



# **Submission to the Victorian Parliament's Public Accounts & Estimates Committee Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting**

**2 December 2019**

## **About Women's Legal Service Victoria**

Women's Legal Service Victoria has been providing free legal services to women since 1982. Specialising in legal issues arising from relationship breakdown or violence, Women's Legal also builds the capacity of other professionals to respond appropriately to legal need and advocates for law and policy that promotes women's rights. In the last two years we have taken on a leadership role in the legal and justice sector to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women.

Women's Legal Service Victoria is a proud member of Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC), the peak body for gender equity, women's health and the prevention of violence against women.

## **Why Gender Responsive Budgeting is important for women and girls in Victoria**

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is a fundamental tool for responsible financial management. By addressing the economic and fiscal impacts of the State Budget on women and gender diverse people, GRB ensures that the Victorian economy is serving and benefiting everyone.

Gender responsive budgeting is important for the advancement of women's rights, ensuring government allocates resources fairly in ways that enhance gender equity. It makes visible the different circumstances and economic contributions of men, women and gender diverse people as individuals, rather than within household units. GRB delivers social benefit by ensuring that the distribution of income, assets and expenditure is shared more equally across the community.

Victoria has been leading the way nationally on family violence prevention and investment since the Royal Commission into Family Violence in 2015. With the commitment to full implementation of the RCFV comes an obligation to address gender inequalities across the state. Gendered violence will not end until gender inequality ends, which is why addressing the gender inequalities in the Victorian economy and State Budget is so important.

With the right resources and policy commitment, an economic gender lens should result in expert tweaking of economic and fiscal policy to deliver tailored policy solutions for enduring financial inequities for women and their children.

For further, in-depth information on gender responsive budgeting responding to the full Terms of Reference of the Inquiry, see GEN VIC's submission *Back on Track: Gender Responsive Budgeting* attached to this submission.

## **The need for Gender Responsive Budget for women and girls in the legal and justice context**

The significant disparity in legal assistance funding provided to men compared to women reflects a deeply gendered view of what is important. Legal aid continues to be more readily available for criminal matters, in which men are much more likely to need legal aid, than family law, in which women are much more likely to need legal aid. There is case law that has led to this valuing of the criminal law but this does not explain government's reluctance to view a mother at risk of permanently losing her children as being at least as deserving of assistance. Gender responsive budgeting has the potential to highlight and disrupt this inequity.

We also believe that gender responsive budgeting would see considerably more investment and more sustainable investment in the primary prevention of violence against women. As a relative newcomer to this work, we have been surprised by the small and time limited grants available for this important work. WLSV received \$100,000 for 12 months from the Victorian Government *Free From Violence* strategy to lead legal and justice sector-wide engagement and planning on primary prevention of violence against women. By leveraging at least \$200,000 of our own resources WLSV has made significant progress in engaging sector stakeholders and planning for consistent, collaborative, best practice primary prevention interventions.

However, the sector remains grossly under-resourced for this work despite being a *Change the Story* (Our Watch 2015) priority setting for primary prevention of violence against women. There is a significant risk that the substantial progress that has been achieved to date will stall without additional and longer term funding.

## **Key recommendations**

**As a member of Gender Equity Victoria, [insert organisation name] supports in full the recommendations put forward by GEN VIC in their Back on Track: Gender Responsive Budgeting Submission. These recommendations are as follows:**

- Recommendation 1:** That the Victorian Government adopt global best practice in the establishment, implementation and resourcing of gender responsive budgeting in the State of Victoria.
- Recommendation 2:** That gender responsive budgeting be aligned to the Victorian Gender Equality Strategy and the forthcoming Victorian Gender Equality Act.
- Recommendation 3:** That the Office for Women be protected from further machinery of government changes, to enable whole of government oversight of gender equity and gender responsive budgeting.
- Recommendation 4:** That the Department of Treasury & Finance publish annual data on the gender make up of the department, including the representation of women on the boards of its agencies, affiliates and entities.
- Recommendation 5:** That the Department of Treasury and Finance establish a specialist gender economics unit to plan, implement and evaluate gender responsive

budgeting, to be supported by the Office of Women's Equality. The gender economics unit should:

- a. be structured, as other Treasury units are, to withstand changes of government.
- b. ensure all economic and fiscal data is collected in a disaggregated way to measure the differential impacts of the Victorian Budget on women and gender diverse people.
- c. lead whole-of-government gender analysis across the budget cycle, working closely with the Office of Women, to develop Gender Equality Budget Statements, with high level analysis of the impact of annual budget decisions, outputs and asset investments on Victorian women and gender diverse people.

**Recommendation 6:** That Department of Treasury & Finance's Resource Management Framework be updated to include accountability for gender responsive budgeting.

**Recommendation 7:** That the Treasury Annual Report include a quality performance measure related to gender equality and gender responsive budgeting in its Revenue Management and Administrative Services to Government

**Recommendation 8.** That the Department of Treasury & Finance support the establishment of a Gender Equality Budget Group, bringing together civil society organisations, gender economic experts within government and the academy to inform the development of gender responsive budgeting in Victoria, including greater transparency, accountability and analysis. This group may also assist in the evaluation and monitoring of the project, by independently assessing the effectiveness of the GRB approach on gender equity in the State. An outline of the expenditure required to establish a Gender Equality Budget Group is at Appendix C of this report

*Attachment:*

*Gender Equity Victoria's Back on Track, Gender Responsive Budgeting Submission 2019.*

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