

# Alfred Health Gender Equality Action Plan

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55 Commercial Rd, Melbourne VIC 3004

**Phone:** (03) 9076 2000

**Fax:** (03) 9076 2222

**Postal address**

The Alfred  
PO Box 315  
Prahran VIC 3181

**Website**

<https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/>

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This information is intended as a plan only. It is not a substitute for legal advice. This plan may be updated from time to time. For the latest version, check <https://www.alfredhealth.org.au/> or contact [eapc@alfred.org.au](mailto:eapc@alfred.org.au)

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## Acknowledgement of Country

As a national health provider, Alfred Health acknowledges all of the clans throughout Australia who are the custodians of the land and waters, and pay our respects to Elders past and present.

Alfred Health acknowledges all proud members of the Kulin People, including the First People of the Bays (Port Phillip and Westernport) and South East Victoria, the Boon Wurrung, the traditional people and custodians of the lands from the Werribee River to Wilson's Promontory, where our three hospital campuses are located. We also acknowledge the Wurundjeri, the traditional people and custodians of the land from the Yarra River, to Werribee and the Great Dividing Range, the land on which Melbourne Sexual Health Centre sits.

In the context of gender equality, we acknowledge the leadership and tireless campaigning of First Nations women in Australia. We seek to honour their work and legacy through achieving change.

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## Message from the Chief Executive, Andrew Way

For more than 150 years, Alfred Health has been living the values of excellence, innovation and respect. We continue on that journey as we launch Alfred Health's inaugural Gender Equality Action Plan, designed to take positive steps towards achieving gender equality across our organisation.

Pursuing gender equality benefits everyone. Gender equality reduces family violence; challenges the stereotypes which constrict us; and delivers equitable opportunity and rights for all people. At an organisational level, gender equality can unlock greater business performance, efficiency and decision making.

The catalyst for this plan is *The Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020*. This legislation recognises the structural disadvantages faced by women and gender diverse people, and in response seeks to transform systems and cultures to empower all people and progress gender equality. As a large employer of Victorians and a leader in our community, Alfred Health is committed to supporting equality – as demonstrated through this ambitious Action Plan. While this plan includes a focus on removing the ongoing structural inequalities experienced by women in the workplace, it sits within a broader framework of diversity and inclusion for all people at Alfred Health and in our community, and recognises the intersectionality of people's lives.

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging time for the health sector, our workforce and our patients. At a broader societal level, the pandemic has highlighted and exacerbated many existing inequalities. Throughout the pandemic, women have experienced increased rates of family violence, worsened economic insecurity and heightened caregiving responsibilities within the home. As we collectively respond and recover, it's important we take tangible steps to advance gender equality.

Achieving change takes time, but with a sustained focus from all levels of the organisation and the backing of The Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, we will undoubtedly see progress.

As Alfred Health celebrates our 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we are reminded of the dedication and legacy of generations of pioneering women who have made Alfred Health what it is today. We honour them by striving to do better and committing ourselves to advancing gender equality.

## Alfred Health – Our Organisation

### Our Purpose

To improve the lives of our patients and their families, our community and humanity.

### Our Beliefs

- Patients are the reason we are here – they are the focus of what we do.
- Respect, support and compassion go hand in hand with knowledge, skills and wisdom. Safety and care of patients and staff are fundamental.
- We work together. We all play vital roles in a team that achieves extraordinary results.
- How we do things is as important as what we do.
- Excellence is the measure we work to everyday. Through research and education, we set new standards for tomorrow.
- We share ideas and demonstrate behaviours that inspire others to follow.

### Our Story

Across our diverse organisation, we value and respect life from beginning to end. We provide treatment, care and compassion to the people of Melbourne and Victoria. Our research and education programs advance the science of medicine and health and contribute to innovations in treatment and care. Through partnerships, we build our knowledge and share it with the world.

### Alfred Health Strategic Goals

Outlined in the 2021-2023 strategic plan:

- Provide high-quality patient-centred care
- Lead innovative specialist care nationally and internationally
- Improve the mental and physical health and wellbeing of our diverse community
- Provide a healthy, respectful and safe workplace, and a skilled, adaptive and compassionate workforce
- Lead excellent, innovative and collaborative health research
- Provide a modern healthcare environment through innovation in systems design and technology
- Manage our resources and environmental sustainability

## Why Gender Equality Matters at Alfred Health

Gender equality is when people of all genders have access to equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. Gender equality matters because all people deserve to be treated fairly.

Despite achieving many important gains over recent decades, gender inequality continues to persist across Australia. For example:

- Women complete approximately 72% of unpaid care work in Australia. The unpaid care economy is six times larger than the paid care economy<sup>1</sup>.
- 1 in 2 working mothers in Australia report experiencing some form of workplace discrimination<sup>2</sup>.
- One in three people in Australia have experienced sexual harassment at work in the last five years.<sup>3</sup>

Importantly, inequality does not impact all people in the same way. For many people inequality is exacerbated by the intersection of other forms of disadvantage and discrimination. This may be based on their race, faith, ability, location, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or other factors.

### Gender equality matters for the health sector workforce

Historically, healthcare around the world has been delivered by women and led by men. While we have significantly closed this gender gap in Australia and at Alfred Health, there is still work to be done.

Gender stereotypes and cultural practices can reinforce outdated notions that some jobs are 'men's jobs' and some are 'women's jobs', which in turn drives occupational gender segregation. Women make up over 75% of the health workforce in Australia<sup>4</sup>, but are underrepresented in many areas of leadership and specialty. For example, approximately only 30% of Deans, Chief Medical Officers or Medical College Boards are women, and women make up only 12.5% of CEOs of large hospitals in Australia<sup>5</sup>.

Health, like every industry in Australia, has a gender pay gap. In 2021, the reported gender pay gap in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector was 20.7% and the Victorian gender pay gap 12.2%, an increase of 2.6% since 2020<sup>6</sup>. The gender pay gap can lead to lower lifetime earnings for women and reduced financial security.

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<sup>1</sup> PWC, 2017, [Understanding the Unpaid Economy](#)

<sup>2</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2014, [National Review on Discrimination Related to Pregnancy, Parental Leave and Return to Work](#)

<sup>3</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 2018, [Everyone's Business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces](#)

<sup>4</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2020, [The Gendered Impacts of COVID-19](#)

<sup>5</sup> Medical Journal of Australia, 2019, [Advancing Women in Medical Leadership](#)

<sup>6</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2021, [Australia's Gender Pay Gap Statistics](#)

## **Gender equality is good for people of all genders**

People of all genders can be negatively impacted by gender inequality. Men often face cultural barriers when seeking out career paths that have been traditionally reserved for women, as well as structural barriers when accessing flexible work arrangements for caregiving. This is despite evidence that suggests men who have access to flexible work arrangements are more productive in their jobs, report higher work performance, take fewer absences and report lower levels of personal stress and burnout<sup>7</sup>.

Outside of the workplace, rigid and harmful gender stereotypes can impact people in a range of ways including poor mental health, a reluctance to proactively seek healthcare and an increased likelihood of engaging in risky behaviour.

Gender inequality also leads to poor outcomes for trans and gender diverse people who may experience isolation, exclusion or discrimination when accessing services or in their workplace.

## **Gender equality helps prevent violence against women and their children**

Gender inequality provides the underlying conditions for violence to occur. 1 in 3 women in Australia will experience physical violence in their lifetime, and 1 in 5 will experience sexual violence. Almost 10 women per day are hospitalised in Australia for assault injuries perpetrated by a spouse or domestic partner<sup>8</sup>.

Because violence is an expression of power, we know that people in our community who face additional layers of disadvantage and discrimination experience disproportionately high rates of violence. For example, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women have 29 times the rate of hospitalisation for non-fatal family violence assaults compared to non-indigenous women<sup>9</sup>.

To prevent violence against women, it is necessary to challenge the systems, structures and cultures which sustain gender inequality.

## **Workplace gender equality is good for individuals and business**

When workplace gender equality is prioritised, we can achieve:

- Enhanced organisational productivity and greater workplace efficiencies
- Broader diversity in thought leadership which leads to better decision-making and an enhanced capacity to innovate
- Improved organisational reputation and an enhanced ability to retain and attract talent – reducing organisational disruptions and costs
- A workforce that reflects the communities it serves and has a comprehensive understanding of their needs
- A reduced gender pay gap and improved financial wellbeing for all staff
- Improved engagement and enhanced staff wellbeing through the reduction of harmful gender stereotypes and norms

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<sup>7</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, [Gender Equality and Men](#)

<sup>8</sup> Our Watch, 2021, [Violence Against Women Quick Facts](#)

<sup>9</sup> Our Watch, 2021, [Violence Against Women Quick Facts](#)



# Developing the Gender Equality Action Plan

Alfred Health's Gender Equality Action Plan is informed by data, evidence and best practice research. It is shaped by multiple forms of staff and stakeholder consultation with oversight provided by the Alfred Health Gender Equity Committee, Executive Committee, CEO and the Alfred Health Board of Directors.

## Gender Equality Indicators

Our priorities are guided by the *gender equality indicators* within the legislation and shaped by what we have heard from our staff and stakeholders. We are committed to driving progress for gender equality under each of the indicators:

1. Gender diversity (composition) at all levels of the workforce
2. Gender diversity (composition) in governance
3. Gender pay equity
4. Workplace sexual harassment
5. Fair and equitable recruitment and promotion practices
6. Improve access and attitudes to leave and flexible work
7. Reducing workplace gender segregation

All indicators are underpinned by a commitment to intersectionality, as well as leadership and transparency.

## Data and evidence

In developing our Gender Equality Action Plan, we analysed data from our HR systems and 2021 People Matter Survey results to better understand how gender inequality persists at Alfred Health. A snapshot of this data is included in *appendix 1*. We also drew on best practice research and resources from experts including the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, Our Watch and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission.

Through the data and consultation, we understand there are additional barriers facing some women and gender diverse people. For example, in the 2021 People Matter Survey, women who identified as LGBTIQ+ or living with a disability reported higher rates of workplace sexual harassment and bullying.

Over the next four years we will measure and track our progress to further promote accountability and transparency. We do not yet have all of the data we need, and will investigate improved reporting systems to fill the evidence gap.

## **Staff Consultation and Governance**

In 2020, Alfred Health formed a Gender Equity Committee to provide oversight and strategic direction to the development of the Gender Equality Action Plan. The Gender Equity Committee reports to the Alfred Health Executive Committee, which is overseen by the Alfred Health Board of Directors.

The Committee is Co-Chaired by Executive sponsors; the Executive Director People and Culture (now the Chief Experience Officer) and Chief Operating Officer, and reports to the CEO and the Executive Committee. The Gender Equity Committee acts as the decision-making body relating to the implementation of The Act. The Gender Equity Committee have presented several briefs to the CEO & Executive Committee. The Gender Equity Action Plan has been presented for feedback, review and approval to the Executive Committee, the CEO and finally, the Alfred Health Board.

In addition, over 50 staff joined gender equality design working groups meeting monthly to input into the Gender Equality Action Plan. The working groups are supported and coordinated by the Gender Equity Project Lead, with regular reports provided to the Gender Equity Committee. Working groups have provided additional subject matter expertise and support to the delivery of the agreed work-plan.

From the broader staff group, feedback on the proposed strategies was gathered via an online survey. This plan has been endorsed by the Alfred Health Executive and Board of Directors.

## **Health Sector Engagement**

Alfred Health has also liaised and consulted with other partner, peer and external stakeholders across the Health sector in aligning, co-ordinating and developing the Gender Equity Action Plan. These include:

### Alfred Research Alliance (A+ Alliance)

The A+ Gender Equity Initiative formed at the Alfred precinct in response to gender disparity in scientific leadership roles. Senior female researchers are leading this Initiative, having identified the need for a coordinated response to improve gender equity and diversity in STEMM across the Alfred precinct through sharing information and, where appropriate, acting together. The membership includes Alfred Health, Monash University (including SPHPM - School of Public Health and Preventive Medicine and CCS - The Central Clinical School), the Baker Institute (SAGE Athena Swan bronze member), the Burnet Institute (SAGE Athena Swan bronze member), LaTrobe University, and the Nucleus Network.

### Victorian Health Organisation Gender Equity Network (VHOGEN)

Alfred Health co-chairs the Victorian Health Organisation Gender Equity Network (VHOGEN) which has now grown to include 100+ personnel from 40+ health services across metro, regional and rural Victoria. This is a network for shared support, insight and resources in the ongoing development and implementation of the Gender Equity Action Plan and gender Impact Assessments.

### Trade Unions

Several relevant Trade Unions were also notified of our intentions and plans regarding the Gender Equity Action Plan and they were invited to comment. These were the AMA, AMWU, ANMF, HACSU, HWU, MSAV, VPA, AHP and VAHPA.

### Strategic alignment

The implementation of the Gender Equality Action Plan aligns with the 2021-2023 Alfred Health Strategic Plan and specifically supports the delivery of Strategic Goal #4 *to provide a healthy, respectful and safe workplace, and a skilled, adaptive and compassionate workforce*.

The Gender Equality Action Plan aligns with *Health with Heart* and intersects with existing pieces of equity work such as the Alfred Health Reconciliation Action Plan and Disability Access and Inclusion Plan – demonstrating the importance of an intersectional approach.

This work supports the delivery of Victoria's gender equality strategy *Safe and Strong* and aligns with the gender equality principles in the *Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020*.

### Future resourcing

In line with the resourcing requirements within the *Victorian Gender Equality Act 2020*, Alfred Health will ensure appropriate financial and staffing resources are allocated for each year of implementation. The Gender Equality Action Plan will be managed by a dedicated People & Culture Project Lead, supported by Executive Sponsors and guided by ongoing staff design groups.

## Our gender equality vision, 2021-2025

### Five visionary goals:

1. To grow an inclusive, dynamic and flexible workplace culture which understands the benefits of gender equality to individuals and the organisation.
2. To build capacity to actively challenge and dismantle gender stereotypes, biases and norms in order to promote the wellbeing of our staff, patients and community.
3. To have strengthened pathways and initiatives to advance diversity in leadership, to ensure our organisation reflects the diverse communities it serves.
4. To be renowned as an organisation that models gender equality and respect in all interactions, including physical spaces that are inclusive of all people.
5. To strengthen our commitment to transparency and unbiased processes, to ensure all staff have equal access to rewards, resources and opportunities, irrespective of gender.

## Glossary

**Gender based violence:** Gender-based violence refers to harmful acts directed at an individual or a group of individuals based on their gender. It is rooted in gender inequality, the abuse of power and harmful norms.

**Violence against women:** Violence against women is defined as any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women and girls. Violence against women and girls encompasses, but is not limited to, physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family or within the general community. ([UN Women](#))

**Primary Prevention:** Whole of population initiatives that address the underlying drivers of violence (e.g. gender inequality). Examples of violence against women primary prevention include respectful relationships education, social marketing campaigns to promote respect, and bystander action. ([Our Watch](#))

**Sex:** Sex refers to the biological characteristics that define humans as female or male. These sets of biological characteristics are not always mutually exclusive as there are individuals who possess both. ([WHO](#))

**Gender:** Refers to the way in which a person identifies or expresses their masculine or feminine characteristics. A person's gender identity or gender expression is not always exclusively male or female and may change over time. ([AHRC](#))

**Gender Equality:** When people of all genders have equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities. ([Vic Gov](#))

**Gender Equity:** Equality in outcomes for people of all genders. To achieve this, special measures may be used to correct historical and/or systemic discriminations and bias. Equity ensures fair and just treatment, and considers the different needs of different genders, as well as cultural barriers and experiences of discrimination. ([UNICEF](#))

**Gender Identity:** Refers to a person's deeply held internal and individual feeling of gender. ([AHRC](#))

**Gender expression:** Refers to the way in which a person externally expresses their gender or how they are perceived by others. ([AHRC](#))

**Gender norms and stereotypes:** Ideas about how people should be and act according to the gender they are assigned or identify with. We internalise and learn these 'rules' early in life. This sets up a life-cycle of gender socialisation and stereotyping. (WHO, 2009)

**Gender disaggregated data:** Data that is collected and presented separately for people of different genders. It allows for developing appropriate, evidence-based responses based on the experiences of different genders.

**Intersectionality:** The complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or [intersect](#) especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups ([Merriam Webster](#)). Gender based discrimination commonly intersects with other forms of discrimination.

**Cisgender:** Refers to people who identify their gender in the same way as was legally assigned to them at birth. ([AHRC](#))

**Gender Stereotypes:** A generalised view or perception about characteristics, or roles that are or ought to be performed by people of a certain gender. A gender stereotype is harmful when it limits people's capacity to develop their personal attributes, pursue certain professional careers and/or make choices about their lives. ([OHCHR](#))

**Gender Norms:** Gender norms are social norms that relate to a specific gender. They are principles or ideas about how people of different genders should behave and act. Gender norms can be deeply entrenched in society, but they are not static and they can evolve over time. Gender norms can be harmful because they typically uphold a system of privilege where male/masculine is favoured over female/feminine.

**Non-binary:** A person whose gender identity isn't exclusively male or female. A person may feel they have a 'mix' of genders, or identify as being outside of the gender binary.

**LGBTIQA+:** An abbreviation which is used to describe lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer and asexual identifying people or communities collectively. The '+' indicates this term is inclusive of other gender and sexual identities which are not explicitly referenced.