GENDER EQUITY COALITION GREATER BENDIGO

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Newsletter - May & June 2026

Welcome to this edition of the Greater Bendigo Gender Equity Coalition Newsletter; a way for us to connect, celebrate progress, and share opportunities to advance gender equity across our community.

The Coalition brings together local government, businesses, education, community and health organisations, community groups and individuals who share a simple but powerful goal: to create a Greater Bendigo where everyone feels safe, respected and valued. Together, we're building momentum for real change, through collaboration, shared learning, and collective advocacy.

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Gender Equity Coalition Updates



GENDER EQUITY COALITION

Register for Free



New Leadership Governance Group Member

We are happy to introduce our newest member of the Coalition's Leadership Governance Group – Kate Wright, the CEO from the **Centre Against Sexual Assault for Central Victoria (CASACV)**. CASACV provide counselling, advocacy, and support services for children, young people, and adults who have experienced sexual violence and abuse across the Loddon Region. They recognise that sexual and gender-based violence is driven by structural inequality, discrimination, and unequal power dynamics. CASACV is committed to the Gender Equity Coalition because by creating fair, inclusive systems and opportunities they can address the drivers of violence and build safer and more equitable communities for all people.







The Loddon Consortium Candlelight Vigil (2026)

6 May 2026 | Bendigo Conservatory Gardens

In the 12 months to 6 May 2026, 77 women and 27 children were killed because of family and gender-based violence, including 24 women and 7 children this year alone.

Community members, partners and frontline workers gathered at the Bendigo Conservatory Gardens on 6 May 2026 for the Loddon Consortium Candlelight Vigil, held as part of National Family and Domestic Violence Remembrance Day. The vigil created space to honour and remember those who have lost their lives to family violence, stand with victim survivors, and recommit to the change needed to end gender-based violence.

On the first Wednesday of May each year, candlelight vigils take place across the country in quiet reflection and solidarity. Locally, the Loddon Consortium for Gender Equality and Violence Prevention brings the community together for this annual event. At this year's vigil, **Centre for Non-Violence** CEO Margaret Augerinos spoke about the importance of remembering lives lost, supporting survivors, and recognising that every death from family violence is preventable. Her message reflected what services are seeing across the region: increasing demand for support and more victim survivors presenting with high levels of risk.

The Centre for Non-Violence continues to advocate for change and urges everyone to believe and support people who disclose family violence. Support is available through Centre for Non-Violence; Centre Against Sexual Assault Central Victoria, Safe Steps, The Orange Door, Djirra, and Rainbow Door.

The Loddon Consortium includes Annie North Women's Refuge, Centre Against Sexual Assault Central Victoria, Centre for Non-Violence, Omnia Community Health and Women's Health Loddon Mallee.

'Doing' Gender Equity

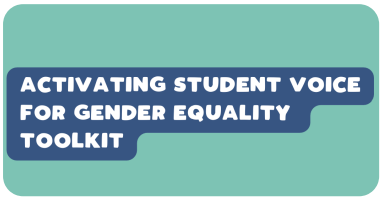
COMMISSION FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Communities of practice are a great way to connect with others in your industry to share learnings and resources as you implement gender equality strategies. Communities of practice are available to:

- The Defined Entity Gender Equality Discussion Group

- Victorian Health Organisation Gender Equity Network
- Water Industry Diversity & Inclusion Steering Committee
- Local Government Community of Practice
- Gender Equality Higher Education Network
- Arts & Cultural Industries Equity and Inclusion

Click here for more info



The **Activating Student Voice for Gender Equality** project (ASVGE) is a gender equality initiative designed to increase student knowledge on gender equality and build student capability to take action to progress gender equality in school settings, through a whole school approach. The project aligns with Victoria's Respectful Relationships (RR) Initiative, with a focus on Grade 5 and Grade 6 students.

Click here for the toolkit



Every three years **Respect Victoria** reports on the progress of the state's work to prevent this violence. The 2025 report – ***Maintain the Momentum*** – shows our collective prevention efforts are working.

Maintain the Momentum captures Victoria's broad-ranging prevention work, from the nation-leading community model to prevent gendered violence, Respect Ballarat, to gender equality programs in schools and sporting clubs, consent legislation, tailored community-led initiatives, work to engage men, social change campaigns and more.

Click here to Read the Report



Everyone deserves respect and dignity as they age, yet relationships can sometimes become harmful. Elder abuse is any act—intentional or neglectful—that causes harm or distress to an older person, often occurring within relationships where there is trust (such as family, carers, or friends). **Ethnic Communities of Victoria, in partnership with Senior Rights Victoria**, has created culturally responsive brochures in 23 languages to help seniors recognise elder abuse and access support services.

Click here to download brochures

Respect Victoria, in partnership with the Zoe Belle Gender Collective, highlights how everyone can support safe and healthy relationships between men and trans women. While all people deserve respectful relationships, harmful social attitudes and stigma can negatively affect how trans women



are treated, making the role of friends, families, and communities essential in promoting respect and challenging harmful beliefs.

Click here to learn more

What's On - Events & Training

Women in Leadership Summit: STEMM

Delivered in national partnership with UN Women Australia, the overarching theme for this year's event is Leading with Momentum. This year, Women in STEMM Australia is represented across three cities in the program and brings together experts and thought leaders to share knowledge, spark innovation, and foster collaboration across STEMM disciplines.

Click here to Register

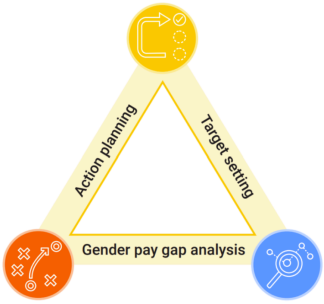
Family Violence Foundations



Our free online learning package will build your knowledge to prevent, identify and respond to family violence. Preventing and responding to family violence is the collective responsibility of a wide variety of professionals. Family Violence Foundations is a key starting point for everyone who has a role to play.

Click here to Register

WGEAs Masterclasses



These classes help workplace leaders to build on their understanding of workplace gender equality and take effective action to improve fairness and equality.

WGEA's gender equality experts run the 90-minute sessions on Microsoft Teams. During the interactive sessions, participants will have an opportunity to ask questions and work in small groups to get hands-on experience with the topics and concepts. undertaking a comprehensive gender pay gap analysis selecting relevant evidence-informed actions setting targets to track progress.

Click here to Register

Women Unlimited: Leadership Summit



In 2026, this landmark summit convenes leaders navigating ambiguity and transformation at scale. Headlined by global leader Jacinda Ardern, this 2-day event brings together voices who have led with clarity, empathy and courage under pressure – making decisive calls when certainty is limited.

Click here to Register

The LGBTIQ+ Health Australia's Ageing in Difference Conference

Bringing together LGBTIQ+ communities, service providers, policymakers and researchers to explore inclusive ageing and care. The event focuses on improving outcomes for older LGBTIQ+ Australians through policy, practice and lived experience.

Click here to Register

Research & Resources



'I face sexist abuse everyday as a female MP - Misogyny is unacceptable whatever side of the aisle we're on'

Georgie Purcell - Victorian upper house MP for the Animal Justice party, highlights the ongoing misogyny in political discourse that recent 'Ditch the Witch' slurs to Jacinta Allen have emphasised. She also points to the damage that such behaviour causes to younger women choosing to enter politics.



Australians Investing in Women: Natasha Stott Despoja

Ms Natasha Jessica Stott Despoja AO, AC, is a globally recognised leader in gender equality who was appointed a Companion of the Order of Australia in the 2026 King's Birthday Honours for her eminent service to the prevention of domestic, family and sexual violence, to gender equity, and to the promotion of human rights and global systemic change.

Tightening NDIS eligibility will disproportionately affect women – in more ways than you'd expect



Tightening NDIS eligibility is likely to disproportionately disadvantage women because they are more likely to have complex, chronic or less well-understood conditions that are harder to prove under stricter rules. The changes may also deepen existing inequalities, as women with disability generally have lower incomes, higher caring responsibilities and fewer resources to meet the increased burden of proving eligibility and accessing treatment.

Mapping the manosphere: A world first content framework charts how algorithms manipulate young men



A world-first framework that maps how algorithms expose young men to different types of "manosphere" content has been developed. It shows that while overtly toxic content is a small proportion, it is embedded within mainstream content streams and gradually introduced, illustrating how platforms can subtly shape attitudes and beliefs over time.

NSW abolishes good character evidence in sentencing perpetrators of sexual offences



Driven by survivor advocates, New South Wales has abolished the use of "good character" as a mitigating factor when sentencing sexual offenders. This means that courts can no longer reduce sentences based on an offender's reputation or standing in the community, and victim-survivors' re-traumatisation is reduced as they no longer hear perpetrators described as "good people" during court proceedings.

2026-27 Federal Budget: Limited Funding for Family Violence will Cost Lives

The 2026–27 Federal Budget includes some investment in preventing and responding to family violence, but Safe and Equal warns it falls short of what's needed to address the growing crisis. They highlight that without stronger, sustained funding, gaps in services and support systems will continue to put victim survivors at risk.

Prevention is Possible with Tarang Chawla



Men's violence against women is a widespread but preventable issue that requires addressing deeper social norms, power, and systems—not just individual cases. interviewed by the Gender Equality Institute advocate Tarang Chawla highlights the importance of shifting culture and

taking collective responsibility to stop violence before it occurs.



Member spotlight: AFS & Associates

Who is AFS & Associates? One of the largest accounting and advisory firms in regional Victoria. A team of professional accountants and business advisors with a wealth of experience in all facets of business services, audit and assurance, risk, taxation and compliance.

Why did AFS join the GEC? AFS joined the GEC as part of its commitment to building a safe, respectful and equitable workplace. AFS sees ongoing value in being involved in the GEC and its Leadership Governance Group because the learning continues to shape both perspective and practice. The work has highlighted challenges, including the time needed to embed new processes and the difficulty of turning theory into practice, but it has also reinforced the importance of staying curious, learning from others and continuing to improve.

For AFS, this work is not only about compliance, but about building a workplace that benefits from diverse thinking, reflecting the community it serves, and better supporting team member retention and inclusion.

What changes have AFS made in Gender Equity? Participation in the GEC has helped AFS to take a more strategic approach to gender equity, with stronger focus on shared policies, practical action and leadership commitment. It has also provided valuable exposure to other organisations' ideas and experiences, broadening thinking and keeping gender equity visible across the firm.

AFS has strengthened several gender equity processes - including more robust WGEA reporting, reduced bias in recruitment and performance review, introduction of paid parental leave, and improved flexibility for returning team members. The firm has

also developed a public gender pay gap statement and elevated gender equity at leadership level.

To view **AFS & Associates Gender Pay Gap Employer Statement - Workplace Gender Equality Agency – February 2026**

E-News

ANROWS - May
Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector - May
Gender and Disaster Australia - June
Gender Equity Victoria - June
intouch - May
Our Watch - May
Safe + Equal PiP Bulletin - May
Victorian Pride Centre - May

Joining the GEC

Separate Pathways exist for organisations and individuals to join the Coalition. A dedicated organisational pathway ensures the relationship is held by the organisation itself—supporting continuity beyond changes in staff or leadership. **Organisations EOI to Join HERE**.

A separate option for individuals allows people to join without needing a workplace or club affiliation, offering a quicker and more streamlined process with fewer barriers to participation. **Individuals Join HERE.**

Community Engagement Groups



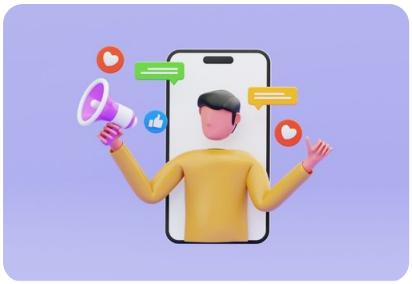
The GEC have held two Community Engagement sessions. GEC members have decided to focus on the following three groups/topics:

- Involving & Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equity
- Celebrating and Creating inclusive leadership in workplaces and community
- GEC Communications & Promotions

If you would like to join a group or contribute to an initiative - please **Contact Us.**

Communications and Promotions Working Group

The Communications and Promotions Working Group will have their inaugural meeting in June. Thank you to those who have generously joined the group. If you are interested in joining the



Communications and Promotions Working Group please **Contact Us.**

Member Spotlight

You are invited to share your stories, projects, or actions, big or small, that are helping to create more inclusive, respectful spaces.

Your experiences can inspire others and highlight the collective progress we're making together. Let's highlight the amazing gender equity efforts happening across our region!

Contact Us

