

ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY IN VICTORIA

A Gender Analysis of the 2024–25 State Budget

Insights and recommendations from the Victorian Women’s Health Services & Gender Equity Victoria on achieving gender equity through budgetary action.

MAY 2024



GENDER
EQUITY
VICTORIA



WOMEN'S
HEALTH
SERVICES
NETWORK

Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Women’s Health Services and Gender Equity Victoria acknowledge that we live, work and play on unceded lands of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders – the First People and First Nations of this country. We pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging; and acknowledge the care that our First Nations People have exercised over this country for thousands of years.

Always was, and always will be Aboriginal land.

About Us

Who is Gender Equity Victoria?

[Gender Equity Victoria](#) (GEN VIC) is an independent member organisation representing over 40 organisations and 80+ individuals across Victoria who are dedicated to achieving intersectional gender equality. GEN VIC evolved from the Women’s Health Association of Victoria (WHAV), which was formed in 1994 as a peak body for the women’s health sector and expanded in 2018 to provide support to a growing gender equity movement across industries, communities and sectors. Our vision is for a gender equal society where all people can thrive.

Who are the Victorian Women’s Health Services?

The [Victorian Women's Health Services Network](#) is a collective of 12 state government-funded women's health services, each a centre of excellence in gendered health promotion, primary prevention, and gender equity.

We work collaboratively for a fairer, safer, and healthier Victoria.

We lead and coordinate local and statewide health promotion activities that reach across every region of the state.

We use evidence-based research to support legislation, policy and programs that ensure women stay well, and if they do need to access healthcare services, that they receive the care that supports their return to health.

We are the only state or territory with this unique infrastructure and reach, supporting the health system to create the best possible health outcomes for women and gender-diverse people.



A Note on our Definition and Practice

Women

For the purposes of this report, the term "women" is used to recognise the diverse range of individuals who identify as women. This definition encompasses cisgender women, transgender women, and those who are nonbinary or gender diverse and align themselves with the female experience. It is important to acknowledge that women come from a wide range of ages, races, ethnicities, sexual orientations, abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, and cultural contexts, and that these factors intersect to shape each woman's unique experiences and challenges.

By adopting this definition of women, the report recognises the breadth of experiences and challenges faced by those who identify as women. This approach is crucial for understanding and addressing the complex issues that affect women's lives, and for creating a more equitable society that values and supports all women.

It should be noted that language and terminology surrounding gender identity are constantly evolving, and this report respects the right of individuals to self-identify. The use of this definition within the report is intended to promote a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse realities of women's lives and to ensure that the findings and recommendations presented are relevant to the widest possible range of women.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality emerged from critical race theory and feminist theory¹ aiming to address the limitations of traditional approaches that treated race and gender as mutually exclusive categories. It recognises that people's lives are shaped by their identities, relationships, and social factors. These combine to create intersecting forms of privilege or oppression, depending on a person's context and existing power structures, such as, patriarchy, ableism, colonialism, imperialism, homophobia, and racism.²

Intersectionality reminds us that gender is not experienced in the same way by everyone. For instance, our age, gender identity, life stage, ability, sexuality, indigeneity, race, ethnicity, class, religious beliefs, family, geographical location, and profession can all change our perceptions of gender as well as the way our gender is perceived and treated by law, policy, institutions, and others (see Figure 1). An intersectional approach helps us to focus on the intersecting and interlinking forms of discrimination and oppression.³

¹ Crenshaw, KW 2013. 'Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color', in *The public nature of private violence*, Routledge, pp. 93-118.

² Guidroz, K, & Berger, MT 2009. 'A conversation with founding scholars of intersectionality Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Michelle Fine', in MT Berger & K Guidroz (eds), *The intersectional approach: Transforming the academy through race, class, and gender*, University of North Carolina Press, pp. 61-78.

³ Chen, J 2017. *Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities in Australia*, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health, Melbourne.

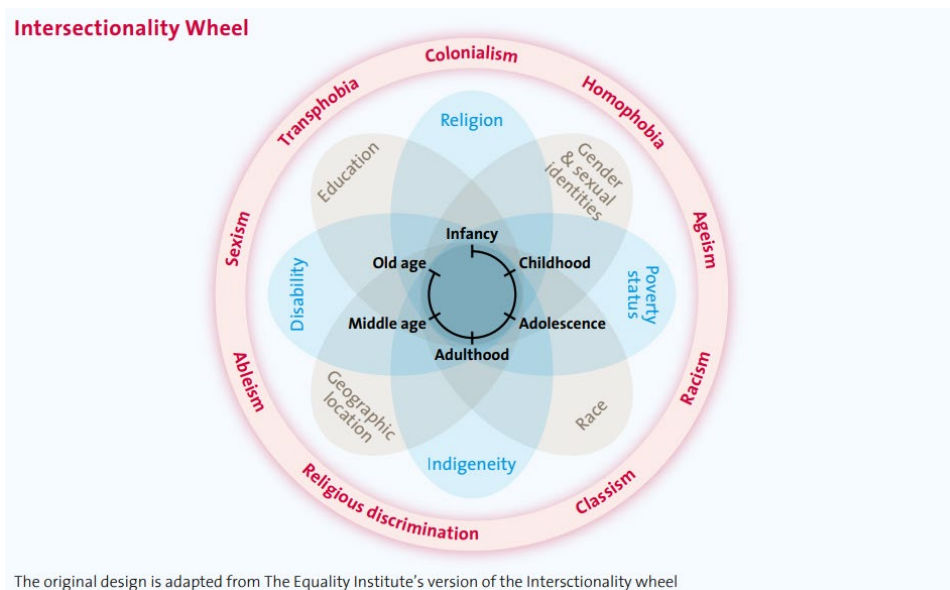


FIGURE 1. INTERSECTIONALITY WHEEL. SOURCE: UN WOMEN.⁴

⁴ UN Women 2021. *Intersectionality resource guide and toolkit*, accessed 30 November 2023, <<https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2022-01/Intersectionality-resource-guide-and-toolkit-en.pdf>>.

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Introduction

Executive Summary

The Victorian Women's Health Services and Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) have collaborated to produce the first comprehensive gender analysis of the Victorian State Budget 2024-25. As the leading organisations representing women and promoting equity across various settings and stages of women's lives, it was crucial for us to partner on this project, just as we do for many other initiatives across Victoria to advance gender equality.

Context

This analysis of the Victorian State Budget comes at a time where the state:

- Is under significant economic pressure due to a complex scenario of deficit management, economic headwinds from overseas crises impacting trade and revenue generation, and the financial repercussions of COVID-19. This has led to substantial government debt, which the government is addressing through various revenue measures and spending cuts.
- Is experiencing a profound sense of anger and outrage over the prevalence and persistent perpetration of men's violence against women. The state has witnessed community mobilisation, and significant public dialogue on the issue through media and community events, and the government and agencies have seen significant increases in calls for services and support due to the rise in deaths of women because of family violence.
- Our state's workforce continues to show the impact of skills shortage with significant shortages in industries most crucial for the growth of our economy, the health of our community, and workforces key to the government realising its policy vision. Shortages are persistent in workforces that are characterised by their gendered nature – for instance in male trade-based occupations such as metal fitters and machinist, mechanics and electricians, and in the female dominated workforces including Early Childhood Education, Registered Nurses and Aged Care workers.

Overview

The Victorian Women's Health Services Network (WHSN) and GEN VIC welcomed the Allan government's 2024-25 state budget, which demonstrates an ongoing commitment to gender and health equality, as well as addressing gender-based violence, despite the challenging financial situation. The budget's focus on cost-of-living relief for families and the additional \$269 million allocated towards the safety of women and children are particularly commendable.

The government has successfully recognised the value of investing in the equitable health and wellbeing of Victorians, which the WHSN has shown will produce a return on equity⁵. The reduction of cost-of-living pressures, which disproportionately impact women, is a welcome focus of the budget, and measures to offer economic relief to families and strengthen women's economic inclusion are expected to contribute to increased access to health and wellbeing. The sector also warmly welcomes the increased investment in the 12 Women's Health Services which will sustain

⁵ Impact Economics, for the Victorian Women's Health Services 2024. *Return on Equity: Health and economic dividends from investing in Women's Health Services*, accessed 16 May 2024 <<https://www.whsn.org.au/an-economic-case>>.

the work to apply an intersectional gender lens on the health system and support improvements to health equity for all Victorian Women.

The WHSN and GEN VIC also support the Gender Equality Budget Statement, particularly the move to embed gender responsive budgeting into legislation, which acknowledges the importance of considering budget initiatives and investments through a gender lens. The Gender Equality Budget Statement includes a focus on women's pain and specific health needs, such as sexual and reproductive health. While the WHSN and GEN VIC would like to see greater investment in this area in future budgets, the Allan Government's focus on addressing the gender pain gap through an ongoing Inquiry is a step in the right direction.

The Gender Equality Budget Statement references broad investments in hospital redevelopment, Free Tafe and workforce support. While these initiatives are recognised as generally positive, we are cautious about acknowledging the direct link to gender and therefore the scale of the gendered impact. We call for more transparency about the gendered impacts of initiatives included in the Gender Equality Budget Statement moving forward.

Despite the devastating toll of gender-based violence this year, the Victorian Government continues to show leadership in working towards a gender-equal Victoria and the elimination of gendered violence. The budget's acknowledgement of the intersecting experiences of Victorian women, including transgender women, women with disabilities, and women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, demonstrates the government's efforts to improve health equity.

While the WHSN and GEN VIC are pleased with the budget's focus and commitment to health and gender equity, it is crucial to acknowledge that there is still a long way to go in achieving optimal health, wellbeing, and safety for all Victorians. Effective prevention, early intervention, and response to health inequities and gender-based violence require sustained, long-term investment and adequate resourcing.

A note on women's health and wellbeing

It is not uncommon for the authors of this report to hear “women's health and wellbeing” defined only in reductive terms, limited to very particular clinical components of sexual and reproductive health – for instance, as increasing cervical screens, or breast screening or abortion rights.

Certainly, it is these things, but it is so much more. And it is certainly not about reducing women's health to only the physical components of their/her body and in particular, forcing health outcomes only through a biological deterministic understanding of health that funds wellbeing on the basis of a uterus and the ability and desire to give birth.

If only it were just about this. It is not.

Throughout this analysis, reviewers and readers and interested parties will see the start of the breadth and depth of policy, programs and settings that drive the health and wellbeing of women. These are in fact the social determinants of health.

Women's health and wellbeing are profoundly influenced by the social determinants of health, which encompass the complex interplay of social, economic, and environmental factors that shape

their lives. Traditional approaches to women's health have often focused narrowly on biological aspects related to reproduction, failing to acknowledge the multifaceted nature of women's health and the importance of addressing the root causes of health inequities.

To promote women's health effectively, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach that recognises the significance of economic stability, education, social and community context, access to healthcare, and the physical environment. Women often face economic disadvantages, such as lower wages and a higher likelihood of living in poverty, which can limit their access to essential resources and negatively impact their health. Education plays a crucial role in women's health literacy and their ability to navigate the healthcare system effectively.

Moreover, social support networks and community safety are critical factors that influence women's mental and physical wellbeing. Addressing these social determinants requires inclusive and supportive environments that foster women's social connections and promote their overall wellbeing. Access to comprehensive healthcare, including preventive and maternal health services, is another critical determinant of women's health that goes beyond reproductive health alone.

The physical environment in which women live, including access to safe housing, nutritious food, clean water and air, and safe spaces for physical activity, also has a profound impact on their health and wellbeing. Addressing these environmental determinants requires a multi-sectoral approach that involves collaboration between healthcare providers, policymakers, and community organisations.

Finally, women's political voice and empowerment are crucial for addressing their specific health needs and reducing health disparities. Empowering women to participate in decision-making processes and advocate for policies that prioritise their health and wellbeing is a fundamental step towards achieving health equity.

A comprehensive approach to women's health that prioritises the social determinants of health is essential for promoting the overall wellbeing of women and reducing health disparities. By moving beyond a narrow focus on biological aspects related to reproduction and addressing the broader context of women's lives, we can create a more equitable and just society that supports the health and wellbeing of all women.

Key Highlights

The State Government has clearly made cuts to public services and programs across health, infrastructure, and education to address the significant debt faced by the State. There are lapsing programs that will impact casual workers and those on short fixed term contracts, first home buyers' grants will be cut, and there are increases in taxes in some services.

Acknowledging the concerns raised by health and community service sectors, especially the need to move beyond short-term funding arrangements for vital services, this analysis reveals that the government has made a concerted effort to 'walk the talk' regarding issues that concern women, particularly in the areas of equality, health, and the prevention of family violence, within the constraints of its available resources. The Women's Health Sector warmly welcomes and thanks the

government for its continued support for our work, and for recognising the role that we play in Victoria's public health system.

A key highlight for our sectors was the introduction of the Financial Management Amendment (Gender Responsive Budgeting) Bill 2024 which codifies, in law, the government's commitment to gender equality. Crucially this Bill (which saw its first and second readings on the day of the budget) will include in the principles of financial management, the requirement that government promotes gender equality "in the pursuit of spending and taxing policies."

This analysis notes that the Victorian Government is keen to focus on how this budget will benefit families. With an equity lens, we note that the care and support of families, and by implication children and young people, is often in the remit of women. Moreover, we recognise that children in and of themselves face intersecting barriers to wellbeing and equity, and to that extent, the investment in families will, by implication, benefit them. However, our question across all these measures is how we will understand the benefit of these investments to those facing disadvantage and how can we ensure the efficacy of the investment if the measuring and evaluation systems are not in place to transparently report outcomes and value.

Reflecting upon the diverse nature of families, we recognise that all families are not alike, and indeed, many do not include children, or young people, or subscribe to what is often thought of as the traditional family unit – that is, a female mother, a male father, and their direct offspring.

The investment to continue Respectful Relationships is welcome and recognition through the gender statement of the need. Noting some of the changes in position of family violence funding, we look forward to hearing more about what the State Government intends to do in the coming weeks to address the community's concerns and distress over the increasing prevalence of violence against women.

Our analysis puts forward the following recommendations for governments to consider.

Recommendations

Families

- Ensure that budget measures proactively dismantle discrimination and intersectional barriers, ensuring inclusivity beyond traditional family structures. Future budgets should articulate clearly how measures benefit varied family dynamics, emphasising inclusivity and equity in familial support and recognition.

Housing

- Allocate substantial resources to address systemic issues underpinning women's housing challenges, specifically targeting the gender pay gap and the impact of domestic and family violence. This approach should integrate economic empowerment strategies for women.
- Enhance investments in secure, accessible, and sustainable housing for women and families facing homelessness or housing insecurity, with a focus on long-term stability.
- Ensure coherence between the Family Violence Reform Action Plan and housing strategies, optimising the synergy between domestic violence interventions and housing security initiatives.

Participation in Employment

- Investing in care work is not only an acknowledgment of its importance but is also a way to create jobs and foster economic growth. As an inherently sustainable economic sector that helps sustain and strengthen human abilities rather than consuming resources, care work, notably child-rearing, should be recognised for its crucial social contribution to broader community wellbeing. Future budgets should aim to reshape societal values towards care work and address its historical undervaluation, rather than viewing policies to provide childcare solely as a workforce participation measure.
- Amplify funding for leadership programs targeting women from marginalised groups, thereby promoting diversity in leadership positions and empowering women across all societal sectors.
- Implement targeted actions to eradicate the gender pay gap, ensuring equitable pay across all sectors, and bolster these efforts with transparent, stringent accountability measures.
- Provide clear, detailed explanations of decisions impacting gender policies, such as the conclusion of the casual sick pay guarantee, and commit to mitigating adverse effects on women.

Women's Policy

- Advocate for substantial new investments in gender equality initiatives aligned with Victoria's strategic gender equality goals, fostering broad systemic change and capacity building within gender-focused policies.

Training, Higher Education, and Workforce Development

- Develop a transformational gender strategy for Victoria's VET and Adult Education system to address persistent barriers to women's participation, completion, and gender segregation in skills programs.
- Implement comprehensive government initiatives and campaigns to encourage and support men and boys to pursue careers in Nursing, Education, Welfare, and Social Work (NEWS), alongside existing efforts to increase women's and girls' participation in STEM fields, recognising the importance of gender diversity across all sectors.
- Align more strongly the activities and policies of Victoria's jobs, skills and adult education to the goals of *Our Equal State* and contribute to closing the persistent gender pay gap.
- Transparently share disaggregated data on how initiatives like Free TAFE have benefited women and disadvantaged groups, in line with gender-responsive budgeting principles and the Gender Equality Act.
- Use this data to better target investments and ensure equitable outcomes, while also explicitly funding initiatives that address the root causes of barriers to participation.

Justice

- Sustain and increase funding for training programs within the family violence sector to enhance the capabilities of services in managing and preventing family violence.
- Improve workforce retention strategies and remuneration for those working in the family violence sector to reduce significant current risks facing the sector through staff burnout.

- Escalate funding for community legal services, particularly those supporting areas impacted by family violence, housing crises, and broader social challenges, ensuring vulnerable groups receive comprehensive legal aid.

Gender-Based Violence

- Endorse a comprehensive government strategy to prevent gender-based violence, integrating efforts across all sectors to address both the symptoms and root causes of violence.
- Establish a sustainable funding model for gender-based violence prevention, allowing organisations to plan and execute long-term strategies effectively that go beyond the current 2 year funding cycle.
- Increase funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to lead self-determined prevention efforts.
- Increase funding for initiatives to promote gender equity within culturally diverse communities.
- Increase funding for initiatives that tackle the disproportionate rates of gendered violence against women with a disability
- Enhance funding for specialist children’s counselling services, ensuring timely and effective interventions that help break the cycle of intergenerational violence.

Climate Change

(taken and adapted from *Care Through Disaster Report Women’s Health Goulburn North East 2023*⁶)

- Address underlying vulnerabilities. Those who are already vulnerable before disaster strikes are hit hardest when shocks occur, and we need to address these root causes of vulnerability before disaster occurs.
- Identify gaps and amplify what’s working in disaster readiness. Bring stakeholders together to identify needs, gaps, share wins and promote best practice.
- Build trust, cohesion and agency in supporting communities through recovery. Enable more autonomy for the community by investing in long-term relationships that build trust.
- Future emergency planning by governments need to encompass and support the preventative planning and recovery required to develop structural and systemic community resilience to what will be an increase in climate change driven natural disasters and crisis on our communities.
- Allocate continuous support for whole of community services aiding individuals affected by climate disasters, acknowledging the specific vulnerabilities of women and marginalised groups.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Implement an intersectional approach in mental health service delivery that actively addresses the specific needs of diverse women. This should involve tailored programs,

⁶ Women’s Health Goulburn North East. *Care through Disaster*, accessed 16 May 2024, <<https://www.whealth.com.au/research/care-through-disaster-2023/>>.

regular training for professionals, and continuous evaluation to ensure services remain responsive and inclusive.

- Increase in funding for primary prevention programs in the 2025-26 budget, recognising their cost-effectiveness in preventing mental health issues. This should include integration of mental health education in schools, community outreach programs, and workplace initiatives.
- Establish proactive support systems that anticipate and mitigate risk factors contributing to poor mental health among women. Address economic insecurity, violence, and chronic health issues through multi-sectoral collaborations, provide accessible resources and emergency support services, and leverage technology to reach underserved areas.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

- Future budgets should increase allocations for a comprehensive range of preventative SRH services, extending beyond fertility and maternity care. This includes investing in community-based education initiatives, preventative screenings, and early intervention services to address the entire spectrum of women's health needs.
- Significant resources should be allocated to create and implement primary prevention education programs at all educational levels. These programs are designed to instill a deep understanding of consent, healthy relationships, and safe sexual practices, laying a foundation for positive SRH outcomes and preventing issues before they arise.
- It is essential to broaden funding for culturally competent preventative care across various cultural and identity groups. This ensures that all individuals receive respectful and preventative care tailored to their backgrounds, addressing health disparities and recognising the diverse needs of different communities.
- Developing policies that focus on intersectionality and primary prevention in SRH is crucial. These policies should be crafted to effectively meet the unique needs of all women, especially those facing compounded forms of discrimination, by acknowledging the complex interplay of various social identities and tackling the root causes of health inequities.

Women with Diverse Identities and Experiences

Recognising the introduction into parliament of a bill to bring gender responsive budgeting into law, an intersectional gender lens should be applied across all policy formulation - including allocation and implementation - to ensure equitable access and relevance for all women, enhancing responsiveness and inclusivity in government initiatives. This can include:

- Invest in comprehensive, evidence-based programs designed to dismantle systemic barriers and empower women in marginalised communities, focusing on eradicating gender-based violence, creating sustainable economic opportunities, and ensuring universal access to holistic healthcare services.
- Allocate significant resources to close the educational gap for disadvantaged girls and young women, implementing robust mentorship programs, substantial scholarships, and targeted initiatives to promote their participation and leadership in STEM fields and beyond.
- Mandate extensive, ongoing cultural competency training for all service providers, equipping them with the tools and knowledge to deliver inclusive, responsive, and culturally

sensitive support that effectively addresses the complex needs of women from diverse backgrounds.

- Establish a powerful, cross-departmental task force comprising diverse community leaders, gender equality experts, and policymakers to embed an intersectional gender lens across all policies and programs, continuously monitoring outcomes, ensuring transparent accountability, and dynamically adapting strategies to achieve genuine, transformative equality for all women.

Methodology and Approach

Victorian Government: Gender Equality Budgeting

Victoria's Gender Equality Budgeting Policy ("Gender Responsive Budgeting") seeks to create a fairer and more equitable society by integrating gender considerations into budgetary decisions. The policy has been in place since 2021, and Victoria was the first state in Australia to introduce such a practice.

The policy aims to promote gender equality, improve the lives of all Victorians, and ensure that public spending is efficient, effective, and equitable and its key elements include:

- **Gender Equality Budget Statement:** The Victorian Government produces an annual Gender Equality Budget Statement, which provides an overview of the government's initiatives and investments to promote gender equality and the impact of these initiatives on women and men.
- **Gender Impact Assessments:** Departments and agencies are required to conduct Gender Impact Assessments (GIAs) on all new policies, programs, and initiatives to ensure that they consider the different needs of women and men and promote gender equality.

The policy also emphasises the importance of gender disaggregated data.

The State Budget's Gender Equality Statement effectively positions its work within a global context, a recognition we welcome. Notably, 61% of OECD countries, including five of the world's seven largest economies – Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and the United Kingdom – have adopted gender responsive budgeting tools.

Gender responsive budgeting not only enhances the transparency and accountability of government expenditure but also empowers decision-makers to craft policies and investments that promote gender equality.

Why a Gender Lens?

Applying an intersectional (including gender) lens to the Victorian state budget is essential for promoting gender equality, enhancing economic efficiency, fulfilling Victoria's commitments, improving transparency and accountability, and fostering inclusive decision-making in the state. It is a crucial tool for achieving a more equitable and sustainable future for all Victorians.

Across the globe, intersectional (including gender) analysis is applied to sovereign budgets, to ensure that public spending and revenue collection are equitable, efficient, and responsive to the needs of all people. For GEN VIC and the WHSN, our focus and use of gender analysis will also be intersectional recognising that there are multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression that impact women in our community.

A gender analysis on a budget such as that being handed down by the Victorian Government matters because we want to:

- **Address gender inequalities in Victoria:** The state budget can either perpetuate or reduce gender inequalities in Victoria. By applying a gender lens, the Victorian government can

identify and address the different needs, priorities, and challenges faced by women and men in the state and allocate resources accordingly.

- Promote gender equality in Victoria: Gender-responsive budgeting can help promote gender equality in Victoria by ensuring that women and men have equal access to public resources, services, and opportunities within the state. This can lead to better health, education, and economic outcomes for all Victorians.
- Enhance economic efficiency in Victoria: When the Victoria state budget is designed with gender considerations in mind, it can be more efficient in achieving intended outcomes. For example, investing in women's health, education, and economic empowerment in Victoria can yield significant returns in terms of increased productivity, economic growth, and poverty reduction in the state.
- See Victoria fulfil its commitments: Victoria, as a state within Australia, has obligations to promote gender equality and women's empowerment through national and international agreements. Gender-responsive budgeting can help the Victorian government meet these commitments.
- Improve transparency and accountability in Victoria: Applying a gender lens to the Victoria state budget can increase transparency and accountability by requiring the government to report on how public resources are being used to address gender inequalities and promote gender equality within the state.
- Foster inclusive decision-making in Victoria: Gender-responsive budgeting in Victoria can involve participatory processes that engage women's organisations, civil society groups, and other stakeholders in the state's budget planning, implementation, and monitoring. This can lead to more inclusive and responsive decision-making for all Victorians.

How we Analysed the Victorian State Budget

The authors recognise that a part of our role, is to ask hard questions and, to encourage hard questions to be asked by all of us to ensure that we are progressing the work to advance equity for *all* women. Whether it is asking and examining if health restructures will deliver equitable health outcomes for women, advance hard won achievements by those advocates and practitioners that came before us, to ensuring governments and policy officers understand the difference between mainstreaming, gender responsive and gender equal actions, all our work – including this analysis – is part of a broader long term effort to deliver the benefits to all Victorians that a gender equal economy and society can provide.

To develop this report, personnel with research and policy expertise from the WHSN, and GEN VIC, came together and, using budget documents and statements, assessed specific allocations and their expected impacts on different gender groups.

Drawing upon the principles of gender-responsive budgeting, we have deliberately taken a “gender transformative” approach to our analysis, focusing on outcomes related to health, education, employment, and social services. This approach goes beyond incremental changes and aims to fundamentally reshape the structures, systems, and norms that perpetuate gender inequalities. It recognises that achieving true gender equality requires a comprehensive, long-term commitment to addressing the root causes of inequality, rather than just treating the symptoms.

Key Sector Asks for 2024

Women’s Health Services

The Victorian Women’s Health Sector put forward a business case demonstrating the collective impact and economic value of our work and seeking current funding to be sustained.

As put to government, and as described in our report [Return on Equity - Health and economic dividends from investing in Women's Health Services](#) (launched on the 23rd of November 2023) the sector is seeking to lock in our current levels of funding, with annual indexing to ensure our funding keeps pace with projected growth in the population of Victoria women. In line with inflation, we sought a one-off 5.45% boost in 2024-25 to reflect higher than usual inflation in the past year. This would match the pay increase that the Government is giving 800 community and social organisations in 2023-24. Maintaining current levels of funding in real, per-woman terms will enable Women’s Health Services to continue delivering better outcomes for Victoria’s women and girls.

\$M	2024-2025	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029
TOTAL	24.4	25.4	26.5	27.6	28.8
\$/WOMAN	6.94	7.11	7.29	7.47	7.66

The 2024-25 state budget provides the Victorian Women’s Health Services with continuation of lapsing funding uplifts. **\$18.3 million is allocated over the next two years**, which is welcomed, however, **falls short of uplifts provided in 2022-23 and 2023-24**. This means **programs will need to be scaled back**. This is in addition to a recommitment to our core funding.

The Women’s Health Services look forward to working with the government and all stakeholders to ensure that future allocations meet increasing demand across our communities.

GEN VIC

GEN VIC’s 2024-25 budget submission reflected requests from the organisation’s members. There was a clear focus on primary prevention, reduction of gendered violence and initiatives to elevate women’s leadership and opportunities for collaboration. Specifically, these included:

1. Provide adequate funding to support delivery of the *Our Equal State*.
2. Strengthen gender-responsive budgeting practices.
3. Provide funding to enable the diversity of gender equality focused organisations to come together, to share information and develop partnerships to build impact.
4. Provide funding to support public entities to undertake and implement gender equality plans, gender impact assessments and reducing the gender pay gap.
5. Maintain funding with CPI indexation for Women Health Services.
6. Maintain and enhance funding to support victim-survivors of family violence and eradicate the gender inequality that normalises and validates gendered violence.
7. Increase funding to enable more Victorian women and gender-diverse people and their children to have long-term housing security.
8. Build and promote innovative leadership models that support women taking on positions of power and influence within all facets of the Victorian community.
9. Enable more Victorians to access safe and dignified birthing support.

Analysis

Economic Equity

Economic equity is a recognised social determinant of health and wellbeing, and women are disproportionately impacted by cost-of-living pressures. As such, we are cautiously optimistic that the budget measures offering economic relief to families will positively impact women's economic equity. We do note, however, that dedicated investment to progressing *Our Equal State* is unclear. We also recognise that much of the funding in this budget is short-term and so by its very nature, does not provide the certainty required to sustain change.

Families

The Victorian Government has led the release of its 2024-25 budget by highlighting how it would benefit families. In our analysis of the state budget, we recognise that the definition of 'family' varies across cultures and in contemporary society is broad and diverse, extending beyond traditional models that primarily include school-aged children. Current evidence highlights the unique compositions and needs of rainbow families, migrant groups, and other community structures that may not fit traditional frameworks. Therefore, it is essential that budgetary allocations that seek to support families in Victoria, reflect this diversity, ensuring that resources are equitably distributed to support the wellbeing of all family types, thereby fostering an inclusive society where every individual can thrive regardless of their familial arrangements.

Families will benefit from a \$287 million investment over three years with the School Saving Bonus providing a one-off allowance of \$400 per child (enrolled in government schools in 2025) to help cover the cost of uniforms and activities such as school camps, excursions, and sporting events, plus an expansion of the Glasses for Kids programs to more schools. **\$21.1 million in 2024-25 will expand the School Breakfast Club Program** to every government school child. The expansion will see 150 additional schools invited to join the program in early 2025, before rolling out to remaining schools from June 2025. A further **\$6 million investment over 2024-25 in the Get Active Kids** voucher program provides participation opportunities for eligible children from priority groups.

Regional and small schools' OSHC - outside school hours care for primary school children will see additional support of **\$14.7 million** over four years to expand the OSHC offering. We welcome this initiative as care responsibilities continue to be a recognised barrier to women's participation in the workforce.

We are disappointed to see the **delay in delivery of the Best Start Best Life kindergarten reforms** with timelines pushed out until 2036 for full implementation of free pre-prep hours and note the potential impact on women's participation in the workforce.

The budget invests **\$4.6 million to enhance food security and hardship support services** will enable efficient food distribution across metropolitan and regional areas, including sustaining operations of six Regional Food Relief Hubs.

Families will also see cost of living support by way of **energy affordability initiatives \$3.9 million** in 2024-25 (\$12.1 million over four years) supporting vulnerable energy customers.

Recommendations

Implementation of these budget measures should seek to ensure that the funding does not create additional discrimination and intersectional barriers for families who do not align with traditional definition. For future budgets, we recommend that the Government recognise and frame this type of investment for one type of family and communicate how other measures can benefit other family structures.

While the budget goes some way to provide immediate cost-of-living relief there is a need to take an intersectional approach to addressing more broadly the systemic issues that drive the cost-of-living crises. Acknowledging that the definition of a family should be inclusive and reflective of contemporary society, the government should invest in strategies that provide long-term benefits and positive outcomes for families, particularly those with low incomes who face multiple, interconnected barriers to health and well-being. We see value in the recommendation from VCOSS for a Cost of Living Commissioner in as much as this role could coordinate and leverage policies from across government for better outcomes for all Victorians.

Housing

A disproportionate number of women are impacted by issues around housing with the fastest growing group of homeless people being women aged over 65.

On average, 9,120 Victorian women a year are becoming homeless after leaving their homes due to family violence with more than 84% of those women returning to relationships due to the inability to find housing.

Rurality significantly magnifies the challenges women face in securing affordable and safe housing.

We recognise and welcome the important investment around housing and supporting people experiencing homelessness, while acknowledging that more is needed and more could be done to address the root causes of homelessness. This budget goes some way to support people experiencing homelessness but not enough to meet the requests made by the sector to address the housing crisis in our community. It is noted that some of the funding is short term in nature and lapses in 12 months.

Ten per cent of the homelessness package **\$11.5 million** has been allocated to support the implementation of **Victoria's Aboriginal Housing and Homelessness Framework, Mana-na woorn-tyeen maar-takoort**. The housing crisis disproportionately impacts Victoria's First Peoples and particularly women, as such we are pleased to see this investment and encourage a sustained investment.

Housing Assistance (2024-25) investment of \$634.3 million ensures more Victorians have a place to call home by providing services and support across the housing continuum; including homelessness services, transitional accommodation and wrap around services.

Affordable housing options delivered through the Affordable Housing Rental Scheme are responding to the growing gap in housing affordability and aim to increase supply for households experiencing rental stress or trying to buy their first home ensuring more affordable, safe, and secure

accommodation is being built right across Victoria, and reforming the housing system to provide greater access to housing services and supports.

\$196.9 million is committed to break the cycle of homelessness, including response and early intervention initiatives aimed at reducing instances of homelessness, providing housing and accommodation for families, expanding the Journey to Social Inclusion initiative, dedicated funding for self-determined initiatives addressing homelessness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and focused initiatives addressing homelessness amongst people with disability, youth and the LGBTQIA+ community. We welcome the intersectional approach that has been applied, but note that while there is some funding for youth services, the Budget doesn't deliver funding for a Youth Homelessness Strategy focused in primary prevention that can coordinate action and investment to prevent youth homelessness from happening in the first place.

Housing is addressed further with:

- the continuation of the **Rental Stress Support Package of \$8 million** over 3 years, providing Victorian households facing rental stress can gain access to information and advice, advocacy, and legal assistance.
- Food relief for tenants in social housing with **social housing community support - \$1.1 million** for one year.

\$784.4 million has been allocated to provide **concessions to pensioners and beneficiaries**. This funding is aimed at making a positive difference for Victorians experiencing disadvantage particularly in terms of homelessness and access to affordable housing.

Recommendation

For housing and homeless support, the measures in the budget offer critical support for women facing housing insecurity and homelessness. However, the budget could allocate more resources to address the root causes of women's housing challenges, such as the gender pay gap and domestic violence.

We recommend investing in more safe, secure, timely and sustainable housing for the growing number of women and families experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity. This should include more social and affordable housing stock, as well as a sufficient amount and strategic mix of emergency and transitional housing for families experiencing violence.

We would like to see legislation that guarantees (rather than encourages) 10 per cent of new, large-scale housing developments to be affordable, public or community housing.

Participation in Employment

The budget includes measures aimed at removing barriers for women in terms of workforce. We welcome the investment, but echo VCOSS in calls for the Victorian Government to design and test a co-leadership and part-time work model.

Funding is provided to continue programs which promote the **participation, leadership, mentorship, and recognition of women with \$1.8 million** for one year. This includes targeted

programs to support women from diverse backgrounds including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women of colour to navigate barriers to advancement and leadership. It is heartening to see the specific acknowledgment of diverse women in this funding, although we would like to see a bigger investment.

Feminised industries such as care and education will benefit from significant investment supporting workers and providing training for women to build in demand and future proofed skills. While the focus on removing barriers and increasing participation is welcome, we are cautious about some of the initiatives having a “fixing women” approach. Investing in care work is also a key way for Victoria to create jobs and foster economic growth.

Funding of **\$55.2 million is provided to support Victoria’s health workforce capacity** through Registered Undergraduate Student of Nursing or Midwifery positions, nurse practitioner development, transition to practice support and capability development resources for nurses and midwives in regional Victoria. **\$109 million is allocated to support paramedics and nurses**, the majority of whom are women, by improving patient flow in emergency care and supporting paramedics on the road.

The **teaching workforce will see \$18 million** to expand the workforce, including by supporting more flexible working for school leaders, enabling job-sharing arrangements and new part time leadership roles in schools. We celebrate the measure to increase flexibility at more stages of the teaching career to help more women remain in this important workforce. In addition, a further **\$64 million is invested to address the mental health and wellbeing of school staff**.

While we acknowledge the investment in workforce, we note that the **Sick Pay Guarantee** for casual workers will not be continued after May 31 2024 and, with women making up a majority of casual workers, we recognise that this will have a negative economic impact on many women and contribute to cost of living pressures.

With women currently significantly underrepresented in start-up investment **\$40 million** delivered by LaunchVic to support Victoria’s startup ecosystem and **bolster women’s representation in the startup sector** is most welcome.

Recommendation

We recommend that future strategies recognise raising children as care work, and value it as an essential contribution to society. We need to address the underpaid and undervalued nature of care work, rather than prioritising women’s workforce participation alone. Supporting more parents to care for their children could also partially address the shortage of early childhood educators. We recommend the Victorian government has a strong voice in this national conversation. While we recognise that childcare and policy support for children crosses Commonwealth and State jurisdiction, from an intersectional lens, the higher order point is that it needs to be addressed across policy.’

We urge the government to recognise and act upon the fact that investing in care work not only creates jobs but also fosters economic growth. Care work is an inherently sustainable economic sector that, rather than consuming resources, helps to sustain and strengthen human capabilities across the community. By allocating resources to support and expand the care work sector, the

government can simultaneously address the pressing need for employment opportunities and contribute to the long-term well-being and resilience of our society. It is crucial that the government understands the far-reaching benefits of investing in care work and takes decisive action to prioritise this sector as a key driver of both economic and social progress.

Measures are included that demonstrate the government's commitment to promoting women's leadership and we propose that the allocated funds appear limited in relation to the scale of the challenges faced by women to achieve economic equity. We ask that the government increase funding for women's leadership programs, with a focus on underrepresented groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women of colour, rural women, and women with disabilities. We echo GEN VIC's and VCOSS's "call for the Victorian Government to fund VCOSS and Gender Equity Victoria to design and test a co-leadership and part-time work model."

We recommend an allocation of targeted funding to address the gender pay gap and promote pay equity across industries, including defined entities and private enterprise.

It would be useful to understand the gender consideration made in concluding the Sick Pay Guarantee program for casual workers, and to see further investment in offsetting the negative impacts.

Women's Policy

Effective gender policy should permeate all areas of governmental planning and budgeting, rather than being siloed within specific portfolios. It is crucial that every department integrates a transformative gender analysis to truly achieve gender equality in budgetary decisions. This approach involves not only setting specific gender-related measures but also applying a comprehensive gender lens across all policy areas to address systemic inequalities. Historically, while it is not uncommon for governments to establish dedicated offices to focus on women's issues, these are often under-resourced, limiting their ability to effect real change. However, we commend the current government for its progressive stance on gender equality, as evidenced by the enactment of the Gender Equality Act and the recent introduction of a bill to institutionalise gender-responsive budgeting. These initiatives mark significant steps forward, showcasing a commitment to leading by example in fostering a more equitable society.

A commitment to **Women's Policy of \$18.4 million** over two years provides initiatives that support gender equality and better outcomes for women across all areas of their lives including economic security, safety, leadership, health and wellbeing. And a further **\$1.7 million** over four years **for the Queen Victoria Women's Centre** that provides services and facilities for women and women's organisations and **\$1.8 million** to women's leadership. While we recognise this aligns and is a contributor to *Our Equal State* goals, we also note that dedicated funding to progress *Our Equal State* initiatives is not explicitly clear.

Recommendation

We advocate for substantial new investments in gender equality initiatives aligned with Victoria's strategic gender equality goals as described in *Our Equal State (August 2023)*, fostering broad systemic change and capacity building within gender-focused policies.

Further, we advocate that government apply its principles and policy of gender responsive budget for all government funded projects. On this note, we look forward to the impact of the recently introduced Bill to State Parliament to make gender-responsive budgeting law.

For this analysis, we note that transformational gender equality is a comprehensive, long-term approach that aims to reshape the structures, systems, and norms perpetuating gender inequalities. It involves mainstreaming gender considerations across all policy areas, conducting rigorous gender impact assessments, setting ambitious targets, investing in evidence-based strategies to address structural barriers, ensuring meaningful participation of diverse women, and challenging underlying social norms.

While funding leadership programs for women is important, it is not transformational on its own, as it does not address systemic barriers. However, in the broader context of a gender transformative budget and policy, it is well situated as part of a range of strategies that embed gender considerations into all aspects of its work and investing in holistic strategies to dismantle structural barriers to women's full participation and advancement.

Training, Higher Education and Workforce Development

There is a clear intent to continue to emancipate the availability of training and adult learning for Victorians. More funding is being made available to Victorians to access fee free TAFE and there are expanded eligibility for the program in priority areas. The identified priority workforce areas include health, early childhood learning (ECE) and energy. We also note allocation of resources to expand apprentices and trainees in areas of skill shortage and, continuing support for those learners in apprenticeship pathways who are “at risk of not completing”. There is also the ongoing investment of government funds to address skill gaps in what is defined as “high priority industries” with a focus on retraining and upskilling.

Eligible students will be supported to undertake accredited vocational education and training to enhance skills and employment opportunities, including through **boosting access to Free TAFE and training services with \$336.6 million** over two years.

TAFE will further benefit with **\$112.7 million** over two years for **the TAFE Services Fund**. Funding is provided to continue to support the TAFE Network as Victoria’s trusted public provider of choice through the provision of student support services, **student inclusion and wellbeing programs, training delivery in priority thin markets and regions**, strong governance, and a high-quality teaching workforce. We acknowledge and value that this initiative provides support for inclusion and goes some way to address the challenge of regionality in terms of training.

Identified workforce priority areas will see **more apprenticeships with \$11.4 million** committed. This includes funding for Apprenticeships Victoria to provide apprenticeship system stewardship and expand opportunities for apprentices, trainees, and employers in areas with skills shortages through a new **Priority Apprenticeship Pathway model**. Funding will continue to support apprentices and trainees most at risk of not completing their training with dedicated support through the **Apprenticeship Support Officer program**.

It would be useful to understand the depth and breadth of the benefits that are being realised by women in terms of training and apprenticeships. It is noted that while there are training options in

health, ECE and caring professions, many of the Free TAFE and apprenticeship options are in historically male-dominated industries and so the scale of the gendered benefit is unclear.

The government's commitment to growing skills and supporting business is further demonstrated with **\$31.6 million** over two years to **support retraining for high priority industries**. A **\$418.7 million investment in business** will grow, create more job opportunities, and develop strategic industries of all sizes by facilitating new investments, supporting more innovative startups, developing and attracting world-class talent, accelerating the growth and impact of Victoria's research translation and commercialisation capabilities, and encouraging a competitive and fair business environment and a strong, diversified economy.

Recommendations

We remain concerned that the state's own training and education system does not have its own strategy and approach to address persistent gender and intersectional inequity. As regularly advised and reported to the State Government, and indeed as the sector as advised the national government, the skilling and education systems across all jurisdictions face significant barriers to equity. (Please see for instance, advice and submissions provided by Women in Adult and Vocational Education – www.wave.org.au).

As education and training is one of the social determinants of health, and a key enabler to economic equity we strongly advocate that Victoria's VET and Adult Education system should have its own transformational gender strategy to address persistent barriers to women's participation in VET and skills programs, the advance their completion of programs and, to address persistent gender segregation in our skills system (for all genders). We also advise that this work will be a key contributor to closing the persistent pay gap in our economy and strongly align with the goals of *Our Equal State*.

Having said this, and with reference to this budget, we recommend that to maximise the impact of training investments on women and those facing intersecting disadvantages, the government should transparently share data on how previous initiatives like Free TAFE have benefited these groups. While reports suggest that Free TAFE has helped women and increased their participation in male-dominated trades, publicly releasing disaggregated data aligns with gender-responsive budgeting principles and the Gender Equality Act. This transparency would enable the government to better leverage investments to ensure equitable outcomes.

While we value seeing increased opportunities for women to participate in training and upskilling, we would like to see explicit funding for initiatives to address the root causes of barriers to participation. These could be articulated and worked through with, as first noted, a specific strategy and impact framework to address inequality in our adult education and skills system.

Encouraging Men and Boys to Pursue Careers in Nursing, Education, Welfare, and Social Work: Policies and Practices

This analysis highlights that just as it is important to create a gender equal STEM workforce and learning pathways, it is also important that policy address the underrepresentation of men in fields traditionally dominated by women, such as nursing, education, welfare, and social work, which is as much a gender issue and presents significant gender balance challenges. Promoting gender

diversity in these sectors not only benefits the professions themselves but also helps in breaking down gender stereotypes and achieving broader societal equality.

Several countries have introduced policies and frameworks aimed at addressing the gender imbalance in these sectors. These initiatives often involve governmental actions, educational reforms, and support from professional bodies. For the reference of readers of this report we highlight that:

- In the UK, the government has launched campaigns to encourage men to enter the teaching profession, emphasising the need for male role models in schools. The "Men in Teaching" initiative includes scholarships and bursaries specifically for male applicants.
- Australia has implemented the "Male Champions of Change" program, which includes strategies to increase male participation in nursing and early childhood education. This program is supported by the government and aims to provide role models, mentorship, and financial incentives to men entering these fields.
- In Germany, several universities have developed targeted programs to attract male students into nursing and social work. These programs offer male-specific scholarships and create awareness about the opportunities in these professions through career fairs and school visits.
- In Canada, the "More Men in Nursing" initiative by the Canadian Nurses Association includes outreach programs in high schools to highlight nursing as a viable and rewarding career option for boys.

To challenge the gender disparity in NEWS sectors, it is essential to confront the deeply rooted stereotypes and societal expectations that dissuade men from entering professions traditionally perceived as feminine. Research indicates that men often face prejudice and are viewed as unfit for caring roles due to pervasive stereotypes linking caregiving with femininity and emotional labour. Furthermore, men pursuing careers in nursing or early childhood education may encounter suspicion or stigma, which can act as a significant deterrent to their participation in these fields.

Justice

The justice system plays an important role in ensuring women and children are safe and plays a leading role in responding to incidents of family violence. The 2024-25 budget includes **\$31 million** to support prosecution of some of the most serious and complex criminal offences in Victoria, where victim survivors are disproportionately women and children.

Funding is provided to further strengthen and embed the justice system's response to family violence through continuing family violence workforce training and implementation of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM) framework across the justice portfolio. **\$600,000** is allocated for **Family violence risk assessment and information sharing schemes**, however this funding does not extend beyond 2025.

\$29 million over four years is allocated to **strengthen community legal support** and early intervention services. This funding will help connect people to early legal support, including those experiencing family violence and hardship and will assist people to put in place safety plans and apply for family violence intervention orders. It is worth noting that **\$166 million** has been allocated to **preventing and responding to gambling harm**, a contributing factor to violence against women. This initiative contributes to the Department of Justice and Community Safety's Advocacy, Human Rights, and Victim Support output.

\$19.8 million is allocated to **supporting the corrections system to improve community safety**. This funding supports operations of the correction systems, reduce recidivism, and enhance prisoner reintegration in the community. This funding will support women to develop or maintain family connections while in custody and help victim survivors of family violence.

We welcome the **\$4.4 million** allocation over three years to support **newly arrived communities** to Victoria. This allocation continues to fund community hubs and legal services for migrants, it also extends legal support for asylum seekers and temporary visa holders. The Ethnic Communities Council of Victoria (ECCV) welcomes the targeted support for newly arrived migrant and refugee communities, however, ECCV Chairperson, Eddie Micallef says "... we are disappointed that funding is lapsing for strategic partnerships and engagement coordinators that provide critical support for our regional multicultural communities. We will continue advocating for sustainable funding for regional ethnic councils to ensure they can support their local communities."

Recommendations

We recommend ongoing funding for family violence workforce training. This will increase the capability of services to effectively identify, assess, and manage family violence risk which is essential to the safety and wellbeing of women and children.

The family violence (FV) sector is currently facing a crisis in recruitment and retention, with staff experiencing significant levels of burnout due to the demanding nature of their work, coupled with inadequate support and compensation. We urge the government to prioritise addressing this critical issue for what is a specialised and skilled workforce. Comprehensive retention strategies and improved remuneration packages must be developed and implemented to support the dedicated professionals working in the FV sector. This investment will not only help attract and retain skilled

staff but also contribute to better outcomes for individuals and families affected by family violence. By demonstrating a commitment to the FV workforce, the government can play a crucial role in building a safer and more resilient community. Urgent action is needed to address the current crisis and ensure that the FV sector has the resources and support it needs to continue its vital work.

While there were no cuts to the community legal sector, we recommend increasing funding to meet growing demands on legal services. The community legal sector plays an important role in a range of areas including family violence, housing and climate justice and are at the forefront of those facing economic, social, or cultural disadvantage.

Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence is prevalent and experienced across all communities and cultures. Men are more commonly the perpetrators of physical violence, sexual harassment, and sexual violence.⁷ In Australia, 2 in 5 women (39%) have experienced violence since the age of 15.⁸ On average, one woman is killed every nine days by a current or former partner.⁹

Violence against women is preventable.¹⁰ We know it is driven by:

- The condoning of violence against women.
- Men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence in public and private life.
- Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.
- Male peer relations and cultures of masculinity that emphasise aggression, dominance, and control.

Some women are more likely to experience violence.¹¹ Along with gender, there are other factors at play, like the impacts of colonisation, race, ethnicity, age, ability, sexuality, class, religious beliefs, and geographical location.

Preventing Gender-Based Violence

We are pleased to see continued investment in family violence, although long term funding will be needed to end men's violence against women.

\$18.3 million is provided to Victorian Women's Health Services to continue lapsing funding uplifts for another two years. This continuation is welcomed but falls short of uplifts provided in 2022-23 and 2023-24, meaning programs will need to be scaled back. This funding is for a range of women's health promotion priorities, not only preventing violence against women.

We warmly welcome the additional **\$39.1 million** over four years that was allocated to continue **Respectful Relationships** Education in schools.

It is unclear how much funding has been allocated to *Our Equal State*, the gender equality strategy critical to ending violence.

Legislating Gender Responsive Budgeting is an important achievement for Victoria and our collective effort to end violence against women.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2023. *Personal Safety 2021-22*, accessed 9 May 2024, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/personal-safety-australia/latest-release>>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Australian Institute of Criminology 2023. *Homicide in Australia 2020-21*, accessed 9 May 2024, <<https://www.aic.gov.au/publications/sr/sr42>>.

¹⁰ Our Watch 2021. *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia (2nd ed.)*, accessed 9 May 2024, <<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/change-the-story-a-shared-framework-for-the-primary-prevention-of-violence-against-women-in-australia>>.

¹¹ Ibid.

Supporting Victim-Survivors of Family Violence

There is a drop in overall **family violence service delivery, \$748.1 million** compared to **\$777.1 million** last year. However, we are pleased to see continued investment in women and children’s safety:

- **\$72 million** of lapsing funding uplifts has been continued for another two years for **victim-survivors supports**, like case management, accommodation, and financial support. We welcome the **ongoing** resourcing for staffing at Sexual Assault Services Victoria, included in this funding.
- **\$41.6 million** over four years to “**drive down family and sexual violence**” through continued delivery of perpetrator case management program, including research to inform prevention policy and programs. This is an extension of existing funding.
- **\$6.8 million** over four years for **financial counselling support** for victim survivors of family violence.

Investment in Aboriginal women’s safety focuses on punitive responses instead of self-determined solutions to end violence. **\$16.3 million** over three years was allocated to **self-determined justice diversion and family violence supports**.

The budget does not address long-term waiting times for survivors and others affected by sexual assault seeking counselling and change is needed to stop re-traumatisation.

Also worth noting is the **\$106.8 million directed towards racing, gambling, liquor and casino regulation**, industries that exacerbate violence against women.

We note government has signalled further announcement in the coming weeks about more measures to prevent family violence, address toxic masculinity and help make sure women are safe.

Recommendations

We recommend a whole-of-government approach to preventing gender-based violence by redressing the drivers of violence, and the reinforcing factors, as set out in Our Watch’s *Change the Story*.¹²

We recommend a long-term sustainable funding model so that organisations can plan and implement long-term workforce and program strategies that successfully prevent violence before it starts, intervene early when it exists, and prevent and disrupt intergenerational cycles of violence. The investment in primary prevention is a small fraction of the investment in response services. To achieve real change, we need sufficient investment across the spectrum.

Further announcements about investment in prevention of violence have been flagged for coming weeks. This new investment is very welcome as we recognise that investing in primary prevention is key to helping stop violence before it begins.

¹² Our Watch 2021. *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women in Australia* (2nd ed.), accessed 9 May 2024, <<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/change-the-story-a-shared-framework-for-the-primary-prevention-of-violence-against-women-in-australia>>.

Significant increase in funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to lead self-determined prevention efforts should be a priority in future budgets.

Investment in initiatives that promote gender equity in culturally diverse communities, and that facilitate an exchange of evidence between mainstream and culturally-specific agencies about what works to eliminate violence in migrant and refugee communities.

Increased funding for specialist children’s counselling for timely and effective healing and recovery, and that helps to disrupt cycles of intergenerational family violence.

Climate Change

Women's health and wellbeing are disproportionately impacted by climate change and disaster particularly those living in rural and remote areas. Research has found that the relationship between violence, child abuse, and divorce increases following a natural disaster. Following a disaster, women are expected and more likely to care for children and the elderly, help community members, experience increased workloads, and cope with the added stress of reduced access to childcare and transportation. Together, these added factors increase stress, pressure, and physical and social isolation for women, as well as endanger women. The documented negative impacts on women's health and wellbeing following disaster reveals the need to focus on and highlight women's needs.

The current budget has a focus on disaster recovery. **\$1.7 million** in **Temporary Accommodation Support** for community members impacted by the October 2022 floods. This initiative contributes to the Department of Justice and Community Safety's Emergency Management Capability output.

\$37.5 million is also allocated for additional recovery initiatives from 2023-24 summer floods and storms, noting that cost-sharing with the Commonwealth is yet to be determined. There is, however, no funding for **psychosocial and mental health and wellbeing support** beyond 2023-24.

Funding is also allocated to **Relief and immediate recovery initiatives – Victorian bushfires and storms commencing 13 February 2024**. **\$0.7 million** is allocated to administer applications for re-establishment assistance payments under the **Personal Hardship Assistance Program**. This initiative contributes to the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing's Concessions to Pensioners and Beneficiaries output. No further funding is provided to the **Temporary Accommodation Program** beyond 2023-24, however, **\$9.8 million** is allocated to **Additional relief and immediate recovery support** initiatives that are yet to be agreed with the Commonwealth on eligibility for cost-sharing arrangements.

A note on evidence and practice from the field

In 2023, a collaboration between Australia reMADE and Women's Health Goulburn North East (WHGNE), produced the report "Care through Disaster". The report was a result of a study involving over 80 participants from the Goulburn Valley region and north-eastern Victoria, encompassing diverse experiences and perspectives on care during disasters. The project sought to understand the work that addressed the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters, and found the need for robust community support and infrastructure to enhance community resilience.

Key Elements and Findings:

- **Community Connection and Visibility (SEEN):** The report underscores the importance of strong pre-existing community ties, which are crucial for effective disaster response and recovery. These connections not only save lives but also provide a sense of purpose and satisfaction.
Recognising and respecting the needs and expertise of community members, especially the vulnerable, is vital. Government funding for local services helps build trusted relationships that are essential in times of crisis.

- **Safety Measures (SAFE):** The government’s role in disaster prevention and mitigation is highlighted, advocating for measures such as decarbonisation, disaster-ready planning, and First Nations-led fire management.
Safe physical shelters that are free from risks of violence and discrimination, coupled with accessible and timely information, are essential. The report calls for improved temporary housing solutions and public investment in moveable accommodations.
- **Support Systems (SUPPORTED):** Personal and community preparedness for disasters is currently inadequate. Enhanced support, including basic safety equipment and funded volunteer programs, is needed.
Quick reinstatement of infrastructure post-disaster is crucial, along with immediate financial aid for affected individuals. Long-term mental health support, access to creative arts, and community-led recovery initiatives are recommended.

The report criticises the over-reliance on the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for disaster response, advocating instead for federally funded and trained disaster response teams.

Implications and Recommendations:

The report emphasises that strong, connected communities are essential for effective disaster management. It calls for public investment in community infrastructure and time for community building, suggesting structural changes like a four-day workweek and basic income policies.

Individualising disaster risk is deemed ineffective; instead, national infrastructure such as public insurance schemes and disaster leave policies are necessary.

The approach to disaster management should evolve to prioritise care and community strength, ensuring people are seen, safe, and supported during crises and that community resilience is built long before disasters strike.

In conclusion, the report advocates for a holistic approach to disaster preparedness and response, focusing on community cohesion, comprehensive safety measures, and robust support systems to foster resilient communities capable of thriving amidst increasing challenges.

Recommendations

To effectively address the disproportionate impact of disaster and climate change on women and marginalised groups, we must take a comprehensive approach that addresses underlying vulnerabilities and builds long-term community resilience.

Firstly, it is crucial to identify and address the root causes of vulnerability before disasters occur. By bringing stakeholders together, we can identify needs and gaps, share best practices, and amplify what's working in disaster readiness.

Secondly, we must focus on building trust, cohesion, and agency within communities throughout the recovery process. This can be achieved by investing in long-term relationships that foster trust and enable greater autonomy for the community.

Looking ahead, future emergency planning by governments needs to encompass and support the preventative planning and recovery required to develop structural and systemic community

resilience. With the increasing frequency and severity of climate change-driven natural disasters and crises, it is essential that we prioritise this approach.

While the 2024-25 budget provides some short-term relief and recovery support to communities impacted by recent disasters, it is important to recognise that the impact of disasters can be profound, long-lasting, and life-changing. Recovery is a long-term, multilayered process that goes beyond simply replacing what has been destroyed.

Therefore, we strongly recommend that future budgets allocate continuous support for whole-of-community services that aid individuals affected by climate disasters, with a specific focus on acknowledging and addressing the unique vulnerabilities faced by women and marginalised groups.

By adopting this comprehensive approach, we can work towards building resilient communities that are better equipped to withstand and recover from the impacts of disaster and climate change while promoting gender equality and social inclusion.

Mental Health and Wellbeing

We know that mental ill health is a much bigger issue among women than men as women experience higher rates of depression and anxiety and eating disorders. The WHSN is focused on **primary prevention and health promotion**. In the context of mental health, we want to **prevent the onset of mental health issues by reducing people’s exposure to risk factors and/or increasing their exposure to protective factors**. Primary prevention and health promotion have been employed to address mental health, and specifically, women’s mental health, for some time. Indeed, the [National Women’s Health Strategy](#) has included the following priority area: “Enhance gender-specific mental health education, awareness and primary prevention.” Furthermore, the recommendations from the [Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System](#) also recognised the importance of prevention with three recommendations calling for the prevention of mental illness and suicide.

It was disheartening to see that the 2024-25 budget did not include much funding for primary prevention of mental ill-health. Such initiatives were absent from the 2023-24 budget.

Early intervention for a feminised workforce included **\$63.8 million** over four years to support the **mental health and wellbeing of school staff**. We hope that this initiative will improve the mental wellbeing of educators who have been changing professions in recent years due to burnout.

Several mental health clinical care programs and services received funding. There will be continued funding of **\$10.2 million** over four years for **bed-based services** to ensure spaces are more accessible and safer for women.

\$25.6 million will be delivered over 3 years to **support people with eating disorders**. We welcome this funding as this disproportionately affects women and girls of all ages. This funding will target early intervention initiatives and **we hope that an intersectional lens is applied** to ensure support is appropriate and accessible for people of diverse ethnicities and abilities.

The budget also targets addiction to alcohol and other drugs. **\$1.6 million** will be delivered to **alcohol and other drug safety services**, specifically designed for **First Nations people and women**. This is vital for these two populations as they are more likely to have chronic medical problems and less likely to be in paid employment.

We are pleased to see **\$5.4 million** has been allocated to develop a new **mental health, alcohol, and other drug emergency department hub at Ballarat Base Hospital**. This hub will be designed to incorporate the **unique needs of women accessing specialist services**.

Community mental health programs (i.e., Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia’s (PANDA) integrated care and coordination service and Q-Space LGBTIQ+ Family Counselling) will collectively receive **\$2.8 million** for 2024-25 which will provide specialist support to populations such as LGBTIQ+ people and their families, new parents and people living with severe anxiety. This will benefit women who experience high levels of anxiety and are twice as likely as men to experience mental ill-health as new parents.¹³

¹³ Better Health Channel 2022. *Postnatal depression*, accessed 9 May 2024, <<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/postnatal-depression-pnd>>.

Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs will receive **\$5.5 million** over two years to provide vital community-based support. Furthermore, the new **Mental Health and Wellbeing Locals** will receive **\$15.8 million** over 3 years to enable them to grow and maintain their workforce. These free services are so important, particularly for people with a low-income or who are not in paid employment – i.e., Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women of colour, and women with a disability.

These priority populations will also benefit from **\$3.8 million** which will enable the continuation of **suicide prevention initiatives** which target high-risk populations such as young people, LGBTIQ+ people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

\$2.1 million over three years will resource public sector departments to enact **preventative measures to create mentally healthier workplaces**.

\$47.3 million over four years will support the **Student Health and Wellbeing Program** to provide access to student support services, mental health support and the primary school nurse program within Victorian schools. These are vital services for girls and LGBTIQ+ students who most frequently access them.

Recommendations

We commend the government's recent investments in enhancing the mental health services and infrastructure dedicated to supporting women in Victoria. However, to truly meet the diverse needs of all women, we propose the following strategic enhancements grounded in feminist principles and practices of transformational gender equality:

1. Implement an intersectional approach in mental health service delivery that goes beyond acknowledging diversity to actively addressing the specific mental health needs of women across different races, ages, socio-economic statuses, abilities, and other identity facets. This approach should involve:
 - Tailored mental health programs that are co-designed with input from community representatives.
 - Regular training for mental health professionals on intersectionality and culturally competent care.
 - Continuous evaluation and adaptation of services to ensure they remain responsive and inclusive.
2. Substantially increase funding for primary prevention programs in the 2025-26 budget. Primary prevention should be recognised not only as a crucial element of public health but also as a cost-effective strategy that reduces long-term health expenditures by preventing mental health issues before they start. Specifically, we recommend:
 - Integration of mental health education into early schooling curricula to foster resilience from a young age.
 - Community-based outreach programs that educate and engage women on mental health self-care and early detection of mental health symptoms.
 - Partnerships with employers to develop workplace mental health initiatives that support women, especially in high-stress industries.
3. Establish proactive support systems that anticipate and mitigate the risk factors contributing to poor mental health among women. These systems should:

- Address known risk factors such as economic insecurity, violence, and chronic health issues through multi-sectoral collaborations.
- Include accessible mental health resources and emergency support services tailored to women facing acute stressors, such as during postpartum periods or after experiencing violence.
- Leverage technology and innovation to reach women in remote or underserved areas, ensuring equitable access to mental health resources.

By adopting these recommendations, we can ensure a more equitable, effective, and comprehensive approach to supporting the mental health and wellbeing of all Victorian women. These strategies not only aim to meet the immediate needs of women but also contribute to the long-term goal of establishing a society where gender does not dictate mental health outcomes.

Sexual and Reproductive Health

There was a noticeable gap in funding for women’s sexual and reproductive health. Last year, we saw funding for screening and treatment procedures, more sexual and reproductive health hubs, research initiatives, free pads, and tampons in schools, and more. It is unclear whether funding will continue to end period poverty in 2024-25. Despite a [media release](#) in April 2024 announcing the free trial program to provide sanitary items in schools, it was not itemised in the budget papers or mentioned in the Gender Equality Budget Statement.

The 2024-25 budget is focused on maternal health and fertility. We welcome the investment of **\$498 million** over three years towards the **Monash Medical Centre Redevelopment**. This will see new birthing suites and maternity inpatient services. The funding will also bring new parents closer to their babies by making it easier to move between the maternity rooms and the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU). This will be a great comfort to new mums and is certainly needed in Victoria with 14.8% of babies being admitted to the NICU.¹⁴

\$28.8 million over three years will provide important support to new parents by continuing to fund **Maternal and Child Health Services**, including the Maternal and Child Health after-hours line. This will also fund Aboriginal Maternal and Child Health programs and associated services. Aboriginal-led services are pivotal for appropriately addressing the health needs of Indigenous Australians. They are culturally competent and draw on traditional knowledge, are connected to community, and are culturally safe spaces which increases trust and accessibility.

Funding is also allocated to **pregnancy support services**. **\$7.6 million** over four years will support the Public Fertility Care egg and sperm bank to help people to become pregnant. These funds will also ensure the Health Mothers, Health Babies program can continue to be delivered to women during and after their pregnancy until they are accessing Maternal and Child Health Services. This program is vital for women who are unable to access antenatal care services and/or have complex care needs.

\$1 million will enable the continuation of a **peer-led sexual health service** to provide important sexual health education and support for sex workers. This profession and group of women face high levels of stigma when accessing primary, sexual and mental health services.

The sustained support for Aboriginal-led maternal and child health programs showcases a commitment to culturally competent care. This approach is essential for effective healthcare delivery and serves as a model for expanding similar initiatives across other marginalised groups. Similarly, the investment in a peer-led sexual health service for sex workers demonstrates recognition of the unique needs of this group. Such targeted programs are a form of primary prevention, reducing the risk of sexual and reproductive health (SRH) issues through tailored education and support.

¹⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2023. *Australia’s mothers and babies*, accessed 8 May 2024, <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mothers-babies/australias-mothers-babies/contents/baby-outcomes/admission-to-a-special-care-nursery-or-neonatal-in>>.

However, the current budget's narrow focus on maternal health and fertility services misses broader SRH needs, including primary prevention strategies. Enhancing funding for a wider array of preventative SRH services – including STI prevention, contraceptive education, and early screening programs – can address the diverse needs of all women.

There's a critical need to invest in primary prevention programs that focus on consent coercion and comprehensive sexual education. These programs are vital for empowering individuals to make informed decisions about their bodies and relationships, ultimately preventing SRH issues and reducing incidences of sexual violence.

While the focus on Aboriginal-led health services is a positive step, broadening this approach to include other cultural and identity groups would enhance the accessibility and effectiveness of primary prevention strategies in SRH. Adopting intersectional policies that incorporate primary prevention can address the multiple barriers faced by various groups. This involves recognising how intersecting identities impact access to and effectiveness of SRH care, particularly in preventative services.

We acknowledge the recent investment in regional SRH hubs across Victoria however access to timely and appropriate SRH services including abortion services in rural and remote areas continues to be extremely challenging. There continues to be a need to invest in innovative models that address the tyranny of distance and the challenges of privacy and objection in small rural communities.

Recommendations

Future budgets should prioritise and expand primary prevention in sexual and reproductive health (SRH) funding. This involves increasing allocations for a comprehensive range of preventative SRH services that address the entire spectrum of women's health needs beyond fertility and maternity care. Investing in community-based education initiatives, preventative screenings, and early intervention services is crucial to this approach.

Substantial resources should be allocated to develop and implement primary prevention education programs at all educational levels. These programs should focus on fostering a deep understanding of consent, healthy relationships, and safe sexual practices. By educating individuals from a young age, we can create a foundation for positive SRH outcomes and prevent issues before they arise.

Broadening funding for culturally competent preventative care is another key recommendation. Extending primary prevention funding to culturally competent healthcare initiatives across various cultural and identity groups ensures that all individuals receive respectful and preventative care tailored to their backgrounds. This approach recognises the diverse needs of different communities and works to address health disparities.

Lastly, developing intersectional and preventative SRH policies is crucial. Crafting and funding policies with a clear focus on intersectionality and primary prevention in SRH ensures that preventative measures are tailored to effectively meet the unique needs of all women, especially those facing compounded forms of discrimination. By acknowledging the complex interplay of various social identities, these policies can tackle the root causes of health inequities.

By emphasising primary prevention in these areas, the government can significantly strengthen its approach to reducing health inequities in sexual and reproductive health, ensuring a proactive, inclusive, and comprehensive public health strategy. Investing in prevention not only improves individual health outcomes but also contributes to a more equitable and healthy society overall.

Support for Women with Diverse Identities and Experiences

Victoria is home to women with diverse ethnicities, cultural backgrounds, and identities. According to the 2021 Census and the Victorian Population Health Survey 2017:

- 35% of Victorians were born overseas
- 33% speak a language other than English at home
- 2.2% arrived in Australia in the past 2.5 years
- 1% identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- 6.2% have a disability
- 5.7% of Victorians aged 18+ identify as LGBTIQ+

We therefore welcome funding in the budget to support Victoria's diverse population. **Multicultural Affairs Policy and Programs** will receive **\$64.6 million** in 2024-25. This will include **\$4 million** over two years to support anti-discrimination measures. Programs that support **newly arrived migrants** will continue to be delivered with **\$4.4 million** over three years, including Community Hubs Australia and Refugee Legal, which will build community cohesion and extend legal support for asylum seekers and temporary visa holders. Moreover, **\$5.2 million** over four years will fund the delivery of programs through the **Victorian African Communities Action Plan**, including Employment Brokers programs, the alcohol and drugs outreach and education program, and the Victorian African Communities Committee. Continued funding for multicultural affairs policies and programs is critical for supporting women in multicultural communities to strengthen their social and economic wellbeing.

The budget will also ensure **tailored healthcare will be provided for refugees and asylum seekers**. With **\$4.4 million**, the community healthcare system will deliver culturally appropriate care to members of these communities who are not eligible for Medicare and other such supports.

The budget will also allocate **\$1,447.6 million** to **increase equal access to education** among Aboriginal students, socially disadvantaged students, students for whom English is an additional language and students living in rural and regional areas.

\$10.8 million over four years will be directed towards **Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations**. We celebrate that this funding is an investment in prevention. It will enable the ongoing delivery and expansion of the Culture and Kinship program, reconnecting young Aboriginal Victorians to their culture, identity, history, and spirituality, to improve physical and mental health.

Funding is also directed towards programs to support people with a **disability**. For instance, **\$24 million** will enable the **continuation of a range of supports** including, but not limited to, supporting Victorians with disability ineligible for the NDIS (which is particularly important for women who are more likely to have an invisible disability), Family Services Specialist Disability Practitioner program, Steps to Confident Parenting program, Parenting Children with Complex Disability program, and supporting children with complex disability and their families to access mainstream supports. A further **\$1,855.1 million** will cover programs that support **students with disabilities** including transport, welfare, and support services. Given that nearly **6.7% of Victorian women have a disability**, and this rate is higher among culturally diverse communities, in rural and regional

Victoria, and among Indigenous people,¹⁵ we hope that an intersectional gender lens is applied to the programs and distribution of funds.

Victoria's LGBTIQ+ communities are also represented in the 2024-25 budget. **\$11.1 million** will be directed towards the delivery of **policies and programs that support equality and improving outcomes** for these communities. **Trans and gender-diverse healthcare** will receive **\$2.5 million** over four years. This will enable the continued delivery of trans and gender-diverse health services including therapy, trans and gender-diverse peer navigators, and medical treatment where appropriate in Melbourne and regional Victoria as well as operate two multidisciplinary gender-affirming care clinics. This is a good start, however, there is still more to be done to ensure all sexually and gender-diverse people can thrive in Victoria.

Recommendations

The Victorian state budget's commitment to diverse and marginalised communities is commendable, reflecting a positive direction in policy-making. The allocation of \$64.6 million for multicultural affairs is significant, but there is an opportunity to ensure these funds are distributed in a way that directly supports women in these communities, particularly those facing multiple forms of discrimination. The emphasis on anti-discrimination and support for migrants is vital, yet there needs to be a specific focus on the unique barriers faced by women within these groups, such as gender-based violence and economic disadvantage.

The tailored healthcare initiatives for refugees and asylum seekers are crucial, especially the culturally appropriate care funded through the community healthcare system. However, there's a need to expand these services to cover more comprehensive women's health services, including sexual and reproductive health which often goes unaddressed in such programs. Similarly, the targeted funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and disability support programs is a step in the right direction, but these programs could be improved by ensuring they specifically address the intersectional needs of Aboriginal women and women with disabilities, who often face heightened barriers in accessing healthcare and education.

The substantial investment in education for disadvantaged groups is promising, but enhancing support for girls and young women from these backgrounds can further reduce educational disparities. Initiatives could include mentorship programs, scholarships, and targeted support for STEM education for girls from indigenous, rural, and socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

To advance intersectional equity, the government should develop and fund programs that address the specific needs of women across all funded initiatives, particularly in health, legal support, and employment. This includes expanding services for domestic violence, career training, and leadership development for women in marginalised communities. Allocating funding and creating programs specifically aimed at improving access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services for all women, focusing on those from culturally diverse backgrounds, those with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ individuals, is also crucial.

¹⁵ Women with Disabilities Victoria, *Fact Sheet 1*, accessed 8 May 2014, <<https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/WDV-Fact-Sheet-1-WDV1.pdf>>.

Training service providers across all programs in cultural competency is essential to ensure they are equipped to handle the diverse needs of women from different backgrounds. This training should cover gender sensitivity, cultural awareness, and specific issues such as the challenges faced by trans and gender-diverse individuals. Establishing a cross-departmental taskforce to ensure that an intersectional gender lens is applied to the creation, implementation, and evaluation of all government-funded programs can help foster a more inclusive approach. This taskforce should include representatives from diverse communities, gender studies experts, and policymakers.

Finally, implementing mechanisms for monitoring and publicly reporting on the effectiveness of these initiatives in improving outcomes for women from diverse backgrounds is crucial for long-term sustainability and accountability. This should include setting clear, measurable objectives and outcomes to track progress and make adjustments as needed.

By taking these steps, the Victorian Government can ensure its budget and policies not only include but are also effectively tailored to the nuanced needs of all women, particularly those at the intersection of multiple forms of marginalisation. This approach will foster a more equitable society where every individual has the opportunity to thrive.

Conclusions & Next Steps

Our analysis highlights significant strides in acknowledging and attempting to address issues related to intersectionality including gender equity, yet also points out areas requiring sustained focus and improvement.

Our analysis has concluded that:

There are positive initiatives: The budget has implemented several positive measures such as increasing safety for women and children, investing in health, and integrating gender responsive budgeting. These steps are crucial in addressing immediate gender-based disparities and setting a precedent for future budgeting processes.

There are areas for improvement: Despite these initiatives, there are lapsing programs and short-term funding issues that threaten the sustainability of these efforts. There is a need for long-term investments, especially in areas like gender-based violence prevention, mental health, and housing, which are essential for achieving lasting gender equality.

There is recognition for economic inclusivity were possible. The budget recognises the economic pressures faced by women and has implemented measures aimed at economic relief for families. However, there is a clear need for more comprehensive strategies to address systemic economic disparities affecting women, including the gender pay gap and employment barriers.

Our Calls to Action

The sector will take this analysis, its recommendations and conclusions, and use them as one of our key inputs for monitoring the government's continued commitment to an equitable Victoria.

Noting this, our calls to action for future policy and budget funding are:

- **Sustained Funding:** We advocate for the continuation and expansion of funding in critical areas such as women's health services, violence prevention, and economic equity. This includes pushing for permanent funding solutions rather than temporary or lapsing allocations.
- **Expand Definitions:** We encourage the government to broaden the definition of families and diversity in policy frameworks to ensure all types of family structures are supported equitably.
- **Legislative Support:** The Victorian Government should continue to support and promote legislation that institutionalises gender-responsive budgeting and other progressive gender policies to ensure they are not reversed and are integrated into all levels of planning and decision-making.
- **Address Systemic Barriers:** The Victorian Government should continue to do work that dismantles systemic barriers to women's economic participation, such as inadequate support for care work and unequal pay. Policies need to be promoted that recognise and value care as essential labor and value to the community, rather than policies for the care of children, being situated only as drivers to enable women's participation in the workforce.
- **Enhance Intersectional Approaches:** Push for policies and programs that are truly intersectional, recognising and addressing the overlapping forms of discrimination that affect women's lives, particularly those from marginalised communities.

- **Education and Skills:** Increase efforts in education and skills policy that build capability to enable VET, Adult Education and Skills programs to address gender inequity.
- **Engagement and Participation:** Encourage community engagement and participation in the budgeting and policy making process to ensure the voices of diverse women and gender-diverse individuals are heard and incorporated in future budget cycles.
- **Increased Transparency:** We advocate for clear, disaggregated data and more transparency about the intersectional, including gendered, impacts of budget initiatives and policy decisions.

These calls to action are vital for not only addressing the gaps identified in the current budget but also for paving the way towards a more equitable and inclusive society. By continuing to advocate for these changes, organisations and advocates can help ensure that the progress made is sustained and built upon in future state budgets.

The authors look forward to discussing this analysis with Government and key stakeholders and playing our role in continuing to create a gender equal Victoria.

