

**Respect
Victoria**

**Preventing
Family
Violence**

GPO Box 4057
Melbourne VIC 3001

T: 03 9096 9501
E: news@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au
W: respectvictoria.vic.gov.au

Letter to the editor

Thursday 5 March 2020

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Our pledge for International Women's Day #EachforEqual

International Women's Day is a moment to celebrate. It's a moment to reflect on women's achievements – here in Victoria and all over the world.

But it's also a moment to commit to more action. Particularly for action to reduce inequality - and thereby reduce the unacceptable rates of violence against women.

We hear that word a lot. 'Equality'. But what does it actually mean for women?

International research demonstrates that women living in societies which have greater inequality between women and men experience higher rates of intimate partner violence. Communities that see women and men as equal, on the other hand, have lower rates of violence against women. The link between gender equality and violence against women is clear.

So while Australia has made progress, there is still a long way to go before women and men are seen as equal.

And it will take all of us. We can't afford to think about violence against women as an individual problem – something that just happens between two people, disconnected from society. Because the impacts are too great, and too far-reaching.

For example, the significant health impacts associated with violence against women. Partner violence is the third greatest risk factor contributing to the disease burden amongst women aged 25 to 44 in Australia. Among adult women, it's the leading contributor to poor mental health, early pregnancy loss, suicide and self-inflicted injuries.

By thinking about it only as an individual problem, it makes it easy for the rest of us to remove ourselves from the equation. It makes it easy to turn a blind eye to the role that we can all play in reducing and preventing this violence from happening in the first place.

So what can we do to support a culture of equality and respect between women and men? As a community we can lead the way in promoting respectful relationships as a foundation for a culture where everyone is safe, equal and respected.

Media Enquiries – Tash Darrigan, Senior Media Adviser, Respect Victoria
M:0421 248 914; E: news@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au



What if we considered the health impact of violence, and approached it, at least in some way, in the same way we do other health problems? What if we thought about preventing violence from happening in the first place, like we do stopping people from starting smoking or getting skin cancer? A concerted, community effort to change the way we think and act.

In Victoria, we have a strong, demonstrated history of leading public health reform – both in Australia and internationally.

Smoking? We've seen consistently declining rates of smoking since the early 2000s. Thanks to a collaborative approach involving government, organisations including NGOs and community groups, and individuals, we've shifted how people think about smoking through a multifaceted approach including research, reforms including legislation and regulation, education and behaviour change.

Skin cancer prevention? Victoria is a world leader. A 30-year strong collaboration between The Cancer Council Victoria, VicHealth, government and community has led to huge changes in what we as a society think, believe and do. The SunSmart program is believed to have prevented more than 43,000 skin cancers, and 1,400 deaths in Victoria between 1988 and 2011.

We need to reframe the way we think about intimate partner violence, domestic violence and family violence: not as an individual issue alone, but as a human rights and public health issue. If we address this violence in the same way we do matters of public health – with a multifaceted approach that incorporates government, industry, communities and individuals – we can see the greatest impact.

That means changing the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that lead to violence happening in the first place.

Last year, Respect Victoria released an advertisement, Respect Women: 'Call It Out'. If you haven't seen it, it shows a man stepping up to block the view of a man leering at a visibly uncomfortable woman on the train.

A simple, clear message: if you see something, do something.

And people are responding. Results from the campaign show that at an overall level, the community shares the sentiment that all members of society need to be doing more to reduce family violence and violence against women. Among people who have seen the ad, almost two thirds say they'd step in and block the leering man's view. People want to know more, too – with four in five saying more education is needed around the issue.

These results tell us something important. People know that we all have a role to play in stopping violence against women, and when they've been shown what that actually looks like, they're more likely to act. Which is why Respect Victoria is making sustained efforts to shift community attitudes, and make sure that relationships are based on equality and respect.

We don't have to wait. We can all take action now.

Media Enquiries – Tash Darrigan, Senior Media Adviser, Respect Victoria
M:0421 248 914; E: news@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au



Taking a public health and prevention approach to ending violence against women means addressing its root cause. Violence against women starts with disrespect and devaluing of women. It starts with attitudes and beliefs and how these play out in relationships, communities within organisations and society as a whole. We know this violence is driven by gender inequality.

That's why the recent passing of the Gender Equality Bill (2019) by the Victorian State Government is such a historic step to improving gender equality in Victorian workplaces and the wider community.

On the eve of International Women's Day, this year's theme '#EachforEqual' speaks to the role we all have in creating a world where everybody feels safe, equal and respected.

So ask yourself, what's your role? What would you do?

Would you teach your teenage daughter about the health impacts of smoking?

If your son was going to the beach, would you tell him to 'slip, slop, slap'?

If someone makes a sexist comment, would you say something?

If you saw a man leering at a woman, would you stand up?

Would you call it out?

Melanie Eagle, Chair, Respect Victoria

If you or someone you know is experiencing violence or abuse, you can contact 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732. If you are concerned for your immediate safety, call triple zero (000) for emergency services.



Media Enquiries – Tash Darrigan, Senior Media Adviser, Respect Victoria
M:0421 248 914; E: news@respectvictoria.vic.gov.au

OFFICIAL