



Ten ways local government can advance gender equity

Why gender matters

The fact sheets, *Ten ways local government can advance gender equity*, are part of a resource package designed to build the capacity for local governments to consider gender equity in their planning, policy and service delivery.

Local government plays an important role in creating and supporting environments that enable community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. Reducing gender inequity for women is a key strategy in achieving this goal, as it allows for a more just, inclusive and fair society for both women and men. The fact sheets include practical information and practice examples of ways local government can advance gender equity for women.

The ten fact sheets are:

1. Why gender matters
2. Gender analysis
3. Infrastructure
4. Land use planning and design
5. Promoting women in leadership
6. Workplaces
7. Sports and recreation
8. Access to services
9. Key concepts and definitions
10. Further resources

What is gender?

'Gender' refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours and attributes assigned to women, men, girls and boys.¹ Unlike the biological characteristics and differences between women and men known as sex, gender roles are socially learnt, differ among cultures and change over time. While it would appear that women and men have all the same formal opportunities, gender inequity causes many women to experience significant disadvantage, impacting on their physical, mental and social health and wellbeing.² To ensure that community needs are considered and responded to in the most informed and appropriate way, it is essential to consider gender when developing local government policy, planning and service delivery.

What is gender equity?

Gender equity is an important social justice goal. The concept recognises that within all communities, women and men have different benefits, access to power, resources and responsibilities.³ Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men by recognising diversity and disadvantage and directing resources and services towards those most in need to ensure equal outcomes for all. A gender equity approach therefore acknowledges that different strategies are often necessary for women and men.

Why is it important for local government to consider gender?

Local government has a critical role in creating and supporting environments that enable everyone in our community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

This role is legislated under the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act (2008) section 24* and the *Local Government Act 1999 (3c) (3d)*, which mandates councils to act as representative, informed and responsible decision makers in the interests of their communities.⁴ This means responding to the interests and needs of both women and men across all aspects of council activity. Councils are also bound by legislation such as the *Victorian Equal Opportunity Act 2010* and *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, which aim to eliminate discrimination and sexual harassment and promote greater equity in our community. Finally, compliance with the *Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006* requires councils to uphold human rights, including the rights of women, as an essential component of a democratic, equitable and inclusive society. Achieving gender equity requires our elected political representatives to drive and champion policy, program and workplace reforms that build a fairer community for all.

The Victorian Local Government Women's Charter highlights the need for increased women's participation in key decision making roles through three principles: gender equity, diversity and active citizenship. In Victoria, 63 of the 79 local s have endorsed the Charter, with many councils developing action

plans to support the development of these objectives. The Charter is consistent with state, national and international protocols which highlight equal rights and opportunities as central to good governance.^{8,9}

How can local government advance gender equity?

There are a number of ways councils can advance gender equity. Strategies include integrating a gender equity strategy into council's core business that enables mapping and analysis of the potential impact of council policies and programs on women and men.

A gender analysis examines the differences in women and men's lives, including those that lead to social and economic inequity for women, and applies this understanding to decision-making, policy development and service delivery. Overcoming gender inequity requires councillors, staff and organisations as a whole, to acknowledge difference and disadvantage and to challenge the stereotypes and attitudes that can lead to discrimination and marginalisation.

¹ Please note the Ten ways local government can advance gender equity fact sheets will for the most part refer to women and men. When considering gender it is also important to take into account the needs of girls and boys to ensure that planning, policy and service development and delivery is not blind to the differing and diverse needs of children.

² E. Broderick, C. Goldie and E. Rosenman, Gender equality blueprint 2010, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney, 2010

³ World Health Organisation, Mainstreaming gender equity in health: the need to move forward, WHO regional Office for Europe, Copenhagen, 2002.

⁴ Victorian Local Government Act 1989: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/lga1989182/s3c.html

⁵ VicHealth, The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the Burden of Disease caused by Intimate Partner Violence, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne, 2004.

⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008, *How Australians Use Their Time, 2006*, cat. no. 4153.0, <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/detailspage/4153.02006>

⁷ ABS Average Weekly Earnings, Australia, February 2010, Catalogue No 2302.2

⁸ Local, State and International Protocols acknowledged by the Charter include:
 – the Declaration on the Role of Australian Local Government (1997), <http://www.alga.asn.au/?ID=55>
 – the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government (1998) the Victorian Code of Good Governance (2000) <http://www.vlga.org.au/Resources/Library/GoodGovernanceGuide.aspx>
 – the National Framework for Women in Local Government in 2007, http://www.algwa.net.au/files/VLJXY6QUTT/ALGWA_The_Way_Forward.pdf
 – Victorian Human Rights and Responsibilities Charter 2006, http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/cohrara2006433/

⁹ Initiated by the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition, endorsed by the Minister for Local Government, the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association.

Gender inequity facts

FACT: Freedom from violence is a human right. Yet for many women and girls this right is violated. Intimate partner violence is the leading contributor of preventable death, disability and illness for Victorian women aged 15–44.⁵

FACT: Women spend almost triple the amount of hours per week caring for children when compared with men.⁶

FACT: Australian women on average earn 18% less than men in similar positions, which is equivalent to 82 cents to every dollar. The average amount of superannuation savings for men aged 25–64 years was \$69,050 compared to \$35,520 for women.⁷



For more information visit www.mav.asn.au/genderequality