

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting**

Melbourne—Monday, 11 October 2021

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Danny O'Brien—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mrs Beverley McArthur

Mr James Newbury

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor

**WITNESS** (*via videoconference*)

Mr Matt Tyler, Executive Director, The Men's Project, Jesuit Social Services.

**The CHAIR:** I declare open this hearing of the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee, and on this occasion we welcome Jesuit Social Services. Welcome to the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting.

We note that members may remove their masks when speaking to the committee but must replace them afterwards. We ask that mobile telephones be turned to silent.

All evidence that is taken by this committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you repeat the same things outside this forum, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

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Welcome to Jesuit Social Services. We invite you to make an 8-minute presentation, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

**Mr TYLER:** Thank you, Chair. And thank you for the invitation to appear before this inquiry. For those that I have not met previously, my name is Matt Tyler and I lead The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services. I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we are all meeting and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge the work of pro-feminist organisations, oftentimes led by women, whose work over many decades has made our work at The Men's Project possible. And one final acknowledgement: on behalf of Jesuit Social Services I would like to recognise the work of the Victorian government to promote gender equality and address family violence on a number of fronts.

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where people can live to their full potential. For over 43 years Jesuit Social Services has worked with boys and men, many of whom are in trouble and causing trouble. This work has been particularly focused on supporting men and boys as they leave prison, although in the last couple of decades it has expanded to include efforts to address homelessness; poor mental health, including after a loved one has taken their own life; and substance use, as well as unemployment. In addition to our service delivery, we advocate to change policies, practices, ideas and values that perpetuate inequality, prejudice and exclusion.

Oftentimes we are working with men and boys who are in crisis, and The Men's Project was established to put a greater emphasis on intervening earlier, including prevention. The gendered nature of some of the challenges I have touched on is clear. Men are almost always the perpetrators of violence: 95 per cent of victims of violence, whether men or women, report experiencing violence at the hands of a man. Almost 95 per cent of adults in prison are men. The same is true of the proportion of boys in our youth justice systems, and six out of eight suicides are men. In our schools, boys account for 80 per cent of expulsions. Given the cost to the community related to crime, policing and prisons we see in simple terms that when men are not coping, that when men are causing harm and damage, there is an immense cost. This cost is felt socially and economically.

One of our first pieces of work at The Men's Project was our Man Box research. Working with global leaders in gender norms—Promundo, based in the US—we wanted to better understand some of the reasons for the gendered nature of these challenges that I have touched on. We conducted a first-of-its-kind Man Box survey of 1000 randomly selected young Australian men between the ages of 18 and 30. This research found that many young men report feeling social pressures about what it means to be a 'real man' and that those who strongly endorsed these stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man—what we call Man Box attitudes—were more likely to use violence, more likely to sexually harass women and also more likely to experience poor mental health themselves. In fact men who most subscribe to these Man Box norms that place pressure on men to be a certain way—to act tough, to assert aggression and control in their relationships, to feel pressured to be the breadwinner and be solely responsible all of the time for bringing money into the home and to have as many

sexual partners as possible—were over 20 times as likely to self-report sexually harassing a woman, were 14 times as likely to self-report the use of physical violence and were over twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts themselves.

So to give you a feel for the absolute numbers there on suicidal thoughts, as one example, 64 per cent of the men who most subscribed to these Man Box norms had experienced suicidal thoughts in the last two weeks, compared to 27 per cent who least subscribed to these norms—both high numbers, but clearly these Man Box attitudes are playing a role. Further research confirmed that it is these attitudes, when controlling for culture, for education and for one's economic standing, that much more accurately predict the life outcomes and behaviours I have touched on.

Our research is one of three streams of work at The Men's Project, and increasingly in schools using our adolescent Man Box survey we are seeking to understand the attitudes of adolescents. Our research is used to inform our practice and to broaden the definition of what it means to be a man, and we particularly seek to work with role models who engage with men and boys every day.

So what does all this have to do with gender responsive budgeting? At its core our work is about addressing gender inequality, the way in which narrow, rigid gender norms and stereotypes limit individuals and groups of both men and women, thereby preventing them from living fulfilling and productive lives where they can flourish and reach their full potential. Gender norms and expectations have historically limited women's participation in public life in the workforce, and we have still got a ton of work to do on that front. Today we see high rates of violence against women perpetrated by men. These gender norms also have a detrimental impact on men and boys. Work to address Man Box attitudes seeks to keep women and children safe, while also enabling men and boys to be their best selves.

Noting there are a number of recommendations in our written submission, given the time I would like to focus on just two of these recommendations here. First, budget decisions should be made based on the cost of harmful masculine norms. We know that Man Box attitudes are tightly related to a range of harmful behaviours that I have touched on: the use of violence, sexual harassment, substance use, poor mental health and even traffic accidents. Each of these behaviours results in substantial costs to our economy, including demands on public expenditure. For instance, the KPMG report—which the panel may be aware of—from 2016 found the cost of violence against women and their children in Australia was up to \$26 billion, with governments bearing almost 20 per cent of these costs. There are also costs in the workplace. Consider the impact of Man Box attitudes on workplace accidents due to risk-taking behaviour, sick days and harassment claims. Man Box attitudes come with significant costs, and this is reflected in a Promundo study which looked at the costs of harmful masculine norms in the US context. If the costs of Man Box attitudes were included in considerations when preparing budgets and associated cost-benefit analyses, it is likely that a greater focus would be placed on their importance across a range of sectors: justice, education, mental health and the prevention of violence. The result would be a greater focus on prevention and early intervention.

The second recommendation I will touch on is workforce capacity building. In our view, workforce capacity building efforts should explicitly consider building skills, knowledge and confidence related to gender norms. If we want to create positive social change to support men and boys to be their best selves, we must involve the community leaders that work with them every day. This means equipping youth workers, teachers, social workers, faith leaders, parents, sports coaches and others with the awareness, skills and confidence they need to decrease rigid adherence to stereotypical masculine norms.

One way the Victorian government can support this is by continuing to support funding for programs like our Modelling Respect and Equality program as well as the Unpacking the Man Box workshop, which support cultural change in the participants' workplace or community. These types of programs have relevance to staff working in prisons, child protection, community service organisations, schools, law enforcement and others. Through the resilience, rights and respectful relationships curriculum there have been huge strides made in our schools. We have seen Victoria Police acknowledge the role of gender norms in their gender equality strategy, a 10-year plan for Victoria Police. There is an opportunity to take these lessons and apply them in other settings as well.

Thanks once again for the opportunity to appear, and I welcome questions based on what I have shared or what is in our written submission. Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much. I will open up to questions. Does anyone want to put their hand up to go first? Mr Maas.

**Mr MAAS:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Mr Tyler, for your presentation and for your appearance before the committee. While women and gender-diverse people experience poorer outcomes as a result of systemic inequality, as you have shown, men too are hindered by gendered norms and bias as well. The written submission that you put forward discusses how gender inequality and rigid gender norms limit people of all genders from leading, quote:

... fulfilling and productive lives where they can flourish and reach their full potential.

So keeping all that in mind, how can the Victorian government ensure people of all genders are considered, recognised and addressed through the implementation of gender responsive budgeting? And the second part to that: why is that important?

**Mr TYLER:** Yes, thanks, Gary. I have had the good fortune of watching the inquiry today, and I think Women's Health Victoria's definition they shared on gender responsive budgeting is helpful in this regard, or part of their definition: to restructure expenditure to promote gender equality. So what I will touch on, Gary, is a few examples of where expenditure could be restructured to promote gender equality in the interests of, as you say, people who identify as any gender. I think first is, and I touched on this in brief, equipping workforces who spend considerable time with men and boys with the capacity to engage on the Man Box and related constructs. So concretely that means embedding training in youth and adult justice systems. I could not think of a bigger Man Box than our youth and adult prisons, and if we are going to genuinely equip people to enter those prisons and then come out reformed, we know that: far from the only answer but part of the answer needs to be looking at these Man Box attitudes.

Sticking with workforce capacity building, I think this work could be embedded in training for teachers, social workers, construction workers. We have seen that the Victorian government has acknowledged the role of gender stereotypes with regard to female workforce participation on construction sites. I think formalising an awareness of the impact of these attitudes and then how they can be challenged and shifted could play a really important role across those sectors that I have just touched on.

I think the second thing, Gary, is investing in a better understanding of what men and boys themselves think about some of these ideas. Our Man Box study, to my knowledge, remains the only example in Australia of a rigorous piece of research which has examined what men and boys think. There is a lot of focus on this healthy masculinities work, but we try to start from a point of curiosity—what do men and boys themselves think about some of these ideas—and use that to inform our practice.

Then, finally, I think there is a role for the Victorian government in public messaging on these concepts. What we are certainly not saying is that we should create another Man Box—that in some way there is a correct way to be a man. Some parts of the Man Box—I will touch on acting tough as an example. I lived in the US for a number of years. I am not going to tell a young man on the south side of Chicago to stop acting tough. That is likely to be very adaptive and part of the nature of that environment, unfortunately. But what we are saying is we want to enable our men and boys to be free to choose: to identify the situation they are in and therefore what behaviours, what types of cognitions, might be helpful as they show up in in different situations. So I think a public messaging campaign highlighting positive examples, because there are tons—there are men and boys every day who are demonstrating alternative ways to be a man, and so I think a public messaging campaign to that end would be helpful.

**Mr MAAS:** Thank you.

**Mr TYLER:** Thanks, Gary.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr O'Brien or Mrs McArthur? Bev McArthur.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Matt. I am just wondering, Matt: does your Man Box include or encompass the issues that we have noticed recently where in my electorate boys were asked to stand up and apologise because they were male at a school. In another school in Melbourne they were asked to stand up and identify if they were Christian and white and so on. Is that part of the curriculum of changing men's attitudes or boys' attitudes, and do you think that was appropriate?

**Mr TYLER:** In short, Bev, no, it is not part of the work we do. In our view we will not make progress by shaming anyone because of their gender. Where we will likely make progress is if we work at a community level—we deliberately work at a community level. I think at times some of these conversations can become perhaps acrimonious when conducted through social media, but at a community level you have got space to actually engage with the people in front of you, whether adults or—the example you have cited—young people, and meet them where they are at, which is part of the reason why, in answer to Gary’s question, I shared the importance of further research to understand what men and boys think about some of these ideas and how they are linked to behaviours. I will keep it brief, though, Bev: in short, no, we would not be supportive of approaches that single out and shame men and boys on the basis of their gender.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Richards.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you so much for appearing this afternoon. The evidence has been really compelling and really important actually. We know that masculine norms see men over-represented in harmful social behaviours, and I think that your evidence before and the material you have provided has been really important for us in understanding that violent and risk-taking behaviour and increases in the consumption of alcohol excessively and that inclination to be less likely to admit pain and seek medical advice can all be contributors. How can the implementation of gender responsive budgeting assist the government to understand the cost of these masculine norms to the economy, and what benefits do you see this understanding will deliver?

**Mr TYLER:** Yes. Thanks, Pauline, for that question. I think there are two parts to it. Firstly, is doing the work, doing the analysis to establish what in fact the cost is of these Man Box attitudes. I think Promundo in the US context has provided us a decent example of that. They single out six cost categories, and you touched on some of them in your question: bullying and violence, sexual violence, depression, suicide, binge drinking and traffic accidents. For each of those, I guess, challenges or things that of course we would all want to stop, they are focused particularly on the contribution of Man Box attitudes. I think doing that groundwork, doing that analysis to actually be explicit about what the economic costs are—there are obviously social costs, which are equally as important, but in the context of budgeting what the economic costs are—of those challenges and what the contribution of Man Box attitudes is is the first piece.

And we have made a decent start on that ourselves. We have actually sought to, using regression analyses, identify what the contribution of Man Box attitudes is to a range of challenges, controlling for a range of demographic factors. And you sometimes hear that perhaps family violence only occurs in poor suburbs or that certain issues are a function of maybe lower levels of education. Well, Man Box attitudes dwarfed those other demographic factors when it comes to the use of violence, sexual harassment, poor mental health. They were just dwarfed by a factor of between 11 and 25 times, depending upon the behaviour. So that is I think the first part—to establish what the costs of these Man Box attitudes are.

I think the second is to translate that analysis into decision-making. And to put it most simply, prevention is better than cure. If you are actually able to identify the benefits by virtue of using the cost of these Man Box attitudes and of investing in and addressing them, I think what we will find is that more money is invested earlier rather than at the back end after a crisis has occurred.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thanks, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Hibbins, I cannot see you on the screen, but do you have any questions? There you are.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thanks, Chair. Look, they have mainly been answered, but just a point of clarification, Matt. What you would be looking for, just particularly in reference to point one of your submission, is you would like to see—in terms of if gender responsive budgeting was implemented in Victoria—these Man Box outcomes, or what have you, or these Man Box elements, be a specific, measurable target for the government within its budget.

**Mr TYLER:** That is right, Sam. Perhaps to break down what you are saying, one is we would welcome efforts to more explicitly measure these attitudes across a range of settings, because they are measurable. There

has been work done in over 30 countries now to look at these attitudes, and they are not some abstract sort of concept. Men themselves in this research tell us that since they were young they have been told that there are expectations on them to behave in a certain way, and so they are very real constructs that people feel in their everyday lives.

And then with regard to your question with regard to the budgeting process, when you are thinking about an issue such as violence—and this is not just violence against women; this is also men’s violence against other men—and how to prevent that violence and the business case that underpins it there is explicit consideration given to the cost of these Man Box attitudes, because as it stands if you are just sort of silent on the role of these attitudes, they can be easily forgotten, or worse dismissed, because there is not actually a number on their cost. What gets measured gets done—that is the world we are in, for better or worse. And I think bringing that to the fore through a piece of analysis and then formal consideration through a budget process would result in promising steps. I have touched on the four R’s curriculum. Women in the construction sector I think is another good example. The Vic Police gender equality strategy—there are good examples in Victoria, and I think the government should be commended for that. But I think there is also room to expand to other settings as well in terms of considering those attitudes.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes, like the examples you have got of investment here in your submission. And I think you also referred to the justice system itself—goodness gracious knows how much they are spending on the justice system. But I like that analysis. You are not necessarily pushing, say, a standalone program or allocation but for the analysis to be given to all these various allocations of funding.

**Mr TYLER:** That is right, and by extension, opportunities in those different settings to address some of these attitudes to be given explicit consideration.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Yes. Terrific. Thanks, Matt.

**Mr TYLER:** Thanks, Sam.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Thank you for attending this afternoon. On the one hand, we know that women undertake twice the amount of unpaid work when compared with men, and this is often an invisible contribution to the economy. On the other hand, and sort of tuning into that aspect of what you have said in terms of Man Box attitudes, men often face discrimination and judgement if they take on caring and domestic responsibilities, so there we have that contradiction in itself. Your submission mentions how services and policies which address the inequity of unpaid work could have a major impact for both men and women in terms of the range of economic opportunities and contributions. On that note, could you explain how the government can ensure that the implementation of GRB could enable changes in existing stereotypes around unpaid work and its value?

**Mr TYLER:** Thank you for that question, Nina. I think it is crucial. I guess I would firstly just touch on a few findings that are related to your question from our Man Box research and then come to the question on what the Victorian government could do. What men who participated in our research told us is that—I will touch on three questions. We asked them, ‘Should men be the ones to bring money into the home to provide for their families, not women?’, and 56 per cent of men said that they feel social pressure which conforms to that particular attitude. ‘A man shouldn’t have to do household chores’—39 per cent. And ‘It is not good for a boy to be taught to cook, sew, clean the house or to take care of younger children’—38 per cent. It has been touched on earlier, though, these are structural challenges. But they are also, to your question, related to some of the pressures that men experience to be the breadwinner, to bring the money into the home and perhaps not contribute to unpaid labour. And so what to do with that? I think that there are three things.

One is to give people an understanding of what the Man Box is and its impact. We know that these attitudes are certainly not in the interests of men’s partners and, in a heterosexual relationship, to the women that they are living with. And we know that they are not in the interests of men either. Oftentimes men are much better off themselves when they have had that opportunity for caregiving. And so one is to just raise the volume on the impact of these Man Box attitudes.

I think second would be to provide environments where some of these ideas can be challenged. And I think the most constructive way to challenge them is to provide positive examples, because we know that there are many

men who are playing these caregiving roles in our society. So to highlight them, to be positive—I think at times some of the rhetoric around men and boys and the challenge across a number of issues can be dominated by more negative news stories. But to highlight the examples of men who are playing these caregiving roles in a range of different settings, and then I think the third thing to do is—and if you have not had a chance to have a look at our research, this comes out every time the Man Box research is conducted across just about any country—that there is a really significant discrepancy between the number of men who perceive social pressures to behave in a certain way and the number of men who personally endorse these ideas themselves. There are always many more men who perceive social pressure than those who personally endorse the ideas, so as part of that community-by-community work that we do, or as part of a public messaging campaign, to highlight that there is diversity amongst men and boys, that many men and boys do not in fact endorse these ideas but they do feel pressure to adhere to these ideas. For us that is a really hopeful story, because it is not oftentimes you get a glimpse into what other people think—you just sort of pick things up in the milieu of conversations and media and advertising—but in fact many men and boys do not endorse these ideas but do feel pressure to adhere to them, which is where the challenges start to generate, because they then conform to societal expectations rather than perhaps having the confidence to show up in a way that you know they would be better off.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Are there any further questions? Bev McArthur.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Thank you. Thank you, Chair. Matt, I wonder if you have looked at or thought about or some other group might have thought about doing a women parcel research project, since you have done the men box project? And I am particularly interested in why we seem to categorise the caring and the sort of home care work that women do as unpaid labour when for many of us it may well be a privilege to be able to bring up children ourselves in the home. I am just wondering whether the Man Box has entered into the women parcel area to see whether there is a differing attitude to how we might perceive women's role?

**Mr TYLER:** Bev, would you mind just—I am not quite catching it. You said 'women parcel'?

**Mrs McARTHUR:** I am just being facetious. I guess you have got a Man Box project, so a women parcel project?

**Mr TYLER:** I see.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** I thought you might have gone down that path, but anyway—lost on us all. Right Anyway, just the different attitudes, there may be a differing attitude to how women themselves perceive the caring role as opposed to just unpaid labour?

**Mr TYLER:** Yes, I guess two reflections then, and thank you for the question. I think it would be a worthwhile piece of research. Our focus is on the attitudes of men and boys and for that matter also the women and girls they are working with. These are social constructions and so our work does not just focus on men and boys but also seeks to understand what women and girls think about some of these ideas.

I think, second, and it goes to the heart of your question, we want men, boys, women, girls to be free to choose how they show up in the world. If someone chooses to play that caregiving role, wonderful. That is an extremely fulfilling choice for many people. What we are trying to address is some of the social pressures that men experience not to play that role, and so we want them to be enabled and feel confident within themselves and not experience a societal expectation that they should just stay in the workplace and not play as significant a role as a caregiver, but certainly, to your question, it is not for us to sort of play a role in saying what is and is not a fulfilling choice with regard to caregiving and work.

**Mrs McARTHUR:** Is there anything wrong with men thinking they ought to be the major breadwinners?

**Mr TYLER:** I would say that it is a challenge as a society if there are constraints that are placed on people because of their gender, whether that is related to breadwinner status or some of the other constructs I have touched on. I do not think that we are in a better place as a society if we are having to come up against constraints that limit the choices we can make and limit the extent to which we can live flourishing lives.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. That just about concludes the time we have available for questions this afternoon, so if there are no pressing further questions, we will conclude this hearing. We thank you very much for your time today.

Just for the record, if there were any issues raised in these discussions for anyone, I will read out the Lifeline number, which is 13 11 14; and for Beyond Blue, which is 1300 224 636.

Thank you very much to Jesuit Social Services for your time and your contribution today. You will be provided with a transcript to check of your evidence. I will declare this hearing adjourned and take a short break before resuming consideration with the next witness. Thank you.

**Witness withdrew.**