



# Women's Health Tasmania

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Submission on the  
*Draft Tasmanian  
Women's Strategy  
2022-2027*

29<sup>th</sup> April 2022

EQUITY  
CHOICE  
IMPACT

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## About Women's Health Tasmania

Women's Health Tasmania (WHT) is a state-wide health promotion service. Our mission is healthy Tasmanian women. We provide health promotion activities and projects. We are also a key voice for women's health in Tasmania and undertake policy development, advocacy and sector development.

We use the WHO social determinants model of health to guide our work. We see health as a holistic state of wellbeing that is determined by "the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live, and age, and the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life."<sup>1</sup>

The women of Tasmania are diverse. Everyday we see how factors such as income, education, gender, geography, visa status, family violence and resources create different experiences of health and wellbeing for women. The health disparities between women are a concerning and growing issue in contemporary Tasmania. We need a strategy that can address these differences and tackle the inequality, discrimination and violence that impact women in Tasmania.

We see the results of women's inequality everywhere. In the staggeringly high numbers of women with disabilities who experience sexual assault. In the high rates of family violence experienced by women, and especially by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. We see it in the way that trans women face discrimination and harassment in public spaces. We see it also in the pervasive economic inequality experienced by women generally.

We are excited by the opportunity that consultation on the Draft Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-2027 (the Strategy) presents to address these and other concerns.

### *A note about framing*

In this submission, many of the ideas and recommendations are based on the work we do with people who identify as women – both cis women and trans women.

While our work is informed by the experiences of non-binary people, our submission will mainly look at the issues experienced by women. The needs of non-binary people need to be addressed as they experience discrimination on the basis of gender. But the question of how a strategy should and could respond to their experiences requires more consultation, research and reflection. We fully support further consultation with non-binary people about how they should be included and their needs addressed in a strategy that tackles gender inequality.

## What looks good

There are a number of aspects of the Strategy that will make a robust contribution to the landscape of gender equality in Tasmania. They include:

- Implementing the *Our Watch Workplace Equality and Respect Standards* across State Government Departments.
- Understanding and speaking to the cultural ideas that limit and constrain women and men in their participation in different aspects of life, such as gender stereotypes.
- Supporting women to take up non-traditional employment roles. The draft Strategy and the Discussion Paper put forward a suite of interventions aimed at increasing the numbers of

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<sup>1</sup> World Health Organisation, *Social Determinants of Health*. 2022. [https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/social-determinants-of-health#tab=tab_1) accessed at 16/02/2021.

women in non-traditional fields. There is support both for women to upskill and the Modern Workplace Framework aimed at making workplaces free of sexual harassment.

- Supporting women in leadership roles. The Women on Boards Strategy, Board Targets and Women's Leadership grants are commended for their focus on increasing the number of women on boards.

### What's missing

While we know that the government action plans will deliver more details about how this Strategy will contribute to a more equal Tasmania, the Strategy is missing actions and ideas in key areas.

This Strategy must include the needs of women in ways that acknowledge diversity and the challenges that women face in Tasmania today. Without this the Strategy is at risk of being irrelevant and inaccessible.

### *We need to define the problem*

The Strategy should include a clear definition of what gender inequality is and what this means for Tasmania.

Currently the Strategy implicitly defines gender inequality by referring to its effects, for example, women's over-representation in sectors that have been historically under-valued and underpaid. For example, health, education and hygiene industries and women's roles as unpaid carers and mothers.

The problem of gender inequality is not simply that women work in lower paid industries or do the majority of unpaid domestic labour. Gender inequality is about who and what is valued by society and the power, resources and opportunities are given out. Gender inequality relies on rigid cultural ideas about gender and is perpetuated by the material ways in which resources are distributed.

In *Change the Story: A shared framework to prevent violence against women and their children*, gender inequality is defined as:

a social condition characterised by unequal value afforded to men and women and an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunity between them.<sup>2</sup>

The WHO defines gender inequality in the following way:

Gender is hierarchical and produces inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities. Gender-based discrimination intersects with other factors of discrimination, such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, disability, age, geographic location, gender identity and sexual orientation, among others. This is referred to as intersectionality.<sup>3</sup>

The Strategy should address the differences between men and women in the context of unequal power relations and the forces that create this.

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<sup>2</sup> Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth (2015) *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children*, Melbourne, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> WHO, *Gender and Health*, 2022, [https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender#tab=tab_1)

This can't be done by only attending to quantitative equality. Initiatives put forward in the current strategy that boost the numbers of women in non-traditional industries are examples of quantitative equality.

While commendable, merely involving more women within male-dominated settings will not be sufficient to change how activities and attributes associated with women, such as child-rearing, are devalued, and how women often lose out financially for engaging in them. The Strategy should facilitate the development of solutions that can transform current relations of unequal status and power.

### *A Gender Equality Strategy or a Women's Strategy?*

There is merit in reframing the Women's Strategy to a Gender Equality Strategy.

The Draft Strategy focuses on fostering actions that bring more women into traditionally male dominated work fields – such as women on boards and women in construction. It also will deliver Gender Impact Assessment tools. These kinds of approaches can boost the numbers of women involved in an activity and it can encourage organisations to reflect on gender inequality in their work. But it doesn't substantively change the social, cultural and economic conditions that mean women will still experience unequal power.

A Gender Equality Strategy encourages a broader view of gender inequality and lends itself to a gender transformative approach.

### ***Gender transformative approaches***

Gender transformative approaches see a more complete picture of how advantage and disadvantage map onto gender. Gender transformative approaches:

“...address the causes of gender-based inequalities and work to transform harmful gender roles, norms and relations. They challenge both normative and structural inequality.”<sup>4</sup>

A gender transformative approach addresses inequality in a deeper way. It looks to the causes of inequality and what sustains it and seeks to alter these conditions.

Gender transformative approaches acknowledge the harm done by gender inequality to women, girls, people of diverse genders, and to men and boys. Such a framework is an opportunity to address the rigid gender norms about masculinity which set up the conditions that enable men's violence toward women. These same norms about masculinity are experienced by men and boys as limiting, alienating, and emotionally crippling. Patriarchal ideas about masculinity and manhood also create inequities for men which limit opportunities and rights for women – for example, inequities in access to parenting leave for fathers forces mothers into the role of primary carer of infants.

A Gender Equality Strategy does not mean that the challenges facing women are sidelined. Rather, it brings them in to high relief as the vast bulk of equity interventions will inevitably be directed towards women, as women face the most significant economic and social disadvantages because of gender.

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<sup>4</sup> Our Watch, A guide to help you work out how gender transformative your initiative is, 2022, <https://handbook.ourwatch.org.au/leadership-resource/a-guide-to-help-you-work-out-how-gender-transformative-your-initiative-is/>

## ***A Gender Equality Strategy in Action***

The Victorian state government has released a Gender Equality Strategy that is aimed squarely at preventing violence against women. The Victorian Gender Equality Strategy sees violence against women as an urgent area of change. It also recognises that many of the interventions that will be effective in preventing violence will have immense benefit for everyone in the Victorian community and create a more equal society. The Strategy draws on examples of good practice, both within Australia and overseas, as a means of exploring solutions in gender inequality.

The aim of the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy is broader than a Women's Strategy. It has the flexibility to both address the key needs of women and provide for gender inclusive interventions that level the playing field.<sup>5</sup>

### *Economic equality should be a goal of the strategy*

Economic equality should be elevated to become a goal of the Strategy.

The government has been working to address issues of economic inequality in the *Financial Security for Women Action Plan 2018-2021*, but the Strategy is an opportunity to take a stronger stance. Economic inequality goes to the heart of gender inequality and should have a key place in the Strategy.

Economic inequality has serious negative impacts on women's lives. We've undertaken consultation with diverse groups of women who call Tasmania home. In every one of our consultations, women said that financial barriers were a major impediment to their health and wellbeing.<sup>6</sup> Women identified that social security reform was needed as the current payment rates kept people in poverty and negatively impacted their health. Economic inequality is also an enabler and a result of family violence. Recent research has shown that there is a strong relationship between financial insecurity and intimate partner violence.<sup>7</sup> Financial abuse is a common form of family violence and women report that financial insecurity can stop them from leaving violent relationships.<sup>8</sup>

Further, economic inequality can look different for women at different life stages. For example, women over 55 years old are the fastest growing cohort of people at risk of homelessness. This is a result of income inequality across the lifespan. On average, women retire with \$157,050 in superannuation, compared to \$270,710 for men and 35% of women approach retirement with no superannuation at all.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Victorian Government, *Safe and strong: A Victorian gender equality strategy*, 2021,

<https://www.vic.gov.au/safe-and-strong-victorian-gender-equality#leadership-and-participation>

<sup>6</sup> We have consulted with migrant women, women who've experienced homelessness, older women who are at risk of homelessness, LGBTIQ+ women and women who live in remote and rural Tasmania. Some of the women in these groups also identified as living with a disability. To read our full reports, go here:

<https://www.womenshealthtas.org.au/resources>

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, A., & Boxall, H. (2022). *Economic insecurity and intimate partner violence in Australia during the COVID-19 pandemic* (Research report, 02/2022). ANROWS.

<sup>8</sup> Kutin, J., Russell, R. and Reid, M., 2017. Economic abuse between intimate partners in Australia: prevalence, health status, disability and financial stress. *Australian and New Zealand journal of public health*, 41(3), pp.269-274.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, *Older Women's Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper*, 2019, p. 11. [file:///C:/Users/Lucinda/Downloads/ahrc\\_ow\\_homelessness2019%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Lucinda/Downloads/ahrc_ow_homelessness2019%20(3).pdf)

Making economic equality a goal of the Strategy creates an imperative to address the structural issues that contribute to economic inequality such as family violence, housing affordability, affordable health care, childcare availability and affordability and unpaid caring responsibilities.

### *Equity at the centre of outcomes and evaluation*

There is a distinction between gender equality and gender equity, as outlined in the glossary of the Draft Strategy.

**Gender equality:** The equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women, men, trans and gender diverse people. Equality does not mean that women, men, trans and gender diverse people will become the same but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on their gender.

**Gender equity:** recognises that people may have different needs and power related to their gender and that these differences can be identified and addressed in a manner that rectifies gender related imbalances.

The Strategy should engage more deeply with the concept of equity as it is a crucial way of achieving gender equality. Equity is also a way of responding to the differences and diversity between women.

Equity could sit as a unifying principle that straddles the outcome and evaluation areas of economic security, leadership and participation, safety and health and wellbeing.

For example, an equity response to women's safety would involve an analysis from an equity standpoint – what are the biggest impacts on safety for women and girls? How do factors such as race, class or disability impact on women's lack of safety?

Equity means looking at ways to address substantive needs. For example, an equity approach to address family violence would involve long term investment in specialist family violence services so that women – who are overwhelmingly the victims of family violence – could have access to the support they need to be safe and to heal. This kind of investment is a way of responding to the needs of women who have been impacted by family violence that is proportional to the need.

A deep engagement with equity as a way of achieving gender equality is vital for the Strategy if it's to be effective.

### *Measuring Success: consultation on the outcomes*

Consultation on the outcomes should occur with groups that are most disadvantaged.

Understanding the extent to which the Strategy and the Action Plans is having an impact should be measured by speaking with women from *groups who experience high levels of disadvantage*.

- Women of CALD backgrounds, including those who have only recently migrated and may not yet be permanent residents of Tasmania
- Women who live in remote and rural areas of Tasmania
- Women who have experienced homelessness or are at risk of homelessness
- Women who are trans and people who are gender diverse.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Work will need to be done to identify the best ways to invite people of the gender diverse community to participate in ways that feeling meaningful to them.

- Women who have experienced incarceration
- Women who use drugs or alcohol, including injecting drug users or those with a history of injecting drug use.
- Women with disabilities
- Women who are mental health consumers
- Women who are single parents and/or carers
- Women who live on a low income

Stakeholder engagement must include deep engagement with women from a range of different identities and from across Tasmania. Finding out what difference the Women’s Strategy is playing in their lives is a way of measuring the success of the Strategy and the actions that flow from it. It will help identify what areas need more work.

### *Accountability and intersectionality: Principles for implementation*

Accountability and intersectionality should be added to the principles for implementation.

Accountability is different to Strong Governance. Accountability invites an understanding of and answerability to the community around the outcomes of the strategy.

Further, accountability as a principle means that there can be stronger expectations around seeing Tasmanian governments take meaningful actions in line with this strategy.

Intersectionality<sup>11</sup> must also be added as a principle of implementation. Intersectionality acknowledges that we are all made up of more than a single identity. Women experience gender discrimination differently depending on a range of identities and experiences such as their socio-economic status, migration status, race, religion, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and whether they are cisgender or transgender.

Applying an intersectional lens to gender inequality means that the Strategy will be able to address the different experiences of women. Without an intersectional understanding of gender underpinning the strategy’s implementation, it runs the risk of only addressing a narrowly defined set of interests. Not all women are the same, and true equality will never demand that we be all the same.

### *Gender budget framework should be developed with consultation*

A gender responsive analysis of the state budget is a commendable idea. But to be truly effective at transforming gender relations, it needs to consider measures that speak to women’s experiences of current economic policies at both the State and Federal level.

A gender responsive budget is one that “ensures gender-equitable distribution of resources and by contributing to equal opportunities for all.”<sup>12</sup> Gender responsive budget looks at the *impacts* of

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<sup>11</sup> Intersectionality was developed by academic and civil rights activist, Kimberlé Crenshaw in the 1980s as a way of understanding the double-discrimination faced by Black women in legal settings. Crenshaw, K., 2018. Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics [1989]. In *Feminist legal theory* (pp. 57-80). Routledge.

<sup>12</sup> Stephenson, M, 2018, A Guide to Gender Responsive Budgeting, Oxfam International, p 1. <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/gt-guide-gender-responsive-budgeting-280218-en.pdf>



budgets on people of different genders. It is a way of seeing who benefits the most and who is most disadvantaged by a budget.

For example, a gender responsive budget analysis should include:

- “How money is raised (for example through direct or indirect taxes, fees, fines and levies on imports) and how revenues are lost (for example through tax havens, tax dodging and unproductive incentives);
- How money is spent (including spending on public services, social welfare programmes or infrastructure such as roads);
- Whether spending is sufficient to meet the practical and strategic needs of men, women, girls and boys, while at the same time contributing to closing the gender gap;
- How decisions on raising and spending money affect unpaid care work and subsistence work, and the distribution of these between genders; and
- Whether spending in practice matches budget plans.”<sup>13</sup>

We applaud the introduction of annual gender budget statements from the State government to demonstrate how the budget intends to meet gender equality goals.

Under the draft strategy, the government will “gradually increase the detail and complexity of our annual Gender Budget Statements as the application of the gender impact assessment and evaluation process matures.”

We believe that the development of the budget statement framework should be done through consultation with stakeholders across a range of areas.

At a minimum, a gender budget statement should include:

- Analysis of how unpaid work – including child rearing, caring work, domestic work – contribute economically
- Analysis of the economic impacts of family violence and sexual assault on the Tasmanian community
- The relationship between social security, single parenthood and economic inequality
- The spending and long-term commitments to key areas that affect women such as family violence specialist services, housing, the women’s health sector including funding for maternal and infant health and reproductive healthcare.

Gender budget statement should be made a mandatory part of the Tasmanian government’s reporting and there should be clear, enforceable minimum requirements for Governments to report to. History has shown that the depth of analysis and usefulness of a gender budget statement are often dependent on the political ideologies of the presiding government.<sup>14</sup>

Making a gender budget statement mandatory would increase the accountability of governments and demonstrate a bipartisan approach to this important issue.

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sharp, R. and Broomhill, R., 2013. *A case study of gender-responsive budgeting in Australia*. London: Commonwealth Secretariat, p. 13. [https://www.unisa.edu.au/siteassets/epi/server-6-files/global/eass/hri/grb\\_papers\\_australia\\_comm-sec-updf\\_final-copy-.pdf](https://www.unisa.edu.au/siteassets/epi/server-6-files/global/eass/hri/grb_papers_australia_comm-sec-updf_final-copy-.pdf)

### *The plan to achieve gender equality – improving governance*

Strategic and policy advice around women's issues is a vital means of connecting government to current and emerging issues in the Tasmanian community.

The Tasmanian Women's Council is a key body that advises the Tasmanian Government on women's inequality. Areas of concern for the current Council are:

- The Women on Boards Strategy
- Women's leadership and safety under the previous Women's strategy
- Employment pathways for young women in non-traditional industries.

Membership of the council depends on a range of factors, and members are appointed by the Minister for Women.

We recommend that the Women's Council recruitment process be made more transparent and that priority populations be represented on the council, whether that be by virtue of organisational membership or lived experience.

Recruitment must be strategic and tied to the aims of the strategy, but it must also reflect the depth and diversity of women's lived experiences, including drivers of inequality such as (but not limited to) family violence, migration/refugee status, living on a low income, being a single parent and disability.

### *Summary*

Our ideas for the Strategy are around broadening its scope, making it more relevant to the diversity of women's lived experiences of inequality.

The strategy is a golden opportunity to create a fairer Tasmania and transform the unequal divisions of power and privilege that limit women. However, it needs work. We need a strategy that prioritises gender transformative approaches. Its current iteration is not bold enough. We would like to see the strategy engage more deeply with the diversity of women, and to reflect the urgent issues that affect women in Tasmania.

We need this strategy to be one that women – in all their diversity – see themselves and their experiences reflected.