



Friday 28 September 2018

The Hon. Natalie Hutchins MP
Minister for Women
Victorian Government
Via email: gender.equality@dhhs.vic.gov.au

Dear Minister

On behalf of YWCA Australia, I would like to commend the Andrews Government on the development of the Victorian Gender Equality Bill.

YWCA Australia is a not-for-profit secular and feminist organisation that has been delivering programs services to women and girls since the 1880s. Through 270 different sites across metropolitan, regional and rural Australia, we aim to create a future where women, young women and girls are safe and respected, with equal access to power, opportunity and resources.

In Victoria, we have a portfolio of housing properties through YWCA National Housing - providing more than 110,000 nights of social and affordable housing accommodation for women on low incomes each year. We also support Australia's largest network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity - the Equality Rights Alliance. In addition, YWCA Australia is part of a global network of women leading social and economic change in over 120 countries, reaching 25 million people worldwide.

There is compelling evidence, through the International Gender Gap Index, to suggest that gender disparity can be tackled effectively through legislative action on quotas, action plans and reporting. In addition, this research clearly shows that gender equality legislation generally improves gender equality overall, including wider instances of discrimination evident outside of the public sector. The Victorian Government are leading Australia in shifting the status quo for women and committing to an intersectional analysis relating to targets that meaningfully include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disability, LGBTIQ people and others who are more likely to experience systematic oppression, discrimination and a lack of representation in leadership positions.

The Bill recognises that addressing gender inequality is an imperative precursor to shifting Australia's endemic family violence statistics, improving social justice regardless of gender and that advancing gender equality is a shared responsibility across the community. Within this, it is imperative that the practical implementation of legislation is delivered through flexible and tailored Gender Equality Action Plans. When working with a "ground up" approach, it is essential that equality strategy is integrated into workforce development; that workplaces are supported through a robust change management process, and that organisations are connected to established resources with demonstrated success in gender equality planning and measurement.

Additionally, research and evidence show that targets for women's leadership are effective in speeding up the pace of change and are critical to policy shifts, social norms, attitudes and expectations. The proposed 40:40:20 gender equality quotas allow for flexibility, scalability and are inclusive of gender non-binary people. YWCA Australia hopes that this legislation will set a precedent and that the Victorian Government will consider applying the 40-40-20 targets to less senior positions over time. The Victorian Government must also endeavour to evolve relationships with specialist women's organisations who represent women from diverse backgrounds to advance their representation and inclusion in targets.

Conversely, organisations and individuals who achieve gender targets should be rewarded and incentivised. YWCA New Zealand have created the NZ Equal Pay Awards, finding phenomenal success celebrating leaders in pay parity. YWCA Australia would be keen to work closely with the Victorian Government in replicating the success of the Awards in Victoria as well as sharing our expertise in building and implementing Gender Equality Action Plans through our Gender Equality Matters (GEM) program in South Australia - an activation point for organisations to advance gender equality and enhance diversity in their workplace.

In addition, YWCA Australia would also be very interested to talk further about working with an independent body — whether a new agency or the Victorian Public Sector Commission — that could collect and publish data, monitor progress and aid organisations to improve their gender equality performance.

We look forward to collaborating into the future with the Victorian Government in the implementation and beyond in this exciting and bold Australian first legislation pushing for gender equality. YWCA Australia seek to advocate for the adoption of replica bills in the rest of the Australian states and territories and build on the pioneering work in Victoria.

If you would like to discuss our submission further, please contact our Director of Communications, Renee Hancock, on 0417 055 299 or email renee.hancock@ywca.org.au.

Yours sincerely



Michelle Phillips
Chief Executive Officer

Have Your Say Survey Responses

Q1. Do you agree with the Bill's Guiding Principles?

Yes. International evidence clearly shows that gender equality legislation in the public sector generally improves gender equality overall, including impacting upon inequalities evident outside of government. The guiding principles rightly recognise addressing gender inequality as an imperative precondition to shifting Australia's horrific family violence statistics, improving social justice regardless of gender and that advancing gender equality is a shared responsibility across the community. YWCA Australia commend the Victorian Government on the strength of the Guiding Principles and proposed population outcome where all Victorians can live in a safe and equal society, have access to equal power, resources and opportunities and be treated with dignity, respect and fairness.

Q2. Do you agree with what's proposed for Gender Equality Action Plans?

Yes. Gender Equality Action Plans are a critical tool of implementation and ultimately underpin the success of the proposed Victorian Gender Equality Bill. International success has been demonstrated in Greece where ministries develop and implement action plans, specifically, accountability in addressing gender issues in their respective fields of activity. In addition, Austria has invested significantly in improving the consistency and coherence of governmental policies and found their action plans had far better success when developed in a participatory process.

Gender Equality Action Plans (GEAP) address the results and/or "products" of an organisation and how these contribute to promoting gender equality within a specific policy area. With varying levels of buy in and progression between policy areas and/or departments in Victoria it is imperative that Gender Equality Action Plans are tailored, allow for flexibility of implementation, are integrated into workforce development strategy and that organisations are supported throughout the change management process. This is of particular importance for areas that are just starting or planning to start their gender equality journey or where they have been identified as having significant gender disparities.

YWCA Australia have built an emerging program called Gender Equality Matters (GEM) which involves the assessment of and engagement with workplace policies, people and objectives to integrate gender equity principles into their policies, program work and organisational culture. Our experiences have led us to build a community of practice in our organisation as well as an understanding of the needs of a myriad of organisations in the development of action plans. We would be willing to share our learnings from this program further.

Q3. What kind of preparation, resources or training would organisations need to develop and implement Gender Equality Action Plans?

Due to the specialist technical nature of gender equality action planning – i.e. what is to be implemented and what this is to achieve within a specific policy area or field of activity, e.g. housing, public transport, health care, each organisation will require a tailored approach utilising key skills and expertise in gender equality action planning. Organisations will have differing gender equality goals that have to be pursued utilising specified measures in order to help achieve an organisation's overall gender equality objectives.

While the Victorian public sector outperforms most industries, the gap in wages between women and men is still 12%. Investing in resourcing organisations to conduct thorough gender analysis, set challenging and yet feasible gender equality objectives and defining and setting appropriate indicators that allow for accurate monitoring and evaluating target achievement are key. Due to the specialised nature of this work YWCA Australia recommends that organisations are connected to the established individuals and organisations with demonstrated success in gender equality planning, an area we have been working in successfully. A community of GEAP practice needs to be developed so that organisations can be connected to organisations, like the YWCA, who have expertise in this specialised area of work to support the creation and implementation of GEAPs.

Organisations require access to quality gender equality planning, training and workforce development activities, resources linked to scale of work required to reach gender equality quotas and incentivisation to celebrate and showcase successes.

Q4. Do you agree with the Bill's proposed targets for women in leadership?

Yes. International evidence is clear: when public bodies promote gender equality by law, gender equality improves. The top three countries on the International Gender Gap Index – Iceland, Finland and Norway – all have gender equality legislation and YWCA Australia believe that it would be impossible to suggest Australia can meaningfully address gender inequality without constitutional or legal reform that sets targets.

Research and evidence show that targets for women's leadership are effective in speeding up the pace of change. For example, in 2004 France set a target of 40% women on public boards and by 2010 women's representation had grown from 30 to 44%. Many Australian organisations already have targets for women and YWCA Australia believes that success can be replicated in the Victorian setting.

It is imperative that we make public institutions accountable on their journey to achieving an equal representation of women. Targets, as confirmed by the Citizens Jury, are critical to policy shifts, social norms, attitudes and expectations. The proposed 40:40:20 gender equality quotas allow for flexibility, scalability and are inclusive of gender non-binary people. YWCA Australia hopes that the bill will set a precedence and the Victorian Government consider applying the 40-40-20 targets to less senior positions over time.

Meaningfully establishing targets for women in leadership will directly impact gender inequality and contribute to significant shifts in society to tackle escalating incidents of violence against women, children and young people, however, further details surrounding the integration of the Citizens Jury report and the underpinning suggested quota are required.

Q5. What would targets need to include to ensure representation of women from diverse backgrounds?

Merit assumes women and men start on an even playing field. The reality is that many factors mean that men already have an advantage over women, this is amplified for women from diverse backgrounds who may experience racism, homophobia, ableism etc. in addition to gender-based discrimination, lack of flexible work, and workplace sexual harassment. YWCA Australia utilises an intersectional feminist lens in our work and suggest that due to the emerging nature of evidence in diversity in women's quotas more work to understand the complexities of diversity and women is imperative.

The evidence is clear: diverse teams are more innovative. Drawing upon greater diversity of thinking and a range of cognitive approaches will only benefit Victorian civil society. Intersectional analysis relating to targets that meaningfully include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disability and LGBTIQ people are critical prerequisites to understanding what is feasible and inclusive. In particular, the availability of disaggregated and diversity responsive data should be acknowledged as facilitating best practice intersectional policy analysis and development.

Good intentions aren't enough to deliver equality for women and women from diverse backgrounds are far more likely to be absent in leadership positions and be disproportionately impacted by gender inequalities. The Victorian Government must continue to evolve relationships with specialist women's organisations who represent women from diverse backgrounds to advance their understandings, representation and inclusion in targets.

Q6. How often should we require organisations to report on their gender equality progress (ie. Gender Equality Action Plans)?

Annually.

Q7. Do you agree with our proposal to promote gender equality through our purchasing guidelines?

Yes. Purchasing guidelines are imperative to holding not only the public sector to account but contributing to a profound effect on civil society at large. Organisations bidding for funding will be compelled to changing their practices in order to be able to survive and thrive in Victorian competitive tendering processes. Promoting gender equality through procurement, funding policies and practices is a huge task and YWCA Australia commend the Victorian Government in reaching for this ambitious inclusion in the proposed Victorian Gender Equality Bill. Monitoring and evaluating the scale of change required and its associated successes and failures are crucial to implementation, ongoing continuous quality improvement and workforce development.

As the guidelines are part of Victoria's Social Procurement Framework, suppliers, in particular smaller or specialist suppliers, may require additional support to work towards being ready for when the legislation takes effect in mid-2022. YWCA Australia note the variance of language in the proposed bill, specifically referring to where an organisation "may/must" comply. This may lead to the proposed bill becoming a blunt instrument where ambiguity leads to loss of intention. We look forward to further details surrounding the purchasing guidelines and the implications for organisations like our own, traditionally in social, education and care sectors where the gender balance disparity is in opposition to what the bill seeks to address.

Q8. Do agree with our proposal for monitoring and compliance?

Yes. Monitoring and compliance is a critical tool in addressing gender equality. YWCA Australia commend the strategic and systematic approach proposed. Promoting the maintenance of gender equality, diversity and inclusion as a business objective that is measured, managed and rewarded is imperative. Underpinning the legislation with robust reporting of key metrics is a core business discipline and will drive the understandings behind success and failures in performance.

As part of the proposed Victorian Gender Equality Bill, gender impact analysis must be included throughout policy, budgeting and ultimately service delivery. Gender impacts analysis methodologies and tools need to be collaboratively developed and draw on expertise in gender equality planning and international development for a comprehensive implementation process.

Leaders need to be held accountable for achieving gender targets and incentives as well as penalties need to be built in. YWCA New Zealand run the NZ Equal Pay Awards and have built phenomenal success in recognising and celebrating leaders, champions and organisations in gender pay equality. YWCA Australia would be interested in working closely with the Victorian Government in replicating the success of the Awards in Victoria. YWCA Australia would also be very interested to talk further about working with an independent body — whether a new agency or the Victorian Public Sector Commission — that could collect and publish data, monitor progress and work with organisations to improve their gender equality performance. We look forward to further details that move beyond compliance versus non-compliance and how the process could be improved to promote transparency.

Q9. Do you agree with the Bill's staged implementation and timeline?

Yes

Q10. What do we need to do to make sure all organisations are ready for a new Act to take effect?

The Victorian Gender Equality Bill provides the fundamental framework by which organisations can navigate and accelerate their own unique gender equality journey. The critical implementation of gender equality progress needs to build momentum and track and account for sustainable progress.

The evidence shows us that when organisations are supported to become more strategic in their approach to gender equality, their efforts link to, and support, broader business strategies and objectives. This evidence echoed in our own Gender Equality Matters (GEM) program which is operating in South Australia. Spending the time to get this right from the beginning is crucial amplifier of success. Efforts put into establishing an effective governance structure and benchmarking to oversee diversity progress is also a prerequisite for positive outcomes.

In order to fully capitalise on the benefits that gender equality brings to organisations of all kinds, organisations must also foster cultures which are consistently inclusive to women, men and gender non binary people. Flexibility and scaling time frames especially for organisations with greater gender disparities represent key enablers of genuine gender equality, diversity and inclusion. Enshrining gender equality in law will only be successful if a huge cultural shift is tackled concurrently within society.