single families are headed by women. If women are able to find leisure time for physical activity, it's likely to be at night or very early in the morning (when it's still dark), before or after their other responsibilities have been fulfilled.

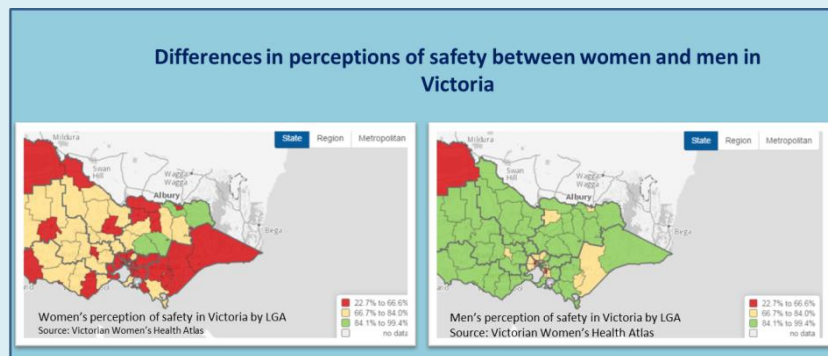
There are a range of tools and resources that Government can use to better understand how gender impacts social inclusion and ensure equal access to sport and recreation environments for women and men. The [Victorian Women's Health Atlas](#) (the Atlas), developed by Women's Health Victoria in collaboration with the network of Victorian women's health services, provides reliable sex-disaggregated data for evidence-based planning.

For example, the Atlas reveals significant discrepancies in perceptions of safety among men and women in Victoria. In one metropolitan local government area, for example, 81.7 per cent of men felt safe at night, while only 40.3 per cent of women reported feeling safe.¹⁴

¹² Women's Health Victoria (2014) Physical Activity: The proportion of males and females who engage in sufficient physical activity, in each LGA. Victorian Women's Health Atlas [Website] Women's Health Victoria, Melbourne. Available from: [URL](#)

¹³ Broderick (2012) Applying a gender perspective in public policy : what it means and how we can do it better : address for International Women's Day Forum : Addressing Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Public Policy, 9 March 2012. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁴ Community Indicators Victoria data from 2011, cited (2015) Violence against women: Perceptions of safety : % people who feel safe when walking alone at night. In: Victorian Women's Health Atlas.. Available from: [URL](#)



Walking and jogging can be a great, inexpensive way for women to build confidence and fitness, but many women report feeling unsafe in their local neighbourhood after dark. Community attitudes that place the responsibility of staying safe from men's violence on women reinforce the belief that women should not be out alone at night.

Understanding the gender differences in perceptions of safety, as well as in use of services and public space, enables local governments to identify and implement measures that will improve women's health and social and economic inclusion, as well as enhancing community safety. For example, reducing the height of curbs, installing accessible alternatives to stairs in public places, and the provision of proper street lighting and safe, clean and accessible public toilets in public spaces can make a city more accessible for women, and indeed men, at all life stages and with differing abilities.¹⁵ Removing sexualised images of women in public spaces can improve women's experience in the urban environment.¹⁶

2.1 Gendered approaches to sports policy and programs

Approaches to policy and programs can be understood along a continuum, from 'gender unequal' to 'gender transformative'. We have translated this continuum into the flow chart (see **Figure 1** below).

There is a need to move away from gender unequal and gender 'blind' policy and programs (which wrongly assume and reinforce the notion that policy is gender neutral), towards gender transformative policies that not only recognise and respond to the different ways policies impact women and men, but simultaneously contribute to breaking down gender norms and stereotypes.

A gender analysis is the basis of gender equity initiatives because it makes visible:

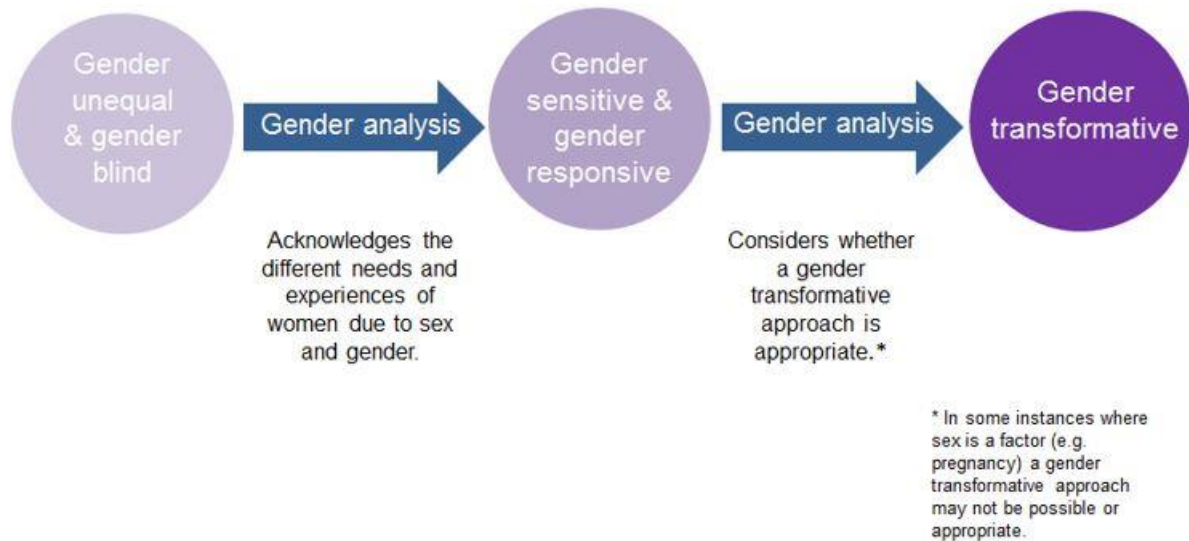
- Differences in outcomes for women and men;
- How gendered norms contribute to differences in outcomes;
- How policies might be strengthened to reduce gender inequities; and
- How program design and service delivery might be reoriented to meet the different needs of males and females.

It is only through a gender analysis that differences in the impact of policies and programs on women and men becomes apparent, and solutions devised.

¹⁵ Khosla (2005) Gendered cities : built and physical environments, p. 3. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁶ de Madariaga (2013) From women in transport to gender in transport : challenging conceptual frameworks for improved policymaking. *Journal of International Affairs* (Sep 22). Available from: [URL](#)

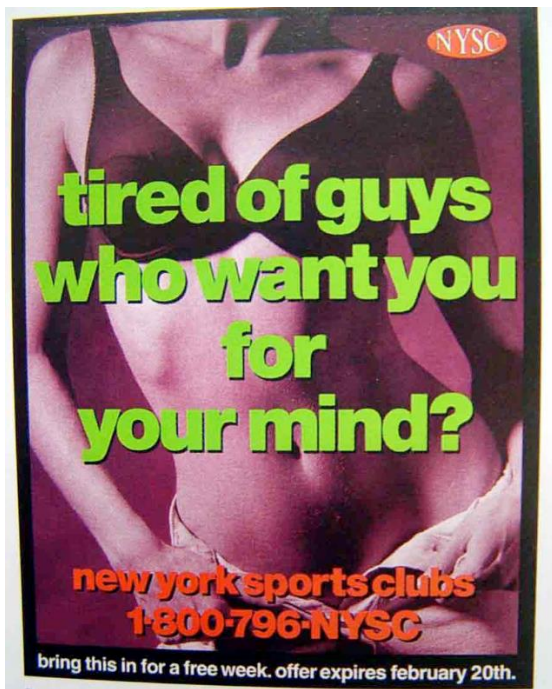
Figure 1: Consideration of gender in policy development – from gender unequal to gender transformative



2.2 Approaches to gender equity – Gym example

Gender unequal and/or gender blind: Standard gyms may appear to be gender neutral on the surface; both women and men are able to attend. But if you scratch the surface, standard gyms may be considerably more welcoming to men than women. They may employ mostly male instructors, be dominated by a group of male ‘regulars’ monopolising the weights area, may promote a sexualising or objectifying culture (as demonstrated by the ads for gyms below) or an emphasis on elitism that discourages or excludes women and girls.

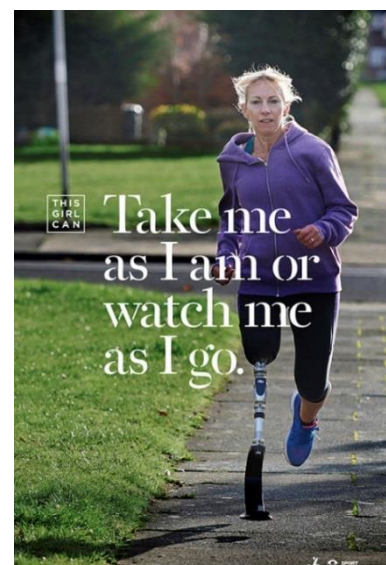




Gender sensitive or gender responsive approach: A gender sensitive approach to gym design might include consulting with women in the area about what facilities, classes and staff would make them feel safe and welcome at the gym. It might include creating women's-only spaces or times, hiring female staff and developing strong policies in relation to sexual harassment. A gender responsive gym might offer child care or include health professionals on site that specialise in building positive body image or trauma recovery.

Gender transformative: A gender transformative approach would involve breaking down the gender-based stereotypes and expectations that we associate with femininity, and which stop women and girls from getting involved in sport and physical activity – for example, that panting or sweating are unfeminine, or that you have to look 'magazine perfect' in a sports bra before you can start jogging.

The recent 'This Girl Can' campaign from the United Kingdom, which aims to increase physical activity among young women, is a positive and welcome initiative which aims to break down some of the barriers to women's participation in sport, including body image. The Commonwealth has recently adapted an Australian version of the campaign, entitled 'Girls, Make Your Move.'



3. Promising initiatives aimed at increasing women's and girls' participation in sport and recreation and a broader social agenda of fairness, inclusion and equality.

3.1 Role and expertise of Women's Health Services

With a statewide infrastructure and a unique focus on gender equality, health promotion and improving women's health outcomes, Victoria's women's health services have been facilitating and resourcing gender equity initiatives in sport in Victoria for many years. Women's health services work with their partners, including local governments and sports bodies, to help ensure that programs and planning respond to local needs and priorities, promote gender equitable outcomes, and are safe and inclusive. Some examples of initiatives and resources that have been developed through these partnerships are summarised below.

Women's health services and their local partners have developed a number of **guides and resources** relating to gender equality and sport, including:

The Courageous Conversations Sporting Clubs Handbook

<http://www.courageousconversations.org.au/courageous-conversations-sporting-clubs-handbook/>

This handbook was developed in 2016 as part of the Hume region's preventing violence against women and children regional strategy, led by **Women's Health Goulburn North East**. The Handbook supports sporting clubs to

- promote a respectful club culture
- create an inclusive and welcoming club environment
- attract and retain members
- take action against disrespectful and inappropriate behaviour at the club.

The Handbook has been created with a focus on rural Football and Netball clubs, however all sporting clubs can use this resource to help promote a respectful and inclusive culture.

Recap...Gippsland Sports Forum

<http://gippsport.com.au/recap-gippsland-sports-forum-why-women-are-the-secret-to-your-sports-survival/>

A joint initiative between GippSport & **Gippsland Women's Health**, this forum held in November 2016 aimed to inspire much needed change and explore how best to increase female participation, as players and leaders, in community sport across Gippsland. 121 people from Local Government, health agencies, State Sporting Associations and sports club members, players and officials attended Gippsland's first Sports Forum.

Preventing Violence Together Resource Hub: Sports and Recreation

<http://pvawhub.whwest.org.au/category/sport-2/>

Developed as part of the Preventing Violence Together regional partnership led by **Women's Health West**, the PVT resource hub brings together a suite of guides relating to planning and delivering gender equity initiatives in the sport and recreation setting.

Team Respect, a respectful relationships soccer program

Gender equity programs in the sport and recreation setting may also focus on engaging men. For example, 'Team Respect' was a soccer program for newly arrived Iranian men which combined weekly education sessions with facilitated indoor soccer play. Funded by Our Watch and facilitated by **Women's Health in the North** in partnership with Whittlesea Community Connections, the Salvation

Army Crossroads and Melbourne City Football Club, the program was adapted from the Department of Education's 'Building Respectful Relationships' curriculum and tailored to include settlement and legal education issues.

3.2 Other promising initiatives

A number of other promising programs and toolkits related to gender equity in sport and recreation settings have been developed and/or funded by organisations such as Our Watch, VicHealth, local governments and sporting bodies, including:

Everyone Wins Toolkit, VicHealth

https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/media-and-resources/publications/everyone-wins_clubs

Everyone Wins is a toolkit developed by VicHealth that provides practical tools and resources to help Victorian community sports clubs become more inclusive and welcoming of everyone in their community. The toolkit specifically aims to help clubs increase the involvement of women and girls, Aboriginal people and people from culturally diverse communities. In 2013 Everyone Wins was trialled in VicHealth's Healthy Sporting Environment Demonstration Project, by Leisure Networks, a group of 73 sporting clubs across Victoria.

Gender and Sport in local government

http://www.knox.vic.gov.au/files/Community/A_Gender_Lens_For_Leisure_Final_Report.pdf

The Councils of Knox, Maroondah and Yarra Ranges have partnered to ensure gender equity in their sports and recreation programs and facilities. The 'A Gender Lens for Leisure' Final Report (2014) identified a range of 'typical mechanisms' for local councils to influence change and create settings that promote gender equity and a culture of support and involvement by women. The Report recommended that a gender analysis (also known as a gender lens) be applied to policies and planning documentation, marketing and promotion, staffing, grounds and facilities allocation.

In 2012, Moreland City Council ratified a new policy for allocation and use of sporting facilities, grounds and pavilions with the stated objective of prioritising the allocation and use of sporting grounds and pavilions to clubs which are inclusive of people with disabilities, females and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.¹⁷

Under the Moreland City Council policy, applicants for use of sporting facilities, grounds and pavilions must submit a written application demonstrating the inclusion of girls and women's teams and/or registered sport association development programs, and provide opportunities for membership, participation and inclusion of people with disabilities.

The 'Fair Game' Respect Matters Program

http://www.respectmatters.com.au/webcontent/pilot_program.html

The 'Fair Game Respect Matters' program was funded by VicHealth and introduced as a 4-year pilot program in the Northern Football League and the Essendon District Football. It ensures that people throughout the football industry are aware of, and have structures in place, which recognise that violence against women and behaviour that harms or degrades them is never acceptable.

Conclusion

The initiatives and partnerships above point to increasing awareness of the need for a new mindset in relation to planning, resourcing and promoting sport and recreation in Victoria. An increasing focus on the issue of gender inequality is driving demand for a more equitable distribution of resources, and safer, more inclusive neighbourhoods and communities. The emergence of new and alternative forms of exercise for women, such as *No Lights No Lycra* and *Roller Derby* reveals that women are looking

¹⁷ Moreland City Council (2012). Allocation and use of sporting facilities, grounds and pavilions policy. Available from: [URL](#)

for ways to get active, but traditional sports and recreation facilities and programs are not meeting women's needs.

Sport and increased physical activity has potential to make a huge difference in the lives and wellbeing of women and girls in Victoria. As a significant part of the social and cultural life of our community, sport has the potential to drive action for gender equality and the prevention of violence against women, and deliver a wide range of long term social, health and economic benefits for Victoria.

Women's Health Victoria looks forward to continuing to work with the Government to inform the future of sport and recreation in Victoria and would welcome the opportunity to provide any further information you may require.