



Ten ways local government can advance gender equity

Infrastructure

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

Local government's role in infrastructure

Local government provides a wide range of essential infrastructure. This includes the construction and maintenance of local roads, lighting, bridges, footpaths, drainage and waste disposal. Local government is responsible for vital social infrastructure and community facilities, such as community centres, arts and cultural facilities, playgrounds, maternal and child health centres, parks, libraries and recreation facilities. These facilities play a significant role in providing opportunities for community inclusion, participation and social connection.

Why is gender relevant to infrastructure?

The provision, design and maintenance of infrastructure within our municipalities has a significant impact on the way people use public spaces and community facilities and how they interact with their community.

Planning and designing community infrastructure that is responsive to and respectful of the needs of women and men means analysing how public spaces are used and creating ways to make them more inclusive. This involves investigating who uses community infrastructure, when and for how long, as well as which community groups don't use a particular space and why.

Infrastructure that is poorly maintained can impact on people's use of public spaces, as well as their perceptions of safety. Factors such as poor lighting, graffiti, low levels of natural surveillance, rubbish and cracked footpaths can affect the real and perceived safety of both women and men.

However, there can be particularly negative impacts on women and girls' use of community infrastructure. For example, if path access to a community facility is poorly lit during the evening, women's participation could decline due to safety concerns including increased risk of assault. A well-lit pathway increases visibility and safety.

In addition to the built environment, the operation of community facilities also impacts on women's sense of safety, comfort and subsequent use of these facilities. For instance, the types of programs offered, opening hours, staff composition and the visuals displayed within a facility can have as much of an effect on women's use of services as factors in the built environment. For example, sporting clubs that have sexist posters in their club rooms can create barriers for women and girls' access and participation.

How can local government ensure that infrastructure is gender equitable?

To ensure that all members of our community are able to participate fully in community life, it is essential that community infrastructure is designed, maintained and programmed to be inclusive. Council infrastructure needs to be usable, welcoming, relevant and safe for everyone.

Simple ways to ensure that infrastructure is gender equitable include:

- Conduct an audit of council facilities to determine whether the needs of women and men are being met.
- Ensure any community consultation that is undertaken to assess community infrastructure or facilities involves women, including women who currently use the facility as well as those who do not.
- Include gender analysis as part of regular council maintenance process.
- Ensure that 'Crime Prevention through Environmental Design' principles are used in all infrastructure design.
- Ensure that staffing and programs at community facilities cater for women and men.
- Use sex-disaggregated data and research to inform infrastructure development.
- Consider ways to utilise council infrastructure, including buildings, sports grounds and vehicles. Facilities can play a very public role in supporting gender equity and preventing violence against women.

Examples

1. In 2008, Maribyrnong City Council conducted an audit of eleven of its facilities to assess how safe and welcoming these facilities were for women. The assessments were completed using a Preventing Violence Against Women (PVAW) Assessment Tool, which was specifically designed for this assessment. A number of recommendations were made for each facility. The assessment tool is available at: <http://www.mav.asn.au>
2. The Darebin Leisure Services Strategy 2010–2014 includes five actions that support greater inclusion and participation of women.

A case study of women's transport needs

Research suggests that women and men use public transport differently, which is linked to their employment patterns and family and household responsibilities. Women are less likely to have access to a car and are more likely to walk and use public transport. When travelling on public transport, women are often carrying shopping and accompanied by small children. Women collecting children from school and childcare usually travel outside of peak hour and across towns and cities. However, most public transport is designed for people who travel in and out of city and town centres, at peak hour and without children, prams and shopping. In recent years there has been increasing recognition that a gender analysis of transport infrastructure is necessary so that the differing transport needs of men and women can be met.

