

Women's Health Services

Disability Audit Tool

Services and Participation

Events and Activities



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Women's Health Services Disability Audit Tool

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Introduction

Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV) is the peak body of women with disabilities in Victoria.

Women with Disabilities Victoria:

- Provides systemic support, advocacy and resources to women with disabilities in leadership roles.
- Works with community services and organisations to ensure they are inclusive of women with disabilities.
- Ensures services for people with disabilities consider a gender perspective that is responsive to women with disabilities.
- Works in partnership with other disability and women's organisations.
- Encourages and undertakes research on issues affecting women with disabilities.
- Provides a voice for women with disabilities to influence government policy and legislation.

Our Vision, Mission and Values

We are an organisation of women with disabilities in Victoria with a diverse and growing membership. Our members have a range of disabilities, backgrounds, lifestyles and ages.

Our Vision

A world where all women are respected and can fully experience life.

Our Mission

To advance real social and economic inclusion for women with disabilities in Victoria, we will:

- Be a voice for women with disabilities.
- Create opportunities for women with disabilities to be visible and to be heard in their communities.
- Build partnerships to deliver the best results for women with disabilities.
- Engage the community to challenge attitudes and myths about women with disabilities.

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Women with Disabilities Victoria's Prevention of Violence Capacity Building Project

Context

Women's Health Services (WHS) are required to develop the capacity of local and regional partners (for regional WHS), and relevant state wide and other relevant sector partners (for state wide WHS), to further strengthen their current work in preventing family violence and all forms of violence against women.

The Victorian strategy on violence prevention, 'Free from Violence' (2017) notes that while violence against women and family violence have their origins in gender inequality and discrimination, "inequalities resulting in racism, ageism, ableism and heterosexism can also, on their own or in combination, influence patterns of violence perpetrated in society" (State of Victoria 2017). Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV) observes that geography can further exacerbate these patterns, due to differential availability of infrastructure and social isolation.

WDV is undertaking a project to increase the capacity of women's health services (WHS) to include the rights, perspectives and participation of women with disabilities in to their current and future prevention of violence against women (PVAW) activities. The project responds to three key issues in relation to PVAW and women with disabilities:

1. Intersecting factors of gender and disability inequality are key drivers for women with disabilities who experience violence at a higher rate than women without disabilities.
2. Regional primary prevention of violence against women strategies and plans can be strengthened to address both the gender and disability drivers of violence and avoid marginalising women with disabilities.

3. Women with disabilities and disability organisations can be engaged in regional primary prevention planning efforts, increasing the effectiveness and reach of strategies.

The project undertakes capacity-building work with identified WHS and their local government partners. WDV in partnership with WHS project participants supports shared learning across the remaining women's health services through communities of practice (CoP) and networks, resources and other activities, including the piloting of tools and resources for subsequent sharing with Victoria's women's health sector and their local and regional organisational partners.

Key Facts About Disability and Gender

Who Are Women with Disabilities?

Nearly one in every five Victorian women has a disability. We are every woman. We are doctors, lawyers, health and community service workers, playwrights and teachers.

We are mothers and carers, actively sexual and celibate, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and heterosexual. We live on farms, in regional communities, in urban high rise and in the suburbs. We follow football and dance, go to TAFE and university. We value public transport and accessible buildings.

We are religious, from many faiths and non-religious, from many perspectives. We are diverse in our ideologies, but passionate about our right to be recognised as ordinary women... with a disability.

What Barriers Do We Face?

We encounter discrimination on many levels, each of which restricts our opportunities for equal participation in economic, social, educational and political life.

Some women with disabilities experience multiple layers of discrimination based on their race, age, gender and sexual orientation, as well as their disability. We are often ignored in government legislation, policies and programs and our needs are not adequately recognised within community organisations and services.

We have traditionally been excluded from the mainstream women's social movement, whilst issues of concern to women with disabilities have not been addressed by the broader disability advocacy movement.

On all measures of social and economic participation (housing security, income, employment and education), women with disabilities are disadvantaged compared to women and men without disabilities. We also experience higher levels of disadvantage than men with disabilities when it comes to employment and income levels. As women with disabilities, we lack access to adequate health care and other services for ourselves and our children, particularly when health centres fail to provide a welcoming, inclusive environment with accessible parking, accessible toilets and accessible examination tables.

Women with disabilities are targeted by people who use violence, including by intimate partners. We are also less likely to know about or have access to services responding to violence against women.

Key Facts About Disability and Violence Against Women

- 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.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

The Women's Health Services Disability Audit Tool

The Women's Health Services Disability Audit Tool presented below is part of a suite of resources produced by Women with Disabilities Victoria to support women's health services to build their capacity to include the rights and perspectives of women with disabilities in to PVAW initiatives. In tandem with accompanying disability and Prevention of Violence Against Women (PVAW) needs analysis tools, it has been designed for use by staff of women's health services engaged in the design, implementation and review of programs to prevent violence against women initiated by their organisations or region. It has been piloted by Women's Health East and Women's Health Loddon Mallee through their participation in the Violence Prevention Capacity Building Project in partnership with WDV, funded by the Victorian Government's Office for Women, for whose assistance WDV is very grateful.

Guiding Principles

The Women's Health Services Disability and PVAW Capacity Building project is grounded in a gender transformative approach to change gender norms, structures and practices for a more equal society (Our Watch 2015; Keel et al 2016). It takes an intersectional approach to address the drivers of violence against women and the multiple systems and structures of oppression and discrimination which affect women with disabilities by upholding a human rights approach to disability, as required by the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of people with Disabilities 2006.

The Women's Health Services Disability and Prevention of Violence Against Women project frames its activities within essential actions to prevent violence against women, as advocated by Our Watch (2015). In undertaking the disability audit below, women's health services can shift their communications, processes, operations and physical infrastructure in ways which will:

Women's Health Services Disability Audit Tool

- Challenge condoning of violence against women.
- Promote women's independence and decision-making in public life and relationships.
- Foster positive personal identities and challenge gender stereotypes and roles.
- Strengthen positive, equal and respectful relations between and among women and men, girls and boys.
- Promote and normalise gender equality in public and private life (Our Watch 2015).

In 2017, WDV produced the Inclusive Planning Guidelines for Prevention of Violence Against Women. These guidelines specify a series of actions conducive to inclusive PVAW activities and processes by women's health services. The auditing toolkit addresses the first guideline, Organisational Readiness through Planning and Development (Women with Disabilities Victoria 2017).

Organisational readiness requires focus and reflection on internal processes, systems, culture and work plans. It involves critical examination of the internal environment and external messaging, as well as recognition of the long-term nature of change to transform social structures, organisational culture and processes and physical infrastructure. Similar to gender equality, disability inclusion within organisations will only be achieved by deliberate actions to implement long-term change. It is suggested that the auditing tools and needs analysis tools inform an ongoing process of disability inclusion, using the following strategies:

- Enlisting the support of senior leaders.
- Researching current inclusion activities, systems and resources.
- Developing a vision of what your inclusive organisation and PVAW activities will look like.
- Accessing resources, information and support.
- Communicating throughout your organisation about disability inclusion.
- Building knowledge of disability, barriers to inclusion and prevention of violence against women with disabilities within your organisation.

- Determining priorities for action and incrementally removing barriers to inclusion.
- Improving policies and procedures to reflect disability inclusion.
- Making small changes which will achieve large impact.
- Maintaining momentum and reinforcing the message.
- Role modelling inclusion.
- Building disability inclusion in to expectations of organisational performance.
- Promoting inclusion through internal events and activities.
- Evaluating progress to guide future action (adapted from VicHealth 2018).

The auditing toolkit has been designed to enable reflection on women's health services capacity to create an environment in which disability inclusive PVAW initiatives can occur, as well as identifying existing barriers to inclusion and planning for their removal. In tandem with the needs analysis tools, the auditing tools can assist women's health services to research existing inclusion activities and systems, guide policy development, future planning and evaluation. In undertaking the audit, women's health services can not only increase the inclusivity of their own organisational practices but also role model inclusion for regional partners with whom they work.

Audit Scope

The auditing tool includes material covering an organisation's interactions with staff, partners and the community through events, communications and its role as employer and agent of change, and on the accessibility of an organisation's physical infrastructure and event spaces. The audit structure reflects a staged approach to the transformation necessary for the creation of truly inclusive cultures, practices and environments, with shifts in organisational operations and communications requiring less financial outlay than changes to physical infrastructure, and thus likely to receive greater organisational support in the short to medium term. Furthermore, the suggestions and resources offered throughout the text invite the examination by women's health services staff of

aspects of inclusion through a gender lens, assisting organisations to determine priorities for change and implement short-term changes while devising strategies for longer-term transformation.

The auditing tools present a series of questions on themes of physical access, events, communications, personnel practices and attitudes towards disability. The responses of users of these tools can be used to assess each women's health services' current disability inclusion capacity, strengths and needs, and guide the design of requests for tailored technical assistance and resource provision from WDV if requested in the future.

Disability inclusion is multi-faceted, covering a wide scope of physical infrastructure, organisational processes, and systems. It is suggested that rather than tackling the audit in its entirety, women's health services review the topics covered in the auditing tool and identify areas which they wish to address as part of a staged process of accessibility review, planning and change. This will ensure manageable and realistic action over time. The tool's checklist format allows for multiple forms of utilisation by WHS and other organisations. The audit can be undertaken as an individual written exercise, or via a workshop format. Questions within the toolkit can also be used as guides to organisational discussion, planning and evaluation of disability inclusion.

By responding to the questions within the toolkit, WHS staff can generate an overview of the current state of inclusiveness of their organisation or events in a range of criteria, including physical access and inclusive attitudes and practices. The tool can be used to produce base-line data and to monitor and plan progress towards inclusivity over time, in recognition of the long term nature of much disability inclusion and PVAW work.

The auditing toolkit has been produced in both printable pdf and in accessible MS Word format, the latter to enable its completion electronically by all users, thus modelling an example of accessible document creation.

Data Collection and Presentation

Users of the auditing tool are able to generate their own snapshot report using the template provided in each section of the toolkit, and determine and plan to fill gaps in current organisational systems, processes and infrastructure according to their organisational and regional strategic priorities and resources.

Audit Instructions

The auditing toolkit comprises a series of self-contained topic areas, in which questions on various aspects of accessibility for people with disabilities are posed, alongside suggestions and resources to improve accessibility in the area under discussion. These topic areas are listed in separate resources for convenience. The resources have been derived from freely available online Australian government and non-government sources, with information from commercial publications only being cited if deemed to contain material applicable to the Women's Health Services context. All links were operable at the time of this toolkit's compilation.

Answers to each question can be entered in to the first column below each question, with N/A entered if the question does not apply to your organisation. If applicable, in the second column, please enter a response indicating a timeframe for the issue's resolution.

The reflective questions in each topic area are designed to encourage thinking about your organisation's current level of accessibility. They do not need to be answered within the tool. Rather, responses to the questions in the checklist will allow an assessment of the organisation's actual accessibility compared to respondents' initial reflections.

Respondents are also invited to develop a summary of findings derived from the completed topic areas, and complete the sections asking about the current situation and future planning to enhance disability inclusion.

Prevention of Violence Against Women Disability Audit

Services and Participation

This tool covers inclusive engagement, interactions, service delivery and participation of women with disabilities within the context of your organisation. The questions apply to the multiple contexts in which women with disabilities may interact, including accessing events and consultations, as visitors, volunteers and employees.

Events and Activities

Questions

The questions below relate to the accessibility of events held by your organisation. These activities may involve both internal or external participants, may take place within your premises or be held off-site. Importantly, the questions relating to physical accessibility elsewhere in this tool apply to off-site event spaces, as well as the questions listed below.

Reflective question:

How accessible do you believe your organisation's events are for people with diverse disabilities?

Question 1:

Which formats and methods are used to promote events/programs?

Notes:

Events and activities are best promoted using a range of accessible communications to ensure maximum reach across the community. Women with disabilities may experience barriers in accessing online resources due to cost of technology or monitoring by a current or former partner. Use of a range of formats, including plain English and community radio can widen the reach of information concerning your organisation's events. Resources about accessible

communication can be found in the tool on communication and in the resource list at the end of this tool

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 2:

How do participants make their access requirements known to event organisers?

Notes:

It is best practice to offer event participants the choice to nominate accessibility requirements as part of the registration process. This not only conveys your organisation's commitment to inclusion but offers autonomy and choice for participants and facilitates planning for event accessibility, e.g. Auslan interpretation.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 3:

How are participants' access requirements recorded?

Notes:

Documenting and collating participants' access requests assists staff to ensure events are delivered accessibly according to the expressed needs of participants, in recognition of their equality and value as event participants.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 4:

How can event organisers be contacted by participants needing assistance before or during an event?

Notes:

Event participants with disabilities may wish to optimise their independence and agency by discussing access needs, or require assistance to locate your event. It is best practice to include a direct method for contacting event organisers, operational prior to and during the event, such as a telephone number which is

responded to by a staff member. A link to a social media site or email address on its own is not an adequate means of direct contact.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 5:

What is the process for choosing event venues?

Notes:

In order to enhance the participation of women with disabilities, it is best practice to ensure event venues and spaces (including entertainment and other venues used for informal events) comply with accessibility standards. Event participants with disabilities will value the ability to access the event venue independently, basing their decision to attend on their interest in the event rather than the accessibility or otherwise of its venue. The resources listed in this tool, such as <https://www.and.org.au/pages/event-checklist.html> suggest that off-site venues are checked to ensure accessibility features such as automatic doors and hygiene facilities are operational during the time of your event, e.g. accessible lifts and bathrooms are unlocked and automatic doors can be accessed from outside without assistance.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 6:

How is venue accessibility checked?

Notes:

This can be undertaken in partnership with women with disabilities and using the material in this tool relating to physical access, ensuring that the expertise and time of women with disabilities undertaking venue checks is appropriately acknowledged and remunerated. Women with disabilities can offer useful insights regarding venue accessibility, as well as their perceptions of safety within and outside the venue.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 7:

How easily can participants locate the venue and event?

Notes:

It is useful to provide the event venue's physical address, and as much information as possible to ensure participants can locate the venue, and to offer assistance to locate the event if no reception is available at the building foyer. This practice promotes women's independence and safety, avoiding dependence and possible risks due to reliance on perpetrators of abuse for assistance.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 8:

How is the event space lit?

Notes:

Consistent and even lighting and avoiding flashing or strobe lighting ensures best access. Spotlights, glare, strobe and flash lighting, and the use of halogen

and fluorescent lighting each contribute to various forms of difficulty or distress for people with diverse sensory or neurological disabilities. Environments which are as comfortable as possible for event participants enhance participants' engagement, autonomy and independence in public life.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 9:

Describe venue wall and floor surfaces?

Notes:

Colour contrast between floors and walls allow these to be distinguishable by people with vision impairments. Venue acoustics are impacted by the types of floor and wall surfaces, with hard walls and floors contributing to echoing and noisy environments making hearing difficult and contributing to heightened anxiety and agitation.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 10:

Dimensions of turning space within seating rows/displays? (in metres)

Notes:

Adequate turning space makes it possible for people using wheelchairs to manoeuvre in and out of seating rows or access other facilities independently at your event, such as display tables. This increases participants' public agency and autonomy.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 11:

How many spaces within the seating area are available to accommodate wheelchairs?

Notes:

Seating aisles need space to accommodate event attendees to fit their wheelchairs in to the seating area, and the spaces need to be located in an area offering an adequate view of the podium or presentation area. Presenters using wheelchairs will also need space to access the presentation area from their wheelchairs. Ensuring adequate seating space for participants using wheelchairs publicly demonstrates the equality of all event participants.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 12:

What is the distance from the wheelchair spaces to the stage/podium?

Notes:

The spaces designated for participants seated in wheelchairs need to be situated close enough and in direct line of sight to the podium or presentation area to facilitate equal access to the activity on stage, equal to that enjoyed by participants using regular seating.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 13:

How is the stage/podium accessed?

Notes:

Access to the presentation area via a clear path, free from steps ensures the participation of people with disabilities as speakers and presenters at your events, promoting the expectation that women with disabilities will contribute to events in this way. This challenges gendered expectations of women with disabilities as recipients rather than experts.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 14:

How can participants receive assistance during events?

Notes:

Factoring and planning for the availability of staff and volunteers with adequate training to offer general assistance to event participants with disabilities ensures equal participation by event attendees with disabilities, without needing to rely on other event participants or members of women's families or support networks. On-site support ensures that women with disabilities can actively choose to attend your event based on interest rather than their access to support.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 15:

What is the distance of the accessible bathrooms from the main event space?
(in metres)

Notes:

Having accessible hygiene facilities in close proximity to your main event space, accessed by a clear path of travel ensures participants with disabilities can take part in your event without undue anxiety regarding access to bathrooms. The resources at the end of this tool relating to accessible event planning recommend people with disabilities be afforded priority access to these facilities, and that the facilities are open and available to participants at the time of the event. It is also important to recognise women’s choice to access safe, women-only facilities.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 16:

How far (in metres) from the event venue to water stations and the dog run?
(for assistance dogs)

Notes:

The availability of these facilities ensures that users of assistance animals, such as guide dogs can provide them with adequate care during the event. Budgeting for temporary artificial grass will be necessary if grassed areas are not available in close proximity to the event space. It is best practice to inform event participants of the existence of facilities for the care of assistance animals. Providing for trained assistance animals enhances the independence and autonomy of some event participants who choose to use them. Consult <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/disability-rights/projects/assistance-animals-and-disability-discrimination-act-1992-cth> for further information regarding anti-discrimination legislation and assistance animals.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 17:

Location of quiet/breakout spaces within the event venue?

Notes:

These spaces are beneficial for participants with diverse disabilities, offering a quiet area away from the noise or stimulation of the event space. Quiet spaces offer a place to rest or to attend to other disability related needs. The availability of safe, women-only spaces ensures that women can locate a place of safety, out of bounds to perpetrators of violence, e.g. an ex-partner who has followed them to the event.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Question 18:

How does your organisation ensure event accessibility for participants who are deaf, deaf-blind, or have hearing impairments?

Notes:

Participants who experience difficulty hearing can more effectively access your event via augmented communication systems, more details are available from: [http://www.hearingservices.gov.au/wps/portal/hso/site/eligibility/abouthearing/telecoils hearing loops/!ut/p/a1/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfGjzOK9A03ND0NjLwtwvzdDBwd_UJ9vNxMjAwcDYEKIvEoMDAITr8BDuBoQEi_FxEWGBX50vu_m60cVJJZk6GbmpeXrRyQm5ZeWZKQmFmXmpetHIKTmpCbnZ-](http://www.hearingservices.gov.au/wps/portal/hso/site/eligibility/abouthearing/telecoils%20hearing%20loops/!ut/p/a1/04_Sj9CPykssy0xPLMnMz0vMAfGjzOK9A03ND0NjLwtwvzdDBwd_UJ9vNxMjAwcDYEKIvEoMDAITr8BDuBoQEi_FxEWGBX50vu_m60cVJJZk6GbmpeXrRyQm5ZeWZKQmFmXmpetHIKTmpCbnZ-)

YUx00F4nPy8wuK9cP1o_AaD_IeWAEe9xfkhkZU-XgYZDoqKgIAkhLqvg!!/dl5/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/.

Auslan is the language of the Australian Deaf community. More information can be found at <http://www.auslan.org.au/>. More information about communication methods used by people who are deaf-blind can be found at <https://www.deafblind.org.au/deafblind-information/communication/communication-methods/>. It is best practice to use certified Auslan interpreters and to budget for the cost of interpretation. More information about interpreters can be found at <https://aslia.com.au/>. Bookings for Auslan interpreters can be made through a number of commercial providers.

Response:

Timeframe for Resolution:

Accessibility of events occurs when people with disabilities can participate fully in the activity safely and to an extent equal to that of other participants, without worrying about meeting their disability related needs or relying on other event participants to do so. Making provision for event accessibility enhances the autonomy of women with disabilities and enhances their public perception as

equal contributors to community life. The references and resources at the end of this tool provide further information and advice.

Summary

The questions above relate to the knowledge and skills of staff in your organisation to create and maintain a disability inclusive environment.

Audit Response Summary

Future Actions

Recommendations

Short Term:

Medium Term:

Long Term:

Key Learning

For (name organisation):

For other partner organisations (if relevant):

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