

2022/2023



VICTORIAN STATE BUDGET

**What Does it Mean for
Women in the South East?**



Introduction

Women's Health in the South East (WHISE) is the regional women's health service for the Southern Metropolitan Region (SMR). WHISE works to eliminate gender inequities and improve outcomes in women's health, safety and wellbeing. This involves working with organisations in our region to collectively challenge the drivers of men's violence against women and the overlapping drivers of marginalisation and oppression, such as colonialism, racism, homophobia, ableism. Part of this work involves translating research and policy so that it is meaningful to women in our region. This paper summarises the Victorian State Budget 2022-23 by analysing what it means for women in the SMR.

Summary statement

This is the third analysis produced by WHISE to apply a gender lens to the Victorian State Budget to understand its impact on Southern Metropolitan Melbourne.

As the benefits of the Victorian *Gender Equality Act 2020* start to filter across our government and community, this budget starts to show how this key reform will impact the way that our state government funds activity moving forward. The *Gender Equality Act* supports the application of an intersectional gendered lens and highlights the breadth of opportunities governments have in creating a gender equal community and society.

Positive news

There is much to celebrate in this budget from the Victorian Government. Additional funding has been provided to the Women's Health Services for the next two years and this is in partnership with additional measures to strengthen and support the health and care sector – both highly feminised industries. How this will impact our region is still to be determined and WHISE encourages all our partners in the SMR to continue our work together to ensure that investments emerging from the budget benefit our region.

The government continues to invest in all areas of our community with specific measures made to challenge the attitudes, behaviours, systems and structures that perpetuate unequal power and marginalise and disenfranchise some populations. The gender lens on these measures, however, is not clear aside from those already mentioned playing a role in ensuring that an intersectional gender lens is applied.

A key positive outcome to drive equality strategically and systemically is the funding of a specific unit within Treasury to focus on gender equitable budgeting. Another highlight is the investment in a new Gender Equality Strategy for Victoria as are measures to fund the ongoing implementation of the *Gender Equality Act* to support gender impact assessments. WHISE also welcomes the funding to continue the implementation of reforms to decriminalise the sex work industry.

The government continues to invest in the reforms, in the way that we respond to and prevent family violence in our community with measures for Respect Victoria, the Orange Door and housing support. Specific investment is being made to the creation of a State-wide Central Information point which is linked to the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM) framework.

More work to do

WHISE is surprised to see minimal reference to the State's next Sexual and Reproductive Health strategy in this budget. We also note the significant investment in other areas of the budget that do impact on equity in our community. For instance, gambling and liquor regulation which continues to attract significant expenditure from government.

We also share the concerns of our state peak, Gender Equity Victoria, that there is no gender equality job creation strategy or deliberate impact framework/research on the care economy. We see this as an opportunity for future budgets given the attention that highly feminised care and health sectors have attracted in this budget.

WHISE also notes that there appears to be limited to no support within the Education and Training budget for an intersectional gender lens to be applied to skills and higher education policy in keeping with the Macklin Review recommendations, and to support the implementation of the *Gender Equality Act*.

Analysis of the 2022 Victorian State Budget

Support for gender equality

WHISE is excited to see that \$19.4 million will be delivered over two years to the Victorian Women's Health Services.

The 2022/23 Budget is investing in gender equality by directing \$8.3 million towards Women's policy. The majority of this is to be used to **implement the *Gender Equality Act 2020*** which includes training and education and resources to support gender impact assessments. This will also fund the delivery of the **Women of Colour Leadership program** which addresses barriers for diverse women seeking leadership opportunities.

The *2021/22 Budget* introduced the gender responsive budgeting unit which is embedded within the Department of Treasury and Finance. In the current budget, **\$1.1 million is allocated to enable gender responsive budgeting to be embedded in Victoria through legislative reform.**

WHISE is pleased that funding is provided to **promote gender pay equity workplace initiatives** and the functions of the Equal Workplaces Advisory Council. Though \$900,000 does not feel enough to adequately address the drivers of gender pay inequality.

As noted by Gender Equity Victoria (Gen VIC), "While these announcements are exciting, we are disappointed not to see any funding available for women's programs or gender equity activities - such as, International Women's Day, cultural activities and awards."

Improving women's economic security

WHISE welcomes the additional funding of **\$3.5 million for the community services workforce** which is a predominantly feminised industry.

This funding will support efforts to recruit workers into the field and also provides scholarships to increase education and training pathways for those who are underemployed and those with lived experience with social services. The hope is to **remove barriers to entry to this workforce and to increase the diversity of graduates**.

The **health workforce** is also a feminised industry. WHISE is pleased to see that the *2022/23 Budget* will provide:

- \$58 million to establish over 1,125 new Registered Undergraduate Student of Nursing positions per year over two years around Victoria. Furthermore, graduate mental health nurse rotations will be expanded into the community sector, with 75 new positions.
- \$1.4 million to create 75 Registered Undergraduate Student of Midwifery positions.
- \$7.9 million to provide a flexible maternity staffing boost to support the midwifery workforce.
- \$3.5 million for networked sexual and reproductive health services and specialist nurses.

While WHISE applauds this initiative, we would like to highlight the importance of also increasing the remuneration and benefits for community service jobs.

WHISE is excited to see that the Victorian State Government is providing **\$8.4 million funding over two years** to continue the **decriminalisation of the sex work industry**. This will ensure that workers, who are primarily women and LGBTIQ+ people, are safe and have access to supports such as a Sex Work Safety Team established by WorkSafe and legal advice and assistance from the St Kilda Legal Service.

The *2022/23 Budget* also supports the retention and growth of the **Aboriginal health workforce** to make culturally safe services more accessible.

We know that more women than men are employed in casual or part-time roles and do not have access to personal (sick) leave (Pennington, 2021). WHISE is therefore excited by the announcement of the two-year pilot of **Sick Pay Guarantee**. The Government have allocated \$132.8 million funding to design and implement this program which will provide a **payment of up to five days of sick or carer's pay** at the national minimum wage.

Continuing to improve mental health care for women as part of the reform

The *2021-22 Budget* announced funding for the mental health reform and the current budget continues to support this initiative.

For the next four years, **\$218 million will deliver bed-based services** for those needing acute mental health care. This includes **increased support for those with an eating disorder** which typically occurs in more women than men.

WHISE notes that the *2022-23 Budget* aims to **increase the safety of mental health inpatient facilities** by delivering more gender-based separation. While this will reduce some of the risk of sexual and gender-based violence from other patients in bedrooms and bathrooms, this *does not protect women from staff who have also been found to perpetrate violence in inpatient facilities* (Foley & Cummins, 2018; Hughes, et al., 2019).

WHISE recognises that the budget has funded several programs to move towards being a more responsive, inclusive and welcoming healthcare system. It is hoped that these measures will improve cultural appropriateness, access and, ultimately, healthcare equity for people who have previously been marginalised by the healthcare system. They include:

- Mental health training for **Auslan and deaf interpreters**.
- **LGBTIQ+** suicide aftercare services.
- **Increasing the capability of mental health workers** to provide appropriate and safe care to **culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people** and **LGBTIQ+ people**.
- Culturally appropriate suicide prevention and bereavement program for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**.
- An 18-month pilot program for a peer call-back service for families, **carers** (who are predominantly women) and supporters caring for people experiencing suicidal behaviour.

This is significant for our region where a considerable proportion of our population belong to multiple marginalised groups. WHISE supports all government effort towards providing non-judgmental and respectful services that promote and recognise diversity

WHISE knows the importance of **community-based services** and we want to ensure that these services are **appropriate and accessible for women**. WHISE notes that for 2022-23, \$42.9 million (\$115.6 million over four years) will be dedicated to providing a range of community-based treatment, care and support services which will include a state-wide eating disorder strategy with funding directed to Eating Disorders Victoria.

Women and girls have a higher risk of experiencing some mental health issues compared to men and boys. WHISE therefore looks forward to working with the State Government to ensure that an intersectional feminist lens is applied to the development of these important services.

Responding to domestic and family violence

WHISE notes that the *2022-23 Budget* is continuing to work towards meeting all 227 recommendations from the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence.

\$585.9 million will support the coordination of whole of government family violence policy and implement and deliver the Government's family violence reform agenda. Excitingly, this will include:

- Establishing and running **The Orange Door Network**.
- Delivering support services for victim survivors and sexual assault victims including specialised interventions for children and young people.
- Perpetrator interventions including specialised programs for diverse cohorts and a pilot program delivering intensive interventions for high-risk and high-harm perpetrators.
- Implementing information sharing legislation.

- Delivering risk assessment and management programs.
- A victim-centred financial assistance scheme to provide victim survivors access to financial support and enable them to recover from injuries sustained during their assault.

Funding will also provide victim survivors with support including the after-hours **Sexual Assault Crisis Line**, expanded crisis brokerage, designing an alternative online reporting model, working with local organisations to deliver community-based consent education, supporting legal assistance, and continued funding for essential services such as **Central Information Point**.

Primary prevention activities through

*WHISE is pleased to see that **Respect Victoria** will receive \$19 million to enable them to continue delivering behaviour change campaigns and evidence-based primary prevention activities. This will include the delivery of *Free from Violence* which is Victoria's state-wide strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women.*

WHISE is also pleased to see support for older victims of domestic and family violence. The **Elder Abuse Prevention Networks** will receive \$2.9 million to support awareness raising and primary prevention activities. The funding will also contribute to elder abuse financial counselling services and other supports. Given that older women are at greater risk of experiencing elder abuse, particularly financial abuse (Neave, et al., 2016), WHISE hopes that an intersectional gender lens is applied to this work to raise awareness and support women.

This focus on primary prevention will support WHISE's delivery of the Respectful Relationships training program which we note the *2022-23 Budget* is funding in primary schools.

Housing support for victims of domestic and family violence

Domestic and family violence is a leading contributing factor to homelessness and housing instability among women (see [WHISE's submission to the Victorian Government](#)).

WHISE is pleased to see that \$42.2 million over four years will be used to consolidate and expand refuge and crisis accommodation. This will include and enable:

- The continuation of family violence refuges, including two **Aboriginal community-controlled refuges**.
- Developing six new Crisis Accommodation Program properties to support victim survivors with complex needs.

Minimal focus on sexual and reproductive health services

WHISE is disappointed to see the lack of attention on sexual and reproductive health services in the *2022-23 Budget*.

BreastScreen Victoria will receive funding to deliver additional breast cancer screening across new and existing services.

Sexual and reproductive health services will be established as part of a drive to support public health prevention, regulation and response programs.

Support for marginalised communities – how will women benefit?

People with a disability

Women with Disabilities Victoria will receive funding to address the needs of women with disabilities.

The 2022-23 Budget will provide funding to services and programs to **support people with a disability who are not eligible to receive NDIS support**. This is a fantastic investment; however, we know that many women with a disability present atypically or have an invisible illness (e.g., Crohn's disease, lupus, fibromyalgia – all more common among women than men) which precludes them from receiving NDIS support. That is, despite the even split of men and women who have a disability (49% female), only 37% of NDIS recipients are women and girls (Yates, et al., 2022). We therefore hope that this group of women are not further excluded from receiving much needed support.

\$7.8 million will fund the Office for Disability which ensures people with a disability experience reduced disadvantage, can full participate in the community, and have their rights upheld.

LGBTIQ+ communities

\$15 million is allocated to the LGBTIQ+ Strategy implementation. This important funding will support:

- The delivery of specialist LGBTIQ+ legal services at the **Victorian Pride Centre which is located in our region**.
- Piloting Safe Spaces for LGBTIQ+ youth in Victoria's West.
- Pride events and festivals including Midsumma and Melbourne Pride.
- Trans and Gender Diverse Peer Support Program.

Indigenous Victorians

The 2022-23 Budget is focusing on supporting Aboriginal **maternal and child health services with \$10.2 million over four years**. The services will be delivered by Aboriginal organisations. WHISE notes that, importantly, they will be **Aboriginal led and co-designed** and include antenatal, maternal and child health, and early parenting.

The budget also includes additional funding to develop four new Early Parenting Centres.

CALD, migrant, and refugee communities

WHISE is pleased to see that \$51.2 million will fund policy and programs to support newly arrived migrants and refugees and Victoria's multicultural communities.

This includes consultations with CALD communities to learn about issues that are relevant to their communities, multicultural events, and research grants. This is particularly relevant to our region as we have a high proportion of CALD women and migrant and refugee women, particularly in the local government area of Greater Dandenong.

The *2022-23 Budget* is providing **\$5.7 million to improve health access and outcomes for refugees and asylum seekers**. This will mean that people seeking asylum will have access to primary health care, mental health support, case coordination, and assistance for basic needs, homelessness and utilities. This funding will also **boost refugee nurse and bicultural health worker capacity**.

WHISE is pleased to see that COVID-19 support will continue to be funded for multicultural communities. The **\$3.7 million that has been allocated to extend the CALD Communities Taskforce for 2022-23** will support the continuation of grass-roots level initiatives that are working to improve preparedness and social and economic recovery.

Support for disaster and climate change

The *2022-23 Budget* is providing **\$700,000 to extend the Victorian Social Recovery Support program** to enable continued delivery of recovery support services to **communities that were affected by the June 2021 flood and storm event**. This will include financial counselling and individualised case support to help people to access housing, health and wellbeing, and legal services.

WHISE notes that this is a particularly important program for women. Women's health and wellbeing are disproportionately impacted by disaster. Research has found that relationship violence, child abuse and divorce increase following a natural disaster, however, women typically sacrifice their own needs and put others first which means they are less likely to report domestic violence following a disaster or it may be unrecorded due to stretched support services.

WHISE therefore hopes that the workers involved in this program are aware and alert to the likely increase in abuse, isolation and exclusion that many women experience in the wake of a disaster (Gender & Disaster Pod, 2010).

Women's participation in sport

In the SMR, between 29% and 63% of women meet the weekly recommended guidelines for physical activity (Women's Health Victoria, 2022). Commonly reported barriers for women engaging in physical exercise include embarrassment, lack of time, perceptions of safety, and a perception that sporting clubs are not welcoming to women (VicHealth, 2019).

WHISE is therefore pleased to see that the **Female Friendly Facilities Fund** will benefit from part of the \$88 million being directed to improving Victoria's local sport and active recreation infrastructure. This means that **safer recreational spaces that are well lit can be developed to enable more women to get involved in sports and recreation**. The Country Football and Netball Program will also receive part of this funding which is positive as Netball is a female-dominated sport. WHISE hopes, however, that women's country football clubs will equally benefit from this funding too.

Observations for Government

WHISE would like to thank the Victorian State Government for the many ways in which women have been supported through the *2022-23 Budget*. However, we do note that known risk factors for perpetration of sexual and physical violence against women (i.e., gambling, alcohol, and sports) continue to be funded.

The sport, recreate and racing industries will receive \$407.2 million for innovation, sector and industry development, and funding support. The Victorian distillery industry will receive \$10 million. Gambling and liquor regulation will receive \$90.8 million for monitoring and regulation of gambling and liquor activities. Meanwhile, initiatives supporting victims of sexual violence and harm will receive \$3.3 million.

While WHISE recognises that the budget is working towards meeting all 227 recommendations from the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence and the \$19.4 million that will be delivered over two years to the Victorian Women's Health Services (we certainly do not want to minimise this funding support), *we nonetheless highlight the contradictory support for industries that place women and children in danger and at risk of violence and harm.*

WHISE is also disappointed to see yet another budget neglecting to recognise the paradigm shift in perspective that has happened in the primary prevention field. Violence against women and gender inequality is an issue for women, however, it is not a women's issue. To end violence against women, we need to engage boys and men in promoting healthy relationships by increasing the capability of individuals and organisations to recognise the connection between acts of domestic violence and community norms that promote hypermasculinity, violence, and inequality in relationships. WHISE hopes to see in the next budget, a long-term strategy and funding for state-wide primary prevention with boys, young men and the parents of young children. Yet, it consistently falls off the agenda, at all times, everywhere. WHISE urges government to include and fund these strategies in the 2023-22 Victorian State Budget.

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