



Women's Health

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healthy • empowered • equal

Setting the Agenda for Gender Equity



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

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Setting the Agenda for Gender Equality: Introduction

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) welcomes the opportunity to share the principles and frameworks we believe should guide the development of Labor's comprehensive strategy for gender equality in Australia. Australia has made significant progress towards greater gender equality in recent decades and the momentum continues to build. There is now an unprecedented focus on family violence and increasing recognition that gender equality is the key to its prevention. However, the benefits, both social and economic, of improving gender equality extend far beyond the prevention of domestic violence. They will be far reaching, not just for individual women and their families, or even for women as a group, but also for the productivity and culture of Australia and the wellbeing of all our citizens.

Our approach to this submission

WHV appreciates the wide scope of the consultation (and the suggested guiding questions). However, rather than providing detailed answers to each of these questions, our submission aims to provide the key principles and strategies that we believe come together to form the basis of an overarching national gender equality strategy. We would welcome the opportunity to provide any further information that may be useful to the Committee or expand upon any points or examples raised in this submission. The submission is divided into three sections:

Part A: Why Address Gender Inequality?

This section summarises key evidence for and the current impetus behind the need to address gender inequality in Australia. It outlines relevant commonwealth and internal obligations in relation to human rights and gender equality and briefly states the need for a national gender equality strategy.

Part B: Guiding Principles briefly summarises the evidence for why a national gender equality strategy is necessary before putting stating three key principles for effective gender equity work. These are:

- The need to simultaneously target the **norms, practices** and **structures** that contribute to gender inequality;
- The need to **take an intersectional approach** to gender equity; and
- The need to **work across multiple settings**.

Part C: Key Approaches

Achieving gender equality will require strong, long-term leadership and a coordinated national strategy that builds momentum for comprehensive and sustained social change. Governments at all levels have a key role to play in leading and coordinating a **whole-of-community approach** to preventing violence against women and achieving gender equality.

Focusing on the federal level, the Commonwealth Government has a critical role to play in:

- **Setting the agenda for change** by demonstrating an enduring commitment to achieving gender equality at the highest levels within the government and public sector;

- **‘Mainstreaming’ gender equality** into all legislation, policy, budgeting, service delivery and procurement, taking a **‘gender transformative’ approach** wherever possible; and
- **Leading and coordinating** efforts to ensure a comprehensive and systematic approach to gender equality across the country, drawing on the **expertise of specialist women’s services**.

Our submission provides a high level summary of key issues, strategies, initiatives and organisations that we hope inform Labor’s future commitments to addressing gender inequality from the national level. Where possible, we have included relevant case studies to help build a multidimensional view of how gender inequality is maintained, and how it can be reversed.

About Women’s Health Victoria

WHV is a Victorian statewide women’s health promotion, information and advocacy service. 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 Victorian statewide services that make up the Women’s Health Association of Victoria (WHAV).¹ The Victorian women’s health services network offers a unique approach to women’s health across Victoria by providing an infrastructure which focuses solely on gender equity, health promotion and improving women’s health outcomes. This submission builds on our expertise and that of the other members of WHAV, including Women with Disabilities Victoria.

WHV and other women’s services around Australia have longstanding specialist expertise in the promotion of gender equality, and in the prevention of violence against women. We urge current and future Commonwealth and state governments to draw on this expertise in developing and implementing violence prevention and gender equality strategies. To facilitate this, Commonwealth funding for the Australian Women’s Health Network should be reinstated.

Recent policy reform

We would like to draw your attention to several recent frameworks and strategies for promoting gender equity and preventing violence against women (developed at both the state and national levels), which have informed this submission. Our submission will not reiterate in detail the evidence and approaches outlined in these documents, and we would refer you to the links below for further information:

Most significantly, we would highlight [Safe and Strong: a Victorian Gender Equality Strategy](#), released in late 2016. Informed by more than 200 written submissions, including [submissions made by WHV](#), WHAV and each Victorian women’s health service, as well as consultation with over 1,200 Victorians, *Safe and Strong* is Victoria’s first gender equality strategy and provides a framework for government leadership and community action to promote gender equality, as well as setting out priority actions.

Responding to the recommendations of the [Royal Commission into Family Violence](#), the Victorian Government has also released its ten year plan for family violence reform, [Ending Family Violence: Victoria’s Plan for Change](#). As part of this plan, in March 2017 the Victorian Government released [Free from Violence: Victoria’s strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against](#)

¹ The three statewide services are *Women’s Health Victoria*, the *Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health* and *Women with Disabilities Victoria*. 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*.

[women](#). *Free from Violence* recognises that the most common form of family violence is male intimate partner violence against women and that this is driven by gender inequality. In 2017, the Victorian Government also released [Women's Sexual and Reproductive Health: Key priorities 2017-2020](#), the state's first strategy for improving sexual and reproductive health, which provides long awaited recognition of the important role sexual and reproductive health plays as a determinant of women's health and wellbeing, and gender equality.

At the national level, the Commonwealth Government (together with the states and territories) has recently released the [Third Action Plan](#) under the [National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022](#). A number of important initiatives have been developed under the National Plan, including the establishment of [Our Watch, Australia's national agency for the prevention of violence against women and their children](#), and [Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety \(ANROWS\)](#). In 2015, Our Watch (together with VicHealth and ANROWS) launched [Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia](#). Building on the [2007 framework developed by VicHealth](#), *Change the Story* and its accompanying background research papers provide a comprehensive summary of the evidence linking gender inequality and violence against women. It shows how gendered norms (including stereotypes), practices and structures interact to increase the probability of violence against women. Victoria's prevention strategy, *Free from Violence*, draws on the evidence and approaches outlined in *Change the Story*,

The specific link between gender stereotypes and violence against women was also the subject of a 2015-16 inquiry undertaken by the [Finance and Public Administration References Committee of the Australian Senate](#). You may wish to read [WHV's submission](#) to this inquiry, which sets out some of the evidence and proposes actions to address the impact of gender stereotypes, in particular sexist advertising.

A. Why address gender inequality?

The benefits of addressing gender inequality

Victorian women's health services have been advancing gender equality as the key means to promote women's health for over 25 years and have been leaders in the prevention of violence against women for over a decade. Gender equity is our core business, and is at the heart of all of our projects, programs and partnerships.

As the causes and consequences of violence against women become more visible in the public consciousness, the links between gender inequality, harmful attitudes towards women and gender-based violence are becoming more widely accepted. Indeed, the evidence clearly tells us that the most significant underlying driver of violence against women is normative and structural gender inequality in public and private life.²

An Australia free of violence against women and their children is an Australia where women are not only safe, but respected, valued and treated as equals in private and public life.³

However, gender equality is a worthwhile and long overdue pursuit in itself.⁴ Equality between women and men is a matter of human rights and social justice. Women are entitled to full participation in social, economic and civic life and to live with dignity and freedom from gender-based fear, violence and discrimination.

Further, beyond its role in preventing violence and creating safer and more respectful families and communities, gender equality promises to deliver a wide range of social and economic benefits for Australia. Greater equality between women and men is a precondition for (and an indicator of) equitable, prosperous and healthy communities. Gender is increasingly recognised as an important social determinant of health.⁵ In fact, gender 'cross-cuts all of the other biological and social determinants that construct human health. Gender influences education, income, reproductive roles, and caring responsibilities, among other determinants.'⁶ Empowered women contribute to the health and productivity of whole families and communities, and they improve prospects for the next generation.⁷ When women and girls live free from violence, poverty, and rigid stereotypes that limit their potential, our neighbourhoods are safer, our economy is stronger, and our pool of future leaders is more diverse. Helping women and girls moves us all forward.⁸

Greater gender equality also has a dual economic benefit. Firstly, a number of studies have identified increased female workforce participation as a 'game changer' for Australia's economic prosperity. Female workforce participation is identified in a 2012 Grattan Institute report as one of the three big

² (2015) Getting serious about change : the building blocks for effective primary prevention of men's violence against women in Victoria : a Joint Statement, p. 7. Available from: [URL](#). Nationally, our ability to draw from and contribute to this evidence base has been considerably strengthened through two significant initiatives under the *National Plan to Address Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. These are the establishment of the Australian National Research Organisation on Women's Safety (ANROWS), and the creation of Our Watch, the first nationwide body specifically focused on preventing violence against women. Each of these new bodies has consistently highlighted the evidence that gender inequality is the underlying driver of violence against women

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. 4. Available from: [URL](#)

⁴ European Institute for Gender Equality (2014) Benefits of gender equality : online discussion report : women and political decision-making , p. 6. Available from: [URL](#)

⁵ According to the World Health Organization, the social determinants of health are 'the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age' and the wider set of forces and systems shaping these conditions such as distribution of money, power and resources: WHO (2015) Social determinants of health. Available from: [URL](#)

⁶ Greaves, Pederson and Poole (2014) Making it better : gender-transformative health promotion, p. 2

⁷ United Nations Population Fund (2015) Gender equality [Webpage]. Available from: [URL](#)

⁸ Canadian Women's Foundation (2015) Improving gender equality improves economic and social conditions for everyone. Available from: [URL](#)

opportunities to increase the size of the Australian economy by around \$25 billion — more than one per cent of Australian GDP.⁹

Secondly, gender equality supports increased productivity and better organisational performance.¹⁰ At a business level, the case for gender equality is made in terms of greater profit margins, enhanced organisational performance, workplace innovation, more effective recruitment, more productive working environment and better company image. Gender equality can also generate benefits in relation to workplace governance, through enhanced decision-making, improved shareholder value and lower risk-taking.¹¹

Addressing gender inequality will also result in enormous cost savings. The most robust evidence for this is in relation to the impact of violence against women. In addition to the serious physical health, mental health and social impacts on the individual, violence against women gives rise to enormous preventable downstream costs to the policing and justice systems, housing and homelessness services, health system and child protection services.¹² A recent study commissioned by Our Watch and VicHealth, and conducted by PriceWaterhouseCoopers, estimated that violence against women costs \$21.7 billion a year, including \$7.8 billion a year in direct costs to governments.¹³

The PwC report also demonstrates the potential economic benefits of investment in gender equality. It estimates that if a similar reduction in violence against women were achieved as has been the case for other community mobilisation and individual/direct participation programs, the benefits would range from \$35.6 to \$71.1 million over a lifetime for community mobilisation programs, and from \$2.2 to \$3.6 **billion** over a lifetime for individual and direct participation programs. These benefits far outweigh the initial program investment.¹⁴

The Commonwealth's obligations and role in promoting gender equality

Over the last 50 years, at both a state and national level, interest in addressing gender inequality has fluctuated.

State and federal governments have implemented a number of positive strategies and actions to promote gender equality. However, in the main, such strategies have been short or medium-term, involved a series of piecemeal initiatives, and focused on addressing structural drivers of inequality without addressing norms and behaviours. Achieving long term change across our whole community will require a comprehensive national strategy, supported by resourcing, coordination and enduring bi-partisan commitment.

History has shown that men's support for women's equality in the public and private sectors has been sporadic, selective and conditional, dismantled when priorities perceived to be more pressing took precedence.¹⁵

Different levers for influencing gender equality are available at the state and national levels. In the context of this submission, we have focused on the role of the Commonwealth Government.¹⁶ The

⁹ Daley (2012) Game changers : economic reform priorities for Australia, p. 13. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁰ See for example: Workplace Gender Equality Agency (2013) The business case for gender equality. Available from: [URL](#)

¹¹ European Institute for Gender Equality (2014) Benefits of gender equality : online discussion report : women and political decision-making , p. 14. Available from: [URL](#)

¹² 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. 16. Available from: [URL](#)

¹³ PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia (2015) A high price to pay : the economic case for preventing violence against women, p. 10. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 4. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁵ Piterman (2016) Australian of the Year David Morrison as a 'warrior for women' shows belief in the male protector lives on. *The Conversation* (Feb 22). Available from: [URL](#)

Commonwealth controls most macro-economic policy, including employment and industrial relations, social security, superannuation and child care. The Commonwealth also provides a large share of the funding for state-run services, including legal services, housing and homelessness services, health services and schools. These areas of policy have very significant implications for women and gender equity.

Australia's international obligations

Australia became a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. In signing CEDAW, Australia has made a commitment to being a society that promotes policies, laws, organisations, structures and attitudes that ensure women are guaranteed the same rights as men. The rights listed in CEDAW cover many aspects of women's lives, and relate to political participation, health, education, employment, housing, marriage, family relations and equality before the law. All States that have signed and ratified the CEDAW commitment to take all appropriate measures, including legislation, to ensure the full development and advancement of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of human rights and fundamental freedoms on a basis of equality with men (Article 3).¹⁷

The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) gives effect to some of Australia's international human rights obligations under CEDAW by making it against the law to discriminate against someone on the basis of gender, sexuality, marital status, family responsibilities or because they are pregnant. Australia has two reservations to CEDAW which relate to women in the armed forces and provision of paid maternity leave.¹⁸ While these reservations do not prevent the government from tackling these issues, WHV recommends that these outdated reservations be withdrawn, particularly in relation into paid parental leave, which must be a critical plank in any strategy to promote gender equality in Australia.

Policy reform to give effect to Australia's international human rights obligations

To give effect to its international human rights obligations under CEDAW, governments must take action to address gender inequality in each of the policy areas where they have responsibility.

As noted above, the Commonwealth has played an important role in legislating the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* and in establishing the Australian Human Rights Commission (and the role of Sex Discrimination Commissioner). Large employers are also now required to report annually to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency against gender equality indicators under the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*. These laws and statutory bodies have been influential in changing community attitudes and helping advance gender equality in Australia.

Historically, the Commonwealth has also been responsible for introducing important gender equity measures, including allowances for single parents (primarily mothers), paid parental leave entitlements and child care subsidies. It is encouraging to note that the Senate is undertaking an inquiry into women's superannuation and the 'retirement income gap'.¹⁹ However, in recent years, some of these programs have been cut back or changed, with disproportionate impacts on women.

¹⁶ Detail on the role of state governments (specifically the Victorian Government) can be found in Women's Health Victoria (2016) Submission to the Victorian gender equality consultation. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁷ Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (1979) Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission (2017) The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW): Sex Discrimination - International Activities. Available from: [URL](#)

¹⁹ Australia. Parliament. Senate Standing Committees on Economics. Economics References Committee (2015) Inquiry into the economic security for women in retirement. Available from: [URL](#)

(An example of international best practice in relation to paid parental leave is detailed in **Case study 11.**)

For example, it had been the practice for over thirty years for federal governments to produce Women's Budget Statements as one element of their Budget Papers. At one stage there were women's budgets at federal level and in each of the territories and states. This practice ceased at the federal level in 2014 without explanation.²⁰ The purpose of the Women's Budget Statement was to make transparent the differential impacts of policies and their outcomes on women.

In recent decades a tendency has emerged (which is not unique to Australia) for federal governments to primarily see gender equality as a foreign policy issue – despite a wide range of indicators clearly showing that gender inequality is worsening rather than improving in Australia. For example, in 2006, the international Gender Gap Index (which combines economic, education, health and political indicators to form an overall comparative ranking) ranked Australia 15 (out of 115 countries compared). As of 2016, Australia had dropped to 46 (out of 144 countries).²¹ Yet in 2017 we have a *Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment Strategy*²² in relation to foreign aid, but no national gender equality strategy for Australia.

The need for a national gender equality strategy

The Commonwealth Government must take action to address gender inequality within its own areas of responsibility, as well as leading, resourcing and coordinating national efforts, and setting the bar for the states and territories to initiate and implement strategies at the state level. WHV recommends that Labor follows the lead of the Victorian Government, which has developed a statewide gender equality strategy, and drive the development of a national gender equality strategy through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), as part of the Third Action Plan under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*. A national gender equality strategy should be developed with input from priority groups, including women with disabilities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander women.

As well as driving the agenda for national change, the national strategy should set out a road map for how the Commonwealth Government itself can take action to promote gender equality, both through specific measures within its key areas of policy responsibility and through 'gender mainstreaming' across all Commonwealth policy and programs. It is a particularly effective means for ensuring that principles of gender equality are embedded in major reform initiatives, such as the NDIS.

Key principles and approaches that should inform the development of a comprehensive national gender equality strategy are discussed further in Parts B and C.

Gender equity within the Australian Labor Party

There is significant scope for the ALP to work internally to improve gender equity within the Party, regardless of whether or not it wins the next federal election. Indeed, 'getting one's own house in order' is an important pre-condition for being an effective and authentic advocate and leader externally.

²⁰ National Foundation for Australian Women (2014) Budget 2014-15 : a gender lens, p. 1. Available from: [URL](#)

²¹ World Economic Forum (2016) Global Gender Gap Report. Available from: [URL](#)

²² Australia. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (2016) Gender equality and women's empowerment strategy. Available from: [URL](#)

The ALP should be congratulated on its target of women holding 50 per cent of organisational roles, parliamentary positions and union delegate positions to conference by 2025, but there is still much work to do to ensure this goal is realised. In addition to gender equity quotas, a comprehensive gender equity strategy for the ALP would include reviewing all ALP policies with a gender lens to ensure that they are sensitive to the needs and experiences of women, including diverse groups of women, and do not, directly or indirectly contribute to gender inequality.

The ALP as an organisation should can implement gender audits of its own internal policies and procedures, particularly in relation to equal representation of women in senior positions within the party, flexible work and paid parental leave. A number of tools and resources have been developed to assist organisations to become more gender equitable, including best practice policy and audit templates. As a member organisation, the ALP can encourage and support gender equity within the membership by providing incentives, training and support. If the ALP is serious about improving gender equality in Australia, it is important that they role model the change that will be required of other businesses, organisations, institutions and the broader community.

B. Guiding Principles

The need to simultaneously target the norms, practices and structures that contribute to gender inequality

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. It often results from, or has historical roots in, laws or policies formally constraining the rights and opportunities of women, and is reinforced and maintained through more informal mechanisms including gender norms and practices.²³ While definitions of gender inequality often refer only to women and men, gender inequality – and gendered norms, practices and structures – also adversely impact gender diverse people.

Gender norms, practices and structures

Gender inequality is expressed and maintained through **norms, practices and structures** that support rigid gender stereotypes and unequal power structures between men and women. Gendered norms, practices and structures overlap in our everyday lives and have a cumulative impact over time, profoundly influencing outcomes for women and men across the life course.

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 childhood. Gender norms shape and maintain gender stereotypes.

Gender norms are internalised by individuals, groups and institutions and become **gender practices**. Gender practices are behaviours that express and reinforce gender inequality. Gender practices are played out in relationships (through unequal sharing of domestic labour, for example), in schools (where girls are excluded from certain team sports) and in workplaces (in hiring and promotion practices).

Structural gender inequality relates to laws and institutions that formalise gender inequality and the way power and wealth is shared (or not) in society. The under-representation of women at all levels of government and in key civil institutions, legislation that discriminates against women, and widening inequality in pay, savings and superannuation are all examples of structural inequality.

Gender inequality is so interwoven into the fabric and traditions of our society that it often seems invisible. In fact, it is expressed and maintained through longstanding norms, practices and structures that overlap in our everyday lives and have a cumulative impact over time, profoundly influencing outcomes for women and men across the life course.²⁴ These gendered norms, practices and structures are mutually reinforcing. For example, structural barriers to equitable economic participation for women, such as lack of access to child care and social security payments, reinforce gender norms and practices in the home, and vice versa.

²³ 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. 24. Available from: [URL](#).

Case study 1: How gender norms, practices and structures interact to shape a young woman's life

Olivia is 12 years old and likes sports. 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 sports. The soccer and football teams are boys only. At lunch the boys play sports on the oval, and the girls sit around the outside of the oval and watch. When Olivia tries to join in with boys sports 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 sports 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 becomes more anxious and starts visibly losing weight, and her Mum tries to get some help, Olivia's experiences and symptoms are minimised, due to a lack of specialist health services for women (and a lack of gender sensitivity in generalist health services). Olivia is told that she is still in a healthy weight range and not to be so vain.

Research shows that structural and norms-based change are interdependent and must be aligned to be successful. For example, evidence from workplace-based interventions shows that when trying to change a culture of discrimination or inequality, structural changes must be supported by, and in alignment with, changes to social norms and attitudes. On the one hand, efforts to change individual attitudes and behaviours are difficult to sustain without structural changes to support individual efforts.²⁵ On the other, structural gender equity interventions (for example, quotas for women in leadership positions) that are not supported by efforts to change attitudes are more likely to result in resistance or 'backlash'.²⁶ For example, the inclusion of family violence leave within an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement will be meaningless if the absence of buy-in from management and lack of training for relevant staff means that women trying to access such provisions are met with ignorance or hostility.

Commonwealth and national strategies to promote gender equality must therefore simultaneously target – and aim to transform – gender norms, practices and structures. Historically, however, gender equality interventions have focused on structural gender inequality, and have neglected the critical role of norms and practices in maintaining gender inequality. For example, little attention has been paid to the role of media in perpetuating gender norms and stereotypes and its potential to contribute to their transformation.

²⁵ PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia (2015) A high price to pay : the economic case for preventing violence against women, p. 24. Available from: [URL](#)

²⁶ Salter, Carmody and Presterudstuen (2015) Resolving the prevention paradox : the role of communities and organisations in the primary prevention of violence against women. *In: Asia-Pacific Conference on Gendered Violence and Violations*; (2015 : Sep 17-20 : Bangkok).

*Difficult conversations are not only inevitable, they are essential. We need difficult conversations for change to occur. It's through conversations that we get to name, examine and potentially shift the personal and cultural attitudes and practices that contribute to violence against women.*²⁷

The need to take an intersectional approach to gender equity

Gender-based discrimination interacts with other lived experiences of inequality across the life cycle. This interaction, in which one experience impacts on another, is termed 'intersectionality'. Social and structural inequalities, such as class, race, sexuality, disability and residency status increase the likelihood that women will be subjected to negative and compounding socio-economic and health outcomes. An intersectional approach to gender equality will recognise and be responsive to the ways in which the experience of disability, cultural or racial minority status, sexuality and gender diversity, rurality or socio-economic status intersects with gender to intensify gender-based inequality.

Using an **intersectional approach** to gender equality encourages social change leaders and policy advocates to make the links and connections between various forms of discrimination, and will help ensure we achieve equality for all groups of women. This means balancing universal strategies with specialist, tailored approaches for women who experience intersectional disadvantage, including Aboriginal women, women of migrant and refugee backgrounds, women with disabilities, sexuality diverse women and gender diverse people, and women living in rural areas. Equality for all women can only be achieved with specific and intensive effort for those experiencing the most disadvantage.

Aboriginal feminist commentator Celeste Liddle explores how race-based discrimination and trauma intersects with gender inequality in Australia:

*... [W]e need to stop ignoring gender as the key contributor to violence against women. And I say this with complete respect to our men who are significantly more likely to be victims of violence than white men, who also experience racism, poverty, addiction and isolation. Yet time and time again, in Australian society both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, we see the celebration of gendered violence. We see football players accused of rape and off-field violence being allowed to continue to play. We see men squaring off against each other out the front of nightclubs because one of them looked at the other's girlfriend and winked and clearly they do this because they feel they own us. We hear about warriors, about thugs, about fighters. We live in a country which while it actively ignores Indigenous history, it also mainly erases women's stories from the books as well. Masculinity and patriarchy is actively celebrated in Australia, yet it causes harm time and time again to both men and women.*²⁸

An **intersectional approach** to gender equality will recognise and be responsive to the ways in which the experience of disability, cultural or racial minority status, sexuality and gender diversity, rurality or socio-economic status intersects with gender to intensify gender-based inequality. **Case study 5** examines how gender norms and structures impact income support for single mothers. **Case study 6** looks at how immigration policy traps many women in violent and exploitative relationships. **Case study 7** investigates how rurality impacts women's experience of gender inequality and **case study 10** illustrates how an intersectional approach can make visible and respond to the experiences of women with disability.

²⁷ VicHealth (2014) Managing difficult conversations. Available from: [URL](#)

²⁸ Celeste Liddle (2015), 'Putting Gender on the Agenda', *Rantings of an Aboriginal Feminist*. Available from: [URL](#)

The need to work across multiple settings

Targeting gender equality initiatives to the settings in which people live, work and play is the best way to achieve reach and saturation of messages and interventions across Victoria.

Settings are places where social and cultural values are produced and reproduced.²⁹ Evidence supporting the strength of a settings-based approach has long been recognised by health promotion practitioners as an optimum way to improve population health.³⁰ Government bodies, workplaces, media, sports and recreation, schools and education, health and community services, faith-based communities, the justice system and the arts all have a role to play to promoting gender equality. A settings approach enables us to work across all levels of society by using settings as 'intervention gateways'.

Schools and other education services are a key setting for addressing gender inequality. Young people's adult relationships are shaped by norms and practices they take on in childhood and adolescence. Consequently, intervening at this stage can change young people's relationship trajectories. Young women are particularly vulnerable to relationship violence and the school setting enables programs to be delivered in a context in which the promotion of respectful, non-violent relationships can be normalised and have (near) universal reach.

Case study 2: Using schools as a setting for promoting gender equality: Respectful relationships education

Respectful relationships education (RRE) is internationally one of our best-evidenced strategies for preventing violence against women and promoting gender inequality.³¹ RRE builds young people's capacity to engage in gender equitable, respectful intimate relationships. By engaging teachers, parents and principals through 'a whole of school approach', RRE can contribute to mutually reinforcing changes across a 'micro-community'. Ideally, RRE should not be limited to a single 'subject', but should be integrated across the curriculum. For example, it is promising to see that the Victorian Government has recently introduced an initiative to help students bring a critical gender lens to the books they read.³²

In Victoria, RRE is being introduced into the school curriculum (for Prep to Year 10) to support students to learn how to build healthy and more equitable relationships to prevent family violence. WHV understands that Year 10 students will analyse pornography, sexting and raunchy music videos as part of the curriculum.³³ Under the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children, RRE content has now been included in the national curriculum. The next step is to ensure it is effectively implemented and supported in all schools nationwide, and resourcing is provided to ensure appropriate programs are delivered in schools for children with a disability and for those children not engaged in mainstream schooling.³⁴ Ongoing evaluation will help us to develop a world-leading model for RRE, and inform the development of curriculum for other education levels and age groups including primary schools.

²⁹ 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. Available from: [URL](#)

³⁰ Newman, Javanparast, Baum and et. al (2015) Evidence review : settings for addressing the social determinants of health inequities. Available from: [URL](#)

³¹ WHO (2016) Violence against women : intimate partner and sexual violence against women. Available from: [URL](#)

³² Victoria. Minister for Women (2016) Stella Prize schools pilot lifts lid on gender bias in books. *Victorian Government Media Releases* (Mar 8). Available from: [URL](#)

³³ Tomazin (2015) Sexting, porn and raunch to form part of 'respectful relationships' classes. *The Age* (Dec 6). Available from: [URL](#)

³⁴ Gleeson, Kearney, Leung and et al. (2015) Respectful relationships education in schools, p. 29. Available from: [URL](#)

Another important setting for gender equality work is the workplace. Both VicHealth and the more recent national prevention framework, *Change the Story*, have highlighted workplaces as another setting where there is significant practice expertise or evidence that demonstrates their potential for impact. Between 2007 and 2011, WHV developed *Take a Stand against domestic violence: it's everyone's business*, Australia's first whole-of-organisation workplace-based violence prevention program, with funding from VicHealth (**Case study 3**). There is significant potential for programs like *Take a Stand* to be rolled out nationally.

Case study 3: Using the workplace as a setting for promoting gender equality – *Take a stand against domestic violence: it's everyone's business*

Take a Stand addresses the underlying causes of violence and builds capacity within workplaces to model, promote and facilitate respectful and non-violent gender relations. The program aims to influence change at both individual and organisational level, through three key elements: leadership (e.g. executive engagement; anti-violence policy development), training (about the causes, prevalence and impact of domestic violence and how to 'take a stand') and message promotion (e.g. use of promotional materials to reinforce messages; participation in events like White Ribbon Day).

The *Take a Stand* program engages employees in skills development to speak up against attitudes and behaviours that sustain violence in our community. The 'bystander approach' is what made *Take a Stand* an Australian first; this approach has since been adopted by a number of other organisations delivering workplace-based programs. *Take a Stand* also ensures that employees who are experiencing domestic violence are supported.

The 2011 evaluation of the *Take a Stand* pilot found that participants felt they had a better understanding of domestic violence and how things people say or do can support domestic violence, and were more likely to challenge violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours as a result of the training.³⁵ Together with its partners Women's Health Loddon Mallee and Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon-South-West, WHV has now delivered *Take a Stand* to over 4500 employees at more than 25 workplaces across Victoria. WHV has also recently formed a partnership with Rockhampton Women's Health Centre to deliver *Take a Stand* to workplaces in regional Queensland.

The media also plays a highly influential role in shaping norms and attitudes relating to gender and the role and value of women.³⁶ Everyday media including television programming, advertising, radio, entertainment and news are powerful forces in setting and perpetuating social norms and practices.

To date, gender equality initiatives in Australia have paid little attention to the critical role of media in perpetuating gender norms and stereotypes and its potential to contribute to their transformation. However, the effectiveness of gender equality interventions in settings such as schools, workplaces and local communities will be compromised if undermined by media and marketing messages that contribute to and normalise gender inequality. **Case study 4** demonstrates the need to address gender equity across all forms of media, including advertising.

³⁵ Durey and Women's Health Victoria (2001) Working Together Against Violence : final project report, pp. 8-9. Available from: [URL](#)

³⁶ For the purposes of this Inquiry we use the term 'everyday media' to refer to media forms which are specifically designed to reach a large section of the population including television, film, advertising, radio, newspapers and magazines, and the internet.

Case study 4: Gender equity in the media setting

*Everywhere the potential exists for the media to make a far greater contribution to the advancement of women.*³⁷

Everyday media set the bar for what constitutes acceptable attitudes or behaviour. The use of sexist jokes, gratuitous depictions of sexual violence, derogatory remarks and attitudes which regard women as possessions contribute to a society that dehumanises women and trivialises gender equality. The prioritisation of men's sports over women's, the disproportionate number of children's shows aimed at and starring boys instead of girls, and the characters and roles allotted to men and women which reinforce rigid gender stereotypes (for example, children's books and television programming that over-represent boys as leaders, stars or adventurers and relegates girls to the roles of carers, mothers and objects of male desire) all contribute to cultures permissive of sexism and discrimination.

Other forms of oppression, including oppression based on race, class and sexual orientation, come together with gender-based discrimination to create specific narratives about different groups of women and men in society (known as 'representational intersectionality'). Depiction of marginalised groups – where they are depicted at all – may include stereotypes that are used to maintain oppression, justify inequality and reinforce the superiority of the dominant group or culture.³⁸ These may include representations that suggest that violence is cultural or that gender oppression is normal or acceptable in particular communities or use of negative stereotypes (for example, portrayals of Asian women as submissive or passive, or portrayals of single mums as 'dole bludgers'). Young girls with disabilities, for example, grow up without role models of empowered disabled girls and women. Aboriginal children don't see respectful Aboriginal relationships reflected in the media. These intersectional narratives shape and inform policies, laws, and institutions.

The absence of effective strategies for addressing structural and normative gender inequality within the media, entertainment and advertising industries represents a major gap in current efforts because of their influential role in reinforcing gender norms and expectations. Best practice prevention work in other settings such as schools and workplaces will be undermined by counter messaging in the media if we do not develop a more ambitious strategy.

We are pleased to see that *Safe and Strong: A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* recognises the importance of the media, arts and culture as a setting for action to promote gender equality, and commits to review laws relating to sexist advertising. However, national cooperation will be required to effectively combat sexist advertising as its regulation falls predominantly within the Commonwealth's jurisdiction. [WHV's submission to the Senate Inquiry](#) makes multiple recommendations for strengthening the regulation of advertising, which is currently self-regulated (see pages 26-30 in particular).

³⁷ United Nations. Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) J. Women and the media. *In*: Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Available from: [URL](#)

³⁸ Mason (2010) Leading at the intersections : an introduction to the intersectional approach model for policy and social change. Available from: [URL](#)

C. Key Approaches

Achieving gender equality will require strong, long-term leadership and a coordinated national strategy that builds momentum for comprehensive and sustained social change. The Commonwealth Government has a critical role to play in:

- **Setting the agenda for change** by demonstrating an enduring commitment to achieving gender equality at the highest levels within the government and public sector;
- **‘Mainstreaming’ gender equality** into all legislation, policy, budgeting, service delivery and procurement, taking a **‘gender transformative’ approach** wherever possible; and
- **Leading and coordinating** efforts to ensure a comprehensive and systematic, whole-of-community approach to gender equality across the country, drawing on the **expertise of specialist women’s services**.

Government leadership must be underpinned by **adequate, long-term investment**, reflecting the long-term nature of attitudinal and structural change. A **bi-partisan commitment** and sustained funding beyond the three year electoral cycle will be critical to the success of efforts to promote gender equality. It is not realistic to expect to achieve broad scale cultural change within a three year funding cycle, and funders need to understand that gender equality requires long-term investment and be realistic about the timescales in which they would expect to see changes. A long term-funding model will also enable successful programs and initiatives to be scaled up, systematised and embedded into ongoing practice, while short- to medium-term funding will support evidence-building through innovation.

Government must set the agenda for change

It is critical that the Commonwealth Government **set the agenda for gender equality** in Australia through its own actions. This will require Government to ‘get its own house in order’ as a model for progressing gender equality for others to follow. As set out in Part A of this submission, there is also a strong imperative for the ALP to work internally to improve gender equity within the Party, regardless of whether it wins the next federal election.

Increasing the political participation of women has been shown to advance laws and policies to address gender-based violence and inequality.³⁹ Yet, as of February 2017, women occupy only one third of all Australian parliament positions, across all parties.⁴⁰ Opportunities remain for Commonwealth and state governments to implement measures that will increase the representation of women in federal and state parliaments, federal, state and local governments, and the public sector (for example, through the introduction of quotas) and bring greater emphasis to gender issues in parliament (for example, through parliamentary gender equality committees and gender-sensitivity training). For example, we welcome the Victorian Government’s commitment to gender equity in appointments to public sector boards and the courts.

As **major employers**, it is essential that governments role model a commitment to gender equality by actively creating more **gender equitable workplaces** (beyond pursuing quotas and other mechanisms to ensure women are equally represented at senior levels). For example, government

³⁹ UNIFEM (2010) Investing in gender equality : ending violence against women and girls. *In*: Ending Violence against Women and Girls : UNIFEM Strategy and Information Kit., page 4. Available from: [URL](#)

⁴⁰ Parliament of Australia. (2017). Composition of Australian parliaments by party and gender: a quick guide. Table 1. Available from: [URL](#)

EBAs should reflect international best practice in terms of paid parental and family violence leave, and gender-related KPIs should be established for senior bureaucrats.

‘Mainstream’ gender equality into all legislation, policy, budgeting, service delivery and procurement

Public policy has the capacity to either perpetuate or eliminate discrimination and gender inequality. It is only by making gender a central consideration in the development and implementation of public policy that we can hope to advance gender equality and women’s human rights in Australia. The risk in failing to do so is that public policy responses will not only perpetuate existing forms of oppression against women and limit women’s and men’s autonomy, but will also create new forms of gender oppression and undermine broader efforts to achieve equality.

‘**Gender mainstreaming**’—or the process of ensuring policies and practices meet the needs of men and women equitably—is a key strategy for removing barriers to equality through policy, law making and resource allocation. It is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated.⁴¹ A 2014 study undertaken by the OECD outlines some of the most effective elements of a gender mainstreaming approach and the ongoing challenges.⁴²

In Australia, governments should introduce **gender mainstreaming or gender equality laws** at state and national level, which would require ministers to outline how they will promote gender equality within their portfolios, a **gender impact assessment** or statement of compatibility to be undertaken for all legislation, policy and funding initiatives, and **regular reporting** to parliament on outcomes and/or monitoring by a parliamentary committee or independent commissioner. All governments should implement **gender responsive budgeting**, which involves undertaking a gender or audit of all fiscal and economic policies,⁴³ and reinstate **Gender Budget Statements** (discontinued at the federal level since 2014).⁴⁴

At the federal level, introducing gender mainstreaming would expose the gendered impacts of Commonwealth laws and policies, recognising that the Commonwealth controls many of the policy levers required to achieve gender equality (including laws and policy relating to employment, social security, superannuation and immigration). As an example, **Case study 5** illustrates some of the gendered impacts of employment and social security policy on single mothers.

⁴¹ United Nations. General Assembly (1997) Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997. (United Nations General Assembly [Proceedings] , 1997 : 52nd Session (Sep 18) : A/52/3). Available from: [URL](#)

⁴² OECD (2014) Women, government and policy making in OECD countries : fostering diversity for inclusive growth. Available from: [URL](#)

⁴³ Lahey (2015) Tax and transfer policies and sex equality : what Australia, Canada and the UK should learn from experience. In: Gender Equality in Australia’s Tax and Transfer System Workshop (Canberra : 2015 : Nov 4). Available from: [URL](#)

⁴⁴ It had been the practice for over thirty years for federal governments to produce Women’s Budget Statements as one element of their Budget Papers. At one stage, there were women’s budgets at federal level and in each of the territories and states. This practice ceased at the federal level in 2014 without explanation. The purpose of the Women’s Budget Statement was to make transparent the differential impacts of policies and their outcomes on women.

Case study 5: The gendered implications of employment and social security policy – single mothers

A good example of how policies and programs have fostered gender inequality by centralising the needs of men over women is the way the Australian welfare state was designed around the needs of the male breadwinner. In the 1907 Harvester case, a 'fair and reasonable' wage was determined to be the amount a man needed to support himself, his wife and three children, even though at this time women were frequently in paid work and often the sole supporters of their families.⁴⁵ In the decades that followed, income support was provided to men long before the government provided allowances to widowers, single mothers or young women.

To this day, single mothers are trapped within a policy construct that cycles between incentivising mums to stay at home to raise children and using punitive welfare policies to force single mums to work. This structural inequality is compounded by norms and practices that perpetuate stigma and discrimination against single mothers. Contradictory norms dictate that 'good mothers' should be at home putting their children first. But 'stay at home single mums' set a bad example for their children, contributing to intergenerational poverty. There is a comparative silence on the role of men either as single fathers or as providers of child support.

A gender impact assessment, supported by sex-disaggregated data, would highlight the disproportionate impact of single parent policies (including funding cuts) on women and the need for a gender transformative approach to addressing the structures, norms and practices that penalise single mothers.

An **intersectional approach** to gender mainstreaming will recognise and be responsive to the ways in which the experience of disability, cultural or racial minority status, sexuality and gender diversity, rurality or socio-economic status intersects with gender to intensify gender-based inequality. **Case study 6** demonstrates the need for an intersectional approach to immigration policy to prevent and respond to violence against women from immigrant and refugee backgrounds. **Case study 7** investigates how rurality impacts women's experience of gender inequality.

Case study 6: Violence against women from refugee and immigrant backgrounds and the role of immigration policy⁴⁶

Violence against women occurs in all Victorian communities and across all cultures. While there is no evidence to show that any one immigrant/refugee community or culture is any more violent than another, due to structural inequalities, immigrant and refugee women as a group are more vulnerable to violence, and have a lower level of access to family violence services.

Immigrant and refugee women experience a range of barriers when they act on family violence, and as a result, are under-represented as participants in early intervention programs, and over-represented as crisis service users.

Many of the factors that increase women's vulnerability to violence and limit access to services are linked to residency and visa status, including:

- migration policy and legislation that reduce women's rights;

⁴⁵ Graycar and Morgan (2002) The hidden gender of law. 2nd. ed, p. 149

⁴⁶ This case study is drawn from: Multicultural Centre for Women's Health (2015) Submission to the Royal Commission Into Family Violence (Victoria). Available from: [URL](#)

- structural racism in the workplace and the education system;
- lack of access to appropriate prevention and early intervention programs;
- refusal of homelessness services due to residency status and quotas in refuges based on residency or visa status; and
- refusal of service due to lack of income.

Women on temporary visas, such as international students, are more susceptible to exploitation and violence. For example, temporary residency visa status can increase women's social isolation from the community. This vulnerability and isolation is compounded when access to income support or work rights, and health and community services (including domestic violence and legal services), is contingent on permanent residency status. Each visa category carries different entitlements and these entitlements change regularly.

Research indicates that perpetrators use spousal visas to threaten and maintain control over their partners in the context of family violence. Deportation threats, and fear of further persecution in country of origin, even if threats are unfounded (and exemptions theoretically allow women who have experienced domestic violence to stay in Australia), keep women in a state of fear for themselves and their children, and make women reluctant to report family violence, seek assistance, or leave the violent situation. A lack of specialist training in the dynamics of intimate partner violence means that immigration agents and relevant government departments are often ill equipped to assess their clients' needs in relation to domestic violence.

There is a clear role for the Commonwealth in further analysing the extent to which temporary and dependency visas exacerbate women's experiences of violence, and amending the visa system to improve women's independence and capacity to gain employment and income.

Case study 7: Addressing the barriers to health and equality for rural women

There is ample evidence that women living in rural and regional areas experience disadvantage relative to women living in metropolitan communities. Fewer opportunities – both in the private and public sphere – have an impact on rural women's ability to live full and prosperous lives, or to seek help and assistance when they need it. Barriers and disadvantages that rural women face include:

- Gendered disparity in access to the labour market, which is symbolic of unequal status, choice and self-determination: Labour markets in rural areas are more strongly gendered, meaning men tend to earn higher wages.⁴⁷ Failure to complete secondary school also has more profound impacts on rural women than rural men;
- Stronger gender stereotypes in rural areas: these can lead to increased incidence of violence against women when these stereotypes are challenged;⁴⁸
- Impacts of climate change and drought. These include an increase in violence towards women, women being 14 times more likely to die in a natural disaster, difficulties accessing resources, and gender shaping the burden of care, recovery and decision making.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Luhrs (2013) Daughters of farmers : farm succession and sustainable farming communities. *In*: Footsteps to the future : collected thoughts on the sustainability of resources, people and community in Southwest Victoria / edited by K. Scholfield et al. . p. 31-4. Available from: [URL](#)

⁴⁸ Pease (2010) Reconstructing violent rural masculinities : responding to fractures in the rural gender order in Australia. *Culture, Society and Masculinity*. 2 (2):154-64

⁴⁹ Clarke (2010) The health impacts of climate change and drought on women in the Loddon Mallee Region : a literature review with recommendations. Available from: [URL](#)

Lack of access to services is a major barrier to rural women's health and equality. Fewer available services, long distances combined with a lack of transport and child care, and cost, all act as barriers to service access. Difficulties in accessing sexual and reproductive health services and family violence services are particularly acute for rural women. For example, in addition to the limited availability of contraception and abortion services in rural and regional Victoria, and the barriers of distance and cost, lack of privacy/anonymity in small rural communities and judgmental attitudes among health professionals compound the disadvantage of rural women in attempting to access reproductive health services.⁵⁰

Rural women who experience family violence also face serious barriers to service access that can further threaten their safety. These include isolation, limited finances, lack of anonymity, greater opportunities for surveillance of survivors and greater likelihood of perpetrator presence around services, as well as limited crisis accommodation, support, health and legal services (exacerbated by conflicts of interest in small communities).⁵¹

An intersectional gender equality strategy needs to take into account the particular challenges rural women face. As a first step, a base level of service provision for all Australians needs to be articulated and provided. The specific barriers faced by rural women then need to be addressed, including through additional support and alternative service models. For example, improvements in community accessible telehealth and tele-education can help overcome the burden of distance. Rural women's health services play a critical role in building the capacity of services in their regions to promote gender equality and the health, safety and wellbeing of women by providing expert training, direct services and activities, health promotion, research and advocacy.

The Government also has significant power to promote gender equality through direct service delivery and through its influence over projects and programs funded through **government grants and tenders**. It is imperative to ensure that public funds are not being spent in a way that reinforces gender inequality. For example, governments should mandate gender equality requirements and reporting and provide incentives to ensure that contracted organisations demonstrate what steps they are taking to ensure gender equity is considered and acted upon. This is particularly important when funding programs or interventions targeting groups at higher risk of experiencing gender inequality, such as those delivered by disability, health, mental health and aged care services. For example, service agreements and other funding arrangements with service providers could require delivery of gender-responsive services, including those funded through the NDIS and Home and Community Care (HACC).

Aim to take a gender-transformative approach to policy and programs

Gendered 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 below (see **Figure 1** below).

Despite the profound impacts of gender inequality over the life course, historically government policy and programs have tended to take a gender insensitive approach⁵², assuming that women's experiences are the same as men's. As a result, strategies, interventions and services across all

⁵⁰ Rural services of the Women's Health Association of Victoria (2012) Victorian rural women's access to family planning services : survey report, August 2012. Available from: [URL](#)

⁵¹ George and Harris (2014) Landscapes of violence : women surviving family violence in regional and rural Victoria. Available from: [URL](#)

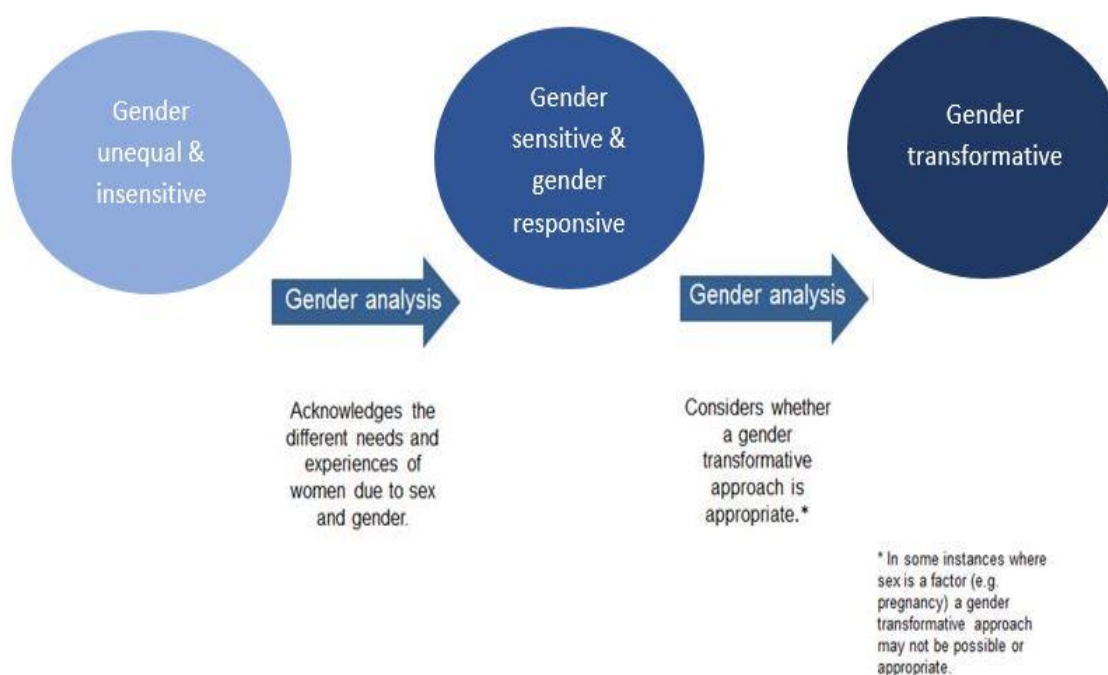
⁵² Gender insensitive approaches are often referred to as 'gender blind', however 'gender insensitive' is now the preferred language. Gender insensitive approaches are discussed in more detail on page 23.

portfolio areas have not been tailored for women, and opportunities to improve outcomes for women have been missed, reinforcing gender inequality. The NDIS is a good example: while this major reform is changing service systems across Australia, a gender-sensitive approach would have maximised benefits for women, both as participants in the scheme and as part of the largely feminised workforce that will provide services.

There is a need to move away from gender unequal and gender insensitive 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.

In 'mainstreaming' gender across all policy, programs and funding arrangements, WHV recommends that government demonstrate real leadership and maximise its impact on gender inequality by taking a **gender transformative approach** where possible.

Figure 1: Consideration of gender in policy development – from gender unequal to gender transformative⁵³



Gender unequal policies contribute to gender inequality either directly, for example lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services (see **Case study 8** below), or indirectly, through a **gender insensitive** approach – that is, an approach that appears to be gender neutral, but which in effect disproportionately harms women. A gender insensitive or gender-neutral approach assumes that gender-based differences do not exist, minimises identified gender-based differences or ignores gender norms, roles and relations. Consequently, gender insensitive policy and practice often serve to reinforce and perpetuate gender-based discrimination and inequities. Gender-neutral approaches are common in 'mainstream' policy areas, where gender is not perceived to be relevant. **Case study 9**

⁵³ Flowchart developed by Women's Health Victoria based on the work of: Greaves, Pederson and Poole (2014) Making it better : gender-transformative health promotion, p 22.

looks at how a gender insensitive approach to cutting Sunday penalty rates will disproportionately impact women.

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.⁵⁴

Case study 8: A gender unequal approach – Access to contraception and termination services

Denial or lack of access to sexual and reproductive health services, including contraception and abortion, is an example of gender unequal policy and service delivery. For biological as well as social reasons, women and girls bear the primary burden of sexual and reproductive health management, associated costs and decision-making. Barriers to sexual and reproductive health contribute significantly to unequal health outcomes between women and men.

Access to reproductive health services is essential for every woman's health and wellbeing. A comprehensive **national sexual and reproductive health strategy** is necessary to address the continuing barriers to women's access to essential basic sexual and reproductive health services, including:

- **Lack of access to safe and legal abortion for all Australian women:** abortion remains under the criminal code in some states and territories;
- **Cost, including for contraception, appointments, travel, child care and time off work**
- **Lack of accurate and up to date information, referral and support**, including a lack of comprehensive education for both clients and health professionals around contraceptive options. In addition, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, including international students, may lack awareness of family planning services and methods, and there is a lack of interpreting services and in-language print information regarding contraception and abortion.
- **Lack of services** (especially surgical and medical abortion and long acting reversible contraception), **particularly in rural/regional areas**
- **Uneven resourcing and prioritisation of women's sexual and reproductive health services by public hospitals**
- **Workforce capacity** in relation to medical abortion and long acting reversible contraception
- **Insurance coverage for international students** in relation to abortion

⁵⁴ New South Wales. Health Department (2000) Gender equity in health. Available from: [URL](#)

Case study 9: A gender-insensitive approach – Fair Work Commission's changes to Sunday Penalty rates

The recent Fair Work Commission decision to cut Sunday penalty rates across the hospitality and retail sectors⁵⁵ is a good example of gender insensitive policy at the Commonwealth level. The change will exacerbate gender inequality, disproportionately impacting women on low incomes, including single mothers.

Traditional measures of the "gender pay gap" indicate that women earn around 17 per cent less than men, in ordinary pay in equivalent full-time positions. Factoring in the over representation of women in part time work, women now earn one-third less than men.⁵⁶ Compounding this, women make up most of the workforce in the retail and hospitality sectors specifically. Most of the workers whose Sunday wages will be cut are women – and they were already among the lowest-earning workers in the entire labour force.⁵⁷

Cuts to Sunday penalty rates constitute gender insensitive policy not just because of their disproportionately harsh effects on low income women, but also because these effects were not acknowledged or discussed, either in the Budget papers⁵⁸ or the Summary Decision.⁵⁹

Whereas tax cuts predominantly benefit men, women are more likely to benefit from increased wages, improvement of workers' rights and conditions access to welfare, and social investments.⁶⁰

Gender-sensitive and gender-responsive policy and practice

Undertaking a gender analysis which identifies how policies and practice are explicitly or implicitly gendered enables policy makers and service providers to consider how they can make policies and programs more gender-sensitive and gender-responsive. A gender-sensitive approach involves incorporating a gender perspective into policy and practice, but does not necessarily take action to redress gender-based inequities.¹⁵⁹ Gender-responsive policy and practice builds on a gender-sensitive approach by not only identifying how gender norms and structures influence outcomes, but also taking remedial action to respond and ameliorate the impacts of discrimination, bias and inequities. **Case study 10** provides examples of a gender-responsive approach to addressing violence against women with disabilities.

Case Study 10: A gender-responsive approach to counter the marginalisation of women with disabilities

Gender-based and disability-based discrimination increase the risk of violence for women and girls with disabilities. Men who use violence often target victims whom they perceive to be less powerful, such as women who are unable to communicate to others what has happened to them, and those restricted in their physical movement. Women and girls with disabilities are twice as likely as women and girls without disabilities to experience violence throughout their lives. Over one-third of women with disabilities experience some form of intimate partner violence.⁶¹

⁵⁵ With some exceptions.

⁵⁶ The Australia Institute (2017) Women's Wages and the Penalty Rate Cut. Available from: [URL](#)

⁵⁷ The Australia Institute (2017) Women's Wages and the Penalty Rate Cut. Available from: [URL](#)

⁵⁸ National Foundation of Australia Women (2017) A Gender Lens – Budget 2017-18: p7. Available from: [URL](#)

⁵⁹ FairWork Commission (23 February 2017) Summary of Decision 4 yearly review of modern award – penalty rates. Available from: [URL](#)

⁶⁰ National Foundation of Australia Women (2017) A Gender Lens – Budget 2017-18: p7. Available from: [URL](#)

⁶¹ Women With Disabilities Victoria (2014) Violence against women with disabilities : Fact Sheet 3. Available from: [URL](#)

Violence against people with disabilities has recently become a key focus of governments and oversight bodies. However, development of policy in this area has traditionally not been concerned with gender equality and so has not connected with a gendered body of knowledge about violence response and prevention.

For example, the National Disability Insurance Scheme's (NDIS) 'Operational Guideline on Responding to Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation 2014' instructs on managing safety and risks. However, the Guideline appears not to have been developed with any input from experts in violence response and prevention. If it had, it would reflect awareness of the gendered nature of violence against women with disabilities, as well as the additional risks associated with being older, living in a remote area, coming from a non-English speaking background and being socially isolated.

Work is currently underway on the establishment of a nationally consistent approach to Quality and Safeguarding for the NDIS. The Quality and Safeguarding Framework is intended to ensure that mechanisms are in place to uphold the rights of people with disability, and to address issues identified in a series of inquiries into violence and abuse directed at people with disability. The Quality and Safeguarding Framework will establish new roles governed by legislation to monitor and regulate provision of NDIS services to ensure that they are safe and fit for purpose and that all workers comply with a Code of Conduct.

While this new Framework is still in development and yet to be tested, it is not clear whether it will reflect a gender-sensitive approach, which would recognise that the rates of violence against women in our general community are extremely high, and they are even higher for women with disabilities. Gender sensitivity in this context would require all elements of the Framework to recognise this increased risk and then act to prevent and respond to violence against women with disability.

Without a gendered approach, the Quality and Safeguarding Framework will represent a lost opportunity for raising awareness of violence against women (including domestic and family violence) amongst NDIS workers, and risks reinforcing and perpetuating gender inequality.

By contrast, the Victorian Office of the Public Advocate's 'Guideline for Addressing Violence, Neglect and Abuse' (IGUANA) was developed in conjunction with violence specialists and women with disabilities. IGUANA clearly states what actions should be taken in cases of neglect or when abuse is reported, or is witnessed or suspected by a staff member or volunteer. It makes explicit the gendered nature of violence against women with disabilities: "Staff and volunteers should be aware that women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence than both men with disabilities and women in the general population."⁶²

The current major reform of disability services through the NDIS provides an opportunity to consider how cross-portfolio policy development can embed gender equality strategies in new programs. Given the high levels of disadvantage that women with disabilities experience, the disability policy portfolio is an ideal setting for a greater focus on gender equality. This could consider areas of governance, data collection, service specifications and workforce development strategies as well as specific gendered program development.

A great example of best practice in workforce development is the Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program run by Women with Disabilities Victoria. This program is designed to change culture across whole organisations, and works with clients, staff, managers and executives. The aim

⁶² Victoria. Office of the Public Advocate (2013) Interagency guideline for addressing violence, neglect and abuse (IGUANA). Available from: [URL](#)

is to improve gender equitable service delivery as a strategy for increasing women's well-being and reducing gender based violence. The package is co-delivered by women with disabilities and professionals from relevant sectors. Ongoing communities of practice within the organisations support and sustain cultural change.

A recent evaluation of the pilot showed evidence of positive cultural change at both an individual and organisational level. For example, participants reported:

"Now when we have conversations, we introduce concepts of gender; it's actually discussed as a point in decision making. There has been a shift in our conversations since the training." (Manager)

"I have observed a marked difference in staff approaches to working with women with disabilities, in particular between staff who have completed the training and those that have not. Moving from managing one residential service to another has highlighted this for me." (Support Worker)

"We lose sight of gender issues in 'individual person centred planning.' It needs to remain at the forefront." (Manager) ⁶³

Towards gender-transformative policy and practice

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.⁶⁴

A gender-transformative approach proactively and intentionally transforms and alters the underlying gender structures, norms and relations that perpetuate gender inequality. It involves actively challenging rigid gender roles, norms and imbalances in power between women, men and gender-diverse people. Gender-transformative practice also seeks to establish and strengthen the structures that promote diverse and equal gender roles, relations and norms.⁶⁵

Ultimately, policy and programs should aim to create gender transformation whereby the structures and norms that disadvantage women (and men) on the basis of gender, and the construction of gender difference as a whole, are dismantled, leading to gender equality. However, in some instances where sex is a factor (for example, pregnancy) a gender-transformative approach may not be possible and a gender-responsive approach may be more appropriate.

As an example, paid parental leave schemes have the potential to be gender-transformative by promoting a more equal distribution of household and caring responsibilities between couples, as demonstrated by **Case study 11** below.

⁶³ Women With Disabilities Victoria (2015) Workforce Development Program on Gender and Disability : summary paper of independent evaluation findings. Available from: [URL](#)

⁶⁴ 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](#)

⁶⁵ British Columbia Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (2014) Approaches to integrating gender in health promotion : July 2014 [Slide presentation]. Available from: [URL](#); and Rugkhla and Women's Health Victoria (2011) Women and suicide. Available from: [URL](#)

Case study 11: A gender transformative approach – Paid Parental Leave in Norway and Sweden

In Australia, although workforce participation by women has increased over time, women still do significantly more unpaid housework than men.⁶⁶

Norway and Sweden have introduced gender-transformative measures into their Paid Parental Leave (PPL) schemes in order to encourage fathers to take a more active role in child care and domestic labour. Both Norway and Sweden have PPL schemes with high rates of income replacement (80-100%) and non-transferable mandated 'daddy (or co-parent)' quotas of 10 weeks and 90 days respectively.⁶⁷ The introduction of mandatory 'daddy quotas' in the 1990s dramatically increased the proportion of fathers taking parental leave from between 4-7% before 1990, up to 90% in 2008.⁶⁸ By contrast, in 2014, only 36% of Australian eligible fathers took 2 weeks' Dad and Partner Pay (DAPP).⁶⁹

Studies have shown that the 'daddy quota' in PPL schemes has a gender-transformative effect by increasing the distribution of household chores and childcare more evenly, even after the leave entitlements have been used up.⁷⁰ By promoting fathers' engagement with childcare and housework, these schemes allow mothers greater employment opportunities and allow fathers an equal chance to develop close relationships with their children.⁷¹

The availability of government funded PPL and DAPP in Australia has made some fathers more willing to take leave following a birth and employers more inclined to see it as a normal leave obligation for men.⁷² However, Australia's current policy of two weeks' DAPP at minimum wage is not sufficient to effect any long-term change. An evaluation of the scheme found no change in the distribution of household chores or any other evidence of an increase in gender equity.⁷³ Set at minimum wage, Australian fathers stated that the main reason they didn't take DAPP was because they could not afford to.⁷⁴

The experience of Norway and Sweden is that a gender transformative PPL scheme must be well remunerated and flexible enough to be used at various intervals over the first few years of their child's life.⁷⁵ The Commonwealth should lead the way by taking a gender-transformative approach to PPL and DAPP.

⁶⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) 2011 Census of population and Housing

⁶⁷ Swedish Institute (2015) Gender equality : the Swedish approach to fairness. Available from [URL](#); and Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (2016) Parental benefit. Available from: [URL](#)

⁶⁸ Moss (ed.) (2013) International review of leave policies and related research 2013, p.36. Available from: [URL](#); Duvander and Haas (2013) Sweden country note. In: International review of leave policies and research 2013 / P. Moss (ed.), pp. 5-6. Available from: [URL](#); and S.H. [pseud.] (2014) Why Swedish men take so much paternity leave. *The Economist* (Jul 22). Available from: [URL](#)

⁶⁹ Martin, Baird, Brady and et al. (2014) PPL evaluation : final report, p. 8. Available from: [URL](#)

⁷⁰ Kotsadam and Finseraas (2011) The state intervenes in the battle of the sexes : causal effects of paternity leave. *Social Science Research*. 40 (6):1611–22, p. 1621. Available from: [URL](#); and Duvander and Johansson (2015) Reforms in the Swedish parental leave system and their effects on gender equality, p. 4. Available from: [URL](#)

⁷¹ Chronholm (2007) Fathers' experience of shared parental leave in Sweden. *Recherches Sociologiques et Anthropologiques*. 38 (2):9-25. Available from: [URL](#)

⁷² Martin, Baird, Brady and et al. (2014) PPL evaluation : final report, p. 13. Available from: [URL](#)

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.11. Available from: [URL](#)

⁷⁴ Australian Institute of Family Studies. Child Family Community Australia (2013) Dad and partner pay : implications for policy-makers and practitioners, p. 10-11. Available from: [URL](#)

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p. 10-11. Available from: [URL](#)

Lead and coordinate effort across the country, drawing on the expertise of specialist women's services

The Commonwealth Government must take a whole-of-government approach to gender equality across all portfolio areas, and support a whole-of-community approach through partnerships with the non-government sector.

High level whole-of-government coordination is imperative in overcoming policy fragmentation within government, maximising the linkages between interdependent strategies, and supporting cooperation across government departments. A strong **governance and accountability framework** will be required for any national gender equality strategy, which mandates and facilitates involvement of all Commonwealth government departments, state governments, and cross-sector partners. The governance framework should involve monitoring by an independent body (such as the Australian Human Rights Commission), a Commonwealth cabinet committee to drive whole-of-government action, and COAG Ministerial Council to drive national action, a coordinating unit within a Commonwealth central agency, gender 'focal points' in all Commonwealth departments, and an interdepartmental committee with senior representation.

The whole-of-community change required to realise gender equality will depend on the ability of government to **mobilise and coordinate strategic partners** in all portfolio areas across business, state and local governments, faith-based communities and the community sector, and to leverage established organisations and networks. The **collective impact model** provides a structured approach to making collaboration work across government, business, philanthropy, non-profit organisations and citizens to achieve significant and lasting social change,⁷⁶ and should be supported by the Commonwealth.

Specialist networks (such as the network of women's health services) have **expertise in gender equity** and can provide advice, as well as coordinating and resourcing regional work and undertaking quality control on behalf of government. The critical role of specialist women's services in addressing gender inequality has been highlighted in a number of studies:⁷⁷

*'Civil society is fundamental for providing independent research and women's NGOs are crucial for advocating policy and funding changes and contesting budgetary processes and outcomes. In other words, predominately [sic] internal government exercises need to engage external actors to be effective.'*⁷⁸

Valuing and resourcing women's health services and other specialist services around Australia, particularly those with expertise in relation to the intersectional experience of gender inequality, should be a key pillar of the government's gender equality strategy. This will enable these services to continue to act as 'backbone' organisations which advocate for change, share best practice, build the capacity of others, and coordinate local gender equity initiatives. WHV is concerned the decision to de-fund the Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN) will impact the government's ability to leverage the specialist knowledge of women's services at the national level. **WHV recommends that**

⁷⁶ This model is already used by women's health services for regional action planning to prevent violence against women, and could be directly applied to mobilise a diverse range of players and sectors within a unified statewide strategy for gender equality.

⁷⁷ 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. 51, 56. Available from: [URL](#); Sharp and Broomhill (2013) A case study of gender responsive budgeting in Australia, p. 4, 8. Available from: [URL](#)

⁷⁸ Sharp and Broomhill (2013) A case study of gender responsive budgeting in Australia, p. 8. Available from: [URL](#)

AWHN's funding be re-instated to ensure its continued existence as a source of specialist expertise in women's health and gender equality at a national level.

PRIORITY ACTIONS

Addressing gender inequality will require long-term commitment and involve very level of government as well the wider community. The development of a national gender equality strategy, as well as national strategies for the primary prevention of violence against women and for sexual and reproductive health, is critical to provide the infrastructure, coordination and accountability to drive long term change.

Priority actions for the Australian Labor Party should include:

1. Setting the agenda for change

The ALP should role model best practice in gender equity by:

- Continuing to work towards the achievement of gender equity quotas for positions within the Party;
- Undertaking a gender review of all ALP policies;
- Conducting an internal audit of internal policies and procedures, including workplace policies;
- Encouraging gender equity within the Party membership, by providing incentives, training and support.

2. Development of a national gender equality strategy

A national gender equality strategy should:

- Be comprehensive and coordinated and take a whole of community approach including mutually-reinforcing strategies across multiple settings (schools, workplaces, businesses, media, etc);
- Address both gender inequitable norms and structures;
- Take an intersectional approach to gender equity;
- Have a long-term focus and sustained funding (as well as rolling short term action plans);
- Link directly to a new national strategy for the prevention of violence against women (PVAW).

As well as driving the agenda for national change, the national strategy should set out a road map for how the Commonwealth Government itself can take action to promote gender equality, including by:

- Demonstrating an enduring commitment to achieving gender equality within the government and public sector;
- 'Mainstreaming' gender equality into all legislation, policy, budgeting, service delivery and procurement, taking a 'gender transformative' approach wherever possible.

The national gender equality strategy should also include the following priority actions:

- Restore funding to the Australian Women's Health Network;
- Remove CEDAW reservations and implement gender-transformative Paid Parental Leave (see case study 11);
- Roll out best practice whole-of-school respectful relationships education as part of the national curriculum, and ensure that young people not engaged at school, or who attend schools for young people with a disability, or private and faith-based schools have equal access to respectful relationships education;
- Work with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency to encourage take up of the workplace standards being developed by the Our Watch *Workplace Equality & Respect* project and

consider strategies to improve engagement with workplaces (for example, by subsidising workplaces to participate);

- Develop a strategy to improve the representation of women and girls in advertising and entertainment, including a review of the Advertising Standards Bureau's ability to assess and regulate sexist advertising, and consideration of the sexist advertising bans now in place in cities such as London and Paris;
- Ensure a gender lens is applied to the roll out of the NDIS including quality and safeguarding frameworks, training and supports.

3. Development of a national strategy for the prevention of violence against women (PVAW)

A national strategy for PVAW should:

- Build on actions for the primary prevention of violence against women under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*;
- Link to the national gender equality strategy (and use consistent language and concepts, reflecting evidence that improving gender equality is the best strategy for preventing violence against women);
- Reflect and be consistent with the evidence and strategies laid out by Our Watch's *Change the Story* framework;
- Include ongoing, secure funding for Our Watch and ANROWS as well as funding to states to support PVAW efforts at the state level, for example through peak bodies such as the Women's Health Association of Victoria;
- Address Commonwealth-related issues for migrant and refugee women, for example in relation to visas and family violence exemptions (see case study 6).

4. Development of a comprehensive national strategy for sexual and reproductive health

A national sexual and reproductive health strategy should:

- Recognise and affirm that safe and equitable access to the full suite of sexual and reproductive health services and information is a human right and a fundamental determinant of women's equality, health and wellbeing;
- Put pressure on the Queensland and New South Wales Governments to decriminalise abortion in recognition that access to family planning services, contraception and abortion is essential to women's health and equity, and a human right;
- Include strategies to address the emerging issue of reproductive coercion as a form and early indicator of violence against women;
- Build the capacity of the primary care workforce to deliver sexual and reproductive health services, including medical termination of pregnancy and long-acting reversible contraception;
- Ensure Medicare rebates and pharmaceutical benefits are sufficient to prevent cost being a barrier to seeking an abortion, and to avoid financial disincentives for health professionals or those seeking contraception;
- Negotiate health insurance requirements for international students to ensure they are able to access the full suite of sexual and reproductive health services they require upon arrival and during their stay in Australia;
- Prioritise the professionalisation and expansion of skilled health interpreters, ensuring that health professionals use interpreter services appropriately.

CONCLUSION

Gender inequality is expressed and maintained through norms, practices and structures that support rigid gender stereotypes and the unequal distribution of power between men and women at every level of society. These formal and informal systems are linked and mutually reinforcing, creating a self-fulfilling cycle of inequality and making the task of achieving gender equality a daunting one.

The inclusion of respectful relationships education within the national curriculum and the development of best practice programs for gender equality in workplaces represent significant strides in this work. However, there is much more to do. This submission has highlighted several areas for action, including engagement with the media, advertising and entertainment industries, and addressing inequalities in sexual and reproductive health.

The Commonwealth Government has a critical role to play in leading Australia towards a more gender equitable future. WHV strongly recommends that the Government lead development of a comprehensive national gender equality strategy. Such a strategy should simultaneously target the norms, practices and structures that drive gender inequality and take a whole-of-community approach to reversing it. It should require all governments to show leadership by role-modelling change and mainstreaming gender across all policy and programs. In addition to gender mainstreaming, the Commonwealth must take action in its key areas of policy responsibility to improve women's civic and economic participation and economic security.

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