

Local government can drive social change to achieve a society free of violence against women

June 2017

Gender inequality is the fundamental driver of violence against women

Victoria is committed to ending violence against women now and forever.

To achieve this, the whole service system must work together, support people who have experienced violence and tackle the underlying driver of violence against women - gender inequality. Preventing violence against women starts with building the knowledge and skills to overcome

entrenched gender inequality in our communities. The social norms, practices and structures that allow gender inequality to persist need to change across multiple levels - individuals, communities, organisations and society at large.



Photo credit: City of Port Phillip



Photo credit: Macedon Ranges Shire Council

Local government has a pivotal role in promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women

As the level of government closest to the community, local government can play a key role in promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women.

The reach of local government across the community is unrivalled. Local government connects people in the spaces where they live, work, learn and play from birth to old age. Councils can lead the societal change needed to achieve gender equality and PVAW through the services they deliver, their organisational structure and operations, and most importantly through leadership in the community. There are opportunities for leadership on gender equality across the wide range of council responsibilities, including

maternal and child health, kindergartens, cultural and arts activities, special events, the management of libraries and sporting grounds, and importantly through organisational policies and procedures.

Over the past ten years local government has been a strong leader in Victoria around gender equality and PVAW. Councils have been building their capability and capacity, and steadily driving change within their organisations and across their communities.

Local government can lead gender equality and PVAW through mutually reinforcing strategies

Local government is in a unique position where it has the potential to embed PVAW across multiple community settings and services. Specifically, councils can lead gender equality and PVAW through their external service delivery, internal operations, and civic leadership, as shown in Figure 1.



Council service delivery

Local government is closest to the people, with scale and reach through their delivery of services

Councils connect with their communities across the life course and through personal, recreational and professional aspects of their lives. Councils operate assets such as libraries, kindergartens and sporting grounds, and run community events, all of which provide opportunities for building knowledge and awareness of gender equality and PVAW among wide and diverse audiences, as shown in Figure 2.

Council internal operations

Councils are large local employers with collective responsibility

Councils are among the largest single employers in their communities. Their investment in building gender equality and PVAW skills and awareness among employees can lead to positive impacts on the wider community, through their interactions with community members. Councils can also adapt their policies and practices to support gender equality and PVAW for staff.

Council leadership

Local government leaders have a strong influence on gender equality and PVAW work in their communities

Councils have a strong leadership role in the community and their leaders are critical to upholding and guiding that role. Local government leaders can influence community attitudes. Strong leadership commits councils to taking action.

Figure 2: Councils' reach for PVAW programs across the community



The Municipal Association of Victoria supports local government to effectively and efficiently work towards gender equality and PVAW

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) plays a central role in facilitating information exchange among organisations involved in PVAW, supporting a multi-sector approach.

<p>The MAV:</p>	<p>CONNECTS local government with the State and Federal governments, as well as other PVAW partner agencies</p>	<p>REPRESENTS local government in a vast array of forums, discussions and events</p>	<p>SUPPORTS local government through knowledge exchange.</p>
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Current funding constraints require local government to do more with less

Councils are investing in gender equality and PVAW, but their efforts are limited by an increasingly constrained fiscal environment.

Rate capping and funding changes have reduced income to councils, while their responsibilities are increasing. This continued pressure to do more with less is becoming

the operational norm for local government. This pressure is evident - fewer councils have increased their funding allocation to PVAW in recent years.

Social change requires sustained commitment with ongoing capability and capacity building

Local government has made good progress on the journey towards a more equitable society that does not tolerate violence against women. However, there are key components that need to be addressed to fully realise the potential of the sector.

RECOMMENDATION //01

Long-term commitment by Federal, State and local government is necessary for councils and the MAV to be able to realise opportunities for increasing gender equality and PVAW. This includes sustained funding, leadership and partnerships. Specifically:

Sustained State and Federal funding is needed to support the long-term program investment required to build knowledge and change attitudes.

Sustained positive leadership is needed in the local government sector that supports and drives gender equality.

Sustained partnerships are required to provide continuous and evolving service delivery that can steadily foster community change.

RECOMMENDATION //02

Councils need greater support to build capability and capacity to embed an equity lens for effective leadership on gender equality and PVAW. This is a particular challenge since gender equality is difficult for individuals to discuss. Specifically:

There is a need to **embed a gender equity lens** across local government to genuinely and effectively model and lead gender equality and PVAW.

Capability and capacity building is required that is comprehensive, sustained, and accountable.

Local government is uniquely placed to **lead these mutually-reinforcing activities** and iterate, due to its close and diverse connections with the community.

RECOMMENDATION //03

With government support, the MAV can further strengthen the work of local government in gender equality and PVAW. This includes supporting council leaders, officers, and the local government PVAW community. Specifically:

The MAV can continue to support local government leaders in **building capability and capacity** in a way that is thorough, genuine and consistent.

The MAV can support local government officers to **clearly articulate the learning** and intended outcomes of their work by providing best practice examples.

The MAV can support the local government PVAW community by facilitating a more **strategic approach** to programs, funding and collaboration.

In the 2017 MAV Local Government Gender Equality and PVAW Survey*

- 82% of respondents (councils) increased recognition of violence against women and the role council can play in prevention in the past twelve months
- 98% of respondents indicated that they had dedicated staff time to preventing violence against women and gender equality work
- 80% of respondents dedicated funding, separate to staff time, to preventing violence against women and gender equality work
- 91% of respondents participate in PVAW activities on a regional level
- 91% of respondents recognised or participated in the Victoria Against Violence Campaign in 2016
- 83% of respondents indicated they had benefited from the MAV PVAW communications

“Through a sustained and strategic approach, collaborating within and across sectors, local government can drive the social change necessary to achieve a society free of violence against women.”

*At the time of publication, 59 councils had responded to the survey