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.

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.

**Figure 1: Strategies for local government involvement in preventing violence against women**

- Building relationships
- Modelling equitable services in all aspects of service delivery
- Sharing the learnings
- Raising the profile of primary prevention
- Developing the workforce
- Normalising workplace discussion about gender equity
- Influencing and adapting council business, including data collection
- Stimulating and nurturing leadership
- Applying an equity lens to decision-making

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

Councills connect with their communities across the life course and through personal, recreational and professional aspects of their lives. Councills 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.

Councills are large local employers with collective responsibility

Councills 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. Councills can also adapt their policies and practices to support gender equality and PVAW for staff.

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

Councills 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 councillors to taking action.
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.

The MAV:  
- **CONNECTS** local government with the State and Federal governments, as well as other PVAW partner agencies  
- **REPRESENTS** local government in a vast array of forums, discussions and events  
- **SUPPORTS** local government through knowledge exchange.

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.

**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

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