# Taking action:

## Examples of actions to prevent and reduce gender and disability inequality

Violence against women is prevalent across our society and is driven by gender and other intersecting forms on inequality. Violence against women occurs across all ages, socio-economic groups, geographic locations and cultural and faith backgrounds. However, evidence shows that some women are disproportionately affected and face additional barriers to seeking support. Women with disabilities experience all forms of violence at higher rates, increased severity and for longer than women without disabilties(State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services ). This means it is important to understand and address how gender and disability inequality come together to shape women with disabilities’ experiences of violence.

Evidence shows that there are actions that can be taken to prevent violence against women and reduce gender and disability inequality (Our Watch, 2015). In Australia, *Change the Story*, the national shared framework for preventing violence against women, sets out the evidence base for violence prevention, as well as what essential actions are required to stop violence before it occurs.

The table below sets out these essential actions as well as what these might look like when focusing specifically on preventing violence against women with disabilities.

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| **Essential actions to prevent violence against women (Our Watch, 2015)** | **Essential actions to prevent violence against women with disabilities** |
| Challenge condoning of violence against women | Challenge attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, systems and practices that condone violence against women with disabilities |
| Promote women’s independence and decision-making in public life and relationships | Ensure women with disabilities are supported to make their own decisions to the greatest extent possible in all areas of life |
| Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles | Promote positive images and role models of people with disabilities and challenge gender and disability stereotypes |
| Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys | Encourage respectful and equal relations with and among people with disabilities and the broader community |
| Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life | Promote and normalise gender and disability equality in public and private life |

### Examples of what this might look like in your workplace

There are many opportunities to put each of the essential actions into place in your workplace. Below, you will see examples of what each of the essential actions could look like in practice. This is not an exhaustive list – we encourage you to think about what other ways you can take action in your workplace to prevent and reduce gender and disability inequality.

#### Challenge attitudes, beliefs, behaviours, systems and practices that condone violence against women with disabilities

* All staff should be aware of how gender and disability inequality can occur in your work and workplace, and what they can do to prevent this. This includes understanding family violence, access and inclusion, unconscious bias, and bystander action.
* Speak out when you see people excusing, minimising or justifying violence against women with disabilities, including in the media, popular culture, advertising and entertainment.
* Challenge attitudes that excuse or minimise violence perpetrated by men with disabilities, including the belief that this is part of expressing masculinity.
* Clearly state in all workplace policies, procedures and practices that violence against women with disabilities is a human rights violation, is driven by gender and disability inequality, and that perpetrators will be held accountable.
* Develop a process for dealing with complaints around gender and disability inequality and ensure that all complaints are considered and responded to as quickly as possible.

#### Ensure women with disabilities are supported to make their own decisions to the greatest extent possible in all areas of life

* Advocate and support the independence and informed decision-making of women with disabilities across all areas of their lives, including education, communication, transportation and finance.
* The voices of those most impacted by discrimination and inequity should be at the centre of your work and should play an active role in shaping how your organisation takes action. Consider how you will engage and consult with a range of people, including women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, or members of the LGBTIQ community.
* Ensure that all projects, programs and services are able to meet the specific needs of victims/survivors of violence, including those with disabilities.
* Promote programs that develop women with disabilities’ livelihood skills so they can earn an income and achieve financial independence.
* Empower women with disabilities through leadership development and increased participation in decision-making at all levels, including in the home, in the workplace and within governments.
* Support women and men with disabilities to make informed choices about their sexual and reproductive lives, including access to education, contraception and parenting.
* Respect and facilitate women and men with disabilities’ right to choose a same sex support worker as per section 24 & 26 of the Equal Opportunity Act.
* Have a clear policy on how your organisation supports the rights of people with disabilities to exercise ‘dignity of risk’ and personal freedom, including how to balance this with duty of care.
* Undertake a regular review of your workplace’s policies, practices and systems to identify opportunities to make your workplace and work practice more gender and disability equitable, including identifying any barriers that may limit how women with disabilities are able to access your service.

#### Promote positive images and role models of people with disabilities and challenge gender and disability stereotypes

* Role model positive images and messages in your work and workplace about having a disability.
* Challenge negative or disempowering gender and disability stereotypes, including supporting staff in your workplace to identify any unconscious biases or beliefs they may hold.
* Promote and celebrate the diversity of people with disabilities, including different kinds of disabilities as well as gender, sexuality, age, faith, race and ethnicity.
* Review your current communications and marketing to identify opportunities for improvement, including how you represent gender and disability in your imagery and advertising and whether your language reflects best practice inclusive language.
* Take active steps to diversify your workforce, such as adopting affirmative action policies and quotas to increase the representation of women and people with disabilities across all levels of seniority.
* Look at the informal division of labour in your workplace, such as who cleans the office kitchen, who takes minutes during meetings, and who undertakes additional unpaid work such as organising staff social events. If this does not reflect an equitable division of labour, it may require clear direction from management to ensure that women are not always tasked with undertaking this additional unpaid labour.

#### Encourage respectful and equal relations with and among people with disabilities and the broader community

* Ensure both your clients and staff have access to and understand accessible information about the rights of people with disabilities regarding bodily autonomy, personal space and boundaries, sex, consent, relationships and parenting.
* Engage men and boys with disabilities in gender and disability equality activities, such as respectful relationships education and promoting healthy, equal masculinities and femininities.
* Provide people with disabilities with safe and supportive spaces to express their sexuality and sexual identity without judgement.
* Promote and normalise gender and disability equality in public and private life
* Ensure you organisation’s internal and external public image reflects your commitment to gender and disability equity.
* Support and encourage your partner organisations and those you do business with to reflect the same commitment and standards.
* Be a public advocate for gender and disability equality, including in your media profile and social media presence. This includes celebrating significant days such as International Women’s Day, International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, Ochre Ribbon Day, International Day of People with Disability and Human Rights Day.
* Engage in advocacy to address structural discrimination or inequity that disadvantages people based on gender and/or disability, including submissions to parliamentary inquiries and commissions and supporting public campaigns for national or state legislative or policy change.

### Getting started

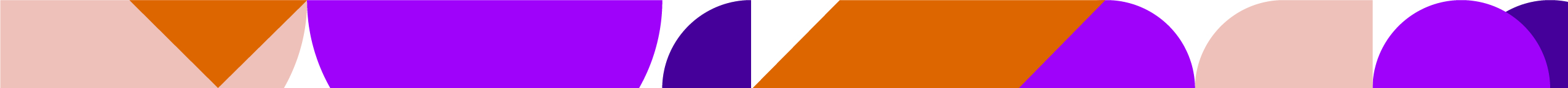
There are many ways you can start to take action in your workplace.

* Review the examples in this handout and identify which might be appropriate for your organisation.
* You might like to start by picking one simple action from each section that you can get started on right away.
* You might also like to identify which actions require more time and effort, and plan out what steps need to occur for this action to take place.
* Think about who needs to be involved in order to give the action credibility, authority and influence, and how to bring them on board. This includes ensuring the voices of women with disabilities are at the heart of how you undertake action in your workplace.
* **Women with Disabilities Victoria** offers training and resources to support workplaces to be gender and disability equitable and prevent violence against women with disabilities. Visit our website for more information [www.wdv.org.au](http://www.wdv.org.au/).
* Additional information about preventing violence against women can be found at:
* **Our Watch,** a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia. [www.ourwatch.org.au](http://www.ourwatch.org.au)
* **Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS),** the national research organisation on addressing violence against women and their children.[www.anrows.org.au](http://www.anrows.org.au)
* **Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV),** a statewide Victorian organisation working to build the capability of professionals, organisations and systems to prevent and respond to violence against women.www.dvrcv.org.au

### References

State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services, (May 2016), ‘A discussion paper of the Victorian State Disability Plan 2017-2020.’

Our Watch, ANROWS and VicHealth (2015) Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia



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