

**Respect  
Victoria**

**Preventing  
Family  
Violence**

**Respect Victoria Submission**

# **Safe and Strong: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy**

<b>Attention</b>	Office for Women, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing – <a href="mailto:women.victoria@dffh.vic.gov.au">women.victoria@dffh.vic.gov.au</a>
<b>Response to</b>	Call for Submissions: Renewal of Safe and Strong: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy
<b>Date</b>	29 October 2021
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## About Respect Victoria

Respect Victoria is an organisation dedicated to the primary prevention of all forms of family violence and violence against women. Our focus is stopping violence before it starts, by changing the norms, practices and structures that allow it to happen.

Respect Victoria is a statutory authority established under the *Prevention of Family Violence Act 2018* (the Act) to fulfil Recommendation 188 of the Royal Commission into Family Violence (the Royal Commission). We deliver on commitments under Recommendation 187 of the Royal Commission and support the delivery of *Free from Violence*: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women (Free from violence).

Our work spans all manifestations of family violence and all forms of violence against women across all Victorian communities. The establishment of Respect Victoria under the Act demonstrates the Victorian government's recognition that primary prevention —distinct from but complementary to secondary prevention (early intervention) and tertiary prevention (response) — is critical to bringing an end to violence. We exist to drive primary prevention over the long-term and ensure prevention efforts are considered and coordinated.

Respect Victoria's legislated responsibility under the Act includes providing advice to the Minister for the Prevention of Family Violence on policy, decision making and funding. We monitor and report on trends in family violence and violence against women. We undertake and disseminate research into the drivers of family violence and violence against women. Using this research, we develop and promote best practice primary prevention programming. We provide advice about what programs work and should be invested in.

Primary prevention's whole-of-population approach means we bring this work to all areas of Victorian life. Respect Victoria collaborates with government, industry, organisations and communities to promote awareness of and strengthen primary prevention. Informed by research, we lead social marketing campaigns and engage with stakeholders across sectors and settings to build a culture of respect for all Victorians.

Further information about Respect Victoria, including our current Strategic Plan 2019-2022, can be found on our website: [respectvictoria.vic.gov.au](https://respectvictoria.vic.gov.au).

## Renewal of Safe and Strong: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy

Respect Victoria is pleased to make this submission on the renewal of Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy, *Safe and Strong*. Respect Victoria welcomes the decision to extend *Safe and Strong* for a three-year period and to elevate safety as one of four overarching themes. This submission focusses on ways that outcomes related to safety can be achieved through strategic integration of gender equality and primary prevention initiatives. A list of recommendations is provided at the end of the submission.

### Relationship of Gender Equality to the Prevention of Family Violence

Respect Victoria's joint work with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to develop the *Free from Violence Strategy* Second Action Plan is an essential complement to *Safe and Strong* and informs this submission, which provides targeted recommendations focussed on priority areas for action, and critical linkages with work on primary prevention of violence against women and family violence. Continuing to emphasise the connections between these two key Victorian Government strategies is consistent with the Report of the Royal Commission into Family Violence of 2016.

There is a critical interrelationship between safety, economic power, representation and engagement. *Safe and Strong* has a key role to play in demonstrating how work in each of these domains collectively contributes to reduction of gendered violence. In particular, we urge the strategy to maintain a strong focus on women's economic security and financial independence, noting the way in which the COVID-19 pandemic reversed hard won gains for many women and in turn put them at increased risk of abuse and violence. Achieving gender equality brings many benefits, including the prevention of men's violence against women as set out in Our Watch's *Change the Story*, the national framework for a consistent and integrated approach to preventing violence against women and their children.

#### **Respect Victoria recommends that the renewed *Safe and Strong*:**

1. Reinforce the established relationship between improving gender equality and the prevention of violence against women, emphasising critical connections between work on safety, economic power, representation and engagement.
2. Maintain a strong focus on women's economic security and financial independence, including addressing recent threats to progress in this area including as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*Safe and Strong* will be improved by the incorporation of an updated understanding of gendered violence as including financial abuse, coercive control, sexual harassment and intergenerational violence, amongst other forms. We also recommend that the Strategy highlight the ways in which gender issues are often implicated – directly and indirectly – in the family violence perpetrated against older Victorians, people from migrant backgrounds, children and people with disabilities. The LGBTQI+ community is also not immune from gender dynamics; while more needs to be known about this, gendered stereotypes and

expectations are clearly implicated in the family violence seen in in same sex relationships, for example (as explained in Rainbow Health Victoria's *Pride in Prevention 2020*).

Respect Victoria recommends the Strategy put increased focus on the critical role of intersectionality, highlighting the complex and complementary ways in which inequality and disrespect based on gender interact with that emanating from other factors including ageism, racism, ethnocentrism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia, and the continuing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal Victorians. These issues should be called out as a dedicated focus as well as being embedded right across the various themes and proposed actions.

We note that the Victorian *Gender Equality Act 2020* provides an excellent platform for this by noting the compounding impact of other forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Respect Victoria has invested considerable effort in frameworks for understanding and addressing intersectionality - as well as specific work on older women, women with disabilities, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds and LGBTQI+ communities. These resources can support the refinement of the Strategy to better reflect intersectionality.

The Strategy will also be improved by the inclusion of support for the *Everybody Matters: Inclusion and Equity Statement* developed by Family Safety Victoria and the work of the Dhelk Dja Partnership which highlights the need for separate mechanisms to address the complex and endemic drivers of gendered violence in Aboriginal communities, consistent with the principles of self-determination.

***Respect Victoria recommends that the renewed Safe and Strong:***

3. Incorporate a broad understanding of gendered violence that is inclusive of coercive control, sexual harassment, financial abuse and intergenerational violence, and recognises the role that gender inequality plays in violence perpetrated against older Victorians, people from migrant backgrounds, children and LGBTQI+ peoples.
4. Embed an intersectional focus throughout in which inequality and disrespect based on gender interact with that emanating from other factors including ageism, racism, ethnocentrism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia.
5. Recognise that the continuing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal Victorians include strongly gendered patterns of abuse and harm and support specific Aboriginal-led initiatives to reduce family violence and violence against women.

### **Achieving healthy masculinities**

A key emerging theme across gender equality and prevention of family violence is the active **promotion of healthy masculinities**. Several recent reports and guidance resources produced by Jesuit Social Services, Our Watch and others have identified this as a core element of primary prevention work. This challenges everyone working to achieve gender equality to consider how to effectively and comprehensively engage men and boys in programs, including but not limited to their roles as change agents (often denoted as 'champions' or 'ambassadors') of gender equality. It also challenges us to promote positive masculinities and gender equality in a way that avoids a totally binary understanding of gender. Respect Victoria recommends this is embedded throughout *Safe and Strong*.

**Respect Victoria recommends the renewed Safe and Strong, in partnership with Respect Victoria:**

6. Promote gender-transformative approaches including policies and initiatives that promote healthy masculinities and engage men and boys in forming positive attitudes and behaviours as a key pathway to a safer and more gender equal society.

**Building system infrastructure and connecting governance**

The new strategy is an important vehicle to consolidate a well-articulated **delivery system and infrastructure** for supporting gender equality. This strongly overlaps with the system being built to advance prevention of family violence and other forms of violence against women. There is potential to enhance both these systems to mutual benefit; in particular, to align workforce development strategies given the strong overlap in personnel working in gender equality programs and those working in the field of the primary prevention of family violence and other forms of violence against women.

**Respect Victoria recommends the renewed Safe and Strong, in partnership with Respect Victoria:**

7. Consolidate a coordinated delivery system and support infrastructure for gender equality and ensure connections with the system focused on prevention of family violence – including alignment of workforce development strategies; and consider these intersections at a governance level.

**Using public sector workplaces as a key setting for change**

The establishment of the Commissioner for Gender Equality under the *Gender Equality Act 2020* has undoubtedly shifted the landscape in regard to the commitment to tackling **gender inequality in public sector workplaces** and agencies. Respect Victoria has noted the way in which effort to meet the requirements of this Act has also boosted discussion in organisations about the prevention of family violence, sexual harassment and other types of gendered violence.

We recommend initiatives to further encourage and support this shift are included in the revised Strategy and that attention is paid to embedding links between initiatives to achieve gender equality and prevention of family violence. Continuing close liaison between those leading gender equality action planning and those leading violence prevention programs will help ensure consistency of messaging and application of best practice approaches.

**Respect Victoria recommends the renewed Safe and Strong, in partnership with Respect Victoria:**

8. Prioritise the primary prevention of gendered violence in the workplace, public spaces, and in the context of natural disasters and emergencies, building on recent reports and cross-sectoral partnerships in each of these areas.

## Changing community attitudes to support gender equality and reduce family violence

A key function of Respect Victoria is to develop and implement broad **population based social marketing** programs to shift attitudes and behaviours that underpin gendered violence. There is potential for *Safe and Strong* to position such campaigns as a key tool to reach the community on a range of issues affecting women's equality and safety.

The potential for positive changes in attitudes and behaviours through this type of action is well demonstrated by recent Respect Victoria campaigns. These campaigns have tackled issues such as calling out disrespect for women, sexism and sport, financial abuse of older migrant women, and abuse of LGBTIQ people within families. These campaigns have achieved high reach and effectiveness in raising understanding and prompting action. The *Respect Each Other: Connection Keeps Us Strong* campaign in October 2020 was seen by nearly one million people. The *Respect Women: Call it Out (Respect Is)* campaign in June 2021 led to 49% of viewers better understanding the importance of respecting women and 51% being more comfortable discussing this issue with others.

Behaviour change campaigns work most effectively when implemented as an integral part of multifaceted strategies. Subject to funding and partnerships, Respect Victoria's forward campaign strategy can reinforce community attitude changes needed to achieve gender equality and prevention of family violence, as well as promotion of safety in public spaces. Future campaigns will address various aspects of gendered violence, in combination with other drivers and risk factors in different communities and settings, together with practical calls to action such as bystander action.

### **Respect Victoria recommends the renewed *Safe and Strong*, with *Respect Victoria to lead*:**

9. Advance population based social marketing campaigns, communications and coordinated messaging to shift community attitudes and behaviours regarding to gender equality and violence prevention. Respect Victoria is well placed to lead this activity, in line with its legislative remit and established credibility in this work.

## Building data and research to address gender inequality

Finally, we would highlight the importance of **enhancing data and research on gender equality**. Recent initiatives such as the Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform, led by Respect Victoria with the Crime Statistics Agency, the expansion of large surveys such as the National Community Attitudes Survey on Violence Against Women, the data collection work of the Commissioner for Gender Equality, and research led by ANROWS, Respect Victoria and other bodies, deliver a sound basis to build upon over coming years.

Building on these achievements, we would encourage *Safe and Strong* to consider ways to support the use of more consistent measures and sharing of data across agencies concerned variously with economic, social and cultural domains, as well as those concerned with safety and gendered violence prevention. We would also recommend that the Strategy promote and encourage support for the research agenda for primary prevention of family violence and violence against women currently being finalised by Respect Victoria.



**Respect Victoria recommends the renewed *Safe and Strong*, with *Respect Victoria* to lead:**

10. Prioritise enhanced data and research on gender equality and violence, including through use of more consistent measures and sharing of data across agencies in economic, social and cultural domains, and through research partnerships. Respect Victoria is well placed to lead on this through our legislated role and in particular continuing stewardship of the Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform, Family Violence Prevention Research Agenda and associated partnerships.

Other more specific key elements of the **Safety** theme that we would highlight are:

- **Workplace sexual harassment and gendered violence** – The prevention stream of the work being undertaken by the Victorian Government to prevent workplace sexual harassment could be usefully strengthened through *Safe and Strong*. We consider there is a strong connection between the prevention element of the emerging Victorian Sexual Assault Strategy and the Strategy. A common and consistent approach to the role of gender equality should be promoted across each of these initiatives.
- **Public spaces** – ensuring that all public spaces support women’s safety is a well-established priority and now embraces virtual environments and use of information technology. There remains significant work to do in this area. Respect Victoria is a partner in the XY Lab Gender Safety Map initiative run from Monash University and would support expansion this kind of highly participatory approach. While emphasising that “unsafe” spaces are no excuse for continuing perpetration of violence; alerting women to these spaces is an important complement to continuing effort to shift in the attitudes and behaviours that underpin the lack of safety.
- **Natural disasters and emergencies** – building on increasing recognition of the disproportionate impact that disasters tend to have on women. Respect Victoria is working to connect the emergency management sector with the prevention of family violence field, and to bring together and support agencies concerned with family violence prevention, gender equality and other forms of discrimination and disadvantage. The critical insight is that disasters do not only trigger increased incidence of violence in the immediate term, but they exacerbate gender-based and other inequalities that set the foundation for the emergence of such violence over the long term. There is scope to better embed this understanding and ameliorative action across all phases of emergency management work. We recommend this is as a focus area under the Strategy.
- **Broadening cross-sectoral scope** – Gender equality and prevention of violence against women and family violence will advance more quickly where efforts are mutually reinforcing, and there is collective impact across all the settings where Victorians live, work, learn and play. Thus, Respect Victoria advocates for a strengthened cross-sectoral scope of *Safe and Strong* in the next phase of the Strategy. Priority sectors for leading change that we have identified and/or commenced work with include the advertising industry (specifically through the *ShEqual* initiative with Women’s Health Victoria), the tertiary education sector, health services (including perinatal services), faith-based leadership bodies, sports and local government.



## Summary of Recommendations

### ***Respect Victoria recommends that the renewed Safe and Strong:***

1. Reinforce the established relationship between improving gender equality and the prevention of violence against women, emphasising critical connections between work on safety, economic power, representation and engagement.
2. Maintain a strong focus on women's economic security and financial independence, including addressing recent threats to progress in this area including as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Incorporate a broad understanding of gendered violence that is inclusive of coercive control, sexual harassment, financial abuse and intergenerational violence, and recognises the role that gender inequality plays in violence perpetrated against older Victorians, people from migrant backgrounds, children and LGBTIQ+ peoples.
4. Embed an intersectional focus throughout in which inequality and disrespect based on gender interact with that emanating from other factors including ageism, racism, ethnocentrism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia.
5. Recognise that the continuing impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal Victorians include strongly gendered patterns of abuse and harm and support specific Aboriginal-led initiatives to reduce family violence and violence against women.

### ***Respect Victoria recommends the renewed Safe and Strong, in partnership with Respect Victoria:***

6. Promote gender-transformative approaches including policies and initiatives that promote healthy masculinities and engage men and boys in forming positive attitudes and behaviours as a key pathway to a safer and more gender equal society.
7. Consolidate a coordinated delivery system and support infrastructure for gender equality and ensure connections with the system focused on prevention of family violence – including alignment of workforce development strategies; and consider these intersections at a governance level.
8. Prioritise the primary prevention of gendered violence in the workplace, public spaces, and in the context of natural disasters and emergencies, building on recent reports and cross-sectoral partnerships in each of these areas.

### ***Respect Victoria recommends the renewed Safe and Strong, with Respect Victoria to lead:***

9. Advance population based social marketing campaigns, communications and coordinated messaging to shift community attitudes and behaviours regarding to gender equality and violence prevention. Respect Victoria is well placed to lead this activity, in line with its legislative remit and established credibility in this work.
10. Prioritise enhanced data and research on gender equality and violence, including through use of more consistent measures and sharing of data across agencies in economic, social and cultural domains, and through research partnerships. Respect Victoria is well placed to lead on this through our legislated role and in particular continuing stewardship of the Prevention of Family Violence Data Platform, Family Violence Prevention Research Agenda and associated partnerships.