



National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

April 2023



Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

1. ABOUT JESUIT SOCIAL SERVICES

Jesuit Social Services has been working for more than 40 years delivering support services and advocating for improved policies, legislation and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities where every individual can play their role and flourish.

We are a social change organisation working with some of the most marginalised individuals and communities, often experiencing multiple and complex challenges. Jesuit Social Services works where the need is greatest and where we have the capacity, experience and skills to make the most difference.

Our services span Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory where we support more than 57,000 individuals and families annually.

Our service delivery and advocacy focuses on the following key areas:

- **Justice and crime prevention** – people involved with the justice system
- **Mental health and wellbeing** – people with multiple and complex needs including mental illness, trauma, homelessness and complex bereavement
- **Settlement and community building** – recently arrived immigrants and refugees, and disadvantaged communities
- **Education, training and employment** – people with barriers to sustainable employment
- **Gender Justice** – providing leadership on the reduction of violence and other harmful behaviours prevalent among boys and men, and building new approaches to improve their wellbeing and keep families and communities safe.
- **Ecological justice** – inviting discussion on what practices, policies and actions can be taken by governments, individuals, organisations and the community services sector within Australia, to build an ecologically just society.

Research, advocacy and policy are coordinated across all program and major interest areas of Jesuit Social Services. Our advocacy is grounded in the knowledge, expertise and experiences of program staff and participants, as well as academic research and evidence. We seek to influence policies, practices, legislation and budget investment to positively influence people's lives and improve approaches to address long term social challenges. We do this by working collaboratively with governments, business and the community sector to build coalitions and alliances around key issues, and building strong relationships with key decision-makers and the community.

Our Learning and Practice Development Unit builds the capacity of our services through staff development, training and evaluation, as well as articulating and disseminating information on best practice approaches to working with participants and communities across our programs.

For further information, contact:

Julie Edwards, CEO, Jesuit Social Services

T: 03 9421 7600

E: julie.edwards@jss.org.au

Jesuit Social Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of all the lands on which Jesuit Social Services operates and pay respect to their Elders past and present. We express our gratitude for their love and care of people, community, land and all life.

2. SUBMISSION

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality (the Strategy), previously through the Strategy's Phase One Consultations last year, and now, through responding to the Discussion Paper. We are a social change organisation, with a strong focus on gender justice, that has been working with men and boys for over 45-years. Our key priorities within this include addressing the root causes of male violence and harmful behaviours, improving men's wellbeing and relationships, and promoting healthier masculinities. [The Men's Project](#) was established to lead this agenda.

Gender stereotypes are fundamental to gender inequalities. This is demonstrated in the '[Man Box' Study](#) conducted by The Men's Project. The study, based on attitudes and beliefs of young Australian men of what it means to be a 'real man', found that most men feel significant social pressure to conform to rigid and outdated ideas of masculinity. These beliefs are underpinned by patriarchal systems. The [Man Box Study](#) found that men who held strong patriarchal beliefs were more likely to perpetrate violence against women. Men in the Man Box were over 20 times as likely to self-report sexually harassing a woman and over 14 times as likely to self-report the use of physical violence. [Challenging patriarchal beliefs](#) is at the core of violence prevention.

Men conforming to gender norms comes at a real cost to everyone, particularly women, and contributes to the inequality and risks to safety they face in the workplace, the home and elsewhere. It is important to identify the gendered root causes of inequality, including rigid adherence to gender norms, condoning of violence towards women and cultures of masculinity that emphasise male dominance and control.

For instance, the disproportionate burden of care on women can be linked to the belief that men are the breadwinners and women the homemakers. A [study](#) by the Australian National University found that when women earned more than men within their relationship, there was increased reporting of intimate partner violence of 35 percent and emotional abuse of 20 per cent experienced by women. Challenging this gender norm increased male partner violence.

Stereotypical gender norms also have detrimental [impacts on boys and men](#) – particularly those who already experience disadvantage, or have experienced discrimination due to their race, ethnicity and cultural background. In particular, First Nations boys and men experience a range of these [intersectional inequalities](#). They have poorer educational outcomes, are overrepresented in prisons, have higher mental health concerns, and [lower life expectancy](#). These disadvantages can be exacerbated with geographical remoteness and poverty.

Examples of these negative impacts more generally, that are also reflected in our research, include that [men are most likely to be perpetrators of violence towards men and women alike](#) and that suicide is the [leading cause of death](#) in Australia for 15-44 year olds, three-quarters of which are [men](#).

While most young men feel pressure to conform to these stereotypes, many do not personally endorse them. This diversity among men is reason for hope and should be highlighted as part of efforts to challenge stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man.

In the drafting of a National Strategy, it is fundamental that boys and men are engaged with directly if any meaningful progress is to be made. This is essential to confronting the inequalities both they, and women and girls, face in Australia. Developing this strategy must involve a trauma and culturally informed response, in which the lived experiences and trauma of boys and men, and how this can influence male violence, is acknowledged and recognised. Progressing towards gender equality requires that men must be supported to take responsibility for challenging these attitudes and changing behaviours. This involves building capacity and leadership within the community and the workplace (e.g. our Modelling Respect and Equality Program).

In this, we must also avoid divisive approaches to this debate where men and women are on opposing sides. Efforts to promote gender equality must be embedded into all relevant policy efforts guided by both research

evidence and lived experience. Further, a binary, largely heteronormative focus of gender also risks excluding the intersectional experiences of gender inequality and violence within the LGBTQIA+ community.

The Strategy must be evidence-based and, given they underpin many inequalities, should include the longitudinal tracking of gender norms through the [NCAS](#). Further, data collection should reflect the intersectional experiences of boys and men - such as socioeconomic status, cultural background and geographical location. Mechanisms of accountability and reporting within the Strategy should include a focus on changes in men's attitudes and behaviour that could have a positive impact on all genders.

Achieving gender equality can only occur if we address the gendered drivers and root causes of violence and inequality through work that seeks to engage with men and boys.