Equality and respect for all women: An intersectional approach
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Acknowledgement of Country: Our Watch acknowledges the traditional owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Workplace Equality and Respect key tools

- Workplace Equality and Respect Standards
- Workplace Equality and Respect Implementation Guide
- Workplace Equality and Respect Self-Assessment Tool
- Workplace Equality and Respect Key Progress Indicators
- Workplace Equality and Respect Staff Survey

Practice guidance:
- Engaging leaders
- Communications guide
- Dealing with backlash
- Equality and respect for all women - an intersectional approach
- Reducing risk in workplace initiatives to prevent violence against women
- Responding to disclosures
- Understanding your rights in the workplace and Victorian anti-discrimination law
- Workplace responses to staff who perpetrate violence
- Workplace gender equality and the law
- Workplace policies to support equality and respect
- Working in rural, regional and remote workplaces to prevent violence against women
- Workplace support for staff who experience family violence
This guide aims to help you by providing:

- a brief explanation of intersectionality
- guidance on how workplaces can take an intersectional approach in their equality and respect initiatives
- resources for staff and leaders (Appendix 1).

In order to achieve equality and respect for all women, gender inequality cannot be seen as separate from other forms of discrimination and disadvantage that women face.

Gender inequality is not experienced in the same way by all women (or men). While gender needs to remain at the centre of efforts to prevent violence against women, to achieve equality and respect for all women, gender inequality must be addressed concurrently with other forms of discrimination and disadvantage such as racism, colonisation, ableism, homophobia and religious discrimination.

It is important that staff leading workplace equality and respect initiatives understand intersectionality, in order to focus their efforts and tailor work accordingly.

What is intersectionality?

Gender inequality is not experienced the same way by all women, nor expressed the same way in all contexts. For example, an Anglo-Australian, able-bodied woman, is likely to have a vastly different experience of sexism in the workplace than a recently arrived refugee or a woman living with a disability.

To achieve equality and respect for all women, gender inequality cannot be seen as separate from other forms of discrimination and disadvantage that women face. Everyone’s identities, social positions and experiences are shaped not just by gender, but by a range of other social categories of difference, including
Aboriginality, culture, race, ethnicity, faith, socio-economic status, ability, sexuality, gender identity, education, age, and migration status.

The consideration of how people experience multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage is referred to as ‘intersectionality’. The image below illustrates the various systems and structures which affect people differently.

- The green ribbon represents the various factors that make up a person’s social status and/or identity. These factors are what we often consider when we address the issue of ‘diversity’.
- The purple ribbon represents the social systems and structures which can impact people positively or negatively.
- The grey ribbon represents forms of discrimination which can form the basis on which people are excluded.

Where did the concept of ‘intersectionality’ come from?

The concept of intersectionality was developed by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. In developing ‘intersectionality’ as a concept, Crenshaw cited a court case where a group of African-American women argued that a manufacturing company had refused to hire them on the basis on their race and gender. However, the court ruled that the company was not guilty of discriminatory hiring practices based on race, because they had hired African-American men to work on the factory floor.
The court also ruled that the company had not discriminated on the basis of gender, as they hired white women for office-based roles. What the court failed to consider was the intersection of race and gender and the compound discriminated faced by African-American women.

The outcome of this court case illustrates how looking at diversity through only one lens (in this case *either* gender or race) can obscure instances where discrimination against particular groups of women exists. It also highlights how some workplace policies, though they may appear to promote diversity, can fail to be inclusive of all women or all employees.

**How intersectionality complements work to promote diversity and inclusion**

Many workplaces are already undertaking important work in promoting diversity and inclusion through their policies. As highlighted by the manufacturing-company example above, applying an intersectional approach is different to promoting diversity, because it considers more than one form of privilege and/or discrimination at the same time.

An intersectional approach to workplace equality and respect firstly requires that a diversity of employees and stakeholders are considered in your initiatives. It then *also* requires that initiatives consider the intersection of different forms of discrimination that might affect groups of people in the workplace. For example, your workplace diversity policy might aim to increase the number of women in leadership, or it might seek to create a work culture where all LGBTIQ identifying employees feel safe and valued at work. An intersectional approach addresses *both* the impact of gender alongside other forms of identity and social status, such as cultural background, and can consider whether women whose second language is English face structural or cultural barriers in the workplace.
How can workplaces aim to achieve gender equality for all women?

Taking an intersectional approach to your equality and respect initiatives will help you identify where to focus your efforts in order to address norms, practices and structural forms of discrimination that affect particular groups of women, so that your work can benefit all employees and stakeholders.

The following principles provide useful guidelines for effective intersectional equality and respect work.

**Critical reflection**

Reflective practice is an approach used within many workplaces to affirm the positives in the workplace and to identify areas for development or change.

In addition to considering how power and privilege are related to gender inequality in your workplace, it is also important to reflect on other forms of discrimination which might be occurring.

Reflecting on your and others’ personal experiences of power and privilege, and recognising which groups of people within your workplace do and do not benefit from different types of privilege, is key to this work. Part of the critical reflection process also requires consideration of the discrimination that different groups of people experience, recognising that some groups are likely to be subjected to multiple forms of discrimination.

While critical reflection can sometimes be uncomfortable, it is important to be able to sit with the discomfort and not allow it to paralyse you and your work.

**Develop and maintain partnerships and networks**

Reaching out and developing relationships with peak bodies or representative organisations to support you in this work is a key component of developing effective intersectional equality and respect initiatives.

Consulting with specialist organisations, such as disability, multicultural, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or LGBTIQ organisations to assist you in your planning and reflective process is important, as they bring a breadth of experience and expertise to thinking and planning around diversity, inclusion and intersectionality. It is
important to avoid making tokenistic efforts such as consulting with or including one or two employees from a particular group and thinking that they ‘speak’ on behalf of all people from that group. For example, a staff member who has a visual impairment would not necessarily be able to offer advice and direction on how an employee with a mobility disability experiences the workplace.

**Allow adequate time and resourcing**

It will take time to develop an effective intersectional approach, so it is important that you allow sufficient time in your initial planning stages. Even without significant funding or resources, an intersectional approach can still be applied. For example, the task of critical reflection (above) is not dependent on financial resources.

**Accessibility**

Ensure that the work you do as part of your equality and respect initiative (and your work more broadly) is accessible to the groups of women you are wishing to engage. For example, if you want to support women with a disability to have the same opportunities in the workplace as employees without a disability, then you need to make sure that the information and infrastructure is accessible to these women. This highlights the value of consulting with specialist organisations, such as a disability peak body, as they can identify barriers to inclusion that might not be obvious and suggest ways to overcome them.

**Ensure messaging and representation is inclusive**

Images, messages and actions should include positive representatives of different people within the workplace and stakeholder groups, such as people with a disability, and people of different ages and cultural backgrounds. Inclusivity also refers to the involvement of a range of different people and groups in the planning and governance of equality and respect initiatives.

**Tailor to the audience**

Because gender inequality, discrimination, power and privilege are experienced in multiple ways, equality and respect initiatives need to be tailored to the workplace, workforce or stakeholder groups to make sure that they ‘speak’ to their intended audience. For instance, if you are directing your work at shift workers, who are mostly newly arrived migrants, then information sessions should be provided at
appropriate times, in relevant languages and with appropriate imagery. This also extends to any consultation with groups of women from particular groups.

**Specific and intensive effort with communities affected by multiple forms of disadvantage and discrimination**

While all programs should be tailored for the specific audience and context, more specialised approaches and greater effort and resources are needed when working with people or groups affected by multiple forms of discrimination and inequality. Some groups of women experience multiple intersecting forms of inequality, in the workplace and in society. Equality and respect strategies aimed at these groups of women need to target the particular norms, practices and structures that drive discrimination and disadvantage for those individuals or groups.
Appendix 1 | Intersectionality resources

The following is a list of resources to support intersectionality and workplace equality and respect practice.

Resources explaining intersectionality

TED Talk by Kimberlé Crenshaw The urgency of Intersectionality

International Women’s Development Agency

- What does intersectional feminism actually mean?
- Intersectionality 101: 3 Ways to be an ally

Buzzfeed clip, Nicola Harvey What is privilege?

Our Watch Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to change the story

Resources on preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Our Watch Changing the Picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children

Our Watch Changing the picture: Background paper: Understanding violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children

Djarra (formerly Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service Victoria) Resources

ANROWS Existing knowledge, practice and responses to violence against women in Australian Indigenous communities: State of knowledge paper

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Alliance

National Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services, including links to state and territory member organisations

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) Safe for our kids: A guide to family violence response and prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
The Healing Foundation

Our healing our solutions: Sharing our evidence
Glossary of healing terms

Resources on tailoring prevention strategies and intersectionality
Kimberlé Crenshaw Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color

Our Watch

Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: How to change the story
Reflections from the 2016 Prevalent and Preventable Conference

Resources on preventing violence in the culturally and linguistically diverse Australian community

AMES, VicHealth
Violence against women in CALD communities - Understandings and actions to prevent violence against women in CALD communities

Multicultural Centre for Women’s Health
Intersectionality Matters: A guide to engaging immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women
Promoting community-led responses to violence against immigrant and refugee women in metropolitan and regional Australia. The ASPIRE Project Research report: ANROWS.
Working with immigrant and refugee communities to prevent violence against women
On her way: Primary prevention of violence against immigrant & refugee women in Australia
‘Bringing the Margins to the Centre’ in Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth. Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia: Framework Foundations 2 (Scroll to page 46)
Our Watch Working with culturally and linguistically diverse communities
White Ribbon Australia
  Diversity and Inclusion
  Key issues in working with men from immigrant and refugee communities in preventing violence against women
VicHealth Preventing Violence Against women: Community of Practice reflections (working with CALD communities)
Other
  Respect: A guide for Muslim Faith Leaders and Communities: City of Darebin
  Evaluation of the preventing violence against women and their children in culturally and linguistically diverse communities project: Centre for Social impact
  Prevalent and Preventable: Conference reflections: Our Watch, AWAVA and Good Shepherd

Resources on preventing violence against women with disabilities
Australian Human Rights Commission Information on disability rights
National Disability Services National Zero Tolerance Framework
People with Disability Australia Preventing violence
Women with Disabilities Victoria Voices Against Violence Research Project
Women with Disabilities Australia Preventing violence against women and girls with disabilities: Integrating a human rights perspective
Women with Disabilities Australia Youth Network What is disability?
State and territory government departments can also provide information and links to further services.
The Victorian Government’s Office for Disability is a good example: Communicate and consult with people with a disability

Resources on preventing violence against people from LGBTI communities
Primary prevention of family violence against people from LGBTI communities
Our Watch