

ECCV Submission to the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy

March 2016

The Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria Inc. (ECCV) is the Voice of Multicultural Victoria.

As the peak policy advocacy body for ethnic and multicultural organisations in Victoria, we are proud to have been the key advocate for culturally diverse communities in Victoria since 1974. For over 40 years we have been the link between multicultural communities, government and the wider community.

We aim for a culturally diverse and harmonious society that is just, fair and inclusive where all people have the opportunity to participate in and contribute to, community life. We advocate for freedom, respect, equality and dignity for multicultural communities and strive with others, to build a strong, vibrant Victorian community.

This submission is informed by several forums, meetings with the ECCV Policy Advisory Committee on Women Issues and community consultations on women issues relating, but not confined to, leadership, opportunities and family violence.

Strategy

ECCV applauds the Victorian government's initiative to develop a Gender Equality Strategy. The consultation paper highlighted some of the issues which hinders true gender equality in Victoria. ECCV believe that further guidance is needed for all stakeholders on how the Gender Equality Strategy will be prepared and implemented. ECCV recommends that the Victorian government provides further consultation on future drafts of the Strategy before it is finalised. Equally important is to install outcome measures and evaluation strategies to assess the effectiveness of the Strategy's driving in cultural and systemic change.

There are many barriers and issues related to full participation and acceptance of women as equal partners in all areas of society and life. It is necessary for the Victorian government to work in partnership with Commonwealth and local governments, businesses and community organisations, to ensure true gender equality in Victoria. Without input from other sectors in the community, any strategy will not successfully achieve cultural, systemic and structural change. There is a danger of the Strategy being overwhelmed by the numerous issues related to gender inequality. Therefore, it is a risk that the Strategy will be unable to adequately address all the significant systemic and structural barriers that are necessary to drive gender equality. Below are issues that ECCV believes should be considered in the Gender Equality Strategy.

Recommendation 1

Initiate community consultations and review of the Strategy needed before it is finalised.

Women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

Victoria is a diverse state and each facet of women's identity, whether it is her ethnicity, sexuality or disability, escalates the lack of opportunities and barriers for women in achieving their goals. In the 2011 Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, there were 46.8% of the Victorian population which were either born overseas or have at least one parent who was born overseas. Culturally and linguistically diverse issues are no longer a minority issue, but one which affects nearly half of the Victorian population. The Gender Equality Strategy should acknowledge that women require differing levels of support and resources to achieve equality.

Recommendation 2

The Strategy should acknowledge the importance of diversity, which includes, but is not restricted to ethnicity, sexuality, disability, education and socio-economic status. It should acknowledge that all women have different levels of needs, opportunities and barriers.

Language proficiency

English proficiency continues to be a challenge for culturally and linguistically diverse women in workforce participation and gaining substantive employment pathways. This also affects women's access to education, especially higher education. All of which further frustrates women's employment opportunities and economic stability.

The Commonwealth government provides 500 hours of free English language classes to newly arrived migrants with the appropriate visas. Many women find it difficult to attend these classes, and other vocational English language classes. Women with young children do not have access to childcare, which makes it difficult for them to attend English classes.

Recommendation 3

Commonwealth funded English language classes to be delivered in a flexible manner that considers women's familial responsibilities.

Access to promotion and leadership opportunities

In 2015, ECCV hosted a "Women's Leading the Way" Forum, where leadership and opportunities for professional advancement were discussed. For many culturally and linguistically diverse women who already have stable employment, there are limited opportunities to participate in leadership programs and opportunities. ECCV would like to see greater access to women's leadership training and professional networking opportunities. At the moment, many women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are not aware of these networks. These training opportunities are

integral for culturally and linguistically diverse women in developing their own networks and learning how to empower and impact organisations on issues such as gender equity. At our Forum, participants discussed the need for role models and mentors who could help women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

There are opportunities for intergenerational learning and sharing. It is vital for both older and younger women to be provided with space to share experiences and knowledge to better work towards gender equality. Providing prospects for intergenerational connections provide chances for mentoring and learning from role models.

There are already moves to address Board diversity; however further consideration of strategies for Board recruitment of women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities should be considered. The participants in the Forum agreed that culturally and linguistically diverse women need opportunities to attain board and leadership skills which will allow them to leverage change within leadership positions. True gender equality should be measured on the effect and influence women have in leadership positions, not just ensuring gender equity through numbers on boards and leadership positions.

Recommendation 4

Women networking opportunities to be promoted within and to the multicultural sector.

Recommendation 5

Strategies for innovative programs to overcome gender and culturally and linguistically diverse inequality in leadership roles and Board positions.

Visa status

Visa uncertainty or visas which are dependent on a spouse makes women more vulnerable to abuse, exploitation and unstable economic circumstances. Different visa statuses means some are not eligible to access services such as free English language classes, health services or family violence services, which other Victorian women take for granted. Further information can be found in ECCV's *The Victorian Inquiry into the Labour Hire Industry and Insecure Work* submission. The submission is attached as Appendix A for further reference.

Recommendation 6

Basic services and programs to be open to all residents living in Victoria.

Family Violence

Gender inequality is a major determinant of family violence. Family violence occurs in different ways and in different cultural and physical context. Family violence services and responses should acknowledge the diversity of women and their diversity of experience and needs. ECCV drafted a submission for the Royal Commission into Family Violence, which is attached as Appendix B. Its key recommendations were:

- a) Compulsory competence training for all service providers, medical practitioners and police officers

- b) Long term funding for primary prevention strategies and promotion which target culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- c) Crisis assistance should be available to all Victorian women regardless of visa status.

To successfully address family violence in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, funding and resources should be invested in proportion to Victoria's demographic structure. Best practice resourcing should be directed into the provision of culturally tailored services, which includes employment of bilingual and bicultural workers and better cultural competency training of all family violence workers in Victoria. Prevention and early intervention funding has always been time limited, meaning long term impacts are never fully realised. In 2015, Our Watch, the national organisation drive nation-wide change in the culture, behaviours and attitudes that underpin and create violence against women and children, funded two culturally and linguistically diverse specific prevention projects. Despite the success of both projects, these projects have found it difficult to continue with lack of ongoing funding. Therefore, it is hard to achieve long term cultural change within the communities without ongoing programs and funding. The Victoria Government should consider better funding models to be considered to provide long term prevention strategies and outcomes to ensure long term cultural change in communities. Funding models should include consideration of targeted programs for disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, such as culturally and linguistically diverse, disabled and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Recommendation 7

Fund and resource allocation should reflect Victoria's demography structures.

Recommendation 8

Resources should be allocated to culturally tailored services, including bilingual and bicultural services and cultural competency training of all family violence workers in Victoria.

Recommendation 9

Better funding models to be established for family violence prevention and early intervention strategies, especially targeting disadvantaged and vulnerable communities, such as the culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Funding and resourcing

The Strategy should be adequately funded and resourced ensure it successfully achieves true gender equality. In addition to the Strategy, the Victorian government should include firm commitments to the creation of policies and programs which lead to gender equality.

ECCV looks forward to hearing more from the Victorian Government on the progressing with the drafting and implementation of the Gender Equality Strategy.

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