



Ten ways local government can advance gender equity

Access to services

The fact sheets, *Ten ways local government can advance gender equity*, are part of a resource package designed to build the capacity for local governments to consider gender equity in their planning, policy and service delivery.

Local government plays an important role in creating and supporting environments that enable community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. Reducing gender inequity for women is a key strategy in achieving this goal, as it allows for a more just, inclusive and fair society for both women and men. The fact sheets include practical information and practice examples of ways local government can advance gender equity for women.

The ten fact sheets are:

1. Why gender matters
2. Gender analysis
3. Infrastructure
4. Land use planning and design
5. Promoting women in leadership
6. Workplaces
7. Sports and recreation
8. Access to services
9. Key concepts and definitions
10. Further resources

Council's role in access to services

Local government is an important tier of government, and has a significant impact on the lives of all Victorians. Councils spend over \$4 billion annually to provide a wide range of services and facilities to the communities in their municipality. They work in partnership with the local community, state and federal government, and a wide array of other agencies, to deliver these services.

Local government is responsible for over \$40 billion worth of assets and infrastructure¹ including roads, bridges, drains, town halls, libraries recreation centres, community centres, kindergartens, childcare centres and sports pavilions. Local government also provides a comprehensive range of community services including property, economic, human, recreational and cultural services. Councils have a role in enforcing state and local laws for environment, public health, traffic, land use planning and animal management. Local governments regularly review all these activities to ensure they are providing best practice for their communities.

An important consideration with regard to service planning is flexibility to ensure that services meet the diverse needs and capacities of the citizens who will be accessing them.

Why is gender relevant to access to local government services?

Women and men are not homogenous groups. Age, ability, ethnicity, cultural and religious background, socio economic status and literacy all impact people's ability to access and use services. Women and men may experience different barriers and constraints with regard to accessing services including the above.

Within aged and disability care, for instance, the gender profile of the home support workforce has a direct impact on the capacity of the service to meet community needs. Male and female clients have different needs and require a workforce that reflects this. A gender and diversity lens is crucial for designing services so that they meet the needs of all individuals in our community and promote inclusion and equity.

How can local government advance gender equity through services?

- Recognise that gender is diverse and includes individuals of all ages, abilities, socio-economic status, ethnicity, religious and cultural backgrounds and sexual orientation
- Identify relevant gender reporting resources that take into account the above and implement and adopt these as part of council's regular policy planning, development and service delivery process.
- Undertake gender reporting training for all staff involved in policy, planning and service delivery to enable staff to be aware of and address the various barriers and constraints to service access for women and men.
- Ensure that gender equity is a standard consideration when developing or updating all council community planning documentation
- Provide council reports on the significance and impact of gender equity across all areas of council's work.

Services Case Studies

Not taking gender equity into account when planning services can have service consequences for women. For example, mixed sex wards in psychiatric hospitals have resulted in many vulnerable female patients being assaulted and/or abused.²

Women and children do seek housing support through council services, particularly when fleeing family violence situations. If gender is not taken into account these women and their families can be even further disadvantaged and placed at risk.

City of Whittlesea is one of a number of councils who have changed hours of service operation in Maternal Child Health to accommodate the needs of working families and encourage shared parenting responsibility.

¹ Taken from Dept Victorian Communities website: www.dpdc.vic.gov.au/localgovernment

² Taken from Victorian Women and Mental Health Network, *Nowhere to be Safe Report*, April 2008.

