

Safe and Inclusive Sport:

Preventing Gender-Based Violence Summary



Acknowledgement of Country

The Victorian Government proudly acknowledges Aboriginal people as the First Peoples and Traditional Owners and custodians of the land and water on which we rely. We acknowledge the ongoing leadership role of the Aboriginal community on gender equality and the prevention of gender-based violence. As First Peoples, Aboriginal Victorians are best placed to determine a culturally appropriate path to gender equality in their communities.

We recognise that self-determination is the vital guiding principle for all Victorian Government actions to address past injustices and to create a shared future based on Aboriginal sovereignty. We are deeply committed to Aboriginal self-determination and to supporting Victoria's Treaty and Truth-telling processes.

Thank you

Safe and Inclusive Sport: Preventing Gender-Based Violence was developed by Sport and Recreation Victoria in partnership with Family Safety Victoria.

Sport and Recreation Victoria thanks everyone who shared their time, expertise and experiences with us to develop this resource. Our work is deeply strengthened as a result of these contributions, partnerships and collaborations.

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Sport plays a valuable role in preventing gender-based violence. It is an important setting for championing equality and challenging gender inequality.

By working towards gender equality in community sport, we can create inclusive, equitable, healthy and safe environments for everyone: women, men, girls, boys, gender diverse and LGBTIQ+ people. This helps to prevent gender-based violence.

Sporting clubs are influential leaders within local communities, especially in regional and rural areas, providing a valuable point of connection and belonging. They are well placed to influence the attitudes and beliefs we have around gender, inclusion, respect and belonging.

Sport settings are places where people gather as players, coaches, administrators, officials, spectators, families and volunteers. They provide a strong platform for cultural change by setting the standards and expectations from those connected to their club and sport.

Sporting organisations that prioritise and engage in gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence, position themselves as safe and welcome settings where people want to play and connect.

Sport and active recreation organisations provide a workplace where all employees deserve to be treated with respect regardless of their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, age or ability.

Safe and Inclusive Sport: Preventing Gender-Based Violence (the Guide) has been created as Victoria moves towards a gender equal State, free from violence.

This document provides an overview of the Guide. The full version can be accessed on the Sport and Recreation Victoria [website](#).

The full version contains a range of helpful resources, case studies and links to further reading and networks. It contains an explanation of key terms and concepts and how they are applied to sport. This includes gender equity, the gendered drivers of violence and intersectionality. Sport and Recreation Victoria's (SRV) website also has a Club Gender Audit Tool and Gender Equity Action Plan template for use by key organisations.

This resource has been designed for use by organisations such as:

- National Sporting Organisations (NSOs)
- State Sporting Associations (SSAs)
- Regional Sports Assemblies
- Active Recreation Organisations
- Local Councils
- Women's Health Services
- Community Health Organisations.

The Guide is a tool for these organisations to work more effectively with a range of community sporting organisations including governing bodies, associations, clubs and volunteers to drive cultural change in community sport.

The Guide supports compliance with the [Fair Access Policy Roadmap](#) and the [Gender Equality Act 2020 \(Vic\)](#), and aligns with existing responsibilities under the [National Integrity Framework](#) and [Child Safety Standards](#).

Gender-based violence is a community issue and we need to work together as a community to address it.



What's sport got to do with the prevention of gender-based violence?

Sport settings are also places where gender-based violence and disrespect occurs, and sport plays an important role in stopping violence before it starts. It has the potential to be a safe place for people to disclose experiences of violence and support those experiencing it.

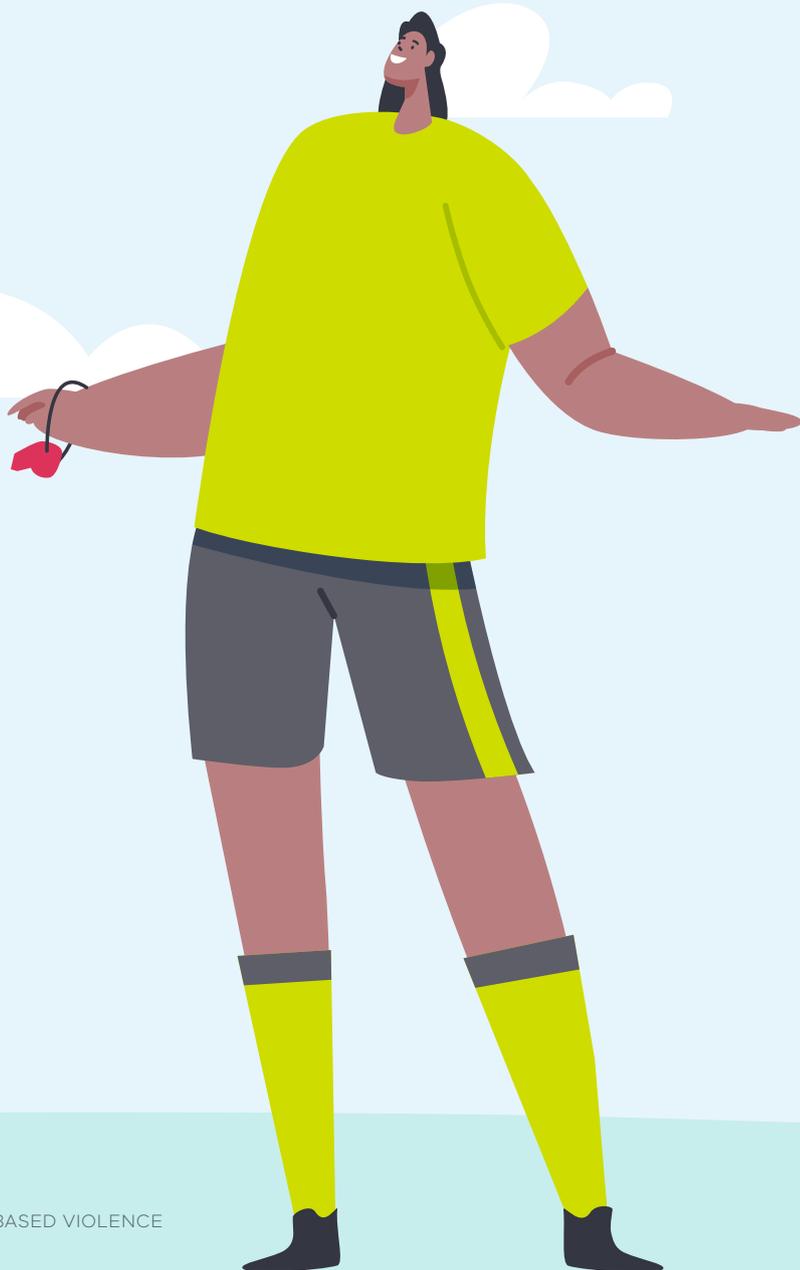
Community sport involves people of all ages and backgrounds coming together to do something they love. Sport settings can help set positive social norms and expectations about equality and respect and provide opportunities to challenge gender stereotypes. The norms and expectations learnt through sport can be translated into everyday life, impacting future generations of children and young people who will see gender equality as the norm.

Gender-based violence is violence used against someone because of their gender. It describes violence linked to gender-based power inequalities and gender-based discrimination.¹ This includes violence targeted directly at someone specifically because, for example:

- they are a woman
- they identify as LGBTIQ+
- they don't follow socially prescribed gender roles and stereotypes.

Gender-based violence has many forms and can occur in the home, workplaces, schools, online and in sporting clubs. **Gender-based violence is not just physical** – it includes behaviours that are controlling or which cause psychological, emotional and financial harm.

In a sport setting it can also look like harassment and assault by colleagues, teammates, club volunteers and other community members. People who use violence can be people in positions of power such as coaches, or strangers (for example, women referees experiencing abuse or threats from spectators). Sport is also a setting where people who have experienced violence may seek help.



What drives gender-based violence?

International and Australian research demonstrates that gender-based violence is driven by gender inequality.²

There are certain expressions of gender inequality that consistently predict (or drive) higher levels of gender-based violence. Our Watch provides 4 drivers and 8 essential actions to prevent gender-based violence through their [Change the Story](#) resource.

Emerging evidence shows there is overlap between the gendered drivers and the drivers of violence against the LGBTIQ+ community.³ To prevent violence against LGBTIQ+ communities we need address the gendered drivers and actively challenge [cisnormativity and heteronormativity](#).

The 4 drivers of gender-based violence are:



GENDERED DRIVER 1

Violence against women is accepted, excused and justified.

When violence is excused, trivialised, downplayed, justified, ignored or denied through attitudes, behaviours and systems, allowing people to think violence is excusable or acceptable.

An example of what this looks like in sport: Sport clubs, organisations and associations not taking instances of violence against women and gender diverse people seriously. Clubs allowing perpetrators of violence to continue playing with little or no consequence – putting the organisations/perpetrator's reputation/sporting success first rather than supporting the victim.

GENDERED DRIVER 2

Men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public life and relationships.

When men control decision-making and resources in the home, workplace or community, it creates a society where men can abuse power, and women have less power and voice. When men and boys are given more value than people of other genders, this sense of entitlement, ownership and disrespect can seep into all relationships.

An example of what this looks like in sport: The overrepresentation of men in leadership positions at all levels of sport, including coaching.

GENDERED DRIVER 3

Rigid gender stereotyping and dominant forms of masculinity.

When we hold simplistic generalisations and strict ideas about what individuals can and can't do based on their gender, and the roles they should play in our society, for example, men should be tough, aggressive, stoic and strong, and make better leaders than women. These ideas can be reinforced through the cultures and institutions we interact with, including workplaces, families, sport settings.

An example of what this looks like in sport: Gender-stereotyped awards at club level, for example, women get vouchers for the beauty salon and men get vouchers for the hardware store.

GENDERED DRIVER 4

Peer relationships between men and boys that promote aggression and disrespect towards women and girls.

When men and boys form relationships and bond with each other by proving their masculinity through actions that are sexist or disrespectful towards women. An example of this driver is 'locker room talk'.

An example of what this looks like in sport: 'Locker room talk' that disrespects women and is viewed as harmless and normal.

Actions to prevent gender-based violence

To prevent gender-based violence we must focus our efforts on addressing the 4 gendered drivers, as well as other forms of discrimination such as racism, ableism, ageism, homophobia, class discrimination, cisnormativity and heteronormativity.



1. Challenge disrespect and violence against women and gender diverse people.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: Adopt, implement and regularly review policies and codes of conduct that clearly articulate zero-tolerance for disrespect, violence and harassment of any kind against women, trans and gender diverse people at all levels of the sporting setting.

2. Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: The sport or club creates targets to increase the number of women and gender diverse leaders. Ensure there is a plan to recruit, train and retain women and gender diverse people for leadership roles at all levels and areas of the club such as president, board/committee member and coach.

3. Challenge gender stereotypes and roles, and support all personal identities not constrained by rigid gender stereotypes.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: Language across the sport that does not reinforce gender stereotypes or use gendered language, for example use terms like 'folks' or 'players' instead of 'ladies'/'guys' and avoid phrases like 'you throw like a girl' and 'man up'.

4. Support men and boys in developing healthy masculinities and positive, supportive peer relationships.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: Engage men and boys as allies and focus on positive, practical actions that men and boys can take in their everyday lives with their teammates, families and friends.

5. Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: Using the sport and club's social media to share videos and content that emphasises the sports' commitment to gender equity and respectful relationships, such as this [Respect Victoria clip](#) featuring two men talking about their role in gender equity in sport.

6. Address the intersections between gender inequality and other forms of systemic and structural oppression and discrimination, and promote broader social justice.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: Sport organisations partners with experts such as CMSport, Koorie Heritage Trust, Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association (VACSAL), Proud 2 Play, Regional Sports Assemblies, and Disability Sport and Recreation. The partnerships build the capacity of staff and club communities to understand how other forms of discrimination (such as racism, homophobia, transphobia, and ableism) impact on people's experiences of gender inequality and take action to address these forms of discrimination.

7. Build safe, fair and equitable organisations and institutions by focusing on policy and systems change.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: Sport organisations commit to developing a gender equity action plan and systematically addressing gender inequality in their organisation and supports their affiliated clubs to do the same.

8. Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys in public and private spheres.

An example of positive action in a sport setting: The club identifies and acts on opportunities to promote positive and respectful mixed gender participation where appropriate, for example, doing mixed-gender warm-ups or drills together at training.



Key messages

- Gender-based violence is a national epidemic. Almost 1 in 3 Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15.⁴ Gender inequality is a driver of gender-based violence, and gender equality is at the heart of the solution.
- Sport is a highly influential part of Australian society and can reach a large number of Australians. On and off the field, sport provides the opportunity to reinforce positive community standards about respect and equality.
- Community sport settings have great potential to drive social change and prevent gender-based violence by creating inclusive, equitable, healthy, and safe environments for women, girls, trans and gender diverse people.
- Gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence must be a whole-of-sport approach. National, state and community sporting organisations (including leagues and associations) have a role to play by taking a strong leadership position on this issue and ensuring their sport is safe, inclusive, and equitable for all.
- Sport should show leadership by setting the standard of zero tolerance towards sexist attitudes, language, and discriminatory behaviour. Sporting organisations should have clear policies and procedures for complaints to support people impacted by discrimination and gender-based violence, whether this occurs within the sport setting or outside the club. The policies and procedures should be guided by the governing body and made relevant and useable for all levels of its sport, including for community clubs.
- Sport should provide opportunities and pathways for women, girls, and gender diverse people to work and participate at all levels and promote their voices and needs equally.
- Environments that focus on gender equity for women and girls, can also be safer and more inclusive for gender diverse people and those from LGBTIQ+ communities as these environments foster understanding and acceptance of people of all genders and sexualities.
- Men and boys have an important role to play as allies for gender equality in sport. Collectively and individually men and boys will benefit from gender equality.
- We all have a role to play to help create a Victoria free-from gender-based violence. Sport can be supported through partnerships and existing networks to prevent and address gender-based violence.



Overview of the 10 guiding principles



Establish a case for change



Commit to adopting a whole-of-sport approach including leadership support



Take an intersectional approach



Work in partnership with other organisations and experts



Embed strong planning and evaluation



Engage men while ensuring women and gender diverse people are central to the work



Develop and implement appropriate responses to instances of disrespect and violence towards women and gender diverse people



Expect and prepare for resistance



Share knowledge and learn from experts and peers

By working towards gender equality in community sport, we can create inclusive, equitable, healthy, and safe environments for everyone; women, men, girls, boys, gender diverse and LGBTIQ+ people. This helps to prevent gender-based violence.



Celebrate successes

Guiding Principles

The following 10 guiding principles provide a framework to help organisations drive gender equity in sport settings to prevent gender-based violence.

1. Establish a case for change

Provide the sporting community a clear case for change. That is, a story about why gender equity and the prevention of gender-based violence is important, why change is needed, and a clearly articulated goal for any proposed activities.

Develop a 'key messages' document communicating your case for change which includes key statistics and the benefits of gender equality to their community. This can be developed using the messages from this resource but should be tailored to suit the audience you intend to work with.

Putting together a case for establishing an equal, safe, welcoming and inclusive environment in your sport will help you articulate a clear argument about the benefits it will bring to the sport and clubs.

2. Commit to adopting a whole-of-sport approach including leadership support

A whole-of-sport approach is a critical part of creating cultural change at all levels of sport.

To work towards the prevention of gender-based violence, all levels of sport and their community partners need to be working towards the same goals. For cultural change to be successful, sporting organisations should adopt a comprehensive and holistic approach that extends from their executive through to players, coaches, staff, supporters, sponsors, members and volunteers.

While you might be working at a community sport level, there are plenty of stakeholders that you can involve in the project by drawing on connections at multiple levels.

Gender equity should become business as usual and not a standalone piece of work. Sport organisations need to do internal work to ensure they 'walk the talk', putting a gender lens on all their practices, policies and processes and addressing the drivers of gender-based violence. It is important that the organisations that support the work at the community sport level first build their own capacity to promote and support gender equality and prevent gender-based violence.

Gender influences all areas of an organisation and staff training is important. Professional development and capacity building opportunities to understand and apply a gender equity lens should be available for staff at all levels (including board and directors). Competency in gender equity should be built into staff position descriptions.

Achieving gender-equal and inclusive workplaces and sporting environments requires a transformative approach that changes systems, structures, and social norms.

3. Take an intersectional approach

Sport has historically addressed inclusion in terms of individual factors in isolation or in silos. For example, gender as separate to race, and race as separate to disability. In reality our identity is made up of the interplay of many different and inseparable aspects.

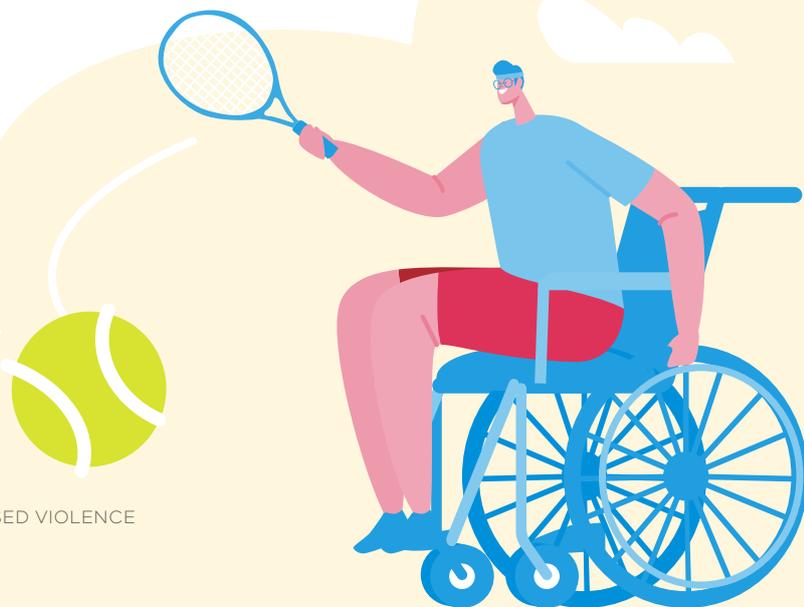
Intersectionality is a framework to help us understand how intersecting structures of oppression based on gender, ethnicity, ability, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, religion, race, age or location can compound and interact on multiple levels to create overlapping forms of discrimination and power imbalances. It also provides an important opportunity to acknowledge that everyone has their own unique experiences of power, discrimination and privilege.

An intersectional approach is a way of thinking, reflecting and working, and can be used to better understand and meet the needs of people who are underrepresented or marginalised in sport.

For example, a Muslim woman of colour who wears a hijab may experience both sexism and racism in a sports club. This would make her experience different from a white woman, in the same sports club, who may be experiencing sexism but not racism. Developing a program that only considers gender will not meet all her needs. We must understand her experiences of discrimination and racism. Her Muslim identity is not the issue we need to address or focus on, but rather it is the racism or structures of discrimination that need to be addressed.

An intersectional approach in sport will broadly focus on:

- Working with and supporting groups who experience multiple forms of discrimination in the community or sport setting you are working in
- Undertaking activities that address, and challenge, the multiple forms of discrimination and oppression that intersect with gender inequality. This can include changing policies and systems, designing programs and delivering education to shift discriminatory beliefs, attitudes and behaviours.



4. Work in partnership with other organisations and experts

The prevention of gender-based violence is a community-wide responsibility and sport is not alone in taking action. Working in partnership can be a great way to collaborate, share expertise and build the capacity of all partners involved. Project partners can support an intersectional approach and ensure other forms of social inequality and disadvantage are also discussed and being addressed.

Partners that can support sport include:

- Universities and TAFEs
- Local councils
- Gender equity and prevention organisations (such as Safe and Equal)
- Women's Health Organisations
- Regional Sports Assemblies
- Schools (linking with Respectful Relationships Education)
- Specialist inclusion organisations (such as Proud 2 Play, CMSport, Women with Disabilities Australia, Rainbow Health Australia, Zoe Belle Gender Collective and Minus 18)
- Local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
- Organisations with specific expertise in engaging men and boys in gender equity such as the Men's Project.

Evidence shows the sport sector can benefit from working with gender equity and violence prevention experts to:

- better inform policy and guideline development
- facilitate translation of policy into practice across multiple sport and organisational formats
- gain access to up-to-date knowledge and research
- access evaluation expertise
- receive useful education and training.⁵

Partnering with experts and local services shares the workload, expands the reach of projects, and provides a range of expertise. Partners can also provide access to wider professional networks working towards the prevention of gender-based violence. At a local level, organisations should also consider partnering with other sports, especially if they are using the same local facilities. Similar strategies could be used and learnings shared.

5. Embed strong planning and evaluation

Strong planning, governance and evaluation are essential for gender equity initiatives.

In any sport, continuous improvement is a key goal. Evaluation has the same objective and is an essential part of the planning process, from start to finish.

Evaluation is the process by which we judge the worth or value of something, and is more than simply measuring success or failure. It should involve asking questions and reflecting on the answers. Evaluation plans should start at the beginning of a project and involve an ongoing process of planning, implementation and reflection against the project's goals and objectives. Understanding your aims and objectives will help to understand what you are trying to find out or test in your evaluation.

There are many ways to use sport to engage in the prevention of gender-based violence. Whatever you do, it must be practical and relevant for your sport and its members. Projects should have a long-term focus with short and medium-term measurable goals, as cultural change takes time.

The prevention of gender-based violence needs to extend beyond just awareness raising and campaigns. The work needs to address a combination (or all) of the gendered drivers. According to a recent Australian study, the most effective prevention work addresses gender inequality across multiple levels of sport organisations and incorporates a number of interrelated components rather than just one-off activities.⁶



6. Engage men while ensuring women and gender diverse people are central to the work

Engaging men and boys is essential for gender equality. Men play a critical role in calling out sexism and disrespect and building gender equality in their everyday lives with family, friends, teammates and in sporting clubs.

The evidence suggests that the most effective gender equity and violence prevention programs engage men and boys from the outset.⁷ Projects engaging men are more likely to be effective if they explicitly address the harm caused to men by masculine stereotypes (the practices, norms and relations associated with 'manhood' or ideas about 'real men').⁸ Sport is a key setting where dominant ideas about what it means to be a 'real man' are reinforced (for example, strong, athletic, aggressive). These ideals are normalised and valued in sport settings, resulting in sport being perceived as a domain primarily for heterosexual men.

It is important that men can explore and discuss outdated ideas of masculine stereotypes that constrain them and limit their choices. [The Man Box 2024: re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia](#) and the corresponding [video and fact sheets](#) provide a good starting point for these conversations.

Gender equality and violence prevention initiatives must not focus solely on the benefits to men of dismantling gender stereotypes. While focusing on the benefits of gender equality for men can be a good place to start, these conversations need to occur alongside conversations of gender inequality and the ways women and gender diverse people are disadvantaged in the broader community and in sport. Women and gender diverse people must also be equally consulted, empowered and engaged throughout the project.⁹

Gender equity programs that focus solely on women and girls reinforce the perception that gender inequality is a women's issue rather than a whole of community issue.

Programs that focus on engaging men and boys should consider how they include reflections on men's understanding and ideas around power, privilege and violence. These reflections can help to highlight how gender inequality and rigid gender stereotypes are harmful for men as well as women, gender diverse people and LGBTIQ+ people.

7. Develop and implement appropriate responses to instances of disrespect and violence towards women and gender diverse people

Sport is a setting to both prevent and respond to instances of gender-based violence.

Sport organisations have a responsibility to protect employees and participants from gender-based violence. They can do this by ensuring they have policies and procedures to address instances of violence and disrespect and ensure people who experience violence and discrimination (both within and outside of the club setting) receive appropriate support.

While sport may set standards for behaviour, sport organisations have a legal responsibility to address behaviour that offends community standards or is against the law (for example, racial vilification, sexual harassment, common assault). This includes meeting legislative requirements such as the Victorian [Child Safety Standards](#).

Australia now has a consistent set of policies across all sport. The [National Integrity Framework](#) provides a set of rules that all members of a sport need to follow when it comes to their behaviour and conduct in sport. These policies are best practice and a consistent approach to protecting against integrity threats in sport and outline what types of behaviour are unacceptable in sport.

Sport organisations at all levels should adopt a zero-tolerance approach to inappropriate, disrespectful or aggressive behaviours, whether they occur within or outside of the sport setting. Community clubs need to be supported to understand and implement this approach and have clear processes for dealing with breaches of the policies and codes of conduct.

Partnering with organisations such as a local response service e.g., the Centre Against Sexual Assault or The Orange Door, and other gender-based violence advocacy organisations can assist in the development of policies, processes, and training around response.



8. Expect and prepare for resistance

There will be many people who support efforts to promote and normalise gender equality, however, some people will be resistant to change. Resistance here is defined as an active or passive pushing back against progressive programs, policies and perspectives. It may come from individuals or collectively, and from people of all genders. Keep in mind that values and attitudes about gender roles do not split neatly down gender lines. Resistance to gender equity and prevention of gender-based violence initiatives can come in many forms such as inaction (refusing to prioritise and take action for gender equality), or appeasement (agreeing to take action to appease people, but not taking action).

Backlash against LGBTIQ+ social progress in community sport is also increasingly common, particularly for trans and gender diverse communities. This causes significant harm to LGBTIQ+ communities and reinforces harmful rigid gender stereotypes for everyone.¹⁰

Not everyone in your sport may be ready for change but it is possible to bring people along with you. You can do this by creating an environment where ideas can be discussed and knowledge and information shared respectfully. Having a strong case for change, a 'key messages' document and whole-of-staff training will assist with resistance. While resistance is challenging, don't give up! The hard conversations can be a space for change.

9. Share knowledge and learn from experts and peers

Look for opportunities to share your evaluation findings with peers. It's important we keep learning from each other about what does and doesn't work.

There are a large number of people working in Victoria with expertise in gender equality and sport. Seek support and advice from experts, understand the research and learn from your peers. Remember this work does not need to be done alone. Everyone is on a learning journey and there is expertise and a desire for people to work together to support each other.

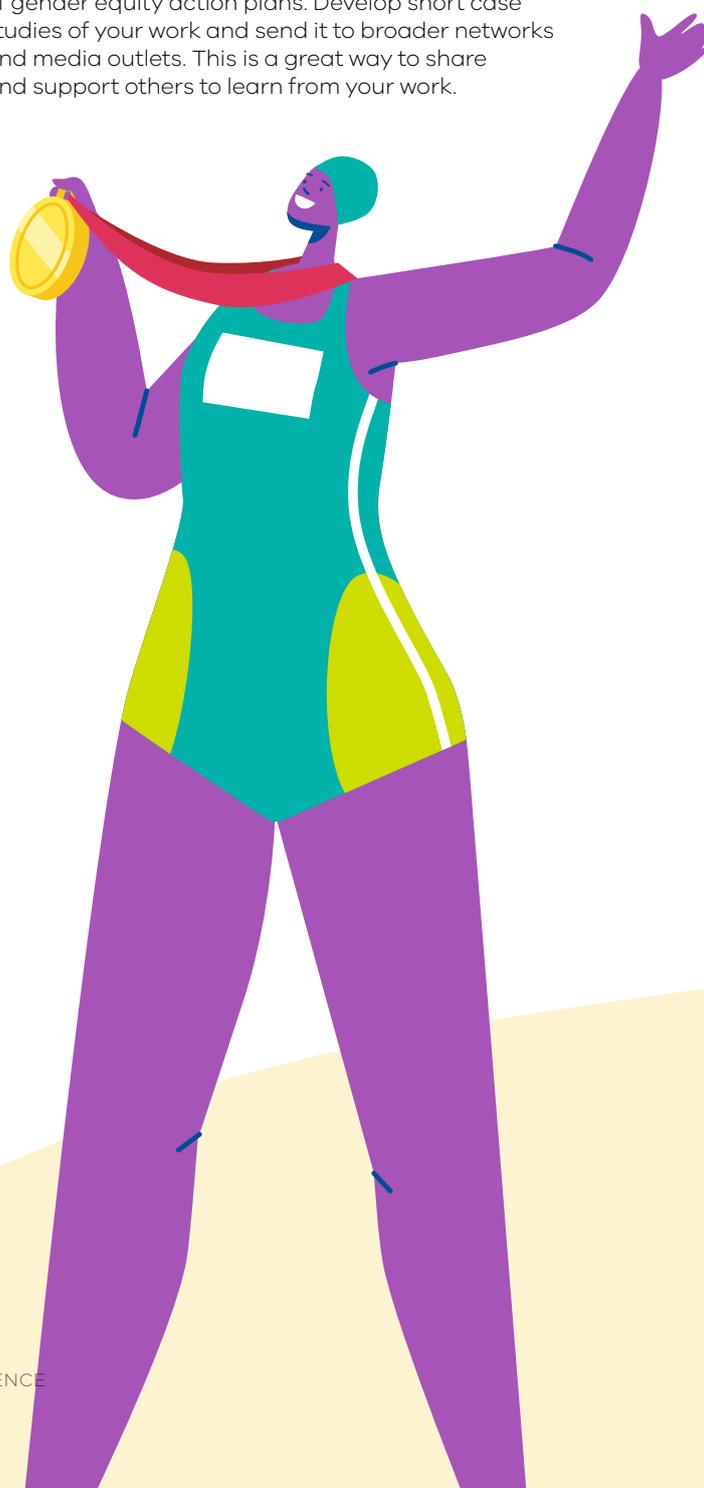
Communities of practice can be an excellent way of sharing knowledge and learning from each other. A community of practice is a group of people with a common interest coming together to share ideas and strategies. These groups can be formal or informal. It might be a formal group of people working on similar projects who meet monthly with a facilitator. Alternatively, a community of practice could be an informal group of project workers who meet, when needed, to workshop challenges or ideas. Clubs and program participants also benefit from being involved in communities of practice and learning from each other.

10. Celebrate Successes

Although the work never ends, it's important to recognise each step towards a better and violence free future. Make sure you celebrate your successes, no matter how big or small!

When you have achieved a goal, noticed positive changes or received external recognition for your work, share that with club members and the wider community. Use your organisation's or the club's website or social media pages to write a short story about your work or upload a handy resource. Actively promote participation in local or global initiatives that promote gender equality and the prevention of gendered violence. Sharing your successes will not only highlight your organisation's work, but it will enhance the sports or club's profile, showcase its strengths and provide ideas and inspiration for others.

Support clubs to consider hosting forums or celebration dinners to mark events such as the development of gender equity action plans. Develop short case studies of your work and send it to broader networks and media outlets. This is a great way to share and support others to learn from your work.



Endnotes

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