

Women with Disabilities Victoria (WDV) welcomes the publication of the Victorian Government's Inquiry into Women's Pain report, *Bridging the Gender Pain Gap*, to inform improved model of care and service delivery for Victorian women experiencing pain and living with pain conditions.

We thank the Victorian Government for making space to recognise and address the pain inequality experienced by women and gender diverse people with disabilities.

Reinforcing impacts of pain inequality

The report echoes what our members have long been telling us: pain inequality is a systemic failure – driven by gaps in health services and policy, gender-biased research, and entrenched sexist and ableist attitudes in healthcare and the wider community.

It also confirms that the combined impacts of pain, disability, and gender contribute to women's social isolation, reduced economic participation, and increases the barriers to women with disabilities gaining and fulfilling social and community roles. These effects are mutually reinforcing and the impacts far reaching.

The report highlighted that:

- Women and girls with disabilities reported higher levels of pain intensity than women and girls without disabilities,
- Women with disabilities and LGBTIQ+ respondents said that high costs of healthcare affected their ability to seek help for their pain compared to women without disabilities or non-LGBTIQ+ respondents,
- Women and girls with disabilities living with pain had higher negative impact across all areas of their lives surveyed,
- Women and girls with disabilities reported higher levels of poor mental health due to their pain than women and girls without disabilities,
- Experience of healthcare discrimination based on gender, sex, sexuality, age, disability, weight and race which diminished trust in the system and deterred them from accessing further treatment.

The report highlights the overrepresentation of women and girls with disabilities living with pain across all areas of their lives. To effectively address and reduce the

gender pain gap, integrating disability inclusion into systemic change efforts is essential.

Opportunities and recommendations

WDV Member Insight

“We are the experts in living with our pain!! That we already do so much to manage our pain, so don’t dismiss our efforts. Your role is to build on my current pain [management], not dismantle it.”

WDV has the expertise and experience to work alongside Victorian Government and other women’s health services and mainstream health providers to address: the intersection of pain and disability, systemic ableism in care settings, and the need to integrate trauma-informed practice into all pain management and support responses.

The report has highlighted the urgent need to apply a disability and gender lens to pain care and support. WDV believes it is essential to use lived experience knowledge to map existing enablers and barriers within pain management and support pathways available for women and gender diverse people with disabilities living with pain across Victoria. The mapping will identify the specific areas where work is required to address barriers and promote good practices, enabling interventions that will create a high impact change.

In alignment with the report’s recommendation, deliver training and education to healthcare practitioners and services, promote intersectional care practices, provide access and inclusive pain management, and supporting the building of a disability-inclusive and gender-responsive organisational culture.

To be successful this work must be led by women and gender diverse people with disabilities living with pain.

This initiative will complement and enhance other women health initiatives and the recommendations within the report to improve access to appropriate pain management and support for all Victorians.