



6 July 2017

To whom it may concern,

RE: Response to Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020

I am writing in response to the State Disability Plan 2017-2020 consultation process that is currently underway in Victoria.

Women's Health Victoria (WHV) is a Victorian statewide women's health promotion, information and advocacy service. We work collaboratively with health professionals, policy makers and community organisations to influence and inform health policy and service delivery for women. Our vision is all Victorian women living healthy, empowered and equal lives.

On all measures of social and economic participation (housing security, income, employment and education), women with disabilities are disadvantaged not only on the basis of disability, but also on the basis of gender. Australian women and girls with disabilities are twice as likely as women and girls without disabilities to experience violence throughout their lives, but less likely to receive an adequate service response (Healey 2008). Research suggests that the experience of violence for women with disabilities tends to be significantly more diverse in nature and more severe than for women in the general population, with a greater number of perpetrators involved and abuse lasting a longer period of time (Frohman, Dowse and Didi 2015).

An intersectional approach to policy development is essential because our goal is not only to achieve equality in health and other outcomes between women and men, but also to achieve equality in opportunity and outcomes across all groups of women. This means balancing universal strategies with specialist, tailored approaches and strategies.

WHV is proud to work closely with Women with Disabilities Victoria and acknowledges their specialist knowledge and expertise regarding the intersection of gender and disability in the lives of Victorian women. We endorse and acknowledge their far more detailed submission to the consultation process.

Furthermore, WHV would like to take this opportunity to identify five guiding principles that we believe should be applied across the Plan to help ensure that together we strive for and deliver improved and gender equitable outcomes for people with a disability.



WHV suggests the following guiding principles should be applied across the Plan.

Guiding principles for a gender equitable State Disability Plan:

1. Listen to women with disabilities about what will best meet their needs. **Involve women with disabilities at every level of the service system** – from planning to evaluation and as a part of governance structures.
2. **Apply a gender lens to all policy, program development and investment and ensure that data on disability and gender is collected.** Gender should be included in all relevant parts of the plan, from overall goals to specific measures of progress.
3. The State Disability Plan should **connect to and be consistent with other important and related pieces of policy and reform work.** At State level, these include the Royal Commission into Family Violence, and the Parliamentary Inquiry into abuse in disability services.
4. Value and invest in **specialist services for women:** “Providing services for vulnerable women through mainstream organisations presupposes that services can achieve the same outcomes for women without applying gender-informed practice. The history of social policy and our knowledge of best practice in achieving outcomes for vulnerable women does not support this assumption.” (Women's Services Network (WESNET) 2015)
5. **Provide information regarding the Plan and its actions in accessible formats** across all areas of government and the community so that everyone can access your information.

Please do not hesitate to contact WHV for any further information you may require.

Yours sincerely,

Rita Butera

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Women's Health Victoria