



**courageous  
conversations**

# Gender Equity

## Policy Template



**WOMEN'S HEALTH  
GOULBURN NORTH EAST**

*Challenging inequity, embracing diversity.*

# Gender Equity Policy Template

Women’s Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE) developed this policy template as a resource to support workplaces across Goulburn Valley and North East Victoria, in particular Local Government, in developing and implementing policies to promote gender equity internally.

Inspiration has been taken from:

- [Mildura Rural City Council’s Gender Equity Policy](#)
- City of Melbourne’s Gender Equity Policy
- [Hobsons Bay City Council Gender Equity Policy Statement](#)
- [Women’s Health West, Developing a Gender and/or Prevention of Violence against Women Organisational Policy: A sample policy tool](#)
- [Workplace Gender Equality Agency’s, Developing a Workplace Gender Equality Policy](#)

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# Introduction

## What is a Gender Equity Policy?

A Gender Equity Policy is a formal policy that provides a clear statement and understanding of an organisations position regarding gender and equity to management, staff, clients, and contractors.

It provides an organisational framework for responsibility and accountability, and demonstrates a high level of commitment to a workplace that values inclusivity and diversity, and actively promotes equitable opportunities and outcomes for women and men.

## Why have a workplace Gender Equity Policy?

A Gender Equity Policy provides an important and effective mechanism, for communicating the expectations and standards of the workplace, to managers and employees. It is a tool to ensure women and men are equally valued, rewarded, and represented in the organisation, and all individuals feel respected, safe and supported.

The policy provides managers and employees with a framework to support action that promotes inclusivity and diversity, and shared standards to safely challenge and reject sexism, harassment, discrimination and inequality in the workplace.

Furthermore, organisations across the globe are experiencing the complexity of recruiting talent in a quickly evolving and changing workforce. In parallel, workplaces are also encountering a leadership challenge, with many workplaces facing a lack of diversity in leadership positions, and specifically a lack of females in leadership positions (PWC, 2015). Achieving gender equality is important for workplaces not only because it is 'fair' and 'the right thing to do,' but because it is also linked to a workplace's overall economic performance (Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), 2016).

## Business Case for Gender Equality

Workplace gender equality is associated with:

- *Productivity and economic growth*

Increasing women's participation in the workforce has positive impacts on organisational culture and on operations. A diverse and inclusive workforce regardless of size and industry generates tangible benefits, such as increased efficiency, productivity, innovation, creativity and improved employee engagement (WGEA, 2016).

Companies with more women in executive management have been shown to financially outperform companies that have no women in senior roles. McKinsey research (2012) has shown that organisations with a higher proportion of women in their top management have better financial results. Firms with the most gender diverse management teams have 47% better Return on Equity (ROE), 56% better Earnings Before Interest and Tax (EBIT) and 1.7 times better share price growth than average companies (Chief Executive Women (CEW), 2013).

- *Increased organisational performance*

Diverse teams are associated with greater organisational innovation. International research examining gender diverse teams suggests that more gender balanced teams are better at promoting an environment where innovation can flourish, compared to teams lacking gender diversity (WGEA, 2016). Heterogeneous teams are more creative, better at thinking up new ideas and avoiding 'groupthink', but only if the organisational culture values diverse views (CEW, 2013).

A study by Credit Suisse (2012) acknowledges that there are a range of reasons company performance and gender diversity may be linked. One factor is that well managed diversity brings together varied perspectives, which can produce a more holistic analysis of the issues a company faces and lead to improved decision-making (WGEA, 2016).

- *Enhanced ability of companies to attract talent and retain employees*

Having the best talent is critical to success in competitive markets. In Australia, women constitute a large proportion of the workforce, make up more than half of all graduates, and are increasingly more highly educated than men. Currently, 39.9% of Australian women aged 25-29 have achieved a bachelor's degree or above, compared to 30.9% of men of the same age bracket (WGEA, 2018). An organisation that is equally attractive to women and men will have access to the entire talent pool and is more likely to have a competitive advantage in attracting the best talent available (WGEA, 2013).

Employees value positive workplace cultures and environments that offer equitable policies and practices, flexible working arrangements and support for employees with family and caring responsibilities (WGEA, 2013).

Research conducted by the Diversity Council of Australia (2012) shows that flexible working arrangements are important to female and male employees of all ages. Research also suggests a positive association between flexibility for men and commitment to work, with flexibility being one of the top five employment drivers for men (WGEA, 2013). Flexible working arrangements enable employees to meet their family and personal needs, with evidence suggesting that all employees, regardless of age or caring responsibilities are more likely to be engaged and motivated in workplaces with access to flexible working arrangements (WGEA, 2013).

There is a common assumption that the predominant reason women halt their careers and leave organisations is to start families, and caring responsibilities. However, research conducted by PWC (2015), found women are more likely to leave an organisation due to a lack of career progression and learning and development opportunities, with 31% of women stating they left their previous organisation for these reasons. This was compared to 4% of the studies participants who left to start, or spend more time with family (PWC, 2015).

- *Enhanced organisational reputation*

A reputation for promoting diversity can help you to attract the best employees to an organisation, retain existing customers and attract new clientele (WGEA, 2013). Organisations with gender equality policies and strategies that include family friendly workplace policies and that address sex-based harassment and discrimination against employees are reducing the risk of workplace discrimination cases which can potentially be damaging for a company's reputation (WGEA, 2016).

Research conducted by PWC identified that 86% of young employees recognized an employer's policy on diversity, equality and workforce inclusion as important when deciding whether to work for an employer (PWC, 2015).

Workplace policies that support gender equality are an important tool for retaining talented employees. Research by Kaplan, Wiley and Maertz (2011) shows that employees are more likely to remain with an organisation where there is a proactive diversity climate. High staff turnover not only leads to a loss of specialist knowledge and productivity, the costs associated with hiring and training new employees can be high (WGEA, 2016).

## Organisational Context and Accountability

Gender is a factor in everything we do. It is entrenched in language, behaviour and workplace structures. Therefore, it is imperative that all parts of the organisation have an understanding of gender and are included as part of the solution to redress gender inequities and gender stereotypes.

The following questions may be useful to consider when developing a Gender Equity Policy to ensure that it is effectively embedded across the whole organisation.

- Who is responsible for the development, promotion and implementation of the policy across the organisation?
- Who needs to be involved for the policy to be effective and sustainable?
- What training and support will be available for staff to gain a deeper understanding of the policy and the broader context of gender inequality?
- What mechanisms are in place to support staff who take bystander action and report sexist and discriminatory behaviour?
- How often will the policy be reviewed? And by whom?
- What are the factors that motivate your organisation to adopt and implement a policy that promotes gender equity internally?
- What other factors are in place in the organisation that can help support effective adoption and implementation of this policy? I.e. Existing strategies and policies (such as Bullying and harassment policy, equal opportunity policy)

# Policy Context

Gender Equality is a human right and a precondition for social justice (Victorian Government, 2016).

Australia is a party to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women, committing our nation to be a society with policies, laws, institutions and attitudes that support equal rights for women and men (Victorian Government, 2016).

This Workplace Gender Equity policy aligns with a broader movement dedicated to creating a safer, more inclusive, respectful and equal society. The policy sits within the context of the following international, national and state frameworks and structures.

## International

- United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)
- United Nations Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW, 1979)
- United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993)

## National

- Sex Discrimination Act (1984)
- Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act (1999)
- Time for Action: The National Plan to reduce Violence Against Women and their Children 2010 – 2022
- Change the Story: A Shared Framework for the Primary Prevention of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia 2015

## State

- Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act (2006)
- Family Violence Prevention Act (2008)
- Indigenous family violence 10-year plan, Strong culture, strong peoples, Strong families: Towards a safer future for Indigenous families and communities 2008
- Indigenous family violence primary prevention framework 2012
- Ending Family Violence Victoria's Plan for Change 2016 (State 10 year plan)
- Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017 - 2020
- Safe and Strong: Victorian Gender Equality Strategy 2017
- Free from Violence; Victoria's Strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women 2017

## Purpose

This policy describes the [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] commitment to take positive action to ensure fair treatment of all employees, volunteers and contractors, consistent with organisational values and obligations under the Victorian Equal Opportunity Act (2010).

It provides the foundation for a policy framework specifically designed to guide efforts to promote gender equity in order to maximise organisational culture, productivity and the function of the workplace in preventing violence against women.

## Scope

This policy applies to all [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] employees, volunteers and contractors.

## Policy

The [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] recognises that women, and particularly those from marginalised communities such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or Indigenous Australians, LGBTIQ, disability and CALD communities, have largely been disadvantaged from participating in all spheres of life, and particularly their place of employment. This is evident by women experiencing higher rates of sexual harassment and discrimination at work. [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] acknowledges the importance of deliberate strategies to identify and address gender inequalities in the workplace.

The [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] acknowledges that an equitable workplace, characterised by respectful relationships can:

- Positively influence health and wellbeing of employees
- Contribute to job satisfaction and productivity; and
- Reduce absenteeism, conflict and staff turnover

Gender inequity and unequal relationships between men and women, are the underlying drivers of violence against women. [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] understands that violence perpetrated against women has significant impact at the individual, family, workplace and community level. As a consequence, [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] has identified the prevention of violence against women as a key priority for action.

Strategies will be implemented to enhance flexible working arrangements for employees to enable women and men to combine paid work and meet their individual needs, and family or caring responsibilities.

Initiatives to promote gender equity and challenge gender norms will be implemented at all levels across the organisation and will include:

[INSERT ALL RELEVANT ACTIVITIES CONDUCTED BY THE ORGANISATION TO PROMOTE GENDER EQUITY  
– EXAMPLE ACTIONS LISTED]

- Staff training and development activities
- Audits and reviews to examine pay and conditions, and diversity in roles,
- Review of staff participation in professional development and career advancement opportunities
- Review of staff recruitment, performance management, mentoring and retention

# Sample Policy P.2

- Policies and procedures review to support integration of gender equity
- Review of internal and external communication materials
- Promotion of parental leave options to both men and women
- Flexible working arrangements for staff
- Breastfeeding facilities and supportive arrangements
- Assessment of resource allocation; and
- Action to address identified issues

## Responsibilities

### *Employees*

- Be responsible for making themselves familiar with this policy and other relevant policies and procedures

Model appropriate behaviour based on the [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] values [LIST ORGANISATION VALUES]

- Are open to learning about, and actively participate in organisational training regarding gender inequality and the prevention of violence against women
- Attend and participate in all required training relevant to this policy
- Use language and images that promote equal and respectful relationships, and do not reinforce gender norms or gender stereotypes in all aspects of work
- Where relevant, consider gender, accessibility, and the needs of those from CALD, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples or Indigenous Australians and LGBTIQ communities in project design and delivery
- Take bystander action if they see or hear about sexism, harassment, discrimination, violence or any other form of unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour. Support their colleagues who disclose an experience of sexism, harassment, discrimination, violence or any other form of unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour
- Report any instances of victimisation, bullying, harassment or intimidation to their Manager immediately

### *Managers/Leaders*

Include all responsibilities listed above, in conjunction with;

- Actively promote and implement this policy, and other gender equity and preventing of violence against women policies and procedures.
- Model appropriate behaviour based on the [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] values.
- Take reports of sexism harassment, discrimination, violence or any other form of unacceptable or inappropriate behaviour seriously, and immediately address and action these reports.
- Take a leadership role across the organisation in raising awareness about issues of gender inequity, sexism, harassment, discrimination and violence against women.
- Support staff who take bystander action.

# Sample Policy P.3

Chief Executive Officer and the Executive Leadership team

Include all responsibilities listed above, in conjunction with:

- Championing this policy, both internally and with external parties and stakeholders
- Promote the adoption of the Gender Equity Policy and [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] commitment to gender equality internally, and advocacy for gender equality more broadly across the community
- Take a leadership role across the organisation, in raising awareness about issues of gender inequity, sexism, harassment, discrimination and violence against women.
- Model appropriate behaviour based on the [INSERT ORGANISATION NAME] values

## Policy review

This policy is to be reviewed by [INSERT RESPONSIBILITY] by [INSERT TIMEFRAME].

## Related policies and procedures

[INSERT ALL RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES]

EXAMPLE

- Equal Opportunity Policy and Procedure
- Response to Family Violence Policy and Procedure
- Sexual Harassment Policy and Procedure
- Workplace Flexibility Policy and Procedure

## Related Legislation and Regulations

[INSERT RELATED AND RELEVANT LEGISLATION AND REGULATION]

Equal Opportunity Act 2010

Fair Work Act 2009

Family Violence Protection Act 2008

Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006

Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012

## Key Terms and Definitions

**Bystander Action** - the action taken by a person or persons not directly involved in the incident, to identify, speak out about or seek to engage others in responding to specific incidences or behaviours, attitudes, practices or policies that are sexist, discriminatory, and violent or reinforce unhelpful gender stereotypes (Vic Health, 2014).

Bystander action is an effective strategy to address sexist language, sex discrimination and sexual harassment and an important part of providing a safe and inclusive environment (Vic Health, 2014).

**CALD** – Culturally and Linguistically Diverse.

**Equity** - the process of being fair and just. It is not about giving everyone an equal amount. It is centred on recognising diversity and disadvantage and distributing resources based on need to address disadvantages to produce equal outcomes (Women's Health Association of Victoria, 2016).

**Gender** – socially learnt roles, behaviours and activities and attributes that any given society considers appropriate for men and women; gender defines masculinity and femininity; Gender expectations vary between cultures and can change over time (Our Watch, 2015).

**Gender Equality** – the outcome reached through addressing gender inequities. It is the equal participation of women and men in all spheres of public and private life and the equal valuing by society of women and men, girls and boys (Women's Health Association of Victoria, 2016).

**Gender Equity** – the process of being fair to men and women with the aim of achieving equal outcomes for all. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for historical and social disadvantage that have prevented a level playing field (Women's Health West, 2016).

It is not about the equal delivery of services or distribution of resources; equity recognises diversity and disadvantage and seeks to direct resources and services towards those most in need to ensure equal outcomes (Australian Women's Health Network, 2014).

**Gender Stereotypes** – Simplistic generalisations about the gender attributes, behaviours and roles traditionally perceived as male or female (Victorian Government, 2016).

**Gender Norms** – set of beliefs and rules of conduct which are considered the types of behaviours, interests and attitudes expected from boys and girls, men and women (Our Watch, 2015).

**Groupthink** – an emphasis on group unanimity at the expense of critical thinking and measured decision-making (Janis, 1991).

**LGBTIQ** – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer.

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