

Violence against women with disabilities

Rates and types of violence against women with disabilities...

- Gender-based and disability-based discrimination doubles the risk of violence for women and girls with disabilities as compared to women without disabilities.
- Women with disabilities experience all types of violence at higher rates, with increased severity and for longer than other women.¹
- Men who use violence often target women who they see as less powerful, such as women with barriers to communicate to others what has happened to them and those restricted in their physical movement.
- Over one-third of women with disabilities experience some form of intimate partner violence.²
- In mental health inpatient services, a survey found that 45 per cent of women experienced sexual assault and more than 80 per cent lived in fear of being abused, while 67 per cent of women reported harassment during admission.³
- Many women experience social isolation as both a risk factor for, and a consequence of, violence. Some perpetrators use social isolation as a form of controlling behaviour in itself.
- Isolation can be compounded for women living rurally or remotely, women who are culturally isolated and for older women.⁴

Women with Disabilities Victoria's research and contribution to the recent Royal Commission into Family Violence ensured the voices and experiences of women with disabilities were heard. Women with Disabilities Victoria continues to work with community organisations and all levels of government to ensure the recommendations of the Royal Commission are implemented.

Do you work with women with disabilities?

Voices Against Violence research

The [Voices Against Violence Research Project](#) is an investigation of women's experiences of violence and support systems.

A review of 100 women's files at the [Office of the Public Advocate](#) found:

- 45 of the 100 women reported experiencing violence from a total of 89 perpetrators.
- the most commonly reported forms of violence were psychological, physical, sexual, controlling behaviour and economic abuse.
- impairment-related abuse included actions such as withholding medication and disability aids.

These numbers are particularly stark when we consider that violence against women is an under-reported crime.⁵

See also our [Position Paper on Violence Against Women with Disabilities](#).

“ If we could change one thing, it should be to make sure that no violence happens and that if it does, people are safe to talk about it.” Fiona, WDV member

The findings from Women with Disabilities Victoria's Voices Against Violence research informed 21 recommendations for government and services.

To prevent and respond to violence...

- **Listen to women with disabilities:** women report that the most important help they received was that people listened to them.
- **Empower women:** representation of women in staff, on boards and in all levels of decision making is a critical way to reduce discrimination and break down power imbalances.
- **Provide accessible information on rights and services:** “Unless you know the systems you don't know what to ask for and you don't have any power.” Sam, WDV member.
- **Find out about services in your area:** we need to work together to remove barriers for women with disabilities to access safety and justice.
- **Understand the causes of violence against women with disabilities:** layers of power and discrimination combine with negative stereotypes.
- **Address discrimination:** environments and attitudes are often disabling. Take steps to reduce the access barriers that you can see.

For women with disabilities

Our Right to Safety and Respect

The [Our Right to Safety and Respect Project](#) was developed by Women with Disabilities Victoria so that women with disabilities can access safe information that builds their confidence and knowledge to identify and seek support if experiencing violence and abuse.

The project includes a video resource and video guide for women with disabilities about violence, abuse, safety and respect. The project also

includes guidelines for organisations developing resources with women with disabilities about safety from violence and abuse.

Are you experiencing violence?

“ Go to a... women's organisation (or someone you can trust) that is likely to believe you. 'Cause that's the first thing you want... There's nothing worse than going to somebody and they don't believe you, and then you often stop there and you don't follow it through. The other thing, for people with disabilities, be strong in yourself and know that what you're feeling, if it's feeling wrong, then it is wrong.” Michelle⁶

Contacts for support and information

Emergency: Victoria Police
Phone: 000

Women needing help or referral for family violence crisis: Safe Steps Family Violence Response Centre (24 hour)
Phone: 1800 015 188
Email: safesteps@safesteps.org.au
Website: <http://safesteps.org.au/>

Family violence outreach services support safety planning for safety at home or when planning to leave violence. They also offer secondary consultation. Find your local outreach service: <http://dvrcv.org.au/prevention/referrals>

People who have experienced sexual assault: find the nearest Centre Against Sexual Assault, <https://www.casa.org.au/contact-us/>

Or for a 24 hour sexual assault counselling service:
Phone: 1800 806 292
Email: ahcasa@thewomens.org.au
Website: <http://sacl.com.au>

Men concerned about their behaviour at home: Men's Referral Service
Phone: 1300 766 491
Website: <http://mrs.org.au/>

About Women with Disabilities Victoria

Women with Disabilities Victoria is an organisation run by women with disabilities, for women with disabilities. We aim to advance real social and economic inclusion for women with disabilities in Victoria.

For more information, see our [About Women with Disabilities Victoria Factsheet](#), or look at our website: www.wdv.org.au/

Membership is open to both individuals and to organisations who share our aims, and is free for women with disabilities.

<https://www.wdv.org.au/get-involved/membership/>



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- 1 State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, (May 2016), 'A discussion paper of the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017–2020', p. 9.
 - 2 *ibid.*
 - 3 Victorian Mental Illness Awareness Council (VMIAC), 'Zero Tolerance for Sexual Assault: A safe admission for women', 2013.
 - 4 Healey, Lucy. 'Voices Against Violence: Paper 2: Current Issues in Understanding and Responding to Violence Against Women with Disabilities.' Women with Disabilities Victoria, Office of the Public Advocate, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria, 2013.

5 *ibid.*

- 6 Women with Disabilities Australia, University of New South Wales and People with Disabilities Australia, 'Stop the Violence: Improving Service Delivery for Women and Girls with disabilities.' 2013.