

Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women

Government's response



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Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women – Government's response

The Inquiry into Economic Equity for Victorian Women was established to understand the gendered impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and to develop recommendations to progress economic equity for Victorian women.

The Inquiry was established in July 2021. The Panel was chaired by Ms Carol Schwartz AO, accompanied by Panel members Ms Liberty Sanger AOM and Mr James Fazzino.

The Panel was asked to inquire into the extent and nature of economic inequity for women in Victoria and consider ways to address it, then report to the Treasurer and Minister for Women.

The Inquiry heard from 86 individual stakeholders via submissions, consultations, and commissioned research. Stakeholders were from across government, the private sector, unions, academia, the not-for-profit sector, community service organisations and advocacy groups.

The report outlines workplace and economic inequity for women in Victoria. It then makes recommendations about policy options to address systemic disadvantage and structural barriers experienced by Victorian women.

The report contains 26 findings and 31 recommendations.

The Inquiry found that compared with men:

- women were paid less
- took on more unpaid caregiving responsibilities
- were less able to fulfil their potential in the paid workforce and in senior leadership positions due to structural barriers
- faced higher rates of gendered violence at work and in the community, including harassment and discrimination.

The recommendations reflect critical issues in the systemic undervaluation of women's contribution in the home, workplace and community. These issues remain persistent. Data released by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency in February 2022 shows that women earn \$25,000 less, on average, than men a year, with every industry reporting a gender pay gap.¹

The Inquiry also previously made two early recommendations to Government in September 2021. These related to access to childcare and school for children of single parents during Stage 4 COVID-19 restrictions, and for parents attending vaccination appointments. The Victorian Government promptly responded to this announcement at the time, by:

- recognising single parents as authorised workers
- announcing a \$21 million package on 19 October 2021 to support Victorians facing additional barriers to vaccination.

¹ [Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2022](https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality-scorecard) <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/publications/australias-gender-equality-scorecard>>

The Victorian Government welcomes the recommendations and findings of the Inquiry

The Victorian Government has made significant progress on gender equality. We are proud to have the first majority-women Cabinet in the State's history. The Government has introduced new gender equality legislation, driven ground-breaking policy reform and led innovative programs to advance gender equality. The Government has worked collaboratively with communities and experts to pave the way for change.

But as this report highlights – there is always more work to do.

The Victorian Government is committed to addressing economic inequity for Victorian women and supports, supports-in-part or supports-in-principle 28 of the 31 recommendations. Three recommendations are subject to further consideration.

The report lays out an ambitious agenda for short, medium and long-term action. Some recommendations call for coordinated action across the Victorian Government, and others require partnership with the Commonwealth and the private sector.

The Victorian Government recognises that gender equality is a long-term vision, requiring deep cultural and structural change to our society.

The report's themes will continue to underpin and drive Victoria's ambition and gender equality policy development in the years to come. The Victorian Government will use the evidence and recommendations contained in this report to develop and implement Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy, for release in 2023,² and in future engagement with the Commonwealth Government.

The Victorian Government has considered and taken action to implement many of the Inquiry's recommendations

The Victorian Government has committed to a significant reform of early childhood education and care in the state, through a \$9 billion investment over the next decade into the Best Start, Best Life initiative. Funding will deliver free kindergarten for three and four-year-old children and from 2025, will see 50 new government-owned childcare centres established in areas of unmet demand.

Over the next decade, four-year-old kinder will transition to pre-prep, increasing to a universal 30-hour week program of play-based learning for every four-year-old child in Victoria. This investment will support the workforce participation of Victorian women by addressing one of the most significant barriers to increasing women's economic equity.

The 2022–23 State Budget saw investments of more than \$940 million for initiatives primarily focused on improving outcomes for women. This investment compliments a range of initiatives and programs already undertaken to address the impact of COVID-19 on people who experience barriers to economic equity, including women. These investments include:

- \$241 million to support victim survivors of family violence, including \$43.3 million for family violence services.

² Note: The Inquiry primarily focused on the inequalities that exist between women and men, including people who identify as women and men. The Victorian Government's response to the Inquiry includes initiatives and strategies that support women's economic equity. These initiatives complement the Victorian Government's actions to support trans and non-binary Victorians, including through the ground-breaking *Pride in our future: Victoria's LGBTIQ+ strategy 2022–32*.

- \$50 million for Victorian Legal Aid to deliver legal services, including duty lawyers and legal aid grants.
- \$8.3 million over three years to support gender equality initiatives and the implementation of the *Gender Equality Act 2020* (Gender Equality Act).
- \$6.9 million to expand WorkSafe's WorkWell program to include a dedicated stream for preventing sexual harassment within workplaces.
- \$6.5 million to enable the community legal sector to provide early intervention programs for disadvantaged Victorians and respond to demand for legal assistance.
- \$1.1 million to support gender responsive budgeting in Victoria through legislative reform and culture change to embed the practice across public sector entities. This builds on the use of gender responsive budgeting in the 2022–23 State Budget.
- \$200,000 for the Women of Colour Leadership program to address structural barriers for diverse women seeking leadership opportunities.

Commitment to treaty and truth-telling in Victoria

We acknowledge the impact of colonisation continues to this day and we seek ways to rectify past wrongs, including through truth-telling and the development of treaty. We are deeply committed to Aboriginal self-determination and to supporting Victoria's treaty and truth-telling processes. We acknowledge that treaty will have wide-ranging impacts for the way we work with Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians. We seek to create respectful and collaborative partnerships and develop policies and programs that respect Aboriginal self-determination and align with treaty aspirations.

We acknowledge that Victoria's treaty process will provide a framework for the transfer of decision-making power and resources to support self-determining Aboriginal communities to take control of matters that affect their lives. We commit to working proactively to support this work in line with the aspirations of Traditional Owners and Aboriginal Victorians.

Detailed response

Chapter 1: Addressing the exacerbation of existing economic inequities by the COVID-19 pandemic

Early recommendation 1

Consider all single parents authorised workers for the purposes of accessing early childhood education and care services and schools during periods of COVID-19 pandemic restrictions.

Government's response

Support

The Victorian Government announced that early childhood education and care (ECEC) services would be open to all single parents from 9 September 2021, regardless of their authorised worker status.

There are no restrictions to access for ECEC services within current pandemic orders.

Early recommendation 2

Make early childhood education and care services available for parents while they attend a vaccination appointment if they cannot make alternative supervision arrangements.

Government's response

Support

The Victorian Government announced a \$21 million package on 19 October 2021 to support Victorians facing additional barriers to vaccination. This included offering respite or occasional childcare in suburbs with low vaccination uptake.

Recommendation 1

Develop a gender responsive whole of government COVID-19 pandemic recovery strategy. The strategy should:

- provide assistance on the basis of gender disaggregated data about which industries have been hardest hit by job losses
- provide dedicated and significant catch-up support to the hospitality and arts and creative industries to alleviate the severe impacts of job losses
- increase public spending in critical human infrastructure including social, community and health services
- ensure gender and intersectional data is collected and considered as part of COVID-19 pandemic recovery planning, decision making and spending
- fund re-skilling programs to support women to move into new and emerging industries.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Victorian Government is committed to ensuring gender equity is embedded in Victoria's COVID-19 pandemic recovery. A range of initiatives and programs are being undertaken to support Victoria's social and economic recovery, stimulate growth and address the impact on certain groups, including women.

The intent of the recommendation will be addressed by ensuring COVID-19 pandemic recovery, initiatives and programs across government incorporate gender-responsive components.

The 2022–23 State Budget invests around \$940 million in initiatives primarily focused on improving outcomes for women.

The Government is putting women's health first, with over \$600 million going directly to improving access and equity for women-specific health services around Victoria.

The Government will focus on improving representation to ensure that policies and spending reflect the diversity in the Victorian community. Up to mid-April 2022 for example, women made up 63 per cent of people the Jobs Victoria Fund helped into employment. Given that the Fund's initial target was to pay 60 per cent of wage subsidies to women, the Government is performing above our targets.

The Victorian Government has delivered a range of support for creative industries affected by the pandemic, including a \$15 million package to support some of the hardest hit parts of the state's creative sector. The Sustaining Creative Workers initiative has also delivered 771 grants totalling \$4.7 million, which helped to enable creatives to continue to work during lockdown.

As our economy and communities continue to recover from the effects of the pandemic, we need to create new opportunities for women to enter employment, encourage greater workforce participation, increase flexibility and deliver more pathways to upskill or change careers.

The Government is delivering more apprenticeships for women by providing financial support through the rollout of Women in Apprenticeships. The Apprenticeship Innovation Fund creates career pathways for women apprentices in majority-men trades like electrics and air conditioning. The women's stream of Apprenticeships Victoria also aims to recruit 25 women looking to change careers by providing a wage subsidy (to remove the age disincentive for women over 21) and other support to enable the women to complete their apprenticeship.

The Victorian Government's Digital Jobs Program is building the state's digital workforce by training and upskilling mid-career Victorians so they can transition into digital careers, including support for women over the age of 30 who are ready for a career change.

The Victorian Skills Plan, released August 2022, sets out training needs both for local communities and industries, for the year ahead and beyond. It focuses on the state's areas of economic growth and will help decision-makers understand broad workforce trends, challenges and opportunities.

Recommendation 2

Embed co-design and co-delivery practices across Victorian Government policies, programs and services targeted at women from diverse communities and social groups.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Gender Equality Act, puts into practice the Victorian Government's strong commitment to ensuring inclusivity and diversity are prioritised in program development, including through co-design and co-delivery.

The Gender Equality Act requires certain organisations (defined entities) to complete a gender impact assessment on all new policies, programs and services that have a direct and significant impact on the public. Gender impact assessments are designed to help organisations think critically about how policies, programs and services will meet the different needs of women, men and gender diverse people. The Gender Equality Act requires gender impact assessments to apply an intersectional approach, by considering how gender inequality can be compounded by disadvantage or discrimination on the basis of other factors such as age, disability or ethnicity.

The ECHO (Elevating Connections, Healing Ourselves) leadership program is an example of this commitment in practice. First Nations women reported that they need to be understood as their whole selves, including their identity, choices, culture and familial obligation beyond their immediate family, in order to access meaningful leadership positions. This unique community-led program strengthens connections between women and supports them to shape their own leadership journey. The program – a core part of the Victorian Government's commitment to self-determination for First Nations women – is expanding in 2022 based on these lessons. The Victorian Government has worked in partnership with Aboriginal women to co-design and pilot the ECHO program.

There are many examples of co-design and co-delivery across government, and the Government commits to continuing to expand this.

Recommendation 3

Increase ongoing investment in gender equality policy initiatives, such as funding for implementation of the Safe and Strong gender equality strategy.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The 2022–23 State Budget committed \$8.3 million over three years to implement the Gender Equality Strategy. This includes training, education and resources to support gender impact assessments, funding to upgrade the Gender Equality Act's reporting platform and develop a dispute resolution case management system, and support to deliver the Women of Colour Leadership program, which addresses structural barriers for diverse women seeking leadership opportunities.

The Government will continue to consider gender equality policy initiatives in future policy decisions and investment.

Chapter 2: Re-balancing the load of unpaid work and care – tackling a core barrier to women's workforce participation

Recommendation 4

Establish a nation-leading best practice approach to supporting parents and carers in the Victorian public sector that:

- models a best practice approach to paid parental leave including an equal, non-transferable entitlement to paid parental leave for all parents
- models a best practice approach to part-time, flexible, and remote work
- sets targets for the number of fathers and partners taking their full entitlement of parental leave.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

Victoria is the leading the nation with legislating action on gender equality through the Gender Equality Act. The Gender Equality Act sets out seven gender equality indicators (the indicators) where progress towards gender equality must be demonstrated. One of the indicators is leave and flexibility.

Organisations that are covered by the Act (defined entities) must collect and report data against these indicators in a workplace gender audit. Based on these results, defined entities are required to develop and implement a Gender Equality Action Plan, which incorporates strategies and measures to improve gender equality in the workplace, including in relation to leave (including parental leave) and flexibility. Defined entities must demonstrate progress against the indicators, including leave and flexibility, by publicly reporting on progress every two years and undertaking a full review via audit and updating their Gender Equality Action Plan every four years.

The Victorian Government notes that this recommendation is whole-of-government in nature and supports it in principle, noting that in the Victorian public sector, parental leave provisions are subject to Enterprise Bargaining Agreement negotiations, and this is the appropriate mechanism to alter or improve these provisions.

The new and improved parental leave entitlement in the VPS Enterprise Agreement 2020 provides a significant benefit to public service employees who could otherwise only be a secondary caregiver, or a subsequent unpaid primary caregiver, to their child. The VPS Enterprise Agreement 2020 also allows the initial primary caregiver at home to return to work to progress his or (more commonly) her career at an earlier opportunity than would previously have been feasible.

There is also now more flexibility with how leave can be taken, with parents able use their leave in a manner which suits them, subject to operational requirements, instead of being required to take leave in blocks. Employees will also be entitled to paid lactation breaks on return to work.

The [Flexible Work Policy](#) for the Victorian Public Service sets flexible working as the Government's default for all employees, with *championing equity* as one the guiding principles of the policy.

The Victorian Government will further consider which elements of the VPS Agreement could be applicable to the broader public sector and how public sector enterprise bargaining can best be utilised to:

- encourage secondary caregivers working in the public sector to take up parental leave
- address potential shortfalls in retirement incomes for employees, particularly for women, as a result of taking long periods of leave to have and care for children.

Recommendation 5

Establish a coalition of states that will collectively advocate to the Australian Government for greater investment in and stewardship of early childhood education and care.

Government's response

Support

Victoria and NSW released a joint statement of intent to transform early education in June 2022. The commitment stated that in the next 10 years, every child in Victoria and NSW will experience the benefits of a full year of play-based learning before their first year of school.

The Victorian Government will continue to advocate for shared investment in early childhood education with the Commonwealth Government.

Recommendation 6

Expand the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy into all early childhood education and care providers offering a funded kindergarten program.

Government's response

Support

The Victorian Government has committed to a significant reform of early childhood education and care in the state, through a \$9 billion investment over the next decade into the Best Start, Best Life initiative. Funding will deliver free kindergarten for three and four-year-old children and 50 new government-owned childcare centres in high demand areas from 2025.

In 2023, every three-year-old will have access to up to 15 hours of a funded kindergarten program and every four-year-old will have access to 15 hours of funded kindergarten. This will grow over the next decade to a universal 30-hour a week pre-prep program of play-based learning, available to all children in the year before they start school.

From 2023, Free Kinder will be available in all funded kindergarten settings. This will include long day care services. Free Kinder will replace the Kindergarten Fee Subsidy (KFS). It will be available to all children and will be a higher rate than KFS. This will support workforce participation by women by offering significant savings for all families with a three or four-year-old child in a funded kindergarten program in a long day care setting.

The Commonwealth has made a public commitment to introduce childcare reforms, including moving to a universal 90 per cent Child Care Subsidy. The Victorian Government would welcome the opportunity to work collaboratively with the Commonwealth to support a national focus on improving the affordability and accessibility of high-quality early childhood education and care.

Recommendation 7

Ensure Victorian early childhood education and care services are of the highest quality as the sector expands by investing in educators, teachers, and the enforcement of quality standards.

Government's response

Support

The Victorian Government has invested \$209.9 million to support the attraction, retention and quality of early childhood teachers and educators, who are predominately women.

This includes short- to medium-term measures like financial incentives for qualified early childhood teachers and educators, recruitment agency support and the Early Childhood Jobs website. Teachers and educators also have access to a range of professional development supports including coaching, communities of practice and an alumni network.

There are also medium to long-term measures to create a pipeline of early childhood workers. These include early childhood and Aboriginal pathways scholarships and the accelerated innovative initial teacher education program to support diploma-qualified educators to upskill.

The early childhood traineeship program is also available through Jobs Victoria and Chisholm, along with Free TAFE, for those studying to become an early childhood educator.

The Victorian Government continues to invest in early childhood quality and regulation, including more than \$46 million in the 2020-21 State Budget for protecting children's safety and wellbeing through early childhood regulation.

Recommendation 8

Commit to ensuring all children, including children with disability, can access appropriate and high-quality outside school hours care.

Government's response

Support-in-part

The High Intensity Outside School Hours Care Initiative builds on the outside school hours care (OSHC) Demonstration Program operating since 2018 allowing children and young people with disabilities to access appropriate OSHC services for free.

From 2018 to 2021, the Victorian Government funded a small number of OSHC services providing higher intensity support through the OSHC Demonstration Program in six schools.

From January 2022 as part of the State Budget, the Victorian Government has committed further funding to continue the delivery of high intensity OSHC services at the OSHC Demonstration Program sites until December 2023.

In November 2020 as part of the COVID Recovery Budget, the Victorian Government funded the OSHC Establishment Grant initiative providing grant funding to Victorian Government schools delivering primary aged education without an existing OSHC program. The initiative will operate until 2024 and aims to improve the availability of OSHC services across Victoria. It will ensure that all children and families can access programs on their school site or in their local area.

The Victorian Government notes the Commonwealth's primary responsibility for outside school hours care and that any long-term solution would require a partnership to leverage Commonwealth funding or significant additional state investment.

Chapter 3: Creating safe, equal, and accountable communities and workplaces

Recommendation 9

Accept and fund all recommendations made by the Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment and treat workplace gendered violence as an occupational health and safety issue.

Government's response

Subject to further consideration

The Victorian Government publicly responded to the Ministerial Taskforce on Workplace Sexual Harassment (the Taskforce) recommendations in July 2022, agreeing with the Taskforce that work-related gendered violence and workplace sexual harassment be treated as an occupational health and safety issue.

Of the Taskforce's 26 recommendations, the Government response accepts 21 recommendations in full, in part or in principle, notes one recommendation, and considers four recommendations require further consultation.

The 2022–23 State Budget invested \$6.9 million to expand WorkSafe's WorkWell program to include a dedicated stream for preventing sexual harassment.

Recommendation 10

Ensure women have equitable access to work related advice and support by providing increased and recurrent funding to community legal centres, Aboriginal Legal Services, and Victoria Legal Aid to provide legal advice and assistance to vulnerable workers who experience discrimination, gendered bullying or harassment in the workplace, considering the particular needs of workers facing intersectional discrimination.

Government's response

Subject to further consideration

The 2022–23 State Budget invested \$6.5 million to enable the community legal sector to provide early intervention programs for disadvantaged Victorians and respond to demand for legal assistance.

This will provide community members with greater access to legal support for complex legal issues, including family violence and workplace harassment.

Further long-term funding will be required to make these programs more widely available and ensure service sustainability across Victoria Legal Aid and community legal centres.

Consideration may also be given to improving regional accessibility and delivery for people facing intersectional discrimination.

The 2022–23 State Budget also invested \$50 million for Victorian Legal Aid to deliver legal services, including duty lawyers and grants of legal aid.

This builds on previous investment in JobWatch, a specialist community legal centre (CLC). JobWatch saw high levels of demand during the pandemic. JobWatch also provided services to people with a disability who experienced employment discrimination and supported members of the LGBTIQ+ community facing intersectional discrimination.

Under the National Legal Assistance Partnership, Commonwealth funding has provided \$8.4 million of funding over four years, which has been distributed to Victoria Legal Aid, JobWatch, Djirra, Victorian Aboriginal Legal Services and five CLCs delivering programs to clients experiencing workplace sexual harassment and discrimination. This funding is supporting services to vulnerable people across Victoria, including CALD community members in Melbourne's growth corridors, First Nations people, people with a disability, and people in regional Victoria.

The 2022–23 State Budget also invested \$1.6 million to establish a specialist LGBTIQ+ legal service. This will help LGBTIQ+ Victorians address their legal needs including discrimination and unfair dismissals.

The Victorian Government acknowledges long term and recurring funding for Aboriginal-specific services can help to ensure services are culturally appropriate and self-determined.

Recommendation 11

Take a nation-leading approach to addressing the challenges faced by women of colour working in the Victorian public sector. This includes allocating four years of funding to the VPS Women of Colour Network to develop strategies to address racism and discrimination in the VPS and public sector more broadly.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Victorian Government is strongly committed to addressing racism and discrimination in the VPS and the public sector more broadly. Actions to address this recommendation require whole-of-Victorian-Government action and investment over time to drive cultural change.

DFFH will fund the Women of Colour Network \$20,000 per year over two years (2022–23 to 2023–24) to support the Network's engagement in addressing challenges faced by women of colour working in the public sector. These funds will provide opportunities for the Network to engage in the development of sector-wide initiatives to address racism and discrimination.

The VPSC has developed a number of practical tools for managers and leaders to create diversity within public sector teams. The VPSC will continue to work with the Women of Colour Network to support its networking and advocacy.

Recommendation 12

Address systemic barriers to women's leadership and promotional opportunities across the Victorian public sector by de-biasing recruitment and promotion processes.

Government's response

Support

This recommendation requires whole-of-Victorian-Government action.

Recruitment and promotion is one of the seven workplace gender equality indicators under the Gender Equality Act. This means that organisations covered by the Gender Equality Act (defined entities) must collect and report recruitment and promotion data in a workplace gender audit.

Based on the results, defined entities are required to develop and implement a Gender Equality Action Plan, which incorporates strategies and measures to improve gender equality in the workplace, including in recruitment and promotion. Defined entities must demonstrate progress against the indicators, including recruitment and promotion, by publicly reporting on progress every two years and undertaking a full review via audit and updating their Gender Equality Action Plan every four years.

The VPSC has developed a number of practical tools for managers and leaders to create and support diversity within public sector teams to support these aims. This includes investments in initiatives to reduce bias in recruitment practices, including:

- initiatives to develop inclusive recruitment practice and address unconscious bias (Recruit Smarter)
- piloting CV de-identification and de-biasing language in job advertisements
- developing and sharing resources to support best practice approaches to equitable and inclusive recruitment.

Recommendation 13

Increase the visibility and recognition of women as leaders and role models in Victoria.

Government's response

Support

The Office for Women continues to implement a range of leadership programs for women including a co-designed leadership program for First Nations women and a targeted leadership program for migrant and multicultural women. The 2022–23 Budget included \$200,000 for the Women of Colour Leadership program to address structural barriers for diverse women seeking leadership opportunities.

In 2021, the existing Women on Boards commitment was refreshed, expanding the scope of included boards to apply to all boards including Victorian courts, with a few exceptions. As of July 2022, 52 per cent of Victorian Government board positions are held by women.

A \$1 million investment into the Victorian Women's Public Art Program works will increase the visibility and recognition of women in Victoria and improve representation of women in public spaces.

The Victorian Government recognises that the representation of women in media matters. In June 2022, the Office for Women provided an additional \$1 million to Women's Health Victoria to support continued delivery of the Gender Equality in Advertising project. This project, known as SheQual, is the first coordinated effort in Australia to promote gender equality and address the drivers of violence against women in advertising. It takes a whole-of-system approach to achieving long-term, sustainable change to sexist advertising practices, and has been funded by the Government since 2017.

Recommendation 14

Extend the *Gender Equality Act 2020* to non-defined entities on a voluntary basis and support all organisations to address gender inequalities in workplaces and communities through the development of tailored research, guidance materials and education.

Government's response

Subject to further consideration

The Women's Portfolio is working with the private sector to influence and advocate for gender equality initiatives.

The Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector will continue to engage with the private sector to support it to address gender inequalities. Opportunities to deliver a voluntary reporting scheme may be explored in the future, alongside collaboration with the Commonwealth to align reporting requirements, including those under the Workplace Gender Equality Act.

The Victorian Government will continue to consider the most effective way to influence the private sector, including through the development of the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy, due for release in 2023.

Recommendation 15

Embed Gender Responsive Budgeting in Victoria through legislation that secures and future proofs the practice within government.

Government's response

Support

The Gender Responsive Budgeting unit works across Government to ensure outcomes for women are measured and considered as part of the entire budget process.

The 2022–23 State Budget committed \$1.1 million to embed gender responsive budgeting in Victoria, through legislation and culture change. This builds on the piloting of gender responsive budgeting in 2022–23 State Budget. This also aligns with the obligation of defined entities under the Gender Equality Act to complete Gender Impact Assessments on all policies, programs and services that impact the public.

The Victorian Government is currently preparing a response to the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting, due to be tabled in Parliament in September 2022.

Recommendation 16

Show policy leadership to other jurisdictions by increasing the collection, quality, and use of gender disaggregated and intersectional data across the Victorian public sector. This should include supporting defined entities under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* to report on gender pay gaps for women from diverse backgrounds and social groups.

Government's response

Support

Under the Gender Equality Act, certain Victorian public sector organisations (defined entities) are required to collect and report on gender disaggregated data, intersectionality data and the gender pay gap.

The 2020–21 State Budget provided \$1.5 million to establish a Reporting Platform for entities operating under Gender Equality Act reporting requirements.

The 2022–23 State Budget invests a further \$1.1 million in output funding and \$1.6 million in asset funding to upgrade the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector's reporting platform. This equips the Commission to communicate and analyse the gender equality audit data received from defined entities.

The Victorian Public Sector Commissioner is currently engaging with Public Sector Commissioners in other jurisdictions about the value of gender disaggregated data collection and is committed to working with other jurisdictions to build their capacity and capability in these areas.

Work has commenced with the Workplace Gender Equality Agency on the opportunity to share Victorian public sector gender equality data.

In September 2022, the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector for the first time published a comprehensive gender disaggregated data on the state and nature of gender inequality in the Victorian public sector. This includes the workplace gender audit baseline report, which provides key findings on sexual harassment, gender pay gaps, gender segregation in workforces and sectors, and promotion and recruitment practices at a sector-wide level.

The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector will publish a companion report in 2023 containing intersectional data analysis. It is important not to misrepresent the experiences of different sections of the community but, as this was the first time many organisations had collected intersectional data, there are some data gaps.

The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector will also shortly launch the Insights Portal, a public and interactive data explorer tool, which will allow people to view the high-level audit results of individual entities.

The Victorian Government will also continue to show leadership nationally, including through collaboration with the Commonwealth Government on the development of a Commonwealth gender equality strategy.

Chapter 4: Addressing gender segregation and inequities by occupation and industry

Recommendation 17

Improve outcomes for women through the VET-TAFE system by:

- ensuring the inaugural Victorian Skills Plan includes specific consideration of the intersectional needs and interests of women to boost women's participation in non-traditional education and training
- appointing a Gender Equality Advisor who will work across the VET system to develop a whole of system Gender Equality Strategy
- providing adequate resourcing to implement the Respect and Equality in TAFE approach across Victoria and ensure consultation with the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Victorian Skills Plan provides evidence on gender inequality in the education and training system. The evidence supports providers and employers identify and address drivers of inequality and consider the needs of women with a focus on intersectional barriers.

The Department of Education and Training is considering how best to support a gender equality strategy across the VET system.

A new funding model for the Victorian TAFE sector is being implemented from 2022 and recognises the unique role of TAFE as the public provider of vocational education and training, including governance and public sector compliance requirements.

Funding has been secured through the Office for Prevention of Family Violence and Coordination to support the implementation of Respect and Equality in TAFE across the network for two years, until June 2024.

Recommendation 18

Increase the number of women working in non-traditional sectors through programs such as:

- free courses and scholarship incentives in fields including STEMM, technology, manufacturing and building/construction (similar to the Women in Trades initiatives)
- tailored pre-employment support programs for women from diverse communities and social groups that support their transition into well matched jobs.

Government's response

Support

To help address Victoria's future skills and training needs, the Free TAFE initiative was expanded to offer more than 60 courses in 2022.

The Victorian Government has increased the Skills First Funding eligibility criteria exemption to 30 per cent of total places in a course from 2020 to 2022, allowing TAFEs to enrol students who would not otherwise be eligible. This was supported through \$37.9 million in funding in 2022–23 for fee waivers. Eligibility exemptions will be prioritised for people affected by the pandemic, including women.

Women accounted for more than half of all Free TAFE commencements in 2021, with 28 per cent from a culturally and linguistically diverse background. There have also been strong increases in enrolments by women in courses usually dominated by men.

Jobs Victoria facilitates employment opportunities for people facing barriers to employment. The Jobs Victoria Fund recognises that women's employment has been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and has allocated funding to support women back into work. Sixty per cent of the Jobs Victoria Fund funding has been allocated to support women, including targeted support for women over the age of 45.

In 2021–22, \$5 million from the Apprenticeship Innovation Fund was allocated for innovative projects piloting ways of supporting more women into majority-men trades.

The \$64 million Digital Jobs Program seeks to reskill mid-career workers and jobseekers into digital employment. As of July 2022, the program has supported more than 2,200 Victorians, with women making up 55 per cent of participants.

These projects will be evaluated to inform input by the Department of Education and Training into the Building Equality Policy (see Recommendation 20).

The Office for Women recently provided over \$400,000 in additional funding to the Women's Information and Referral Exchange and Fitted for Work. This will support continued delivery of multilingual financial capability training, and training and upskilling opportunities for women making the transition to paid employment.

Recommendation 19

Develop new industry strategies to attract, recruit and retain women in majority-men industries. These strategies should:

- set an ambitious long-term vision of at least 40 per cent women in both the workforce and leadership positions (a 40/40/20 model), alongside short-term stretch goals
- collaborate with key industry associations, unions and employers to ensure targets are achievable and broadly supported
- create inclusive, respectful workplace cultures, including by preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in workplaces
- provide funding for education and training pathways, such as free TAFE and supported apprenticeship placements, to increase the pipeline of workers (refer to Recommendation 18)
- use the Social Procurement Framework to incentivise progress as well as formally capture and monitor changes
- provide funding to key women focused peak organisations to build the support network for women before organisations have critical mass and to support small businesses
- encourage a diverse workforce within the strategy
- encourage men to take parental leave and adopt flexible work arrangements
- mandate that gender-equitable facilities are available on site at all worksites, including separate changerooms, proper PPE and equipment designed for all genders.

Once the industry strategies are developed, a pilot strategy should be trialled in the manufacturing sector; the supply chain/operations sector; the technology sector; the finance sector; or the energy sector. Following evaluation, the Inquiry recommends rolling out similar strategies to other industries.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Victorian Government will continue to consider this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy. The Government notes that close consultation with industry stakeholders will be needed in the development of achievable interim targets and specific pathways to achieve those interim targets.

In 2019, the Victorian Government released Victoria's first Women in Construction Strategy 2019–2022 to increase women's participation in trade and semi-skilled roles. The Strategy set out a four-year work program with actions at three key points of intervention: attract, recruit and retain. The Victorian Government is now leading the development of the eight-year Building Equality Strategy 2023–2031 and a three-year action plan, to build on this early work.

The Victorian Government also co-funds the National Association of Women in Operations (NAWO) partnership, a program for leaders and managers in operations sectors. The program supports participants of all genders in mid-management and front-line leadership roles to actively manage their biases, change their behaviour and track their progress in everyday work environments to achieve greater gender balance.

Recommendation 20

Raise the employment targets in the Building Equality Policy (BEP) over time to improve gender equality in the construction industry. To support this, the Victorian Government should:

- create a long-term vision of at least 40 per cent women in the workforce (a 40/40/20 model) and seek buy in from industry associations, employers and unions
- provide ongoing funding to support implementation of and compliance with the BEP

- develop a mechanism to gradually increase targets over time to achieve long-term vision by using incentives built into contracts
- strengthen penalties for non-compliance by suppliers
- fund programs to increase the talent pipeline, including free TAFE for construction skills and priority apprenticeships (refer to Recommendation 18)
- mandate that gender-equitable facilities are available on site at all publicly funded construction projects, including separate changerooms, proper PPE, and equipment designed for operators of all genders
- request suppliers create an inclusive and respectful workplace culture, including by preventing and eliminating sexual harassment in workplaces
- fund support networks for women to assist the construction sector in the transition to gender equality
- pilot a small project with more ambitious targets, including 50 per cent women on site and 50 per cent majority-women enterprises as sub-contractors
- attract and retain more women workers by piloting family-friendly hours on public construction projects. Support the pilot of a five-day working week on public construction projects and roll-out this model to more projects subject to the pilot's evaluation and success.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Victorian Government is creating training and employment opportunities for women through Government procurement on building, infrastructure, civil engineering and other capital works projects.

The Building Equality Policy (BEP) came into effect in January 2022. It seeks to disrupt the existing gender stereotypes, norms and roles in the construction sector.

The Victorian Government is exploring opportunities to increase the targets and requirements in the BEP over time, to create a more gender-inclusive industry.

However, we recognise that targets alone will not address the cultural and structural barriers women face in the construction industry. Effective long-term change will only arise from setting targets at the trade, non-trade, onsite managerial/supervisory and specialist roles. The BEP therefore contains mandatory targets for women, and mandates the implementation of a Gender Equality Action Plan.

An evaluation of the BEP, undertaken by RMIT, will help guide the scope and timing of increases to targets or other changes to the policy.

The Victorian Government is already working closely with the construction industry and training providers to pilot strategies aimed at increasing the number of women in the sector, across a range of occupations. The Construction Industry Culture Taskforce (CICT) is piloting the implementation of the Culture Standard, including three projects in Victoria. These pilots will include measures designed to improve the mental health, time for life and diversity of industry participants, including through the implementation of a five-day working week. Industrial Relations Victoria is working closely with the CICT to coordinate these initiatives.

To effect long-term cultural and systemic change, the Government recognises the need to lead by example and work cooperatively with all industry stakeholders. The Victorian Government will continue to work with industry stakeholders to identify, design and pilot initiatives aimed at attracting and supporting women in the construction industry.

Recommendation 21

Amend the Social Procurement Framework to support better outcomes for women. These amendments should:

- mandate that all government purchasers apply the women's equality objective
- establish an effective governance, oversight and accountability mechanism for the women's equality objective with reporting on progress
- provide implementation support to suppliers and buyers through detailed guidance material, education and training
- introduce industry specific targets for suppliers linked to the industry targets described in Recommendation 19
- establish a framework that allows suppliers to provide their gender equality data to one central point in government while still being able to supply across different departments
- increase requirements for contracts over \$3 million, in line with the *Gender Equality Act 2020* requirements. For example, as part of their tender, suppliers must report data on gender composition in supplier boards, maintain flexible work policies, promote the uptake of parental leave by men as well as meet targets for women in leadership
- impose greater requirements for contracts over \$20 million, in line with the *Gender Equality Act 2020* requirements. For example, suppliers must provide a Gender Equality Action Plan based on a comprehensive workplace audit
- incorporate targets for government purchases from women-owned and controlled small businesses.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

Victorian Government procurement is one of the largest drivers in the Victorian economy. In 2016–17, the Victorian Government spent \$16 billion on goods and services to support service delivery and operations, and \$9.1 billion on public construction and infrastructure. Annual infrastructure spending alone will average \$9.6 billion from 2017–18 to 2020–21 to deliver the current pipeline of projects.

Value for money is the key driver underpinning all Victorian Government procurement decisions. Victoria's Social Procurement Framework aims to ensure value-for-money considerations are not solely focused on price, but include opportunities to deliver social and sustainable outcomes for the wider Victorian community.

The framework sets out a whole-of-government approach to social procurement for all Government departments and agencies that is scalable and consistent. For suppliers, whether they be major businesses or small to medium enterprises, the framework advises how to incorporate social value when competing for government procurement opportunities.

Victoria's commitment to social procurement reflects a growing national and international focus on the strategic use of procurement to drive social, economic and environmental outcomes.

The Victorian Government is using the Social Procurement Framework to drive gender equality outcomes in the private sector. The Government will explore how this framework can more effectively support gender equality outcomes and align with the Gender Equality Act, in the context of the objectives, principles & priorities of the Social Procurement Framework.

The Victorian Government notes that this recommendation is whole-of-government in nature and will consider further action against this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 22

Adopt new or strengthen existing gender equitable policies for Victorian Government engagements with professional services organisations. Policies should:

- increase the Victorian Government Legal Services Panel's Equitable Briefing Policy target to 40 per cent for briefing women barristers
- introduce a Gender-Equitable Purchasing Policy, similar to the current legal services arrangement, to apply across other professional services organisations, such as those in consulting, finance, accounting, IT, media and communications.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Social Procurement Framework is a useful lever to improve gender equity in professional services suppliers to Government. A key to achieving the intended outcomes in other professional services will be ensuring effective Social Procurement Framework implementation across buyers.

The Victorian Government notes that this recommendation is whole-of-government in nature and will consider further action against this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 23

Develop a Victorian Care Economy Strategy to recognise care and community work as critical human infrastructure and assign it fair economic value. The strategy should:

- define the fair economic value of care and community work
- reflect the fair economic value of care and community work in wages and conditions where the State is the employer
- support and advocate for the cases of non-government workers in the care and community sector to the Fair Work Commission, to ensure the value of their work is reflected in wages
- encourage the public to revalue care and community work
- take a strategic approach to workforce supply across the sector
- meet system demand by increasing investment in human infrastructure.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Government is focusing on Victoria's social services sector through a whole-of-government project that focuses on the challenges of training, recruiting and retaining our critical social services workers.

The Victorian Skills Plan provides data insights into priority areas of training and skills across a range of sectors in Victoria, including the majority-women social services workforces, and will support a gender responsive approach to future training delivery.

The Victorian Government will consider further action against this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

The Victorian Government regularly advocates at the national level for workers in low paid sectors, including recent submissions to the Fair Work Commission and the Annual Wage Review case.

Recommendation 24

Improve work and financial security in the care and community sector where the Government is the primary funder by:

- reducing reliance on short-term funding of essential services over the medium to long-term
- developing service agreement structures that include a redundancy payment guarantee for employers on the condition that providers offer the relevant employees ongoing employment
- applying a consistent and adequate indexation formula to service providers that covers the true cost and increasing complexity of delivering services
- expanding the portable long service leave scheme to include more entitlements and support more majority-women care and community services.

Government's response

Support-in-part

Supporting gender pay and participation equity in identified majority-women sectors (including the care and community sector) is a priority under the Equal Workplaces Advisory Council – Action Plan 2021–22 to 2023–24.

In May 2022 the Victorian Government announced the development of a Jobs Code for the social and community services sector, following the earlier development of the Victorian Fair Jobs Code for business seeking high value government procurement contracts and grants.

The Government is committed to working with unions and the social and community services sector to introduce a Fair Jobs Code. This will support the sector to address workforce shortages and job insecurity, while continuing to discuss issues such as indexation and funding.

The Victorian Government committed \$90.4 million over four years in the 2022–23 State Budget to support community service organisations (CSOs), to meet rising cost pressures associated with minimum wage and consumer price index costs. In June 2022, the Victorian Government provided a further \$48.4 million for 2022–23 (increasing indexation to 4.6 per cent) to enable CSOs to meet rising costs associated with the Fair Work Commission decision to increase minimum and award wages, and to respond to cost pressures and issues including workforce shortages and job insecurity. Further work is required to address these cost pressures over the long-term.

The Victorian Government will consider further action against this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 25

Advocate to the Australian Government for a review and evaluation of the Fair Work system that develops processes to address the undervaluation of work in majority-women sectors.

Government's response

Support

The Commonwealth Government has made a range of commitments relating to gender and pay equity in the workplace. Industrial Relations Victoria will monitor the implementation of these initiatives, advocate and provide input and support as required.

The Victorian Government will continue advocacy for gender and pay equity in the workplace through submissions to relevant inquiries. These include the Fair Work Commission's Annual Wage Review, Family and Domestic Violence Leave Review and Aged Care Work Value Case.

Recommendation 26

Support women-owned businesses and women entrepreneurs to start-up or to scale-up through a suite of initiatives including:

- investing in capacity-building program like a Strong Start Women in Business program
- funding pre-accelerator and accelerator programs that help women entrepreneurs launch start-ups
- developing and expanding dedicated programs for migrant women who are looking to start a business. These programs should provide support with accessing finance, financial management principles, and sustainable business design
- increasing women's access to capital by funding the VC Catalyst Program to increase angel and VC investor capabilities
- developing a fund to follow on from the Angel Sidecar Fund to boost access to capital past the initial start-up stage
- supporting the growth of women-owned businesses by funding partner agencies such as Global Sisters and Ngarrimili.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

As part of recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, the Office for Women is currently funding a range of organisations – including Ngarrimili – that support women-owned businesses, particularly for First Nations women and women from migrant and refugee backgrounds. These programs help women establish or grow their small businesses, focusing on improving financial capability and core business skills through mentoring and education.

LaunchVic is also supporting the growth of more women-led startups. Named after the founder of Australia's first all-woman motor garage in the 1920s, the Alice Anderson Fund is a \$10 million angel sidecar fund investing in women-led startups.

The fund co-invests between \$50,000 and \$300,000 in early-stage deals put forward by investors to increase the funding pool available to Victorian women. The investment is structured so that only 85 cents in the dollar is taken as equity; the rest is provided as a grant, providing women-led startups an extra upside.

With every dollar matched by three dollars of private investment, the Alice Anderson Fund will unlock close to \$40 million for women founders by 2024.

The Victorian Government notes that the Alice Anderson Fund is in its early stages and that future fund options will be considered at a later date.

Through the 2022–23 State Budget, the Government will continue supporting small and medium-sized Victorian businesses through grants for specialist advisory services, providing business operators with greater access to expert business advice. The Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions is currently funding both Kinaway Aboriginal Chamber of Commerce and Ngarrimili, providing a range of programs that support First Nations women-owned businesses with programs to improve their core business operations.

The Victorian Government will also consider further action against this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 27

Invest in co-designed, holistic support programs for Indigenous women entrepreneurs that:

- provide resources to prospective Indigenous women entrepreneurs
- facilitate access to wrap around services such as financial counselling, networking, mental health supports, mentoring and training to assist Indigenous women entrepreneurs through the COVID-19 pandemic recovery phase
- support Indigenous women entrepreneurs with grants for infrastructure, equipment and digital literacy to pivot their business through the COVID-19 pandemic recovery phase.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Victorian Government is building on the former Tharamba Bugheen: Victorian Aboriginal Business Strategy. The Yuma Yirramboi Strategy was launched in June 2022 and is focused on strengthening the Aboriginal business eco-system.

The Victorian Government will also consider further action against this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 28

Support women owned businesses in rural and regional areas where business owners are at risk of, or experiencing, financial hardship.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The Victorian Rural Women's Network is a supportive and inclusive group of rural and regional Victorian women who connect, share skills and ideas and empower each other to step up, lead and succeed.

Programs that support women-owned businesses in rural and regional areas are also funded through the Women's portfolio. These include the Victorian Rural Women's Business Leadership Program, which provides training and ongoing leadership, mentoring and business development opportunities for regional women. Financial literacy programs for women were also offered to bushfire impacted communities following the bushfires in 2019–20.

The Victorian Government will consider further action to progress this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

Chapter 5: Improving the safety net for priority cohorts of women

Recommendation 29

Improve the collection and use of data about Aboriginal women in Victoria by:

- developing a qualitative and quantitative research grants program to fill knowledge gaps about the experiences and needs of Aboriginal women. Government can use this research to complete gender impact assessments as part of policy, program and service design
- supporting Victorian public sector workplaces to collect high quality data about the workplace experiences of Aboriginal women under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*, including experiences of discrimination and caring responsibilities.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

The 2022–23 State Budget provides \$1.6 million over three years to upgrade the Gender Equality Act's reporting platform. This will include improvements to simplify the collection and use of higher quality intersectional data, including data related to Aboriginal women in Victoria.

The Victorian Government has committed to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which is built upon genuine and meaningful partnerships with the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, Traditional Owner groups and the wider Aboriginal community. Prioritising self-determined solutions that promote culture, connection and community strengthening is the key to closing the gap. This is reflected in Victoria's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, released in August 2021.

In the Public Sector's research grants round for 2022, the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector will focus on projects that contextualise and deepen Victoria's understanding of the workforce gender audit data. This will help ensure groups experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination are safe, welcome and valued in public sector workplaces.

One research grant supports a project titled 'Make Us Count: Understanding Aboriginal women's experiences in Victorian public sector workplaces'. This project will be led by Aboriginal women, Dr Debbie Bargallie from Griffith University and Prof Bronwyn Carlson and Madi Day from Macquarie University.

Jobs Victoria currently collects demographic data on its participants including gender and ethnicity.

Jobs Victoria supports six specialist Aboriginal services across the state. Three of these services are managed by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, providing tailored support to Aboriginal Victorians into sustainable employment. Further specialist services will be expanded in 2022–23.

The implementation of this recommendation will ensure consistency with future treaty and Yoorrook Justice Commission outcomes. In partnership with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, the State is currently establishing a framework to commence treaty negotiations. Implementation will be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respect the principles of Aboriginal self-determination through treaty.

Implementation will be regularly reviewed to ensure future actions align with treaty negotiations and the delivery of future treaty/treaties in Victoria. This includes funding, the implementation of actions and governance mechanisms, and the Yoorrook Justice Commission's findings and recommendations.

The Victorian Government further notes its commitment to ensuring that the collection, handling, storage and use of Aboriginal women's data and information is conducted according to the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Data Governance.

The Victorian Government notes that this recommendation is whole-of-government in nature, and will consider further action in relation to this recommendation through development of Victoria's refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 30

Support the implementation of the Victorian Aboriginal Employment and Economic Development Strategy, and ensure it addresses the needs of Aboriginal women.

Government's response

Support-in-principle

Yuma Yirramboi Strategy (Invest in Tomorrow) was launched in June 2022 and contains strategic pillars focused on strengthening the Aboriginal business eco-system.

Yuma Yirramboi is the Victorian Government and Aboriginal Victorians' shared vision to generate greater individual and collective wealth for Aboriginal Victorians. It aims to address inequality and build Aboriginal economic parity within a generation, sets high expectations, and is built on strong and enduring partnerships with Aboriginal Victorians, who worked with the Government to develop the strategy and will be central in its delivery.

The implementation of this recommendation will ensure consistency with future treaty and Yoorrook Justice Commission outcomes. In partnership with the First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria, the Government is currently establishing a framework to commence treaty negotiations. Implementation will be sufficiently flexible and adaptable to respect the principles of Aboriginal self-determination through treaty.

Implementation will be regularly reviewed to ensure future actions align with treaty negotiations and the delivery of future treaty/treaties in Victoria. This includes funding, the implementation of actions and governance mechanisms, and the Yoorrook Justice Commission's findings and recommendations.

Recommendation 31

Support services that assist women experiencing economic hardship due to family violence, including economic abuse, to meet demand.

Government's response

Support

The 2022–23 State Budget invests \$241 million to support victim survivors of family violence. This includes \$43.3 million for family violence services for:

- additional crisis case management for victim survivors of family violence
- specialised therapeutic counselling services for children and young people
- financial supports for victim survivors fleeing family violence.

Economic security and family violence are interconnected. Economic abuse is a form of violence against women and economic insecurity can be a risk factor for abuse. Financial supports are critical for survivors of family violence, given that many face financial insecurity and poverty when leaving abusive relationships.

Consideration of economic abuse includes incorporation of the Family Violence Multi Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework and embedding an intersectional service response where appropriate.