Submission to Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy 2022

October 2021

1. Jesuit Social Services

What we do and who we are

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation that delivers practical support and advocates for policies to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish. We work to build a just society by advocating for social change and promoting the health and wellbeing of disadvantaged people, families, and communities. We value all persons and seek to engage with them in a respectful way that acknowledges their experiences and skills and gives them the opportunity to harness their full potential. As a social change organisation, we seek to *do* and to *influence* by working alongside people experiencing disadvantage and advocating for systemic change. Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on the areas of justice and crime prevention; mental health and wellbeing; settlement and community building; education, training and employment; gender justice and ecological justice.

Our work on gender justice

We have been working with boys and men for over 40 years. This work has included engaging with boys and men involved in the criminal justice system, including those leaving prison; establishing Victoria's first dedicated counselling service working with young people struggling with concurrent mental health and substance abuse problems; and the Support After Suicide program which provides free individual and family counselling to people bereaved by suicide and runs a specialist men's group.

Many of the boys and men we work with use violence, and we see many of them hold harmful attitudes towards girls, women and gender diverse people. We work with men who have committed violent or sex offences to ensure a successful transition back into community once released from prison and to lower the risk of recidivism and improve community safety.

Our key priorities, within our gender justice focus area, are to promote positive social change surrounding masculinities, reduce male violence and harmful behaviours, keep families and communities safe and improve men's wellbeing and relationships.

The Men's Project has been established to lead this agenda and is informed by a number of key principles which underpin our work including taking an intersectional and gender transformative approach which is accountable to women and adopts a strengths-based mindset to engage men. The Men's Project incorporates a range of initiatives across three areas of work, namely to:

1. Promote cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender to support primary prevention of violence efforts including building workforce capacity.

2. Design, pilot and evaluate targeted early interventions to address violence and other harmful behaviours that address significant gaps in the service system.

3. Produce and share knowledge about the attitudes of men and boys including how these attitudes impact behaviours.

2. Introduction

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Victoria's next Gender Equality Strategy. We commend the Victorian Government on its achievements and reforms under *Safe and Strong 2016: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy.* In particular, the establishment of Victoria's first primary prevention strategy – *Free from violence* – serves as an important foundation in aiming to break the cycle of

family violence. A further critical step towards gender equality has been the inclusion of 'Gender equality within Victorian Government suppliers' as a key outcome under *Victoria's Social Procurement Framework*. The establishment of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing also positions gender equality as a cross-cutting priority across government, as well as the enactment of the *Gender Equality Act 2021*, requiring public entities and local councils to embed strong governance structures to promote gender equality. In response to the Royal Commission into Family Violence, the Victorian Government committed to implementing the Rights Resilience and Respectful Relationships curriculum. As a result, a generation of young people are being supported to develop social, emotional and positive relationship skills.

On the whole, Jesuit Social Services supports the proposed approach of the new Strategy as detailed in the consultation paper, particularly its whole-of-government approach and overarching commitment of targeted investment and reform to advance gender equality.

Our submission addresses the key pillars of **safety; health and wellbeing** and **leadership and representation**. We draw on our experience to highlight some of the issues we have observed under each of these pillars and make recommendations to ensure the refreshed Strategy:

- Engages men and boys constructively in work towards gender equality
- Achieves cultural change
- Adequately prioritises primary prevention
- Provides long term funding and commitment to raise awareness of, and shift, harmful masculine norms
- Includes specific strategies to engage role models and build workforce capacity in promoting healthy and positive expressions of masculinity

3. Strategy pillars: Key issues

Safety

Gendered norms, practices and structures can influence beliefs and behaviours across the individual, organisational, systemic and broader societal levels[1]. Such norms and expectations can manifest in harmful expressions of masculinity and negative attitudes towards women, and while these do not always result in violence, they provide the underlying social conditions for violence. As such, the rigid adherence to gender roles and stereotyped constructions of masculinity and femininity is considered to be a gendered driver of violence[2]. In Australia, 1 in 3 women have experienced violence in their lifetime when sexual harassment, emotional and physical violence figures are consolidated[3]. For women aged 18-44 years, violence in intimate relationships contributes more to the disease burden than any other risk factors such as smoking, high cholesterol or alcohol and substance misuse or being overweight[4].

Gendered norms also have a detrimental impact on men and boys. Research has shown that men who conform to dominant masculine norms are more likely to engage in risky behaviours and less likely to engage in health

---

[1] Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC]., (2020). Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, Australian Human Rights Commission: Sydney.
[2] Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2020
[3] Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (2016). Personal Safety Survey 2016. ABS2016.
[4] Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS). A preventable burden: Measuring and addressing the prevalence and health impacts of intimate partner violence in Australian women: Key findings and future directions. Sydney: Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety.

promotion behaviours[5]. Men and boys also suffer due to the use of violence by other men. Understanding the state of young men and their perceptions of masculinity provides a basis to identify areas where action is required to change values, attitudes and behaviours.

Our Man Box study on being a young man in Australia was the first comprehensive study that focused on attitudes to manhood and the behaviours of young Australian men aged 18 to 30. The findings shed a new light on the social pressures that young Australian men experience to be a 'real man' and the impact this can have on their wellbeing, behaviours and the safety of our wider community[6].

We undertook a survey of 1,000 randomly selected young Australian men focusing on men's attitudes and behaviours in relation to a set of questions about gender. To do this work we used an analytical tool, the Man Box, to understand the impact of strongly adhering to stereotypical ideas of masculinity. We also looked at the influence of supporting the Man Box rules on different areas of young men's lives, including health and wellbeing, physical appearance, relationships, risk-taking, violence, and bystander behaviour.

> **What is The Man Box?**
>
> The Man Box attitudes are a set of stereotypical beliefs within and across society that place pressure on men to be a certain way – to be tough, not to show any emotions, to be the breadwinner, to always be in control, use violence to solve problems, and to have many sexual partners. The attitudes fall under seven pillars including self-sufficiency, acting tough, physical attractiveness, rigid masculine gender roles, hyper sexuality, heterosexuality and homophobia and aggression and control.

We found that the endorsement of masculine norms strongly correlated with a range of adverse outcomes and harmful attitudes and behaviours. Specifically, men who held such beliefs were 20 times more likely to self-report sexually harassing a woman, 14 times more likely to self-report the use of physical violence.

A further report, Unpacking the Man Box, built on these initial findings by understanding, through regression analysis, the unique contribution of the Man Box and its pillars to the well-being of young men. It found that conforming to Man Box norms had a stronger impact than demographic variables (education levels, where someone lives, or their cultural heritage) on predicting harmful outcomes, attitudes or behaviours[7]. Specifically, outdated attitudes related to gender were 25 times more likely to predict the use of physical violence, sexual harassment, verbal and cyber bullying[8]. It is evident that the endorsement of harmful, gendered norms and beliefs have a detrimental impact on the safety of women and girls, gender diverse people, men and boys and the wider community.

Health and wellbeing

Gender is a key determinant of health and wellbeing with women experiencing mental health disorders at higher rates than men[9]. The 2014-15 National Health Survey based on self-reported mental health found that

---

[5] Our Watch., (2019). Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women, Our Watch: Melbourne, Australia.; The Men's Project & Flood, M., (2018). The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia. Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

[6] The Men's Project & Flood, 2018

[7] The Men's Project & Flood, M., (2020). Unpacking the Man Box: What is the impact of the Man Box attitudes on young Australian men's behaviours and wellbeing? Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

[8] The Men's Project & Flood, 2020

[9] State of Victoria. (2016) Safe and strong: a Victorian gender equality strategy. Department of Premier and Cabinet: Government of Victoria.

almost one in five women (19%) reported mental and behavioural disorders (compared with 16% of men)[10]. Experiences of violence and family violence also significantly contribute to the mental health burden for victim survivors, families, children and society as a whole[11].

Safe and Strong 2016 importantly highlights that gender inequality also affects men. Our Man Box study found that men's endorsement of The Man Box norms was strongly correlated with a range of adverse health and wellbeing outcomes. Specifically, men who held such beliefs were over twice as likely to experience suicidal thoughts[12]. For instance, with regards to suicidal thoughts, of those with the highest Man Box score (top 20%) almost two-thirds self-reported having suicidal thoughts in the last two weeks compared to 27% with the lowest Man Box score. This is highly concerning where over the last decade, the age-standardised suicide rate for males increased from 16.3 deaths per 100,000 in 2011 to 18.7 in 2020[13]. Female rates also increased from 5.2 deaths per 100,000 in 2011 to 5.8 in 2020[14].

The Man Box norms of self-sufficiency and acting tough tend to discourage or stigmatise help-seeking behaviours and displays of vulnerability[15]. The influence of social norms and pressures on the ability to openly express vulnerability and seek help has significant consequences for men's mental health and wellbeing.

Leadership and representation

Gendered stereotypes about participation in particular industries contribute to workplace environments where women continue to be underrepresented and to experience adversities. *Safe and Strong 2016* acknowledges that women are underrepresented in industries such as finance, construction, utilities, science and technical services.

The rigid adherence to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man is prevalent amongst male dominant industries and affects workplace culture and contributes to greater risk taking behaviours[16]. The construction sector has been identified as one of the highest occupational risk sectors in Australia[17] where women are at particular risk of experiencing gendered violence in the workplace[18]. This often drives women to resign from their jobs, with women leaving the construction industry 38% faster than men[19].

The role of gender stereotypes is acknowledged in the Victorian Government's *Women in Construction* Strategy as a key barrier to women and girls in seeking a career in the construction industry[20]. Within the construction industry, there is evidence of an acceptance and tolerance of sexist behaviours, that often goes unnoticed and unaddressed[21]. This type of behaviour manifests in a culture that normalises traditional masculinity. We seek to also highlight the issue of gender-based harassment in male dominated industries which refers to harassment that is not necessarily sexual in nature, but is targeted at individuals, or a group of

[10] Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2015). National Health Survey: First Results 2014-15. Cat No. 4364.0.55.001. Canberra.
[11] Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists [RANZCP] (2021). Family Violence and Mental Health - May 2021 Position statement 102.
[12] The Men's Project & Flood, 2018
[13] AIHW (2021). Suicide and self-harm monitoring - Deaths by suicide over time. Available at <https://www.aihw.gov.au/suicide-self-harm-monitoring/data/deaths-by-suicide-in-australia/suicide-deaths-over-time>
[14] Ibid.
[15] The Men's Project & Flood, M., (2018).
[16] Laplonge, D., (2011). Telling Tales of Safety to men in Mining: Draft Research Article.
[17] Ross, V., Caton, N., Gullestrup, J., Kloves, K. (2020). A Longitudinal Assessment of Two Suicide Prevention Training Programs for the Construction Industry. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health.*
[18] Laplonge & Albury, 2013
[19] Victoria Government (2019). Victoria's Women in Construction Strategy.
[20] Victoria Government (2019). Victoria's Women in Construction Strategy.
[21] Galea, N., Powell, A. (2018). Women in construction: government can do more to shake up the boys club. ABC new.

individuals, because of their sex or gender[22]. Gender harassment is much less overt than sexual harassment whereby women are made to feel unwelcome, as outsiders and will never be 'one of the boys'[23].

4. Engaging men and boys to achieve cultural change

The refreshed Strategy is to be underpinned by the principles of Aboriginal self-determination, intersectionality, lived experience, data transparency and evidence-based cross-Government solutions. We support the proposed principles, but highlight that gender equality cannot be achieved without engaging men and boys. An effective Gender Equality Strategy must recognise that equity is relational and establish the foundations to engage with men and boys to achieve gender equality and cultural change. Progressing towards gender equality requires that men must be supported to take responsibility for challenging attitudes and changing behaviours. Cultural and attitudinal change around issues of masculinity and gender is essential in the pursuit of gender equality. This involves building capacity and leadership on a community level to engage on issues related to harmful masculine norms.

> **Recommendation 1: Include 'Engaging men and boys' and 'Cultural change' as key principles that underpin the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy.**

Enaging role models to demonstrate positive alternatives

Research and practice expertise suggest that engaging role models to demonstrate healthy and positive alternatives to rigid and outdated masculine norms is a crucial strategy to reduce violence, improve outcomes for men and boys and promote cultural and attitudinal change. Modelling respect and equality can expand understandings of masculinity and provide the opportunity to embrace, encourage and celebrate a wide range of expressions of masculinity. For this reason, Jesuit Social Services commenced the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program aiming to develop strong role models to lead change in the places where boys and men live, work and meet.

> **Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE)**
>
> Our MoRE program supports role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women. The program supports participants to develop greater self-awareness of masculine norms and their impact, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Participants include teachers, social workers, sports coaches, leaders in workplaces, and leaders in faith communities. Evaluations of MoRE found significant change in the level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys that the participants worked with.

> **Recommendation 2: The refreshed Gender Equality Strategy must include specific strategies to engage role models in promoting healthy and positive expressions of masculinity.**

---

[22] Foley, M., Oxenbridge, S., Cooper, R., & Baird, M. (2020). 'I'll never be one of the boys': Gender harassment of women working as pilots and automotive tradespeople. Gender, Work & Organization.
[23] Foley et al., 2020

Building workforce capacity to shift outdated norms

Building workforce capacity to engage on issues related to harmful masculine norms is critical for promoting greater female leadership and representation in workplaces. This is particularly relevant for male-dominated industries such as the construction sector. We believe that a critical step towards gender equality in workplaces involves translating the existing enabling policy settings to work – site by site – to build awareness of, shift gendered stereotypes and achieve cultural change.

The Men's Project currently delivers a range of evidence-based programs for workplaces, including the construction sector, that challenge harmful gender norms in order to improve wellbeing, behaviour and safety. We engage with organisations to identify and address beliefs and behaviours which may lead to poor mental health and suicidality, alcohol and drug abuse, workplace bullying, sexual harassment, low female workforce participation, risk taking behaviour, and absenteeism. We aim to quantify and unpack the attitudes which may be driving harmful behaviours, and work with workplaces to develop and implement programs to address these. Critical themes underpinning this work include: addressing gender equality in the workplace; female workforce participation, rigid gender roles including men in care giving roles; and the use of violence – towards both men and women. Our programs help workplaces to understand the current attitudes of their, foster a willingness to change, equip leaders and measure the change.

A key foundation to this work would be training all staff around the harmful effects of endorsing rigid and outdated masculine norms and facilitating the adoption of more positive ways of engaging with themselves and the people in their lives. Not only does this work aim to create a more equal workplace through the education of gendered norms and their consequences, but also a more inclusive and equitable environment which recognises the impact of rigid forms of masculinities on women both in the workplace and at home.

> **Improving wellbeing in the construction industry: Reflections from our workshop participants**
>
> *"It was relevant to what we observe and I found myself reflecting on my own behaviour."*
>
> *"It wasn't about male blaming and masculine toxicity which seems to be the current approach. It was balanced, informative, positive, about evidence based practical solutions."*
>
> *"I have attended a number of webinars and workshops this year, and this was one of very few that I finished thinking it was really worthwhile and a valuable use of my time."*

Jesuit Social Services would welcome opportunities to develop partnerships with employers that seek to engage men and women as agents of cultural change by supporting them to challenge harmful gender norms and male stereotypes as well as equipping them to promote and model respect and equality. We also advocate for the Strategy to prioritise investment for initiatives delivered in high risk workplaces, such as construction, that seek to raise awareness of and challenge gendered norms to create inclusive and equitable workplace environments.

> **Recommendation 3: The refreshed Gender Equality Strategy to prioritise funding for workforce capacity building to engage on issues related to the Man Box and promote and model respect and equality.**

Building inclusive workplaces through corporate diversity partnerships

Through our Corporate Diversity Partnerships, Jesuit Social Services proactively works with organisations to assist with the delivery of their diversity and inclusion initiatives through supported employment programs. We have had particular success supporting women seeking work from culturally diverse backgrounds, into meaningful and on-going employment in historically male dominated industries such as engineering and emergency services.

Through our Pathways program partnership with Melbourne Water, we have placed 16 Participants from culturally diverse backgrounds into on-going roles as Project Engineers, 6 of who identify as female. We are currently recruiting for a further 5 roles with Melbourne Water, of which 50% of candidates referred will be female. Through our delivery of the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program, we have worked with 127 Participants, of which 32 identify as female. Victoria Police has employed their first female Ethiopian police officer and a second female participant of South Sudanese background has recently been offered a position to train at the Academy as a police officer.

The above two examples are proactively challenging the internal attitudes and norms held in both organisations and have led to more inclusive workplace practices including:

- The encouragement of flexible working hours and part time roles for applicants with caring duties
- Pay equity
- An understanding of barriers for women in the workplace – such as the provision of vehicles for those who may be unable to attend site otherwise
- The encouragement of female participants to apply for leadership roles during and after their placement
- The use of female guest speakers throughout Participant Preparation Training
- Commitment to putting a placement opportunity on hold for participants who go on maternity leave mid-placement, to ensure they can return to the role post maternity-leave

Our proactive partnerships within male dominated industries enure our ability to advocate and support employers to build on their internal capacity to provide safe and inclusive workplaces for our female participants. This therefore allows for a positive experience for participants and the likelihood of on-going engagement and employment.

> **Recommendation 4: Further invest in initiatives that promote female participation and leadership in workplaces, such as Jesuit Social Services' Corporate Diversity Partnerships.**

5. Building awareness and addressing the root causes of harmful behaviours and attitudes

Gender equality is a precondition for the prevention of violence against women. Promoting gender equality by understanding and shifting the gendered drivers of violence can ensure that everyone can live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives where they can reach their full potential. A strong Gender Equality Strategy is therefore an essential foundation for the primary prevention of violence in any form.

There is a compelling need to address the root causes of harmful behaviours such as violence, gendered violence, sexism and sexual harassment. A key way to achieve this is through primary prevention efforts that promote cultural and attitudinal change related to masculinities and gender. In order to improve the safety of women, men, gender diverse people and the wider community, the refreshed Strategy must provide long term

funding and commitment to primary prevention efforts that build awareness of the Man Box norms and their harmful impacts. This work should be underpinned by investment in research to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in relation to The Man Box norms as well as the associated links to the use of violence. The attitudes are measurable and doing so means primary prevention work can engage with and tailor content to their audiences. This can be done through the self-reported beliefs of men and boys rather than relying on assumptions.

> **Recommendation 5: Invest in research to better understand the behaviours and attitudes of men and boys in relation to The Man Box norms including links to violence.**

> **Recommendation 6: Provide long term funding and commitment to primary prevention in raising awareness of and shifting harmful gender stereotypes.**

School settings are crucial for primary prevention as they provide an opportunity to critically engage with masculine stereotypes, gender norms and gender inequality. We strongly believe that prevention work in schools that focuses on respectful relationships and recognises that gender-based violence is driven by gender inequality will lead to better outcomes later in a number of different contexts including the workplace and everyday life.

Aligned with the Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum, our Man Box in Schools program is a strengths-based, healthier masculinities education model designed to support young people to be their best selves. To drive this work, we have designed a series of Unpacking the Man Box workshops.

> **Unpacking the Man Box workshops**
>
> Our workshops encourage conversations amongst students, teaching staff, and their wider school communities about the negative consequences associated with gender stereotypes and the tools and resources to foster healthier forms of masculinities, respectful relationships, and positive wellbeing. Our work is consistent with the Victorian Government's Resilience, Rights and Respectful Relationships curriculum. We commend the Victorian Government on the progress they have made implementing this curriculum in schools. We have also adapted these sessions to other contexts including workplaces, early childhood education, justice and maternal and child health settings. We deliver the workshops to a range of participants, namely social workers, well-being staff, teachers, students, faith leaders and parents.

We appreciate the Victorian Government taking these matters into consideration, and would welcome the opportunity to discuss these ideas with you further.

For additional information regarding this submission or to arrange a meeting, please contact:

Matt Tyler, Executive Director of the Men's Project

E: matt.tyler@jss.org.au

T: (03) 9421 7600