

16 Days of Activism: The VLGA joins the *Walk Against Family Violence* and urges councils to continue to ‘walk the walk’ on gender equality

Thursday 25 November 2021 marks the start of the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, which ends on Human Rights Day on 10 December.

This year, the VLGA team will be joining people across Victoria to raise awareness and walk in solidarity with victim-survivors of family violence and violence against women.

Each of us have a role to play to end gender-based violence and the 79 local councils in Victoria have the legislated responsibility to act in preventing family violence and respond to the needs of victim-survivors of family violence in their local community¹. As the ‘closest level of government to the community’, local government is uniquely placed to prevent violence against women and children before it occurs.

Legislative responsibilities for councils under the *Local Government Act 2020*, the *Gender Equality Act 2020* and the *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* are more than just obligations – they create an authorising environment for change.

Research shows that it is gender inequality that creates the necessary social context for violence against women to occur. But councils – within their organisations and through their elected leadership – can, and are already, challenging the attitudes and beliefs that lead to violence against women, by:

- challenging the condoning of violence against women
- promoting women’s independence and decision-making in public life
- fostering positive personal identities and challenging gender stereotypes and roles
- strengthening positive, equal and respectful relationships between and among women and men, girls and boys; and
- promoting and normalising gender equality in public and private life.²

As Victorian councils finalise their first Gender Equality Action Plans (required under the *Gender Equality Act 2020*), the VLGA looks forward to supporting local governments to continue to ‘walk the walk’ on gender equality.

Quotes attributable to VLGA Chief Executive Officer, Kathryn Arndt:

“As we ‘walk from home’ today, the VLGA team will be reflecting on why we walk. Many of us have personal experiences with friends or family that we draw upon, but for us as an organisation, the bottom line is – family violence is unacceptable, entirely preventable, and for local government to take action is a matter of a good governance.”

“The VLGA is committed to continuing to support local councils to promote and advance gender equality in their communities and across their organisations. Gender equality is everyone’s business.”

“Victoria is in an exciting position, 9 months into the implementation of the Gender Equality Act 2020. With less than 4 years left to reach the Victorian government’s target of 50 per cent women councillors by 2025, the VLGA looks forward to working with the state government to support women to participate in local government decision-making, through our Local Women Leading Change project and leading research.”

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¹ *Public Health and Wellbeing Act 2008* (Vic), s26(2)(ba)

² Our Watch, ANROWS & VicHealth (2015). *Change the Story: a shared framework for the prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia.*