



Report Card on the 2023 Victorian State Budget

The Women's Health Services Network Report Card on the 2023-2024 Victorian Budget

The following assessment of the 2023-2024 Victorian State Budget shows that while there is positive progress for women's health, there is still more work to do. Prior to the budget the WHSN put forward the following areas for priority:

- Promote primary prevention and health promotion for all Victorians.
- Deliver to all women and girls in Victoria, access to safe and high quality sexual and reproductive health services, including abortion healthcare, across the life course.
- Deliver investment in culturally safe, gender equitable mental healthcare and investment in the primary prevention of mental illness for women and girls.
- Invest in health services and programs based on data and evidence to address a broad range of women's health issues

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)

In addition to the above points, the Women's Health Services Network called for ongoing investment and work to progress on gender responsive budgeting as a key foundation for gender equality. The WHSN acknowledge and respect that the Victorian Government is currently the only government in Australia using GRB and that this transformational framework is being investigated for application Federally.

The government's Gender Equality Statement highlights areas to which GRB has been applied and there is greater

transparency in the way GRB is used and its benefits for all Victorians, particularly women. WHSN congratulates government on this positive progress.

In the pursuit of increased transparency and accountability, we ask government to provide clearer insights into how GRB is applied to specific programs and its intended application in future estimates. This transparency will be a valuable addition to future budgets, reflecting a commitment to equitable practices and inclusive decision-making.

HEALTH PRIORITIES



Promotes primary prevention and health promotion for all Victorians

MORE WORK TO DO



Welcomes investment in women's health clinics, research into women's pain management and, scholarships to increase women's health workforce.



Welcomes investment for midwives.



Welcomes investment in women's health NGOs to provide women's health and wellbeing support programs.

Observation:

Failing to provide sustained support for prevention measures in Victoria deprives the opportunity to leverage cost-effective and fiscally responsible strategies that address the root causes of ill health.

Solution:

The Victorian Government needs to invest in specific resources and infrastructure for women's health and wellbeing, with a focus on addressing the diverse needs of all communities.

This should include:

- Building capacity and capability of the healthcare workforce on health promotion, primary prevention, gender equality, and aligning with the Gender Equality Act. This will help the sector improve the design, implementation, and alignment of health policies, programs, and services.
- Increase investment in primary prevention and health promotion across health and social reform policy areas (for instance family violence) to 5% of total health expenditure (as per the World Health Organisation), recognising that health promotion and primary prevention are effective, cost-effective, and equitable interventions that can improve the health of all Victorians.

There is a significant opportunity to include health promotion and primary prevention as part of the implementation of the women's health clinics.

HEALTH PRIORITIES



Delivers access to safe and high-quality sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services, including abortion

POSITIVE PROGRESS AND MORE WORK TO DO

- ✓ Welcomes investment in clinical services for women in sexual and reproductive health, SRH hubs and to extend and expand public fertility health services.
- ✓ Welcomes investment in a pilot to reissue contraceptive prescriptions and treat straightforward urinary tract infections.
- ✓ Welcomes funding to improve access and ease period poverty with supply of dispensers with free pads and tampons.

Observation:

The Auditor General's report on SRH Hubs recommends a comprehensive gap analysis and performance measures to monitor the hubs' ability to improve service access.

Solution:

The impact of this investment will be strengthened for all women if accompanied by health promotion activities that address intersectional barriers to accessing these resources.

We recommend working with women's health services to:

- Engage with the community to understand the needs of women.
- Draw on existing research and evidence to design performance measures.
- Integrate the services into the health system sustainably.
- Develop a health promotion strategy to address the intersectional barriers that women face in accessing health and SRH services.



Delivers investment in culturally safe, gender equitable mental healthcare and investment in the primary prevention of mental illness for women and girls

POSITIVE PROGRESS AND MORE WORK TO DO

- ✓ Welcomes funding to continue Mental Health and Wellbeing Hubs, Partners in Wellbeing programs, and Mental Health and Wellbeing locals.
- ✓ Welcomes the ongoing investment in crisis support for women especially Eating Disorders Victoria and Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia (PANDA) and suicide prevention for LGBTQI+, First Nations People and Youth in rural and regional Victoria.

Observation:

The WHSN expresses deep concern that the implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations fails to address systemic intersectional gender inequity in our mental health system and neglects to design and support a system that prevents harmful gender norms with a negative impact on mental health.

Failing to apply an intersectional gender lens to the mental health reform represents a missed opportunity to significantly reduce mental illness and improve outcomes for every Victorian.

By neglecting to address the gendered reality of mental health and wellbeing, we overlook a crucial chance to address the unique challenges and needs faced by different genders in this context.

Solution:

Investing in specialised infrastructure for women's mental health and wellbeing is essential to ensuring that all communities have access to quality care. By applying an intersectional gender lens, we can ensure that all women, regardless of their background, have the opportunity to live healthy and fulfilling lives.



Invests in health services and programs based on data and evidence to address a broad range of women's health issues

MORE WORK TO DO

- ✓ Welcomes the Government's recognition of data, evidence and lived experience to develop services.

Observation:

Lacking gender and intersectional disaggregated data hinders our ability to ensure that our health services are effectively catering to all Victorians and designed with inclusivity in mind.

Solution:

We want to work with government and our partners to identify data and evaluation methodologies that can be used across a broad range of services to support the development of innovative and inclusive services. By working together, we can ensure that all women have access to quality, equitable, and inclusive health care.