Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms

GenVic Submission to the Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor

July 2020

About Gender Equity Victoria (GENVIC)

Gender Equity Victoria (GENVIC) is the peak body for gender equity, women's health and the prevention of violence against women in Victoria. Our vision is for equality, wellbeing and freedom from violence for every woman and girl, in every community of Victoria.

GENVIC represents individual and organisational gender equity leaders across Victoria who advance gender equity and hold values that align with feminist principles. Our current membership reaches every region and community in Victoria. We value our public, private and community sector membership.

GENVIC recognises gender as a key determinant of wealth, power and status in society and therefore one of the most powerful drivers of health inequities, hate and violence. We advocate, influence and collaborate to improve outcomes in gender equity, women's health and in the prevention of violence against women.

GENVIC performs a number of key functions that:

- support Victoria's gender equity industry with training and professional development
- ensure women's voices are integral to policy, legislation and services
- deliver evidence-informed gender equity, women's health and primary prevention projects and activities;
- facilitate collaboration and partnerships between Victorian women.
- Celebrate gender equity in Victoria

For any further enquiries please contact GENVIC Manager: Jacinta Masters
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What is gender equity?

- Gender equity is a journey and a destination.
- Gender equity is fairness and justice for all people in family, community, workplaces, the economy and public policy.
- Gender equity is people reaching their full potential regardless of sex or gender.
- Gender equity is people of diverse and different needs thriving without barriers.
- Gender equity is a future where opportunity is genuinely equally available to all.

For all women

- We're focused on achieving gender equity for anyone who identifies as a woman or experiences discrimination, harassment and oppressions that come from sex and gender stereotyping.

For expert gender equity, women's health and primary prevention practitioners and advocates

- Our membership includes organisations and individuals with expertise in the primary prevention of violence against women (PVAW) including:
    - 9 Regional Women's Health Services and 3 Statewides who:
        - Coordinate **9 Regional PVAW Partnerships with 500 organisations** across the State of Victoria
        - Educate through **Action to Prevent Violence Against Women Resource**
        - Deliver **cutting edge prevention programs**
        - Facilitate **Victim-Survivor voices** in prevention

- Provide **Gender Equity Training** & support to organisations and individuals
- Women's Information Referral Exchange
  - A Statewide advice line providing support to Victorian Women, including **financial literacy for family violence survivors**
- Women's Legal Service Victoria
  - In addition to providing family violence legal services, undertakes primary prevention activity in the form of changing gendered cultures within the Victorian legal system through its ***Starts With Us Project***, the only whole-of-sector primary prevention approach in the legal and justice setting.
- The Women's – Royal Women's Hospital
  - In addition to treating victim-survivors of family violence, The Women's also undertakes primary prevention projects such as **Beneath the surface,** a digital storytelling project of health professionals own experience of family violence, **I-DECIDE** an online healthy relationship tool and safety decision aid; **Better Man Pilot** of an online early intervention tool for engaging men who use violence to seek help.

Our members

Regional Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW) Partnerships – representing 500 organisations

- Together for Equality & Respect (Eastern Metropolitan Region)
- Preventing Violence Together (Western Metropolitan Region)
- Building a Respectful Community Partnership (Northern Metropolitan Region)
- Preventing Violence Together (Southern Metropolitan Region)
- Gippsland Free from Violence Coalition (Gippsland Region)
- Communities of Respect & Equality (CoRE) (Grampians Region)
- Respect and Equality for All (Goulburn Ovens Murray Region)
- Loddon Mallee Takes a Stand (Loddon Mallee Region)
- Respect 2040 (SouthWest)

Other endorsing organisations

Victorian Primary Care Partnerships

Executive Summary

Gender Equity Victoria is focussed on assisting the State of Victoria to create the necessary preconditions to prevent violence against women in Victoria by addressing the key drivers of violence which include gendered attitudes and behaviours which limit women achieving their full potential and seed a culture of gendered hate, violence and misogyny as well as structures, systems and institutions that create and maintain unequal distribution of power and resources between men and women.

Preventing violence against women is both an aim of Gender Equity Victoria, but it is also a metric by which we measure the success of whole of community initiatives to address gender inequity. Which is why we are concerned that despite record levels of investment and a raised profile about gendered violence following the Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015, all forms of gendered violence have continued to increase in Victoria.

Family Violence

Family Violence offences were up **5.0% to 100,480 offences** in 19/20 and family related incidents increased by 5.8%. These are the highest numbers on record according to Fiona Dowsley, Crime Statistic Agency Chief Statistician.

Sexual Offences

Sexual offences are up **11,568 at the start of the RCFV** to **13,796**i. **That's an increase of 19.2%** These statistics align to high profile rape and murders of young women in Victoria over the last four years.

Sexual Harassment

1177 sexual harassment incidents were investigated by the Victorian Equal Opportunity Commission since the Royal Commission into Family Violence. **25% of all women in Australia will experience sexual harassment at work.**

Gendered violence, of which family violence is one subset, continues to be a significant threat to the health, safety and economic equality of women in Victoria.

For these reasons, GENVIC welcomes the opportunity to make a contribution to the Royal Commission into Family Violence Implementation Monitor's ***Monitoring the Family Violence Reforms Review,*** the fourth and final report due to be tabled in Parliament in 2021 as legislated in the *Family Violence Reform Implementation Monitor Act 2016.*

In this submission GENVIC's observations are focussed predominantly on the implementation of primary prevention recommendations, including strategies aimed at addressing the underlying gendered drivers of violence in the home. In relation to other recommendations relating to crisis response (or secondary and tertiary prevention), we defer to the expertise of Domestic Violence Victoria and other specialist family violence crisis services.

Principles in the Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW)

Underpinning this submission are the following principles for the prevention of violence against women shared by our membership and deeply aligned to the RCFV findings:

- **Primary prevention of gendered violence should be delivered by specialist services, including women's services with expertise in the Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW).**

  The Royal Commission into Family Violence has delivered important policy focus and investment in family violence service provision across the State of Victoria, enabling the rapid growth of family violence response expertise within organisations across the State – a project of change that is ongoing.

  While we support the growth of family violence expertise, particularly into understanding its impact on new cohorts, such as young people, aging people, people from intersectional backgrounds, reform was not meant to lead to women's services receiving less funding for family violence reform. Rather than movement away from women's specialist expertise, it was intended instead to build greater capacity in those organisations.

  There is a real risk of decades long PVAW expertise and grassroots organising against gendered violence being lost in the implementation of prevention recommendations.

- **Family violence reform is an intergenerational project requiring sustained and certain investment.**

  Ending gendered violence requires implementation across many years of Government.

  The Royal Commission was meant to put an end to uncertain, ad-hoc, project-project funding for specialist family violence service provision so that there was longevity and sustainability needed to make successful, lasting change.

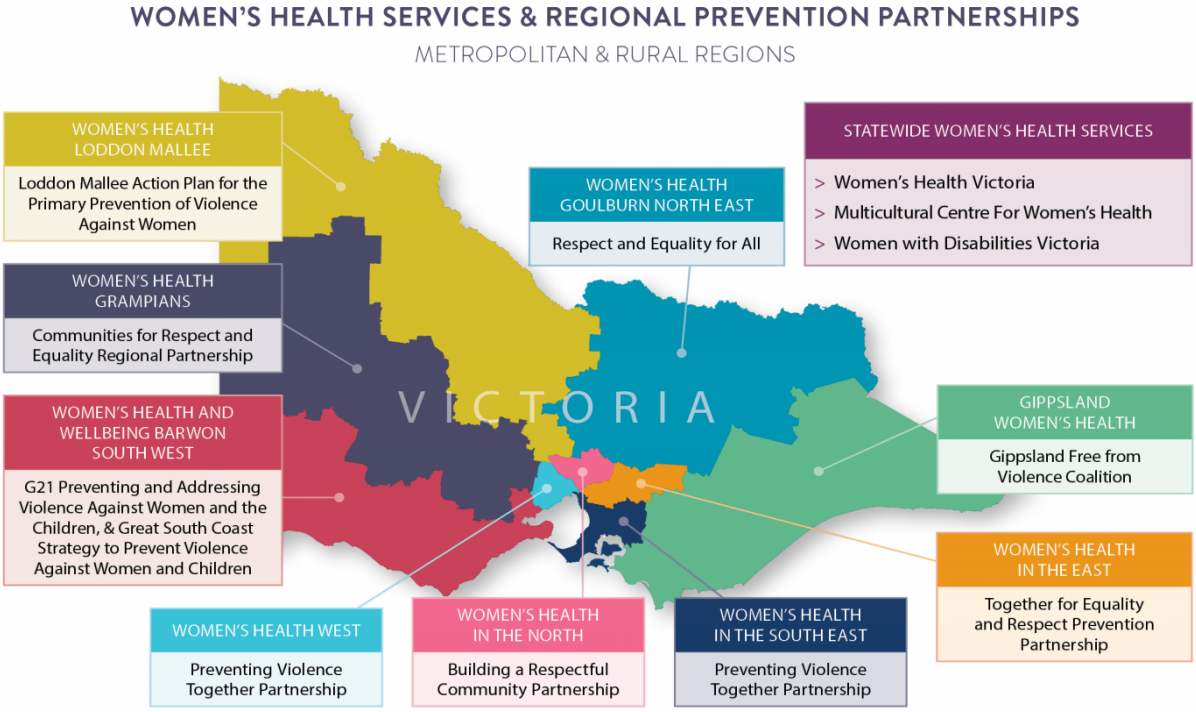
  Project funding under Free from Violence, while welcome, has not provided sustained or certain investment for experts in primary prevention or gender equity. Further, while we deeply support the establishment of Respect Victoria and its population wide, behavioural change mandate, the provision of funding for the organisation and population wide prevention initiatives remains well below recommended best practice. This is putting pressure on both the statutory authority and experts in the field.

- **Family violence reform, particularly in prevention, is a community wide endeavour requiring leadership from the public, private and community sector.**

  Preventing gendered violence is best achieved through Collective Impact – building a shared vision for change, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and measuring results together.

  Giving life to VicHealth's Generating Equality & Respect pilot initiative and OurWatch's Change the Story, PVAW Prevention Partnerships in metropolitan, rural and remote areas of Victoria provide a 500 organisation strong community of private, public and community actors achieving Collective Impact in family violence prevention. Each Partnership is unique, with priorities determined by their unique geography and demography.

  What works for the prevention of gendered violence in an inner urban settings is entirely different within a rural and regional location. Primary prevention activities must be place based and localised.



  Thanks to the *Backbone Support* provided by women's health services in each region, the PVAW Partnerships have been long-lasting and successful alliances, delivering change at organisational and local level, enabling commitment to the RCFV Implementation agenda. They have also delivered a number of innovative localised primary prevention projects, worthy of state-wide scale-up.

  So far, the implementation of Recommendation 188 has not fully recognised or aligned with the existing work of the PVAW Regional Partnerships. This is despite their grounding in Change the Story and repeated independent evaluation of the partnerships and a perception that they are an example of world leading, family violence prevention infrastructure.

- **Victim-survivors in prevention must be essential to prevention.**

The political impetus to convene Australia's first Royal Commission into Family Violence is owed, in large part, to the bravery of victim-survivors, particularly Rosie Batty, mother to the late Luke Batty, a child victim of family violence.

Victim-survivor voices have been essential to shifting attitudes towards family violence, making large scale government reform possible. Their voices must inform change, but also provide the human face of the impact of gendered violence as we journey towards attitudinal and behavioural change. Projects designed to enable victim-survivors to be healthy, safe, thoughtful, engaged and effective advocates in primary prevention are essential to primary prevention activities.

Our Methodology

This submission has been prepared through a series of discussion forums facilitated with our membership, as well as research and analysis conducted by GENVIC's paid and volunteer policy team.

Recommendations

1. Invest in sustainable, long-term funding for the existing infrastructure of Respect Victoria, Regional PVAW Partnerships, women's health services and other primary prevention expertise in Victoria.

2. Formalise Regional PVAW Partnerships into the new prevention infrastructure; enabling the adaptation of state-wide education and behavioural change in place-based settings.

3. End the uncertainty of short-term funding cycles and transition to stable, certain sustainable funding. A number of promising prevention projects (such as Women's Legal Service Starts with Us project) have received one-year Free From Violence funding – with ad hoc renewal – making long term planning for prevention difficult, if not impossible, due to uncertainty. The RCFV Recommendations criticised funding uncertainty for specialist family violence prevention and response services.

4. Ensure state-wide consistency in approving primary prevention projects that are evidence-based, and supporting the scalability of those already successfully in existence and evaluated.

5. Clarify the state-wide support structure for Regional Prevention Partnerships within Government (ie. do these partnerships report into the Office of Women, the Department of Health and Human Services or Respect Victoria?)

6. Provide further funding to the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy to ensure its integration into family violence primary prevention

7. Enhance the clarity of governance structures and scope of operations for Respect Victoria, Office of Women and Family Safety Victoria and ensure better integration of these organisations with women's health services, Regional PVAW Partnerships and other primary prevention experts

8. Improve communication and coordination of research to avoid duplication and to further build the evidence base for primary prevention practice

9. Provide evaluation into the Critical Friends model as part of the Respectful Relationships program to assess potential for state-wide scale up of a joint program between Women's Health Services and the Department of Education and Training.

10. Embed gender equity and primary prevention of violence workforce training in Victorian skills policy and programming

11. Work with local PVAW Partnerships and women's health services to develop local solutions for workforce capacity building within regional TAFES and other education providers.

12. Invest in specialist, expert gender equity organisations to implement the Workplace Equality and Respect standards and align to the Gender Equality Act

13. Lift primary prevention family violence investment to optimal spend of 9-12% of total response expenditure.

14. Victorian Government continue to advocate for increased support from the Commonwealth Government for the implementation of the RCFV reforms.

15. Ensure that there is gender-based planning and inclusion of women in disaster prevention, response and recovery. This should include a plan to ensure a back-up workforce can sustain prevention activity during a major crisis.

16. Implement the Gender Equity & Covid19 Joint Statement, in particular the recommendation for a scale up of Gender and Disaster Pod via a statewide Gender & Disaster workforce.

17. Ensure a gender equal recovery from COVID19 in Victoria.

18. That the Independent Monitor for the implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence statutory role be extended for a further 4-8 years.

How has the family violence service system changed since the Royal Commission?

What's changed for the better

The Royal Commission into Family Violence has had a significant and positive effect on community understanding of family violence and in recalibrating the service sector to better address the complex needs of victim-survivors and perpetrators. It has ensured that crisis response to family violence, via specialist family violence services, child protection, Victoria Police and the Victorian legal system, are resourced and trained to address the high volume of family violence incidents and offences. It has resulted in a strengthening of laws and cultural change within mainstream government services.

It has also resulted in the creation of focussed centres of family violence strategy, policy and action within Government, via Family Safety Victoria, Respect Victoria and the Centre for Workforce Excellence in Family Violence. This is building increased capacity across Government.

Overarching policy and legislative settings have been strong and evidence-based, involving extensive co-design. In the Prevention space particularly, the development of *Free from Violence, Victoria's primary prevention strategy for family violence* and *Safe and Strong: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy* involved extensive community consultation and sector co-design with GENVIC members engaged throughout development.

Our members are particularly pleased with the drafting of the *Gender Equality Act (GE Act)* which resulted in the passage of a strong legislative framework that includes gender audits, targets and reporting obligations for public sector organisations. There is a great deal of hope and enthusiasm for the commencement of the *GE Act* in March 2021, though some concerns about whether it will be adequately funded.

Another impressive aspect of family violence reform has been its deeply intersectional approach. There is a strong sense that family violence service delivery and design is not a one size fits all response, with diverse cohorts of people – aboriginal, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, people with disabilities, people from rural and regional locations and LGBTIQ people receiving focused support and nuanced policy responses. In particular there has been a greater focus on elder abuse. The only significant gap, still, is in the provision of family violence services and responses to young people.

Finally, it is clear that the response system has been strengthened through increased investment of an impressive $2.7 billion + in the reform – the highest level of funding across the country.

What changes need further work

Prevention investment, coordination and recognition of expertise

The vast majority of this targeted funding has been directed to crisis response. Higher levels of investment and recognition of specialist expertise have not been matched by equivalent investment in the family violence prevention sector. To date investment sits at 3% of response expenditure.

While we deeply support the establishment of Respect Victoria and its population wide, behavioural change mandate, the provision of funding for prevention is still well below recommended best practice of 9-12% of response expenditure. Further, project funding under Free from Violence, while welcome, has not provided sustained or certain investment for experts in primary prevention or gender equity.

Instead, despite the recommendations of RCFV, funding for prevention remains small, ad hoc and uncertain. The modest amounts of money available have been for short term projects, with a lack of clarity about evaluation methodology or funding to scale up successful activities into sustainable long term work to drive down rates of violence.

A number of promising prevention projects (such as Women's Legal Service Starts with Us project) have received one-year Free From Violence funding – with ad hoc renewal – making long term planning for prevention difficult, if not impossible, due to uncertainty. The RCFV Recommendations criticised funding uncertainty for specialist family violence prevention and response services.

This lack of resourcing has had an impact on the ability for all parts of the prevention sector to coordinate and deliver on prevention initiatives. It has also had an impact in the quality of initiatives being funded, with some supported projects having a tenuous connection to primary prevention, while others with deep alignment to OurWatch's Change the Story framework, missing out.

The high degree of sector engagement in the prevention policy development phase, has not been matched during implementation, resulting in a concerning gap in expectations between expert primary prevention practitioners and outcomes. The Ministerial Taskforce for Primary Prevention has not met for some time, and there is little opportunity for prevention practitioners to feed into government about the success or otherwise of reforms, although Respect Victoria's working group established to respond to the COVID19 pandemic has promise.

The RCFV made four recommendations in relation to Prevention.

Our members have reflected deeply on the success of these initiatives and provide observations in relation to each of them.

RCFV Recommendation 187

The Victorian Government ensure that the Commission's recommended Statewide Family Violence Action Plan includes a primary prevention strategy [within 12 months] that should:

- be implemented through a series of three-year action cycles
- refer to actions to be taken and be accompanied by performance measures
- guide and be guided by the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy
- be supported by dedicated funding for family violence primary prevention.

Free from Violence, Victoria's primary prevention strategy for family violence, was developed with deep and effective co-design with community in the early stages of implementation. It is well regarded by the gender equity sector because of its clear focus on the gendered drivers of family violence, its intersectionality and thorough outcomes framework. Many GENVIC members were engaged in the Ministerial Taskforce on Primary Prevention and have shared ownership over its implementation with Government.

In evaluating the successful Implementation of 187, however, our members identified a number of challenges that are frustrating successful implementation of this recommendation:

The process for implementing and consulting on the three-year action cycles is unclear

> *"Co-design was done well but has not been followed through"*
>
> *"The Recommendations were strongly implemented at the start of the RCFV, however there is less transparency/ accountability for implementation because the Taskforce rarely meets. The Family Violence Steering Committee still meets, but the Ministerial Taskforce on Primary Prevention has not met for some time."*
>
> *"There is little transparency on the implementation of Free from Violence Action Plan overall"*
>
> *"There's a lack of clarity about the role that Respect Victoria has in regard to the implementation of the plan. Respect Victoria is not working closely enough with Women's health services."*

Actions and investment are not aligned to performance measures

> *"Evaluation approaches have been inconsistent. There has been little understanding of how activity at a local level that adheres to a Theory of Change ie Change The Story makes a contribution to macro level indicators."*
>
> *"Evaluation has been delayed and not well thought through. It is unclear whether the macro evaluation framework is showing any results"*

The Victorian Gender Equality Strategy is insufficiently funded and poorly integrated into family violence primary prevention

> *"Although the Gender Equality Strategy was part of this recommendation, it has received almost no funding".*

The primary prevention strategy is insufficiently funded and PVAW work is still adhoc

> *"Funding for prevention is still hovering at same rate compared with response as before the RC - approx. 3% as opposed to the 10-12% recommended drawing on effective prevention approaches in other settings"*

> *"Overall PVAW work is still largely project funded, and the need for infrastructure such as the Regional PVAW Partnerships needs a long term commitment"*

Secure, ongoing funded is still needed to build a sustainable prevention infrastructure

> *"100K per annum is not sufficient for WHSs to implement FFV. Prevention Partnerships have grown post royal commission however receive the same level of funding"*

> *"The scatter gun approach to funding projects makes it difficult to have a complete picture of what was funded, by which department and how it was evaluated"*

CASE STUDY: Regional PVAW Partnerships – established and best practice programs in limbo

A critical point of difficulty in the management of effective, statewide coordination of prevention initiatives has been the poor engagement of and integration with 9 successful PVAW Regional Partnerships across the State of Victoria. The PVAW Regional Partnerships have been in existence for over a decade, building into a statewide alliance of 500 organisations. The Regional PVAW Partnerships are led by Women's Health Services and have their own distinct name (See diagram below)

Giving life to VicHealth's *Generating Equality & Respect pilot initiative* and OurWatch's *Change the Story*, the PVAW Prevention Partnerships cover metropolitan, rural and remote areas of the state and are a success story in the Victorian family violence prevention infrastructure. They represent best practice in *Collective Impact* – building a shared vision for change, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and measuring results together. *Collective Impact* has been made possible because of the *Backbone Support* provided by women's health services in each region. They have been long-lasting and successful because they are:

- **Genuinely Local**. Strategic plans for each prevention partnership are aligned to the unique features and needs of the metropolitan/regional location & community they're situated in. Being local means taking into account and being responsive to geography, demography, local violence against women statistics and local organisational capacity.
- **Diverse.** Partnerships include Local Governments, Health Services (including Indigenous health services), Primary care partnerships, Primary health networks, Community and Migrant information centres, family violence services, seniors' groups, youth groups, Neighbourhood houses, CASA's Victoria Police and local energy and water providers. Regional representatives within DHHS and DET are also in some partnerships, too.

- **Active.** Local/Regional Prevention Partnerships are strong, deep and active partnerships, which supported PVAW advocacy before, during and subsequent to the findings of the RCFV. Local/Regional Partnerships have delivered unique and promising prevention initiatives (See addendum A for a full list of prevention projects emanating from the Partnerships) Many of these projects are now ready for state-wide scale-ability and it is only funding which is preventing these initiatives from being replicated in other parts of Victoria.
- **Adaptable.** Local/Regional Prevention Partnerships have learned to adapt to the changes in government policy and investment. When government commitment to PVAW is modest, many partners find ways to continue to deliver local solutions, adapting to deliver on shared goals and aims. As funding has increased for the work, partners have found ways to work around government decisions to divest funding away from these collaborations to still deliver what's best in the interest of the partnership and local people.
- **Expert.** Local/Regional Prevention Partnerships honour and centre gender equity at the heart of violence prevention responses in accordance with best practice. This includes the respectful recognition of the expertise and knowledge of gender equity organisations within its catchment. All PVAW partnerships have been independently evaluated many times with feedback provided to government and little further engagement.
- **Collegiate – gender equity and violence prevention in practice.** Preventing violence against women requires challenging traditional power structures. Local/Regional Prevention Partnerships rely on a non-hierarchical partnership of entities engaged in servant leadership, facilitated by Women's Health Services, building shared vision, trust and interdependency. While all partners are equal in the Local/Regional Prevention Partnerships, the partners acknowledge the coordination, leadership *and emotional labour* of women's health services and their role fulfilling *VicHealth's Six Steps to Sustaining Prevention Partnerships*:
    - Identifying and engaging stakeholders
    - Consultation & information sharing
    - Establishing and launching networks
    - Promoting and recruiting to the network
    - Building workforce capacity (including training and development of new workers within existing partner organisations)
    - Evaluating and sustaining

Despite the success of the Local/Regional PVAW Partnerships, funding has been insecure, with women's health services having to dip into their own reserves in order to support collective agency. The partnerships were disappointed that funding opportunities to coordinate local prevention awareness campaigns during #16DaysofActivism were diverted away from the existing structures and given to consortia without grassroots coordination capability.

The lack of clarity about the existence of these partnerships and the role they currently play in supporting the delivery of Free from Violence, is undermining the effectiveness of over a decade of work. Faced with both the dual disaster of the Summer Bushfires and COVID19 the operation of these partnerships are more important than ever in the prevention of violence.

While there has obviously been a need to strengthen the state-wide policy framework and state-wide approaches, through the establishment of Free from Violence and Respect Victoria respectively, the partners do not accept that there is a need to "reinvent the wheel" at the local level and undo many years of hard work, relationship building and expertise grounded in best practice.

The modest amount of Free from Violence funding was designed to enable *"1000 flowers to bloom"* to advance potential violence prevention initiatives however Regional PVAW Partnerships were not a fresh bloom, but a stable and reliable bouquet of relationships that simply need to be watered, nurtured and displayed in the best possible way.

The partnerships have recently been granted a further 2 years of funding, but have been informed that their role is uncertain after those two years. The PVAW Partners continue to call for:

- Formalisation of Regional PVAW Partnerships into the new prevention infrastructure; enabling the adaptation of state-wide education and behavioural change in place-based settings.
- An end to the uncertainty of short-term funding cycles and transition to stable, certain sustainable funding
- Clarification of the state-wide support structure for Regional Prevention Partnerships within Government (ie. do these partnerships report into the Office of Women, the Department of Health and Human Services or Respect Victoria?)

The Regional PVAW Partnerships are keen to work alongside Respect Victoria in its behavioural change campaign agenda and to provide localised delivery of state-wide objectives.

To further support the Government and Respect Victoria's reach and influence, we are pleased to support the newly formed partnership between Gender Equity Victoria, the peak entity representing women's health services and the Victorian Local Governance Association, which supports councils in good governance and has been a long-term leader in promoting gender equity within Local Governments. This collaboration between GENVIC and VLGA is aimed at assisting the Government and Respect Victoria in bringing together all of the regional prevention partnership plans into a cohesive whole under the Free from Violence Framework.

Recommendations for further implementation

1. Invest in sustainable, long-term funding for the existing infrastructure of Respect Victoria, Regional PVAW Partnerships, women's health services and other primary prevention expertise in Victoria.
2. Formalise Regional PVAW Partnerships into the new prevention infrastructure; enabling the adaptation of state-wide education and behavioural change in place-based settings.
3. End the uncertainty of short-term funding cycles and transition to stable, certain sustainable funding. A number of promising prevention projects (such as Women's Legal Service Starts with Us project) have received one-year Free From Violence funding – with ad hoc renewal – making long term planning for prevention difficult, if not impossible, due to uncertainty. The RCFV Recommendations criticised funding uncertainty for specialist family violence prevention and response services.
4. Ensure state-wide consistency in approving primary prevention projects that are evidence-based, and supporting the scalability of those already successfully in existence and evaluated.
5. Clarify the state-wide support structure for Regional Prevention Partnerships within Government (ie. do these partnerships report into the Office of Women, the Department of Health and Human Services or Respect Victoria?)
6. Provide further funding to the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Strategy to ensure its integration into family violence primary prevention

RCFV Recommendation 188

The Victorian Government resource an initiative (either inside or outside government)[within 18 months] to:

- oversee prevention of family violence activities in Victoria provide policy and technical advice to policy makers—including government—on primary prevention
- provide to organisations technical advice and expertise on building primary prevention in their organisations and within communities
- coordinate research that builds evidence around the primary prevention of all forms of family violence
- ensure that accredited workforce development training in primary prevention is available through registered training organisations.

This Victorian initiative should be undertaken in close collaboration with Our Watch, ANROWS (Australia's National Organisation for Women's Safety) and other relevant bodies

The creation of Respect Victoria is a welcome development in primary prevention, providing the opportunity for whole of population behaviour change communication. Campaigns such as *Respect Women: Call it Out* have been important to building community wide commitment to preventing family violence across the State of Victoria. Respect Victoria has also overseen a successful process in ensuring prevention messaging covers other forms of family violence – such as elder abuse and violence within LGBTIQ relationships. Respect Victoria also communicates directly to perpetrators or those at risk of perpetration and bystanders with great effect.

However, it remains unclear what role Respect Victoria has in driving the coordination of the entire initiative outlined in Recommendation 188. Instead it appears that there is a confusing matrix of responsibilities for oversight, technical advice, research and accredited workforce training that extends across Respect Victoria, Family Safety Victoria and the Office of Women within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. The confusion about the setting of strategic direction and oversight is of concern to GENVIC members who make the following observations:

There's still a lack of oversight and coordination of all primary prevention activities

> *"Government still has not produced a clear picture on what the prevention infrastructure is 5 years down the track. Therefore everything that is actually working is difficult to scale up."*

> *"Although there was clearly a call for a consistent and systematic approach to scale up PVAW initiatives, building on existing infrastructure e.g. Regional PVAW Partnership action plans, the first couple of years of PVAW initiatives continued an ad hoc approach to funding - as the department itself has since described it, they took a 'one thousand flowers bloom' approach (or more specifically 130 separate PVAW projects, I believe). This has been very inefficient including duplication of existing resources, a lack of statewide consistency and a failure to scale up existing infrastructure/programs. Some projects have not had the requisite PVAW or Gender Equity expertise embedded, meaning that organisations often approached us (a women's health service), who did have expertise, to partner on projects. We received minimal or no funding for helping on those projects."*

"There seems to be a lack of connection between Respect Victoria, the Office of Women and Family Safety Victoria at times."

"Respect Victoria has a clear mandate to work on strategic statewide prevention communications, but there is a lack the connection to local level and place based prevention activity. Their research agenda is not transparent and has not aligned with local activity. Existing prevention infrastructure and the role of women's health services has been ignored - often using the excuse that regional governance mechanisms are inconsistent - I would say the structures the women's health services lead reflect regional service systems, demographic need and are responsive to partner needs"

"There is a confusing governance split between Respect Victoria, Family Safety Victoria & the Office of Women with no clear communication or line of sight between them and the Gender Equity strategy in particular. There is a need for better integration."

"We were sorry that none of the existing prevention partnerships or any of the existing projects within WHS have been integrated into the statewide prevention approaches. We're seeing the defunding of projects regardless of their successful evaluation, now"
"Many project ideas that were initially developed and implemented by women's health services have been adopted by other organisations without proper recognition e.g. Until Victoria against Violence the government had not focused on the 16 Days against Gender Based Violence campaign. Women's health services engaged regional partners, developed activities and campaign materials and provided leadership - this is completely unrecognised"

"The establishment of these agencies has been welcome, however, for many of our members, they remain very much a creature of government and somewhat disconnected from the activity happening across the gender equity sector."

Opportunities for organisations to share technical advice could be improved.

"There is a lack of opportunity for vertical communication from government down and for grassroots work to feed back up. Respect Victoria and the Office of Women haven't established any clear communication processes with the sector yet"

"Evidence based primary prevention projects are being defunded without explanation - ie Speaking Out Program. This is completely at odds with the Royal Commission recommendations which call for victim/survivor voices should be amplified."

"I would say that dedicated funding to support survivor/victims voices has not been invested in. Programs like Speaking Out are critical to support victim survivors to train them and to support them with their speaking engagements and to provide follow up and reflection."

The current research agenda for primary prevention is unclear

"Not transparent what the research is, when and where it's happening to avoid double up"

More support is needed to build on opportunities to develop accredited workforce development

"Workforce development strategy is still being – we're still 12 months away."

"Accreditation is still non-existent"

"Practicalities of what is effective workforce design not thought of until now"

Recommendations for further implementation

7. *Enhance the clarity of governance structures and scope of operations for Respect Victoria, Office of Women and Family Safety Victoria and ensure better integration of these organisations with women's health services, Regional PVAW Partnerships and other primary prevention experts*

8. *Improve communication and coordination of research to avoid duplication and to further build the evidence base for primary prevention practice*

RCFV Recommendation 189

> The Victorian Government mandate the introduction of respectful relationships education into every government school in Victoria from prep to year 12. Implementation should be staged to ensure school readiness and to allow for ongoing evaluation and adaptation. It should be delivered through a whole-of-school approach and be consistent with best practice, building on the evaluation of the model being tested by the Department of Education and Training through Our Watch [within five years].

Respectful Relationships Education In Schools (RREIS) has been a focus of GENVIC members advocacy and interest for many years. It was very pleasing to see the Victorian Government move swiftly towards the implementation of RREIS within government schools and the adoption of whole of school approaches.

GENVIC members are often called on by schools to provide support for respectful relationships "incursions", providing workshops, training and other curriculum support activities on both the importance of respectful relationships and gender equity. Often, requests for support from schools are made without any funding being allocated to members. Pro bono work is approved because our members have seen the importance of embedding gender equity and primary prevention expertise in schools but this model is not sustainable over the long term.

NGO's being called on to support government schools whole of school approaches for RREIS need funding and recognition.

> *"Respectful Relationships is a strong component of the whole of government response to FV and a strong model of primary prevention. However it needs more resourcing."*
>
> *" Training to support Department of Education and Training respectful relationship activities is underfunded and many women's health services and other organisations provide this 'for free' as part of working with their regional DET and regional PVAW partnerships. There is also a lot of secondary consultation and support provided by Regional PVAW Partnerships to local RREIS and other school staff. "*
>
> *"Although our organisations were not funded to support the program, we have either done this directly with schools or by working with regional DET offices [through a critical friends model] or by supporting their partner organisations who support schools to implement the program."*

Case study - Critical friends for Respectful Relationships Education in Schools

Schools play a significant role and targeted funding is needed to develop a collaborative approach and relationship with local services. The Victorian Government mandated the introduction of Respectful Relationships education into every government school in Victoria from Foundation to Year 12. Implementation should be staged to ensure school readiness and to allow for ongoing evaluation and adaptation. It should be delivered through a whole-of-school approach and be consistent with best practice, building on the evaluation of the model being tested by the Department of Education and Training through Our Watch.

The Respectful Relationships initiative is a strong component of the Victorian Government's response to Family Violence and a strong model of primary prevention. However the program needs more resourcing. Women's Health East and many organisations in the Together for Equality and Respect (TFER) regional PVAW partnership, provide training, resources, secondary consultation and 'in-kind' support to schools involved in the Respectful Relationships program. Much of this work takes place in the context of strengthening partnerships for the PVAW and is mutually beneficial (i.e.; DET is a TFER partner and schools are part of our communities). The Respectful Relationships model is commendable with excellent staff working in the program (DET), however schools are extremely busy with many competing issues and needs. They need someone walking alongside them, as part of their school action team (who is not also teaching and managing student/family wellbeing issues), someone with another perspective, with specific PVAW/GE knowledge and expertise – the *Critical Friends for Respectful Relationships approach (TFER)* provides this. *Critical Friends for Respectful Relationships approach (TFER),* provides training to TFER partner organisations, who are then matched to a RR school as part of their action team. The Critical Friend supports the school as they develop and work through their action plan.

Critical Friends for Respectful Relationships has strengthened the relationship between DET and other TFER partners (eg; WHE, community health, Council youth services, etc) and schools in the Outer Eastern region of metropolitan Melbourne. There is anecdotal evidence that it has led to more robust action plans from Respectful Relationship schools that were part of the Critical Friends approach (ie; action plans from schools without a CF were not as strong as action plans from schools that had a CF on their RR action team). It also led to the development of other RR projects in the Outer Eastern Region (eg; Respectful Relationships Student Voice and Respectful Relationships Active Bystander approach).

There is potential for scale- up of the *Critical Friends for Respectful Relationships approach (TFER)* in other regions of Victoria. In 2019/2020, further collaboration was developed between Women's Health East and Women's Health In the South East (WHISE) as well as DET EMR and DET SMR. WHISE and DET SMR have attended training run by WHE and DET EMR and there have been many planning meetings to support the development of a *Critical Friends for Respectful Relationships approach (TFER)* in the Southern Metro region. *Critical Friends for Respectful Relationships approach (TFER)* will run again in the Outer East EMR in 2020, building on previous work. There is scope for an impact evaluation which could then be used to scale-up the *Critical Friends for Respectful Relationships approach (TFER)* in other regions, creating stronger outcomes for school communities.

Recommendations for further implementation

9. Provide evaluation into the Critical Friends model as part of the Respectful Relationships program to assess potential for state-wide scale up of a joint program between Women's Health Services and the Department of Education and Training.

Recommendation 207

The Victorian Government develop or commission the development of a 10-year industry plan for family violence prevention and response in Victoria, to be delivered by 31 December 2017, with commensurate funding for workforce transition and enhancement to begin from that date. The plan should cover:

- the workforce requirements of all government and non-government agencies and services that have or will have responsibility for preventing or responding to family violence—among them specialist family violence services, perpetrator interventions, police, legal and justice services, and universal and secondary service systems remuneration, capability and qualifications, workforce diversity, professional development needs, career development and workforce health.

The Centre for Workforce Excellence within Family Safety Victoria has prepared a detailed 10 Year Industry plan for family violence prevention and response within Victoria. Members of GENVIC have been engaged in developing, delivering training and development resources and critically evaluating the health, wellbeing and development of the sector.

A safe, well-trained and healthy primary prevention and gender equity sector is essential to achieving the intergenerational vision of the RCFV. GENVIC is concerned that the historical underfunding of the gendered violence sector, which resulted in primary, secondary and tertiary prevention specialists working in high stress, low paid jobs, comes to an end through strategic workforce planning that makes doing primary prevention and gender equity work attractive and sustainable.

There is optimism about the opportunities in the TAFE and skills sector to build greater alignment for primary prevention and gender equity with promising relationships underfoot. The GENVIC membership makes the following observations:

Quicken the pace towards strategic and system-wide approach to primary prevention workforce development & and fund it

> *"The implementation of workforce development has been delayed and complicated by highly centralised approach, when some of the opportunities for training should be implemented via regional model that partners the specialist gendered violence prevention/response sector with leading policy makers in skills development (TAFE and Higher Education)."*
>
> *"The primary prevention workforce strategy has been completely limited at a statewide level - but is occurring regardless at a regional level through PVAW Partnerships and women's health services and also through creation of accredited courses and non-accredited capacity building."*
>
> *"The implementation of prevention workforce development needs to be owned by the regional partnerships that form the best existing and strong network to develop capacity."*
>
> *"Women's health services are providing enormous amount of workforce capacity building and primary prevention skill development. This work far exceeds the dedicated Workforce Capacity Building funding that we receive."*

Clearer communication between Office for Women, Centre for Workforce Excellence and Department of Education and Training is essential

"Roles and responsibilities of different government agencies in prevention workforce development is not clear and there is poor communication between the Office for Women, Centre for Workforce Excellence and Department of Education and Training."

Recommendations for further implementation

10. *Embed gender equity and primary prevention of violence workforce training in Victorian skills policy and programming*

11. *Work with local PVAW Partnerships and women's health services to develop local solutions for workforce capacity building within regional TAFES and other education providers.*

Recommendation 192

On receipt of Our Watch's Workplace Equality and Respect Project final report, the Victorian Government should:

- begin implementing best-practice workplace programs in all public sector workplaces in order to:
  - enable them to build respectful and gender equitable cultures
  - ensure that they have suitable policies for family violence victims
  - provide adequate responses to and not allow for collusion with family violence perpetrators
  - build skills and support staff in taking bystander action
- support the maintenance of the project's proposed web-based portal or database of program models, tool kits, training resources and packages for application and use in all workplaces
- review and report on options for using existing regulatory frameworks and government procurement policies to support all Victorian employers in implementing best-practice family violence policies [within 12 months of receipt of the final report]."

OurWatch's Workplace Equality and Respect Project continues to provide a model for inspired change within workplace settings.

The Gender Equality Act, creates an opportunity for Workplace Equality and Respect to be deepened within public sector organisations across the State of Victoria.

GENVIC's members note that there will need to be significant resources devoted to scaling up the OurWatch pilot to meet the Gender Equality Act requirements. GENVIC members see a direct role for them in assisting OurWatch and the State Government in delivering on its vision across the public sector and make the following observations.

Recommendations for further implementation

12. Invest in specialist, expert gender equity organisations to implement the Workplace Equality and Respect standards and align to the *Gender Equality Act*

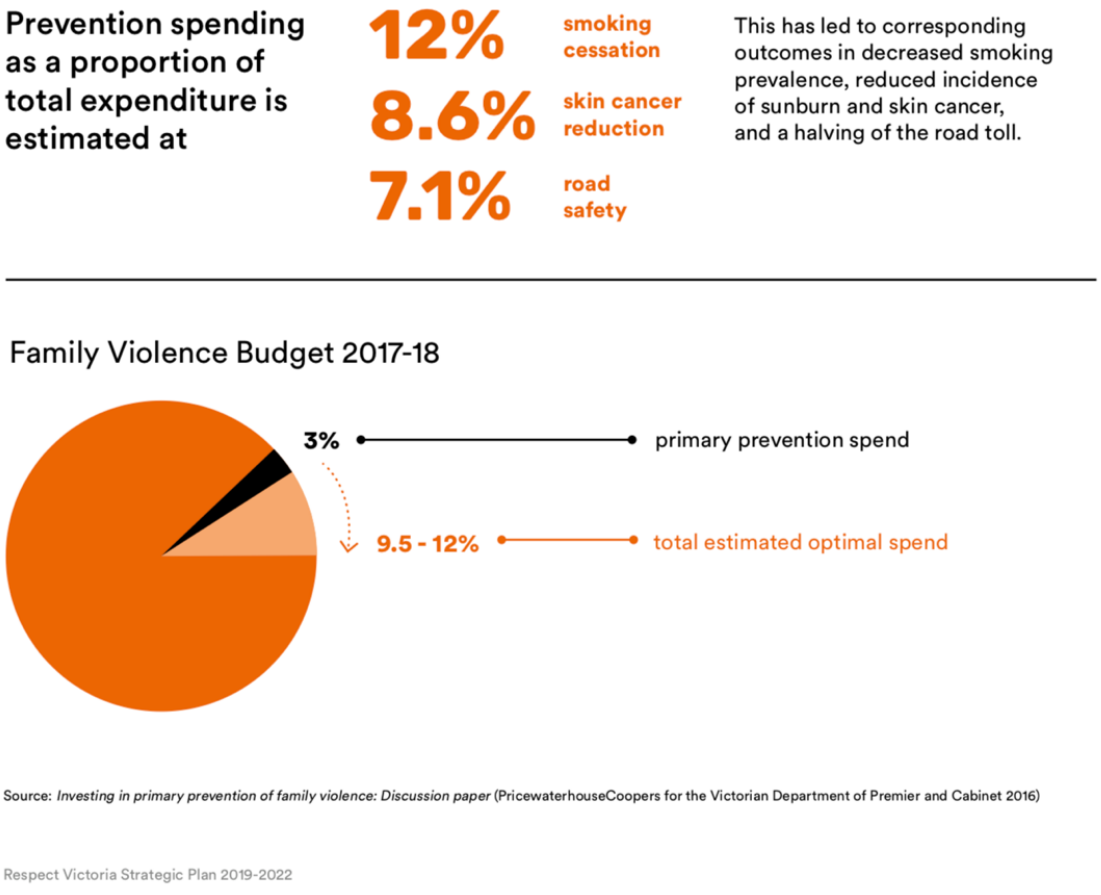
Looking forward – what is still required in the family violence reforms

The Victorian Government has maintained a strong focus on the implementation of the RCFV recommendations and delivering on its family violence reforms. This is changing the lives of men, women and children acoss the State. However, not all of the levers for change exist at a state level.

The Federal Government is also responsible for the prevention of gendered violence, with the capacity to increase funding to critical servces, shape Family Law in the best interests of victim-survivors and drive a national prevention agenda. From time to time the full implementation of Victoria's family violence reform is frustrated by Federalism. There is a need for the Federal Government to also learn from the RCFV findings and to lift the total investment in gendered violence prevention. We are hopeful that as the National Plan comes to an end that this is an opportunity to set a new bold agenda for gendered violence prevention.

The most critical aspect of gendered violence prevention is investment. Without sustained and certain investment, the experts in this work cannot thrive, proven strategies cannot be scaled up and incidents of violence cannot be avoided.

Until primary prevention spending reaches the optimal spending levels, real change in gendered violence will prove elusive.



Source: *Investing in primary prevention of family violence: Discussion paper* (PricewaterhouseCoopers for the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet 2016)

Respect Victoria Strategic Plan 2019-2022

Recommendations for further implementation

13. Lift primary prevention family violence investment to optimal spend of 9-12% of total response expenditure.

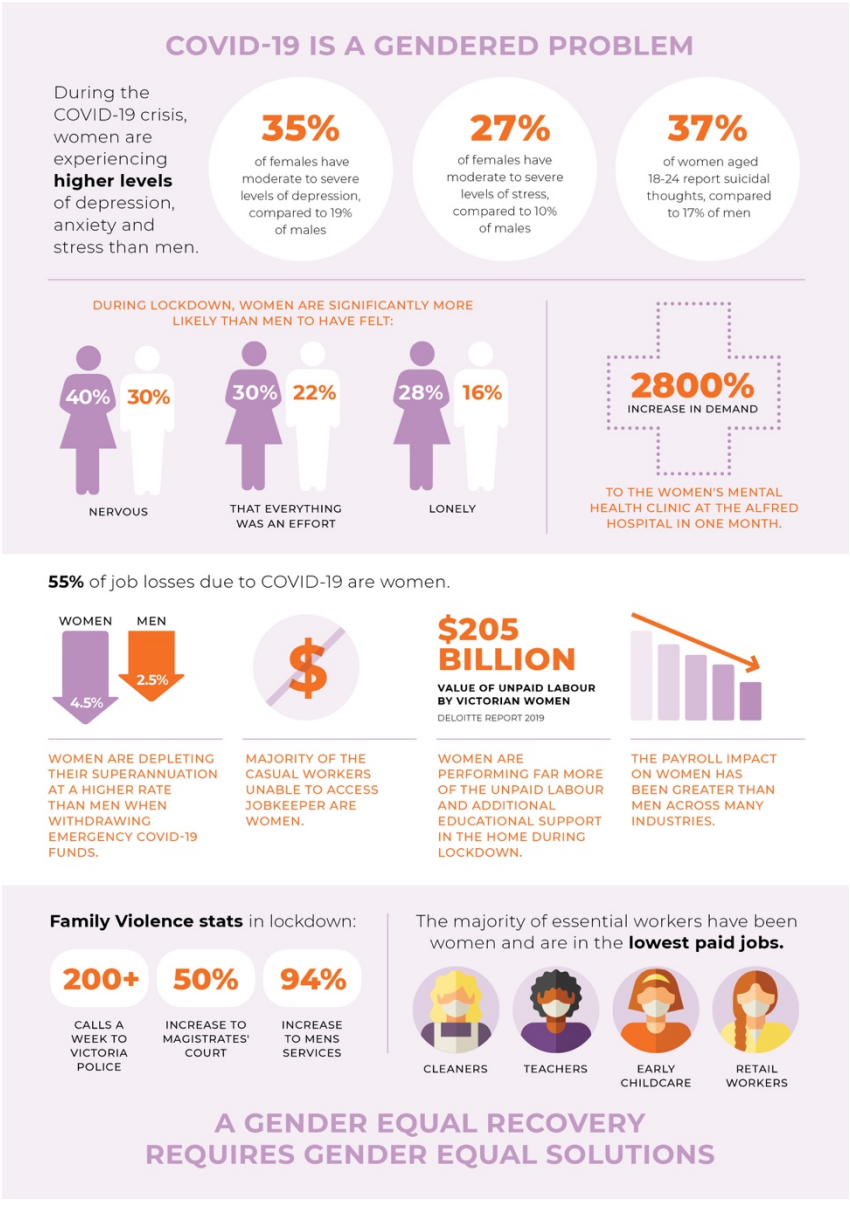
14. Victorian Government continue to advocate for increased support from the Commonwealth Government for the implementation of the RCFV reforms.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

GENVIC members have taken a leading role in drawing attention to the gendered nature of the COVID19 pandemic in Victoria. Building on expertise in Gender & Disaster, our members have highlighted how disasters elevate the risk of violence in the home and community.

But gendered violence is not the only consequence of COVID19. There are other physical and mental health implications for women, as well as economic impacts more detrimental to women than men. GENVIC has been exploring the implications of these challenges for women's health and wellbeing through a regular Gender, Disaster and Resilience e-bulletin.

In March, GENVIC developed a Gender Equity & COVID19 Joint Statement to focus attention on the gendered nature of the pandemic, suggesting 10 Things Government Could Do Now to limit its impact on women. The Statement has now been endorsed by 105 organisations across the State.



The following observations are made with reference to our members advocacy on gender and primary prevention of violence during the pandemic.

Redeployment of prevention resources to response

The impact of COVID19 on the delivery of primary prevention in Victoria has been significant.

Primary prevention staff within Government – both centrally and regionally – have been redeployed during the pandemic to undertake response work.

Women's Health in the South East undertook a stocktake of the impact of COVID19 on their partners locally, which can access here: https://whise.org.au/assets/docs/covid-19_an_assessment_of_partners_need_1.pdf

Connection between Gender & Disaster – lack of planning and investment

Prior to the official calling of a pandemic in Victoria, Gender Equity Victoria officially wrote to Government calling for immediate gender lens over pandemic. In particular, attention was drawn to the internationally and nationally award-winning research and prevention activities of the Gender & Disaster Pod, managed by Women's Health in the North and Women's Health Goulburn North East as examples of a scale-able gendered violence prevention initiative that would assist both the impact of the Summer Bushfires and COVID19.

Gender Equity Victoria has attempted to socialise the Gender and Disaster workforce funding across government without success, to limit the gendered impacts of disaster within socially isolated homes across Victoria. The program has been costed at $6 Million to date and would enable the placement of Gender & Disaster workers focussed on violence prevention within 9 regional communities, as well as specialist focus migrant and refugee communities.

Poor primary prevention focus on migrant and refugee communities.

Gender Equity Victoria and its member the Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, also wrote to government prior to pandemic drawing attention to the high risk migrant and refugee women faced from the pandemic – from disease and violence at home during restrictive lockdowns.

Government's responses have been slow to move to respond to the intersectional health needs of migrant and refugee women during the pandemic. Though some funding was provided to translate health data into multiple languages and distribute across digital and radio media, it is only since the Second Wave breakout in Public Housing that GENVIC members have been engaged in discussion about outreach with migrant and refugee women and their families.

MCWH is currently providing direct telephone engagement with migrant and refugee women in public housing hostpots, using its mulilingual educators and resources. In addition to COVID19 health information, family violence support is also offered in the contact.

Women's Health West have also provided support to migrant and refugee women in public housing towers, providing translated family violence resources during Stage 4 lockdown of the 9 Towers. They want to highlight the importance of centring the skills and knowledge of communities affected as local voices and community-led approaches are vital.

These approaches are focussed only in the Melbourne CBD. There is a need for a statewide primary prevention COVID19 outreach – based on existing regional infrastructure. GENVIC has also costed this work and provided advice to government that the project could be delivered for $700,000. This proposal

for a COVID19 multilingual primary prevention workforce would serve the dual purpose of providing primary health care and preventative violence education, while also creating 40 much needed jobs for migrant and refugee women, as multilingual educators and coordinators.

Gender Equity & COVID19 – risking modest gains & derailing investment and reform

One of the greatest impacts that COVID has had is to put the spotlight on gender and the drivers of violence against women and family violence.

Gender Equity Victoria's primary concern arising from the pandemic is the multitude of ways COVID19 is putting modest gains for women in jeopardy, as well as limiting opportunities presented by the Gender Equality Act to advance gender equity across the State.

Gender Equity Victoria has been keeping a very close watch on the impact of COVID19 on Victorian women. For many women COVID has increased their social isolation, access to finances and support and health services. And it is clear from all of our research and the emerging statistics that women are facing intensive negative impacts in a range of settings – at home, at work and in community.

At home, women are more likely to shoulder the burden of increased child care responsibilities and home schooling. Women's capacity to work and care for themselves is severely limited causing women have higher levels of poor mental health than men.

At work, Victorian women have a higher full time unemployment rate than men – 7.3% compared to 5.8% for men. More women are losing their jobs and finding it difficult to find employment. Tne return to Stage 3 lockdown will multiply this effect.

Further, most of the essential service workforce, sent to the front line of pandemic often without sufficient Personal Protective Equipment was women. For women workers in education, early childhood education, cleaning and retail, the lack of access to PPE.

Links to the Factsheets are contained here:

Gender Equity & COVID19

Preventing violence against women during COVID19

COVID19 and Economic Security for women

Sexual & Reproductive Health care during COVID19

Mental health the context of COVID19

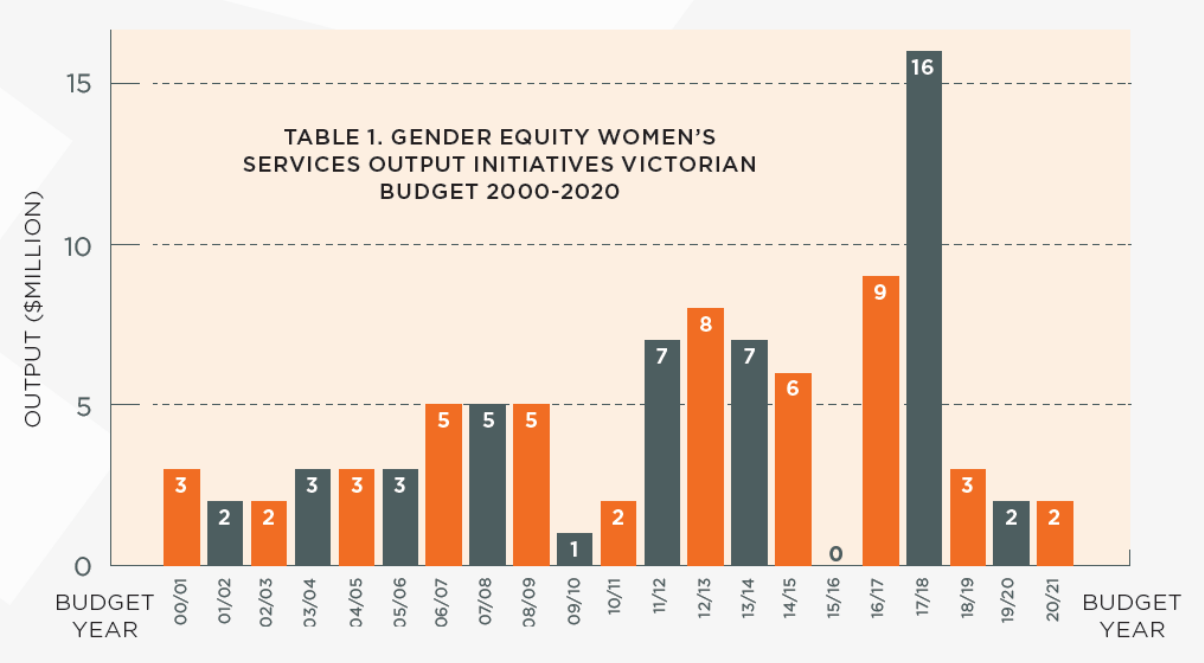
Getting gender equity investment back on track – a gender equal recovery from COVID19

COVID19 presents a unique opportunity for Victoria to snap forward into a more gender equal state through a gender equal recovery from pandemic.

The Government's leadership in creating a *Gender Equality Act* in Victoria provides an opportunity to address gender equity in the public sector, setting the groundwork for longer term change.

Australia's global gender gap has grown significantly over the past twenty years, with Australia subsequently moving from 15th to 44th on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index.

In Victoria we have tracked the Victorian government's investment in gender equality across the past decade, and investment has suffered from the absence of focused analysis and advocacy. With the exception of recent investments in family violence prevention, programs and services that empower women, seek to address women's economic insecurity, other forms of gendered violence and the unequal health consequences of inequality have been exceptionally modest (see below).



To correct historic underinvestment in gender equity, GENVIC calls on the Victorian government to increase its 20/21 Budget to $21.6M to Strengthen Gender Equity in the Community and to Boost Women's Health Services.

The following principles explain why it's important to get gender equity investment Back on Track:

1. To deliver economic returns and other benefits to the Victorian State Budget
2. To increase Victoria's gross domestic product
3. To meet international best practice in promoting gender equality and violence prevention
4. To invest in women across the life course approach and addressing intersectional inequity
5. To include both base operational and special projects funding for gender equity
6. To align to the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy
7. To promote transparency and accountability through gender responsive budgeting
8. To monitor investment annually against outcomes in an independent Victorian Gender Equity Report

Recommendations for further implementation

15. Ensure that there is gender-based planning and inclusion of women in disaster prevention, response and recovery. This should include a plan to ensure a back-up workforce can sustain prevention activity during a major crisis.

16. Implement the Gender Equity & Covid19 Joint Statement, in particular the recommendation for a scale up of Gender and Disaster Pod via a statewide Gender & Disaster workforce.

17. Ensure a gender equal recovery from COVID19 in Victoria.

Other Comments

Family violence reform is intergenerational reform which will not be delivered within one-two terms of government. The independent monitoring of family violence reforms has been critical to ensuring high level commitment to reform, focussed implementation and high performance. It will be needed for much longer than initially envisaged in legislation.

Recommendations for further implementation

18. That the Independent Monitor for the implementation of recommendations of the Royal Commission into Family Violence statutory role be extended for a further 4-8 years.