

For Immediate Release

Friday, 26 May 2023



Victoria's leading gender equality and women's health network has welcomed the ongoing focus on women's health in this year's Victorian Budget and said it looked forward to working with government to develop the services that support the health and wellbeing of all women

The Victorian Women's Health Services Network (WHSN)-cautiously welcome this week's budget announcements, recognising that they followed through on the Government's election commitments.

WHSN Chair and Women's Health Loddon Mallee Chief Executive Officer Tricia Currie, said the network looked forward to working with the government to ensure the funding commitments in this budget were available for all women across Victoria.

"We are pleased to see the Victorian Government commitment to women's health in this year's budget," Ms Currie said.

"The investment in the women's health clinics is most welcome and we look forward to future investment in primary prevention and health promotion because we know that this work stops illness."

"COVID has left our community with vulnerabilities – women were overwhelmingly affected by the pandemic, particularly migrant women, and women with disabilities.

"It is important we ensure these women are not left behind through the next phase of recovery."

"Our network recognises the challenging nature of the state's finances. Looking after wellbeing and promoting health is cost effective and fiscally responsible. and will help Victoria to recover from the pandemic."

Ms Currie said the network was very supportive of the Gender Equality Budget Statement, including the implementation of gender responsive budgeting, and were keen to understand how future budgets and government investment would support ongoing reform.

"This long-term work requires ongoing investment, and we are not there yet," said Ms Currie.

"We still experience inequity in our workforces, our leadership and in the programs, policies and services that government delivers to community."

"We know that the Gender Equality Act has transformed the way that government approaches its work and the WHSN is keen to see this transformation across all of Victoria's businesses and communities."

Ms Currie said the WHSN's 30-plus years of experience in co-design and building partnerships to work for intersectional equity across organisations, programs and services, would stand the network in good stead to work alongside government to realise intersectional equity for all Victorians.

"We see the need to engage with community across all regions on gender equality and improve the capacity of our health system, to understand the benefits and practice of primary prevention and health promotion," Ms Currie said.

“The Victorian Women’s Health Services have the expertise to understand how to take the objectives of this budget and translate it with an intersectional equity lens across all communities.”

“Women are at the heart of many of the objectives put forward in this budget, and it is vital the lived experience of women’s health and wellbeing is centred in our work going forward.

“This will involve co-design with women in community and the Women’s Health Services know how – and are ready - to do this.”

QUOTES FROM WOMEN’S HEALTH SERVICES CEO’S

Dianne Hill, CEO, Women’s Health Victoria

“We welcome the \$153 million in women’s health for new women’s health clinics for reproductive health care including abortion, support to expand the workforce and more sexual and reproductive health hubs. With over 10,000 extra laparoscopy surgeries, \$50 million for free IVF services and \$20 million to expand the role of community pharmacists to treat minor illnesses including urinary tract infections and reissuing contraceptive prescriptions, women will get the care they desperately need

“These measures are a great step in building a comprehensive and integrated sexual and reproductive health system to meet the needs of all women across Victoria and deliver on the Women’s Sexual and Reproductive Health Plan 2022-2030.”

Kit McMahon, CEO, Women's Health in the South East

“We can see that this government is invested in achieving gender equality from the release of the Gender Equality Budget Statement. Gender equality work must address the barriers to women's participation in our economy that are present in our education and training system, our labour markets, and our organisations.

“As a sector and as a government, we now need to move beyond activities that are just seeking to attract women or recruit women. We need to be strategic in our work. Women will not and should not work in industries that are not safe, that do not respect their skills, or recognise the burden of care that they carry.”

Adele Murdolo, Executive Director, Multicultural Centre for Women's Health

“Migrant women have been significantly impacted through COVID - they have lost income, have lost jobs and their health has suffered. They are an integral part of the solution. We must value their leadership, address gender and race discrimination in the workforce, and build an equitable health system. Women’s Health Services are the key to that.”

Amanda Kelly, CEO, Women’s Health Goulburn North East

“Women are at the heart of many of the objectives put forward in this budget, and it imperative that we embed a gendered lens at all stages of the policy process. It is heartening to see the emphasis on gender responsive budgeting going forward and how Women’s Health Services can bring our expertise to the table here.”

Jenny Waterhouse, Acting CEO, Women's Health and Wellbeing Barwon South West

“WHWBSW welcomes the emerging budget which recognises the importance of investing in women’s health and wellbeing. This investment benefits not only women, but all Victorians.”

Elly Taylor, Chief Executive Officer, Women’s Health East.

“Reproductive healthcare is highly gendered and stigmatised. We welcome the State Government’s investment in new women’s health clinics, a dedicated Aboriginal-led clinic, and sexual and reproductive health hubs, as a critical step to support universal public access to sexual and reproductive healthcare. The economic and social benefits of investing in gender equality are clear. We welcome the investment in Victoria’s new gender equality strategy and the implementation of the Gender Equality Act, and the opportunities this brings for our sector to support organisations to create gender transformative change.”

REPORT CARD

The Women’s Health Services will shortly produce a report card that evaluates the budget based on its priorities released earlier this year.

WHAT IS THE WOMEN’S HEALTH SERVICES NETWORK?

The Victorian Women’s Health Services work collaboratively as a Network to lead and coordinate best practice health promotion across Victoria. We are a crucial conduit between population-level strategies and community-level action and are a vital part of the Victorian Public Health infrastructure. We have a unique role as we are specialists in ensuring that health services and programs are gender equitable.

The Victorian Women’s Health Services have been at the forefront of gender equity, improving women’s health and wellbeing and addressing intersecting forms of discrimination and oppression in our community for over 40 years. Victoria’s women’s health sector grew out of the dire need to put women’s health, equality, and safety in the public health spotlight – work that continues to this day.

Over the years, the role of the women’s health sector and our place within the Victorian landscape has evolved from provision of information and clinical services through to state leaders in best practice health promotion. We have helped expand the scope of the state’s health agenda to include preventative public health alongside clinical services, bringing the current VWHP (Victorian Women’s Health Program) priority issues into policy and programmatic focus through our evidence-building and advocacy.

Our role extends across the following fields of expertise:

- Testing innovation and promising practice
- Research and evidence-building, including monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment.
- Bilingual health education
- Workforce development
- Sector and settings capacity-building, including public and private sectors, and community.
- Policy and advocacy
- Regional coordination and state-wide movement-building.

Media Contacts

Tricia Currie, Chair, Women's Health Services Network

