

STARTS WITH US

Legal & justice sector action to prevent violence against women

What is Starts With Us?

Starts With Us is a legal and justice sector project that will contribute to the primary prevention of violence against women in Victoria.

The project started in mid-2018 with Victorian Government funding as part of the [Free From Violence](#) strategy, and it is part of a broad suite of similar projects that are underway in other sectors and communities.

Starts With Us aims to support and encourage legal and justice professionals and organisations to take action to prevent violence against women. The project is for everyone working in legal and justice – lawyers, judges, administrative staff, paralegals, policy advisers, legal educators, court staff and more.

Starts With Us will build on existing successful programs and adapt them to the needs of our sector to develop a sector-wide action plan. Over time, the action plan will achieve measurable changes in sexist and discriminatory behaviours, as well as attitudes that justify, excuse and minimise gender inequality.

What is primary prevention of violence against women?

Primary prevention of violence against women is long-term work that aims to reach whole populations (in our case, the legal and justice workforce) to change the attitudes, cultural norms, and social and structural conditions that underpin violence against women. It targets the factors that are presented on the bottom rungs of the pyramid graphic provided here.

[Make the Link](#) is a great short video produced by Gippsland Women's Health if you would like to learn more about the relationship between gender inequality and violence against women.



Source: Gippsland Women's Health, "Make The Link"

Why is Starts With Us necessary?

Research and anecdotal evidence shows that the drivers of violence against women are present in the legal and justice sector. Examples of the drivers of violence against women in our sector include:

- High incidence of workplace sexual harassment experienced by womenⁱ
- Men working in the legal profession are much more likely than women to be in leadership roles, are more likely to be working at the Bar, and are less likely to take on primary caregiving rolesⁱⁱ
- Women are much more likely to experience discrimination for working part time to look after children, are less likely to be able to develop suitable mentors, are likely to be subject to bias and workplace cultural norms that prevent them from progressing, and are less likely to continue in the profession after having childrenⁱⁱⁱ
- The gender pay gap in the legal sector for fulltime employees is 26 per cent — higher than in other comparable sectors^{iv}

Why are you collecting experiences of gender inequality in our sector?

We are gathering professionals' experiences and observations of sexist attitudes and cultural norms, sexual harassment and unfair treatment related to gender for a discussion paper. The paper will shine a light on the gendered drivers of violence against women as they manifest within the Victorian legal and justice sector.

The discussion paper will be widely distributed across our sector, and will form a basis for sector-wide action planning in 2019.

Who is involved in Starts With Us?

Women's Legal Service Victoria is leading the project, in collaboration with prominent sector organisations.

The *Starts With Us* project partners are Federation of Community Legal Centres, Victorian Women Lawyers, and primary prevention specialists Women's Health in the North.

The project Advisory Committee is made up of executives and senior practitioners from organisations such as Victoria Legal Aid, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, and the Department of Justice and Regulation.

Starts With Us is for and by legal and justice practitioners in Victoria. Over time, the project will seek to directly reach and involve the sector's workforce of 34,000 people.

I want to know more about Starts With Us – who can I contact?

For more information about *Starts With Us*, please email lynda@womenslegal.org.au

How do I participate in the research?

If you have worked in the legal and justice sector in Victoria, we want to hear from you.

Please [CLICK HERE](#)

ⁱ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) (2012). *Changing the rules: The experiences of female lawyers in Victoria*, Melbourne: VEOHRC; Papadakis, M. (2016). Sexism is still rife in the legal profession, *The Australian Financial Review*, June 23 2016. Accessed 6.12.2017 : <http://www.afr.com/business/legal/sexismisstillrifeinthelegalprofession20160623gppq5ao>;

ⁱⁱ Law Council of Australia (2013). *The National Attrition and Re-engagement Study Report (NARS)*.

ⁱⁱⁱ *ibid*

^{iv} Victorian Women Lawyers (2016). *Addressing the Gender Pay Gap in the Legal Sector. Fact Sheet 3* <https://vwl.asn.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/VWL020-Fact-sheet-DP4-FS3.pdf>;