



WOMEN IN THE CITY OF HOBSONS BAY

WHY WOMEN'S HEALTH MATTERS

Women comprise approximately half the population in Hobsons Bay and have different health and wellbeing needs from men. It would appear that women and men have all the same formal opportunities. However, the unequal status of women in our community causes many to experience significant disadvantage, impacting on their physical, mental and social health, safety and wellbeing.

To support women's health, safety and wellbeing, and to recognise and respond to men and women's different needs, it is imperative that Hobsons Bay City Council adopt a gender equity approach to municipal public health and wellbeing planning, program and service provision.

WHY GENDER EQUITY IS A PUBLIC HEALTH PRIORITY

Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men with the aim of achieving equal outcomes for all. To ensure fairness, measures are needed to compensate for historical and social disadvantage that have prevented women from operating on a level playing field with men.

Public health planning and program and service delivery that take a gender equity approach recognise that women and girls experience different and often heightened risk factors for poor health compared to men and boys. This is the result of structural and social factors that continue to marginalise women and girls, such as the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men, and rigid gender stereotypes and norms that assign women and men to certain areas of responsibility in society.¹

These factors intersect with the social determinants of health, such as decision-making power, income, employment, education and housing, which compound the disadvantage experienced by women and girls.



Key measures to promote gender equity

Hobsons Bay City Council can effectively work towards improving the health, safety and wellbeing of women and girls by having a standalone municipal public health and wellbeing plan with gender equity as a key goal. This will ensure that Hobsons Bay City Council's plan is strategically aligned with the Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019, the Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 and Victoria's first Gender Equality Strategy, which will be launched in November 2016.

Women's Health West recommends Hobsons Bay City Council develop measurable gender equity indicators within the plan that are measured across (but not limited to) the following key areas:

- * Promote women's participation in leadership and decision-making at all levels of council and the wider community
- * Ensure equal remuneration between women and men employed by council
- * Ensure equitable workplace policies and conditions are in place, such as superannuation contributions for maternity leave and family flexible workplace conditions
- * Raise public awareness about sexism and problematic expressions of rigid gender stereotypes, and promote diverse and alternative masculinities and femininities among women, men, girls and boys
- * Allocate a percentage of council's budget to fund programs for women and girls through community grants
- * Prioritise preventing violence against women, sexual and reproductive health, and mental health and wellbeing as key health priority areas that affect women and girls

KEY HEALTH PRIORITIES FOR WOMEN

Prevention of violence against women

Data from 2015 indicates that in Australia one woman is killed every five to six days by her male partner and that one in four women have experienced violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.⁴

The increase in reported family violence incidents in Hobsons Bay over recent years demonstrates that violence against women remains a significant and growing concern that requires action.

Women's Health West commends Hobsons Bay Council for publishing a gender equity statement in 2014. Women's Health West recommends that Hobsons Bay Council continues to identify gender equity and the prevention of violence against women as key health priorities in the next municipal public health and wellbeing plan given the ongoing high levels of violence perpetrated against women in the municipality. This will further support comprehensive, integrated primary prevention initiatives currently underway in Hobsons Bay and throughout the west and action plan.

- * Between 2014 and 2015 there were 1,057 reported incidents of violence against women attended by police in the city of Hobsons Bay; this was slightly higher than the previous year when there were 971 reported incidents²
- * The incidents of violence against women where a police report was completed were 116.7 per 10,000 women living in Hobsons Bay in 2014-2015; an increase from 106.5 per 10,000 women in 2013-2014²
- * When asked how safe women feel walking alone in the local area by night, only 55.7 per cent of women living in Hobsons Bay reported feeling 'very safe' or 'safe' compared to 84 per cent of men in Hobsons Bay in 2011³

Partnering to redress violence against women

Preventing Violence Together: Western Region Action Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women

Hobsons Bay Council is a valued partner of Preventing Violence Together. This award winning project is the first collaboratively-developed, regional, primary prevention action plan of its type to prevent violence against women. It is comprised of a range of mutually reinforcing actions for signatory organisations to undertake, such as leadership commitment to prevention of violence against women, embedding gender equity practices into organisational plans and projects, and creating opportunities for men within organisations to engage in the promotion of positive masculinities.

Hobsons Bay City Council's Mayor and Councillors during the 2014 Preventing Violence Together 16 Days of Activism campaign.
PHOTO: Scout Kozakiewicz



Sexual and reproductive health

Sexual and reproductive health is integral to supporting the overall health and wellbeing of women and girls. The population of Victoria is one of the healthiest in the world but despite this, the burden of disease associated with poor sexual and reproductive health continues to increase.⁸

Teenage fertility rates, low condom use, poor Pap screening rates, and sexually transmitted infection notification levels all highlight the sexual and reproductive health of women, particularly young women, in Hobsons Bay as a significant health priority.

Key areas of sexual and reproductive health that must be redressed to improve women and girls' health across Hobsons Bay include: access to affordable contraceptives; access to surgical and medication termination of pregnancy; improving the sexual and reproductive health knowledge of young people with a specific focus on young people from migrant and refugee communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; improving access to basic sexual and reproductive health services; and promotion of the sexual and reproductive rights of women living with a disability.

- * The participation rate for Pap screening among eligible women aged 20-24 years in Hobsons Bay between 2012 and 2013 was low, at 40.4 per cent; this is however higher than the western region average of 31.8 per cent⁵
- * In 2014, 18.1 per 10,000 women living in Hobsons Bay were diagnosed with chlamydia, which is lower than the rate for the western region of 25.3 per 10,000 women⁶
- * Only 38.5 per cent of sexually active adolescents in Hobsons Bay practiced safe sex with a condom in 2012, which is lower than the Victorian average of 58.1 per cent⁷
- * Ten of every 1,000 women aged 15 to 19 years living in Hobsons Bay gave birth in 2014; this is higher than the western region average of 8.2 per 1,000 women⁸

Partnering to promote sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing

Action for Equity: A sexual and reproductive health plan for Melbourne's west 2013-2017

Women's Health West is the lead agency in the Action for Equity partnership, of which Hobsons Bay City Council is a valued partner. This is a four-year sexual and reproductive health promotion plan for Melbourne's west incorporating primary prevention initiatives that work to redress the social determinants of sexual and reproductive health in order to achieve health equity.

Women's Health West was pleased to note that Hobsons Bay Council ensured that equitable programs and services were key principles within the Community Health and Wellbeing Plan 2013-17, Council Plan 2013-17, Advocacy Strategy 2014-18, Children & Young Peoples Plan 2014-18, and Gender Equity Policy Statement 2014. We were pleased to see that sexual and reproductive health was also referenced in the Children and Young Peoples Plan and the Gender Equity Policy Statement. We encourage Hobsons Bay Council to continue this commitment to sexual and reproductive health by embedding this priority area within the next municipal public health and wellbeing plan. Women's Health West also welcomes the opportunity to further support Hobsons Bay City Council to deliver on this important health priority.

Mental health and social connectedness

Mental health and wellbeing is important to consider when taking a gender equity approach, as women and men experience mental health and mental ill-health differently. For example, risk factors that disproportionately impact women's mental health include poverty, limited access to resources and economic participation, strict gender norms and stereotypes, social isolation and men's violence against women.

The weight of greater childcare, domestic and caring responsibilities placed on women in Hobsons Bay presents significant implications for women's mental health and wellbeing and their active participation in community life. It is imperative that council supports women and families with their caring responsibilities through the support of flexible workplace conditions, the provision of affordable and accessible childcare and disability support programs, and appropriate gender-sensitive green space and land use planning.

The higher proportion of women than men who are over 75 years old and living alone in Hobsons Bay also presents mental health and wellbeing concerns, and highlights the need for programs and services that support older residents to be gender-sensitive and respond to the specific needs of older women.

Partnering to enhance mental health and connectedness

Women's Health West delivers a number of different programs to support the mental health and connectedness of women living in Hobsons Bay. We welcome support from Hobsons Bay City Council to continue to deliver the following programs:

- Sunrise – a program that offers friendship, social connectedness, information and skills development for women in the west who identify as living with a disability
- Our Community Our Rights – a program that supports women to engage in actions that promote and protect their own and their communities' human rights
- Lead On Again – a leadership program for culturally and linguistically diverse young women aged 16 to 24, who study, live or work in the western region
- Financial Literacy – a capacity building program supporting newly-arrived women to negotiate financial systems and take control of financial decisions and their economic participation

- * Of all women living in Hobsons Bay, 52.8 per cent reported that they participated in citizen engagement activities in 2011⁹
- * In Hobsons Bay, women headed 82.3 per cent of single parent households in 2011⁹
- * Women were more likely than men to report undertaking unpaid work in Hobsons Bay:
 - 25.1 per cent of women compared to 18.5 per cent of men reported providing unpaid childcare⁹
 - 15 per cent of women compared to 10.1 per cent of men reported providing unpaid assistance to a person living with a disability⁹
 - 30.5 per cent of women compared to 9.4 per cent of men reported undertaking more than 15 hours of unpaid domestic work a week⁹
- * In 2011, 51.8 per cent of women in Hobsons Bay were employed in full time work compared to 76.1 per cent of men⁹
- * Of residents who were over 75 years old and living alone in Hobsons Bay, 72 per cent of these people were women in 2011⁹

Cultural diversity

The high number of female Hobsons Bay residents who were born overseas presents significant municipal public health and wellbeing planning implications, including the need for culturally appropriate and accessible services, and health promotion programs that are tailored to the specific health and wellbeing needs of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

The higher proportion of female residents in Hobsons Bay who reported that they did not speak English well or not at all, means that additional council resources are required to ensure women's access to services and entitlements, employment and educational training opportunities, social support and opportunities for participation.

- * Approximately 36.3 per cent of female residents in Hobsons Bay were born overseas, which is higher than that for Victoria, at 26.4 per cent⁹
- * Furthermore, 6 per cent of women in Hobsons Bay reported low English proficiency compared to 4.5 per cent of men in 2011⁹
- * Ethnicity and culture have largely been recognised as important social determinants of health. Residents of migrant and refugee background often face a variety of challenges in supporting their health and wellbeing, including gaining access to culturally appropriate services and freedom from race-based discrimination. In particular, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds are noted as being at greater risk of poorer health and wellbeing¹⁰



We welcome the opportunity to provide further support to Hobsons Bay City Council in the development of the next municipal public health and wellbeing plan by participating in upcoming steering committee meetings and consultations with council.

For more information about this factsheet please contact Elly Taylor, Health Promotion Manager at Women's Health West via email: hpmanager@whwest.org.au or phone: 9689 9588.

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