



**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER  
WOMEN'S ALLIANCE**

**SUBMISSION**

**TO THE**

**Women and Royal Commission  
Branch**

**INTO**

**Gender Equality in Victoria**

**18 March 2016**

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## ABOUT NATSIWA

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance is one of five National Women's Alliances, with funding from the Commonwealth Prime Minister and Cabinet's Office for Women.

Established in 2009, and incorporated in March 2013, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA) proudly works to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to have a strong and effective voice in the domestic and international policy advocacy process.

NATSIWA's vision is as follows:

*'To protect the health, human rights and fundamental freedoms that are significant to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Women and Children, through cultural preservation, health education and coalition building'.*

Since incorporation NATSIWA's Membership now includes 524 individual Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Women and 14 Aboriginal Organisations across Australia.

Our following Guiding Principles are cognisant of the needs, health, wellbeing and development, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children. They are as follows:

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander strengths;
- Recognition of the centrality of kinship;
- The need for cultural understanding;
- The impact of history in trauma and loss;
- The impact of racism and stigma;
- Recognition of different needs of communities;
- The recognition of human rights and social justice;
- Universal access to basic health care, housing and education; &
- Equitable needs based funding.

Please visit [www.natsiwa.org.au](http://www.natsiwa.org.au) to download NATSIWA's Strategic Framework.

It is with much pleasure that NATSIWA provide the Women and Royal Commission Branch, this submission in response to: Gender Equality in Victoria.

## CONSULTATION PAPER TERMS OF REFERENCE

On February 19<sup>th</sup> 2016, the Victorian Government sought input into the challenges and opportunities that Gender equality presents, as the Victorian Government is developing A Gender Equality Strategy for Victoria to guide actions and priorities, and to work alongside the community towards a common goal of equal social, civic and economic participation for women in society.

In particular they sought responses to the following questions:

- a. How should Government partner with the community, corporate sector, non-profit sector and other stakeholders to advance gender equality?
- b. How do we address the pay and superannuation gap for women in Victoria?
- c. What is the role of men in a gender equality strategy?
- d. What needs to be done to promote women's health and wellbeing?
- e. What are the most urgent areas of gender inequality that Victoria should tackle first?
- f. How do we ensure we meet our objectives over the long term?
- g. How can we improve childcare access?
- h. How do we encourage women and girls to take up leadership roles?
- i. How do we get women to participate in non-traditional careers, in particular STEM?
- j. How should we celebrate and recognise women's achievements?
- k. What strategies do we need to ease the strain of balancing work and caring responsibilities?
- l. What is the role of business in addressing gender equality?
- m. What are the barriers to creating more flexible workplaces?
- n. How do we address inequality among the most diverse and disadvantaged groups of women?
- o. How do we address inequality among the most diverse and disadvantaged groups of women?

Submissions closing date is 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016.

### **Other submissions**

NATSIWA commends and endorses the submission to this consultation by the The Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria which focuses on developing a comprehensive women's plan to rectify causes of gender inequality; and to promote public awareness of the Victorian Charter of Human Rights which defines the cultural rights of Aboriginal people.. Strengthen culture and positive identity of Aboriginal women to overcome ingrained and concealed societal racism. NATSIWA also supports their ongoing long term funding.

## BACKGROUND

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a holistic view of health which encompasses not only the physical, but also the “social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being.”<sup>1</sup> This means that health for Aboriginal women is linked to their families and communities.<sup>2</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have suffered great intergenerational trauma as a result of colonisation, forced removal of children, assimilation, segregation and racism. Cultural practices, traditions and identity have been interrupted and this which has had a devastating impact on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal people also experience significant socio-economic disadvantage, which is strongly related to poor health outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women continue to have poorer health outcomes compared to non-Aboriginal women in Australia. The life expectancy for Aboriginal women is 73.7 compared to 83.1 for non-Aboriginal women.<sup>5</sup>

Aboriginal women are more likely to have one or more chronic health conditions compared to Aboriginal men,<sup>6</sup> and are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence.<sup>7</sup> Though they make up 0.9% of the Victorian population, Aboriginal women are the fastest growing segment of the Victorian prison population, representing 8.9% of Victorian female prisoners.<sup>8</sup> Most Aboriginal women in prison have experienced family violence and many are incarcerated for offences relating to homelessness and financial hardship.<sup>9</sup>

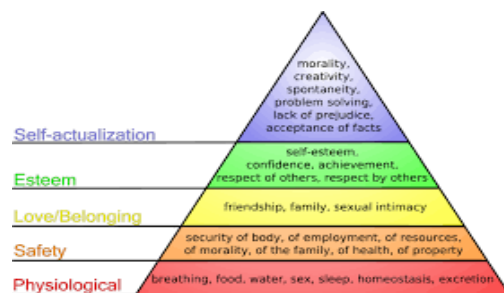
There is a need for more Aboriginal women-focused research as much of the research on Aboriginal health is gender blind and does not explore the impact of gender on the health and wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal women in addition to the trauma of colonization, forced removal, racism and socio-economic disadvantage. NATSIWA thanks VACCHO for providing feedback for this Connector.

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1. Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (2014). [Definitions](#). VAHS, Preston. Accessed on 06/11/2015. ↵
  2. Australia. National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (1989). [National Aboriginal Health Strategy. Ch 9 : Women's business](#) Canberra, p. 179. Accessed on 06/11/2015. ↵
  3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation (2012). [Growing our children up strong and deadly](#). Canberra Accessed on 06/11/2015. ↵
  4. Fredericks B, Adams K, Angus S, and Australian Women's Health Network Talking Circle (2010). [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health strategy](#). Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN), Melbourne. p.8 Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
  5. Holland A (2015). [Progress and priorities report 2015](#). Close The Gap Campaign Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality. p. 7 Accessed on 06/11/2015. Victorian data not available. ↵
  6. Fredericks B, Adams K, Angus S, and Australian Women's Health Network Talking Circle (2010). [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health strategy](#). Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN), Melbourne. p.25 Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
  7. The Productivity Commission (2014). [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage - Key Indicators 2014](#). The Productivity Commission, Melbourne. table 4A.11.22 Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
  8. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2013). [Unfinished business : Koori women and the justice system](#). Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Melbourne. pp.9-10. Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
  9. McInerney M (2015). [Prison is not the answer. Instead, address the needs of traumatised Aboriginal women](#). Croakey, Melbourne. Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵

Australian women still experience sex discrimination daily, especially Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women are subjected to multiple forms of discrimination. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander society and gender relations prior to British occupation were more balanced and equal than western society. Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander men and women had their own roles in society but when it came to decision-making this was more equal.

Gender inequality affects women in all areas especially Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women. The nature, history and context of family violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is different to domestic violence experienced in mainstream communities and populations. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to suffer the intergenerational effects of past welfare practices including the forced removal of their children and dislocation from their communities, country and culture, as well as experiencing higher levels of poverty and social disadvantage compared to other Australians. The combined effects of past practices and current disadvantages present extreme challenges to families.

These historical and current events and issues impact the day to day existence and well-being of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and racism and gender inequalities compound these. In the course of undertaking consultations in relation to this paper the fundamental issues



pertaining to need and daily survival of women and their families were repeatedly identified, and can be related to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

Many of our women struggle to ensure the physiological and safety issues for their families, that they don't have the time or energy to unravel the relationship between their struggles and gender inequality. However, racist attitudes feature highly here when accessing services, wanting to rent a house, getting and holding a job or receiving a promotion.

### **Attitudes about Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women and their role in Society**

NATSIWA seeks to achieve diversity and equal opportunity among other Australians and acknowledge the acute need to remove barriers to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women, who are historically an excluded population and are currently underrepresented in the workforce and education institutions and overrepresented in the prison system, suffering from poor health and economic outcomes.

NATSIWA members in Victoria were surveyed regarding gender equity, and it was noted that gender stereotyping was having an effect on their equal contribution to Australian life. In addition and just as important noted that racial stereotyping went hand in hand and doubly discriminated against Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women based on race as well as gender.

It is with that knowledge that NATSIWA believes for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women there should be dual goals regarding diversity as inclusive excellence and diversity as equal opportunity. Diversity and equal opportunity support an Australian community that reflects a happier and much more just society.

For Australia to ensure its legitimacy as a nation state that values its First Nations people it should continue its efforts to enhance diversity and equal opportunity consistent with legal requirements. As noted by the Human Rights Commission “The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*” gives effect to Australia’s international human rights obligations and promotes equality between women and men.” <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/about-sex-discrimination>.

This prohibits anyone in Australia from discriminating against or “granting preferential treatment” to any individual or group on the basis of sex. Likewise other instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is an international treaty adopted in 1979 by the United Nations General Assembly.

Described as an international bill of rights for women, it was instituted on 3 September 1981 and has been ratified by Australia. And other principle international agreements that over the past 20 years where Australia has committed to responding to violence against women and girls, from the Beijing Platform for Action to the Sustainable Development Goals [www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/evaw-from-the-beijing-platform-to-the-sdgs#sthash.iPi0e69G.dpuf](http://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/12/evaw-from-the-beijing-platform-to-the-sdgs#sthash.iPi0e69G.dpuf) .

In addition to those international human rights obligations it also reflects Australia’s ratification of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by implementing the Australian Racial Discrimination Act 1975.

While Australians are guided by international instruments and protected by Australian legislation it would be ideal to go one step further by considering measures that can be legally implemented to support its commitment to women especially First Nation women and abiding by the international agreement Australia agreed to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Strategies that are set forth to improve Australia's First Nation women standing in Australia would require leadership. Leadership from Victoria's Premier and his Ministers and bold messages to Victorians can promote zero tolerance of gender inequality and racism; together with strong leadership from Aboriginal communities', active involvement and influence can include high level appointments for diversity leadership. For example, Victoria's Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People could be earmarked for a woman when the position becomes vacant next time.

The state government is working towards self-determination for Aboriginal people and is entertaining discussions of treaty and what this might look like, the fundamental principles for a treaty, and a representative Aboriginal structure. Some good leadership elements would include how Aboriginal communities operated prior to European occupation with a gender balanced approach maintaining an equal society.

Victoria could ensure that Ministerial Roundtables (minimum of three roundtable discussions each year) bringing together Ministers and Aboriginal leaders continues to host Aboriginal Women's Roundtables, with an expectation this would happen each year. This is crucial given the extremely poor statistics regarding Aboriginal women's health, high rates of domestic violence and high incarceration rates.

The development of Victoria's Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter) in 2008 and the commitment and self-reporting by Victoria's 10 government departments, Victoria Police and local government provided a good foundation to address many issues.

The Victorian government also developed a state plan to prevent violence against women and from that came the Indigenous Family Violence Framework which is often highly commended by other states. However, from respondents who utilize the system there still needs some work.

- The domestic violence plan should be seen through a cultural lens. That is, ensuring that crisis and service delivery is culturally appropriate and mainstream services should ensure this type of training for all staff. This then allows Aboriginal choice of service delivery.
- All support programs should have built in aftercare with follow up at certain intervals.
- There needs to be more financial resourcing put into early intervention/prevention programs not just the pointy end. However, there needs to be a good balance.

Hopefully with government backing of this report and its findings we will see dedicated funding as the funding has not increased since its inception from the Royal Commission findings and

there needs to be more money for programs and policy especially in the early intervention/prevention context. More money needs to be spent on access for women and men for early intervention prevention programs. At the moment there is no to little access to service delivery when there is a relationship problem; all resources are at the pointy end. There is little amount of funding for evaluation. More money must be dedicated to holistic and therapeutic approaches.

In this submission we provide feedback from consultations held with our members in relation to gender issues, with discussions included but not limited to the following identify issues:

- *Gender inequality affects women in all areas of their lives*
- *On average, girls receive 11% less pocket money than boys.*
- *Many teenage girls begin to drop out of sports and physical recreation, putting them at a lifelong health disadvantage.*
- *More women than men graduate from higher education, but women get a lower average graduate salary.*
- *One in two mothers report experiencing discrimination as a result of their pregnancy, parental leave or return to work.*
- *Australian women spend almost twice as much time on unpaid work as men.*

Government, non-government sectors, industry and education institutions have a legal obligation to provide a safe environment for all their employees and students. Gender equality issues have not been addressed in a concerted effort. Through partnership, education regarding gender equality and rights within all professions and industry must be rolled out and policy and legal implications have to be implemented to support this.

From consultations it became apparent the many women were unaware of their rights and had not identified gender discrimination as it had been masked in historic and ingrained stereotyping, so one could assume that many men may also be ignorant to their behaviour. Gender jokes and innuendos foster an unsafe/uncomfortable environment for women, and perpetuate the stereotypical views.

All education and places of employment must be educated regarding gender issues and the rights of women. Women must be informed on how they can make a complaint or raise gender issues and must feel safe to do so.

Government has an obligation to ensure that all education curriculum addresses and challenges gender and race discrimination, myths and stereotypes, and this must begin in primary school and be incorporated throughout secondary and tertiary levels.

Any and all gender/race programs and initiatives must be adequately funded and resourced, must have bi-partisan agreement, and evaluated to ensure the affirmative action is undertaken and goals are achieved.

***“Women represent 67% of the Victorian public sector workforce, yet only 37% of executive roles.”***

During consultation discussion our women were asked the following questions.

### **How have gender stereotypes affected you?**

The women consulted were able to identify a number of areas and/or times when they believe they were affected by gender stereotypes attitudes, and systems.

The most prominent areas were educational institutions, legal system and employment.

- Women stated that when in court or at police stations that were predominantly men they were made to feel that they were lying or exaggerating.
- It was also noted that in higher education facilities such as university the women felt intimidated. They stated that many of the executive roles in the universities were held by men.
- Males were also promoted ahead of females in employment, especially in management roles, and when women were promoted they found that men proved resistant to being answerable to a woman.

***Respondent 54yrs*** - males have been promoted and selected for supervisor roles as the boss believes staff listen to a male better than a female.

### **What barriers have you observed for women?**

During the consultation the stereotypical attitudes and expectation of women and men's roles were identified. Roles that have been traditionally assigned according to gender is the hardest barriers to challenge. These were particularly strong in the home, childcare, sports and employment.

Women identified that sponsorship and media coverage was proportionately higher in men's sports compared to women. Lack of sponsorship severely impacts women's choices.

Society expectations and structure leans firmly that women provide the care in the home, whether that be for elderly care or childcare, these expectations and structures supports and reinforces the barriers for women in the workforce and to acquire long term financial security.

Women identified that they were also overlooked when applying for employment within historically male arenas, such as construction.

***Respondent 54yrs*** - Getting selected for jobs (men win more at interviews), having the day to day responsibility for the family, employers don't even think about childcare issues for male employees.

***"The Victorian workforce participation rate for women is 58.8%, compared to 71.4% for men."***

***“Only 14% of women enrolling in university chose science-related fields of study, including engineering, manufacturing and construction.”***

### **How do we shift embedded attitudes about women and their role in society?**

The women consulted thought the roles of both men and women had changed in time, however they felt that the struggle to have a role within White Australia had been equally difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander men and women.

The women said that once they had a child and had the role of mother they did receive some kudos for being a mum, yet their men struggled even if they held a job they still felt inferior to their work colleagues. Even those with outstanding and notable sports skill quickly lost their standing when their sports careers were over.

To challenge the embedded attitudes about women, we need to

- Begin with education
- Promote the advantages of employing women
- Reconsider flexibility in employment such as flexible hours and job sharing
- Lead by example for future generations

***Respondent 37yrs-*** *We have to change how we as a society stereotype genders beginning in kinder. This is happening but needs to be more by example rather than picture books with men and women shown in previous gender work roles. How many pre-schools get a visit to the fire station for example and how many firefighters are female? Media can assist by promoting non gender roles within advertising.*

***“Women in full-time work earn around \$15,000 less than men each year.”***

***“Women retire with just over half the superannuation savings of men.”***

***“Gender inequality is a key driver of poor outcomes for women.”***

### **Questions:**

#### **How should Government partner with the community, corporate sector, non-profit sector and other stakeholders to advance gender equality?**

During consultations the women agreed that government should be leaders in this process. In partnership the government would be instrumental in ensuring that gender equality was embedded in funding agreements. All partners including government should review policy and implement policy that supports equality from the top down.

Gender Equality standards should be developed and be the bench mark by which the community, corporate sector, non-profit sector and other stakeholders are encouraged to achieve, thus producing a gender equality best practice.

There are government institutions that sadly don't practice what they preach. This is evident in education and health institutions which need to be accountable and transparent in their

practices with employees.

**Respondent 37yrs** - *Government must partner with other particularly on the issue of independent reviews. I have witnessed on a number of occasions that bullying in the Health department (hospitals & aged care facilities) is not handled appropriately and the victim is often blamed or made a scape- goat. This is more prevalent in hospitals with male dominant leadership and boy's club mentality and the victim female.*

**Respondent 26yrs** - *They need to lead by example, promote employment and engagement with women from a board level down, and hold business and industry accountable and publicly name and shame those that don't engage women.*

### **How do we address the pay and superannuation gap for women in Victoria?**

For many Aboriginal women employment levels are low due to no work experience, unskilled, lack of education and many respondents believed this was due to racist attitudes. For those that were able to acquire work it was identified that many women have years out of the workforce to care for family. That can range from child rearing to looking after elderly parents and in-laws. It was also noted that many women in the workforce choose to work part time as the responsibility in the home does not provide them the opportunity to take up fulltime employment. That being said many women have not and will not have the opportunity to ensure that they have financial security in the future and particularly at retirement compared to their male counterparts.

It was suggested that government could do more to ensure that the gap is reduced by providing entitlements that cover low income, for both genders. This could be as simple as

- Higher rental assistance for retirees
- Incentives for developers to provide rental housing for retirees
- Higher tax incentives (over and above Salary sacrifice) for low income to contribute to super
- Tax incentives for single income families to encourage payment of dual superannuation (for their partners future).
- Penalties for industry that does not pay women equally
- If a married or partnered couple, the superannuation should be put into a shared family super. With considerations for divorce/split up then the superannuation would be shared accordingly to a formula factoring in the care of the number of children in the care of a parent
- When the mother returned to work there might be a higher ceiling (formula driven) for a period of time where superannuation installments could be increased

**Respondent 37yrs** - *More tax incentives for women to put money aside for superannuation, and considered additional benefits to make up for financial shortfall when retiring such as higher rent assistance.*

**Respondent 26yrs** - *an inquiry/survey must be done with younger working women to understand the barriers of contributing to super, with the older women who haven't had the opportunity to accumulate super then a number of options must be considered to ensure they retire with the dignity of their male counterparts, it could be that they work part time without fear of losing a substantial amount of their pension and that their concession cards have more benefits. This could be for example discounts at chemists, travel and rent (over what is standard in concession card holders).*

### **What is the role of men in a gender equality strategy?**

The consultation noted that we had to seek the support of men if we are to tackle the inequality. Men have to lead by example and be genuinely supportive of women if we are to overturn centuries of stereotyping. Just as with OH&S and sexual harassment, policy must be implemented within all sectors if we are to address this seriously. The role of men is to:

- To listen to women, and implement strategies that assist women to long term economic security
- Lead by example to other men and their sons, and support the girls and women in their life, and their work colleagues to achieve and to be safe
- Provide more support to their women at home and be supportive of the women at work
- Men need to support any and all strategies that promote or inspire equality...this could be promoted through media campaigns
  - Data collection should be considered and detail who was offending and for what reason. This might not be ongoing but a snapshot of action research for a period of time

**Respondent 38yrs** - *Seeing women as equals, challenging any derogatory behavior or talk towards women and actively stepping away from the 'boys club' mentality would be a good start.*

**Respondent 46yrs** - *At the same time this respondent who works in domestic violence said that she did not want our men vilified and made to believe that because they are Aboriginal this is a stereotypical view of them. She said that we too are a multicultural society and perpetrators are not all black some are (not all) opportunistic white men who prey upon our women and children's vulnerabilities and these white men's behavior definitely came from a power base. Domestic violence may affect their children(s) outlook and conditioning as they witness domestic violence. Especially male children, hence the real need for good role models for our boys.*

### **What needs to be done to promote women's health and wellbeing?**

Those consulted thought that women's health is well promoted and would like to see it maintained at the current level. There was also concern about recent Medicare cuts and how that would impact on early intervention and prevention for women and their future.

Women's wellbeing however, it was noted, could cover a gamut of issues: in particular women's safety was noted as needing further promotion. The court system in particular lets women down; women's safety must be paramount when deciding bail or non-custodial sentencing. Judges and magistrates in particular must be held accountable for their decisions. The following was noted:

- Continually reviewing and refining court processes that effect women.
- Promote respect for women of all ages.

**Respondent 54yrs** - *Government must not cut any Medicare/health benefits we need to be building on what we have, not depleting it. The health care of the family ultimately falls to the women so any reduction in assistance etc., further burdens women and that would limit her earning saving capacity.*

### **What are the most urgent areas of gender inequality that Victoria should tackle first?**

As mentioned earlier in this paper our consultation identified that many women cannot begin to think of gender issues let alone challenge them when they are struggling to ensure the household has an income to ensure they maintain a roof over their heads and food on the table. During our discussions however we were able to dissect how gender equality was contributing to their current situation. The women consulted listed the following priorities as they saw them:

- Lead by example in all areas of government and any contracts entered into. Governments have contracts that have 'Green' considerations therefore contracts could be devised that consider gender issues
- More housing for single mothers - or more rent assistance reflective of rental markets where employment is available so they can rent a decent house
- More housing options for women and children who are fleeing from domestic violence situations
- Making sure legislation cracks down on employers not paying equitable salaries and look at further tax incentives for women to build superannuation
- More Aboriginal women in Parliament and higher up in the bureaucracy

### **How do we ensure we meet our objectives over the long term?**

Commitment to policy is paramount to ensure we achieve our objectives. Standards must be set and independent reviews undertaken. Goals with timeframes will assist this process.

The following was noted from our women:

**Respondent 37yrs** - *Without commitment in policy we will not meet our objective.*

**Respondent 54yrs** - *We need to set our objectives in the first place. Government and industry needs to set goals with time frames and once achieved we could hold these up like we do 'centre's of excellence'.*

**Respondent E 38yrs** - *Keep the issue on the agenda, more women in parliament.*

### **How can we improve childcare access?**

Childcare is paramount to supporting women and families to achieve gender equality. Government must explore a range of models and options as not one size fits all. Society is evolving and we have many more mothers and fathers wishing to work from home, or work outside normal office hours. Who delivers childcare must also be explored. More men should be encouraged to care for their children, so that the burden does not fall to the mothers. Affordable holiday and after school care, is also an issue, with subsidized in home childcare being identified as the most ideal. The following was noted repeatedly:

- Flexible hours. Affordability
- Affordable and more after school and holiday programs
- Look at family options, even rewarding grandparents not necessarily with direct payment but possibly other incentives such as they earn a point system which would entitle them for higher discount, financial assistance to private health care or rail/bus travel etc.
- Child care subsidies

### **How do we encourage women and girls to take up leadership roles?**

Leadership is paramount to Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander women gaining equality and ensuring financial security for the future. Leadership is high on the NATSIWA agenda and we promote it whenever and wherever the opportunity is afforded to us. All sectors must have policy that encourages and supports women to consider positions on boards, advisory groups and any forum they identify as worthy of their time and skills. Government must also ensure access to leadership and governance courses and workshops. Industry must also nurture and mentor women in leadership roles. This can be done through internal policy, training and media:

- Industries need to have mentorships/cadetships whereby girls are encouraged and supported to become leaders and undertake previously identified male roles
- Promote the training or mentor them in roles
- Enlist media support
- Promote the idea and possibilities in schools
- Mentor and encourage programs out of schools to feed young minds and ignite interests in the greater good and wider community.

**Respondent 54yrs-** *Get media onside - media does a lot of damage when it comes to women and girls and how they are meant to look and be. Getting to the top is hard enough without being scrutinized regarding hair, dress or gender per say.*

## **How do we get women to participate in non-traditional careers, in particular STEM?**

During our consultation it was noted that very little was known about STEM, this in itself identifies that it's an area that women are not encouraged to participate. STEM related industry and institutions that deliver STEM courses and education must be encouraged to broaden its intake to women. Policy within these institutions and industry must address this. Government could assist with incentives to industry to meet gender equality targets.

***Respondent 54yrs** -This will come in time as other industries come to employ women in previously male dominated roles. However that should not delay calling them to account on the employment of women.*

## **How should we celebrate and recognise women's achievements?**

Our consultations noted that there should be a dual recognition. Certainly women need far more recognition for their achievements, and secondly we need to recognise industry, corporations, public and private sector that support women to achieve. Recognition could come through naming awards, buildings and public places or venues after noteworthy women. Media needs also to be encouraged to regularly promote, and celebrate women's achievements. Those consulted mentioned the following:

- All women should be given International Women's Day as a public holiday, or at least a few hours of paid leave to attend a IWD breakfast, lunch or dinner
- Have televised award nights like they do for the Brownlow
- International women's day is a good start, naming new streets and suburbs after notable women
- Equal time on national television and media reporting on female sports – regional stations do it better than the national media
- Just having Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women on television
- Including remunerating sportswomen to the same level
- Education! Historical women of notoriety should be part of the curriculum
- More monuments to women who have made a difference

## **What strategies do we need to ease the strain of balancing work and caring responsibilities?**

Consultations identified that the bulk of family care falls on the shoulders of females. When the women are suffering from ill health very few men take time from work to undertake additional care this will fall to other females of the extended family or female friends. And as said previously in this document family care can be extended to parents and in-laws. This is a societal expectation and its one that must be addressed through education, media and work

policies. Policies must promote the notion that men are valued carers and assist men to take on that role. Government can assist women with policies that enable them to balance work and their family responsibilities if that's what they wish to do. This is noted in the respondents' comments:

**Respondent 37yrs** -Men should be trained to take up aged care roles, many times it falls to the female's to look after the elders. If women in partnership ceases paid employment to look after elders, then her partners' super payment should be split with half going into her superannuation. A tax incentive could be applied here.

**Respondent 26yrs** -Don't take so much off their pension when women work part time they are saving the government money for child care and old age care, as that's what most of them do when they're not working.

**Respondent 54yrs** -It needs to start in schools and boys should be encouraged to take on roles that were once female designated and also roles that will allow them more time to assist in the care of the family and the home. Aged care comes to mind.

**Respondent D 60yrs** -Flexible hours and higher wages for working mums and child care strategies.

**Respondent E 38yrs** -More paternity leave for dads and encouragement to use it and how to use it! Attitudinal shift around the roles of dad within the home is needed. Encouragement for women to pass over the traditional roles to dad more frequently must be promoted. Allow flexibility of work (where you work) for women, more flexibility in hours and working from home.

### **What is the role of business in addressing gender equality?**

Business must acknowledge that women are important to their business as many are either direct or indirect consumers. Business must implement policy and identify gender goals with timeframes. Their investment in gender equality can be rewarded through their own publications and advertising and through public accolade as best practice in gender equality. Our consultations noted the following

- Business must employ more women
- Implement policy and strategies that would ensure the employment of women.
- Promote themselves as an equal opportunity employer.
- Request resumes do not have christian names so as not to identify gender
- Explore the option of flexible hours and higher wages for working mums and child care strategies
- Get more women in CEO, management positions
- Scholarship programs for young girls
- Government subsidized training and education for on the job

## **What are the barriers to creating more flexible workplaces?**

Consultations noted that management attitude will be the biggest barrier to creating more flexible workplaces. The capacity of smaller businesses may limit their ability to offer positions to women. Our consultations noted the following

- The barriers start and end at the top
- Gender barriers may be a new concept to some businesses
- Capacity of small business to accommodate flexibility that families need
- Capacity of small business such as tradesmen, may need males to do heavy lifting
- Allowances for work life balance
- Carer responsibilities
- Attitudes

## **How do we address inequality among the most diverse and disadvantaged groups of women?**

This is a complex question as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women are one of the most disadvantaged members of Australian society. Racism, gender inequality, single parents, and disability for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander women does not allow for a level playing field. This is possibly best identified in the responses during our consultation.

**Respondent 37yrs** -*This is huge give that they not only suffer gender discrimination but may also suffer discrimination because of race, age or disability. Possibly blind interviews on resume and merits would be a start.*

**Respondent 26yrs** -*I think all these questions are about something that is not identified by our women. Our women are worried about one person in the house getting a job, how they feed their family and not lose their housing.*

**Respondent 54yrs** -*This is a hard one, as they often have many other obstacles to overcome when looking for work. But if strategies are implemented to ensure that business is responsive to gender equality in employment, and on boards and if government implements tax or super incentives...then at least for those of us who have bigger struggles than the rest of our society then this would be one less barrier for them.*

**Respondent 38yrs** - *Education, scholarship programs, mentorship programs, all developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input, content and evaluation from inception.*

## Recommendations:

1. NATSIWA calls for the Government to address the extensive, nature of inequality experienced by Aboriginal women by:
  - a. Commissioning a whole of Victorian Government review to develop strategies and plan how best to coordinate efforts to challenge and resolve issues that affect Aboriginal women;
  - b. All programs and initiatives must be adequately funded and resourced, must have bi-partisan agreement, and evaluated to ensure affirmative action.
  - c. A gender equality plan is developed which has an emphasis on race.
2. The Victorian Charter of Human Rights to be promoted and actioned as it identifies and defines the cultural rights of Aboriginal people in Victoria to maintain culture and kinship ties. Support the culture and positive identity of Aboriginal women so that they may overcome and dispel the ingrained and concealed societal racism.
3. Government to bring together key stakeholders in housing to develop strategies to achieve affordable housing plans; and increase crisis accommodation for women in domestic violence situations.
4. Government, non-government sectors, industry and education institutions partner to implement education regarding gender equality and rights within all professions and industry and this to be rolled out with policy support and legal implications.
5. Develop and implement educational and media campaigns that highlight the impact of race and gender discrimination, and inform women how they can make a complaint or raise gender issues safely.
6. Encourage government to ensure that all education curriculum addresses and challenges gender and race discrimination, myths and stereotypes, and this must begin in primary school and be incorporated throughout secondary and tertiary levels. In addition, educating that it is illegal to be discriminatory, and to ensure that all educators are aware of the legal implications of racism and gender discrimination.
7. Government support identified options in childcare availability and affordability.
8. More women targets in parliament and employment targets for APS.
9. Government to resource ongoing existing Aboriginal specific women's services such as the Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.
10. Invest in long term financial commitment FVPLS Victoria to enable expansion of services to meet the overwhelming need for legal assistance across IVO applications, Family Law and child protection issues.
13. Aboriginal & Torres Strait islander men to be involved in all plans and implementation of any recommendations.

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