



Jesuit
Social Services
Building a Just Society

Northern Territory Gender Equality Strategy

December 2025

Jesuit Social Services: Who we are and what we do

Jesuit Social Services is a social change organisation working to build a just society where all people can thrive. For almost 50 years we have accompanied some of the most disadvantaged members of the community, delivering support services and advocating for improved legislation, policy and resources to achieve strong, cohesive and vibrant communities. We are a national organisation with a significant footprint in Victoria, New South Wales and the Northern Territory.

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.

Our work in the Northern Territory

We have worked in the Northern Territory since 2007 when we accepted an invitation to work collaboratively with the Central and Eastern Arrernte people in Ltyentye Apurte/Santa Teresa and Alice Springs/Mparntwe. Our contribution has grown to include service delivery, community capacity building, policy, research and advocacy.

We deliver pre-sentence Youth Justice Group Conferencing in Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs; are a consortium member with the Katherine Justice Reinvestment project; and deliver training and capacity building for the sector. We also partner with the recently incorporated Yeyekerte in Alice Springs/Mparntwe and are the secretariat for the Climate Justice Alliance Northern Territory.

Through our service delivery, advocacy and relationships, we are acutely aware that the Northern Territory carries disproportionate climate change burden, highlighted recently by data on projected temperature increases showing profound implications for the future across communities and the Territory.¹

¹ Centre for Just Places & Jesuit Social Services. (2025). *Climate justice alliance*, retrieved from <https://cjp.org.au/our-work/enabling-climate-justice/climate-justice-alliance/>.

The Men's Project

Jesuit Social Services established The Men's Project in 2017 to support men and boys to live respectful, accountable and fulfilling lives free from violence and other harmful behaviours. Our three streams of work include:

- Undertaking research to understand the behaviours and underlying attitudes of men and boys including related to violence, child sexual abuse and the wellbeing of men and boys themselves
- Promoting positive change around gender norms related to what it means to be a man in the 21st century as well as building skills to intervene to prevent violence
- Developing innovative ways to stop cycles of violence and harmful behaviour among boys and men.
- Two significant studies undertaken by the Men's Project include the 'Man Box' 2024 study, completed in partnership with Respect Victoria. This study explored the association between adherence to traditional masculine norms (the 'Man Box') and the prevalence of specific forms of violence.

Our Adolescent Man Box study was published in November 2025, the first study in Australia to explore in detail how adolescents aged 14–18 years of all genders perceive and agree with stereotypical masculine norms, and how supporting or rejecting these norms is associated with a range of behaviours and life outcomes for adolescent boys². Findings from these two studies are shared throughout the submission.

² The Men's Project 2025, The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14-18 years, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

Overarching feedback

Jesuit Social Services' feedback on the Northern Territory Gender Equality Strategy draws on our research and practice expertise in primary prevention and early intervention of gender-based violence and domestic, family and sexual violence, and our specific expertise on engaging boys and men. Rather than responding to all questions posed in the consultation paper, we provide feedback under the Focus Areas where we have expertise. We also offer recommendations to support the development and implementation of the strategy.

Key recommendations

We recommend that the refreshed Gender Equality Strategy:

1. Takes a whole-of-government approach to gender equality, by:
 - considering gender as part of all government decision-making, including policy, planning, budgeting and service delivery, through use of tools such as gender impact assessments
 - identifying outcome indicators to measure progress towards gender equality across government
 - improving the collection of gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-based policy, planning, program design and monitoring and evaluation; and
 - investing in capacity-building to equip government workforces to analyse undertake gender equality audits and gender impact assessments.
2. Funds local organisations to engage with, young people in the Northern Territory to understand their diverse experiences of gender equality/inequality and the role of gender norms in shaping their attitudes, behaviours and experiences, including through the establishment of a youth advisory group to provide input into the Strategy and policy development relating to gender equality.
3. Centres evidence of intersectional experiences of gender inequality, including the experiences of First Nations women and girls and LGBTQIA+SB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Sistergirl and Brotherboy) communities; identifies gaps in programs and practice; and invests in tailored prevention and early intervention initiatives, including initiatives with a focus on engaging boys and men.
4. Integrates climate risk and disaster resilience considerations across all priority areas of the Northern Territory Gender Equality Strategy, recognising the impacts of extreme weather, disasters, and environmental change on safety, health, economic participation, care, and access to services for people of all genders.
5. Invests in resourcing and equipping Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to design, deliver and strengthen community initiatives to promote gender equality

including building their organisational capacity to create safe and inclusive workplaces.

6. Invests in high quality program evaluation, workforce capability-building and up scaling of promising initiatives to ensure approaches to engaging men and boys are evidence-based.
7. Includes specific actions to engage and build the capability of role models such as teachers, Elders and sports coaches in promoting healthy and positive expressions of masculinities and identities.
8. Outlines actions for organisations – particularly within male-dominated industries – to build safe, inclusive and gender equitable workplaces by addressing gendered norms, practices and structures that disadvantage, discriminate against or exclude women, girls and LGBTQIA+SB communities, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds.
9. Invests in trauma informed, culturally and gender responsive initiatives to increase help-seeking among boys and men.
10. Ensures all Territorians have access to specialist trauma-informed services to support healing and recovery from violence and abuse, as well as general/mainstream mental health services.
11. Invests in evidence-based, culturally safe violence prevention initiatives across a range of settings, including schools, workplaces and sports clubs, that address the drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence, including rigid gender norms, and equip boys and young men with tools and resources to address concerns identified in the Adolescent Man Box research.
12. Includes a commitment from the Northern Territory Government to invest in initiatives that promote the participation of women and people who identify as LGBTQIA+SB in male-dominated industries and workplaces, including through targeted recruitment, retention and progression strategies.
13. Promotes inclusion of gender equality as a principle in the Government Procurement Framework, requiring suppliers to demonstrate action to promote gender equality within their organisation.

Adopting a gender lens across system reform and decision making

When gender and its unique impacts are ignored, discrimination and inequalities are exacerbated. This can impact on individuals' and communities' resources, safety, power and opportunities. There is clear evidence that gender inequality affects the health, wellbeing and life outcomes of people of all genders.³ In particular, evidence shows progress towards Closing the Gap targets is mixed, with the gap for many of the targets widening including Target 13 (the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against

³ See, for example, Veas C, Crispi F and Cuadrado C (2021), Association between gender inequality and population-level health outcomes: Panel data analysis of Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, *eClinicalMedicine*, Jul 31;39:101051. doi: 10.1016/j.eclinm.2021.101051

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero)⁴. Our lack of substantial and universal progress on the Closing the Gap targets exposes deep structural, systemic failures and racial inequalities, particularly amongst First Nations women, children and members of the LGBTQIA+SB community.

To promote inclusion and equality in the Northern Territory, the Northern Territory Government should build on and expand work under the previous Action Plan focused on promoting gender equality in government *workplaces* specifically, to consider gender as part of all government decision-making, including policy, planning, budgeting and service delivery. Through use of tools such as Gender Impact Assessments,⁵ the government should consider how people of different genders will be impacted by government decision-making and determine whether all groups' needs and opportunities are being equitably fulfilled. Importantly, the government should invest in collection of gender-disaggregated data and capacity-building across government departments to equip the workforce to undertake gender impact assessments.

It is necessary to take a whole-of-government approach; target specific cohorts at greater risk of inequality, discrimination or exclusion; work across a range of settings, and with those with cultural or professional authority to positively influence others (influence the influencer), particularly young people e.g. Elders, teachers, sports coaches, social workers. First Nations peoples experience particular intersectional inequalities, and we recommend further consultation to understand their unique experiences and barriers.

The Strategy must be evidence-based and, to support accountability and transparency, include specific outcome indicators by which the government can measure success. For example, public sector bodies in Victoria are required to undertake workplace gender equality audits and report every two years on their progress against seven indicators, including workforce composition, pay equity, career progression, and prevention of violence/harassment in the workplace⁶.

Recommendation 1: For the Strategy to take a whole-of-government approach to gender equality, by:

- *considering gender as part of all government decision-making, including policy, planning, budgeting and service delivery, through use of tools such as gender impact assessments*
- *identifying outcome indicators to measure progress towards gender equality across government*
- *improving the collection of gender-disaggregated data to support evidence-based policy, planning, program design and monitoring and evaluation; and*
- *investing in capacity-building to equip government workforces to analyse undertake gender equality audits and gender impact assessments.*

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Closing the Gap targets: key findings and implications*, catalogue number IHW 294, AIHW, Australian Government.

⁵ Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. (2025). *Gender impact assessment case studies*, State Government of Victoria, retrieved from < <https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/gender-impact-assessment-case-studies>>.

⁶ Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector. (2025). *Workplace gender equality indicators*, retrieved from <<https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/workplace-gender-equality-indicators>>.

Feedback on consultation paper

Focus Area 1– Community Engagement

Jesuit Social Services welcomes the commitment in the Strategy to community engagement as a tool to help the Northern Territory develop a shared understanding of gender inequality and community-led solutions and initiatives.

1.1 Areas requiring greater attention, understanding and investment

Gender inequality as a precondition for domestic, sexual and family violence

In 2023, females made up two-thirds of assault victims (66 per cent), the majority (89 per cent) of sexual assault victims⁷ and it is likely these figures under report the full extent of the problem. The Northern Territory has the highest rates of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia, with First Nations women and children over-represented significantly as victims⁸.

Gender inequality sets the underlying context for domestic, family and sexual violence. Gendered norms, practices and structures can influence beliefs and behaviours across the individual, organisational, systemic and broader societal levels. Such norms and expectations can manifest in harmful expressions of masculinity and negative attitudes towards women and LGBTQIA+SB people, and while these do not always result in violence, they provide the underlying social conditions for violence. There is therefore an important role for the Strategy in contributing to violence prevention including building community understanding of the association between rigid gender norms and the perpetration of intimate partner violence⁹.

Jesuit Social Services' [The Man Box](#) study found a relationship between adherence to strict and outdated gender norms (the Man Box rules) and the perpetration of intimate partner violence, poor mental health outcomes, problem gambling, and alcohol or other drug use. This study, the first Australian study to explore the association between attitudes to masculine stereotypes and men's behaviour, revealed that living up to the pressures of being a 'real man' causes harm to young men and those around them, particularly women. For example, the men who most strongly agreed with the Man Box rules were:

- 17 times more likely to have hit their partner
- eight times more likely to have thoughts of suicide nearly every day
- six times more likely to have forced a partner to do something sexual that is degrading or humiliating
- six times more likely to exhibit signs of problem gambling
- twice as likely to binge drink.

⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2024). *Recorded Crime-Victims, 2023*, ABS, Canberra.

⁸ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) 2025, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: family, domestic and sexual violence*, AIHW, retrieved from <<https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people>>.

⁹ The Men's Project & Flood, M. 2024. *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*. Melbourne: Jesuit Social Services

Looking only at the 18–30 age group, men who most strongly endorse the Man Box rules (compared to men who least strongly endorse them) are:

- over seven times more likely to frequently experience thoughts of suicide
- six times more likely to frequently experience thoughts of self-harm
- almost six times more likely to be problem gamblers
- three times more likely to frequently experience little interest or pleasure in doing things
- almost twice as likely to drink frequently

THE ADOLESCENT MAN BOX

The Adolescent Man Box research provides the first national evidence linking endorsement of rigid gender norms to poor mental health, violence, harassment, help seeking and online harms among adolescents.¹ This landmark research – based on a survey of 1,400 young people aged 14–18 years – found that around 60 per cent of boys and 60 per cent of girls think most people in Australia expect teenage boys to be manly, confident and strong at all times.

The research also found an association between personal agreement with the need to be manly and a range of harmful behaviours. Of boys who most strongly agree with the need to conform to rigid masculine norms:

- 39 per cent had engaged in bullying, physical violence or sexual harassment in the past month;
- 35 per cent said if someone rejects them, they usually try to get back at them;
- 42 per cent believe that it's normal to continually check who their partner is communicating with;
- 27 per cent said their friends would probably use AI to create fake nude images;
- a concerning 82 per cent see harmful acts happening to a female when watching pornography.

- 1.5 times more likely to frequently experience feeling down, depressed, or hopeless.

Gender norms play an important role in producing and reproducing gender inequality. Understanding the experiences of young people and the extent to which stereotypical masculine norms are endorsed helps shine a light on the realities of what it means to be a teenage boy in Australia. The findings from the Adolescent Man Box demonstrate how young people's behaviours and experiences are related to restrictive, potentially harmful forms of masculinity and can assist in identifying priority areas for the Strategy and help direct primary prevention and early intervention efforts tailored to need.

Jesuit Social Services sought to achieve as representative a sample of young people as possible for the Adolescent Man Box study. The survey was reasonably representative in terms of gender, age, state and territory, education level completed, school type, being born in Australia or overseas, First Nations identification and disability. However we recognise that we were not able to capture every experience and background.

Recommendation 2: Funding for local organisations to engage with, young people in the Northern Territory to understand their diverse experiences of gender equality/inequality and the role of gender norms in shaping their attitudes, behaviours and experiences, including through the establishment of a youth advisory group to provide input into the Strategy and policy development relating to gender equality

Understanding of the role of gender norms within different communities including First Nations, LGBTQIA+SB and other marginalised groups

The Strategy must recognise impacts of gender inequality on all genders, cultural groups and marginalised communities. A binary, largely heteronormative, Western focus of gender risks excluding the intersectional experiences of gender inequality and violence. Kimberle Crenshaw, who first coined 'intersectionality' in 1989, reflected on the term more recently stating;

*'Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LGBTQ problem there. Many times that framework erases what happens to people who are subject to all of these things.'*¹⁰

The enduring impacts of colonisation continue to drive racism, systemic disadvantage and intergenerational trauma, all of which cannot be separated from gender inequality amongst First Nations communities. Given First Nations peoples make up almost one-third of the population in the Northern Territory¹¹ and are over-represented in rates of perpetration and victimisation of family, domestic and sexual violence¹², there is a need to better understand drivers and solutions within the Northern Territory context, how they contribute towards progress of existing frameworks such as Changing the Picture¹³ and Closing the Gap targets¹⁴ and inform implementation of the forthcoming 'Our Ways- Strong Ways- Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan.'¹⁵

Consultations as part of *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future*¹⁶ report by the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice, found intersectional discrimination was a recurrent experience driving harm and issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women, particularly for those who identify as LGBTQIA+SB. The gap in research and understanding of gender inequality and gender-based violence amongst First Nations, LGBTQIA+SB communities and other already marginalised groups limits the ability for tailored, effective interventions and supports that prevent violence and/or address impacts of gender norms on social and emotional

¹⁰ Michelle Evans, *Closing the gap in the Indigenous business sector*, The Mandarin (online) 29 April 2019 <<https://www.themandarin.com.au/107668-closing-the-gap-in-the-indigenous-business-sector/>>.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2022). *Northern Territory: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population summary*, ABS.

¹² Cripps, K. (2023). *Indigenous domestic and family violence, mental health and suicide*, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 26 May 2023.

¹³ Our Watch. (2018). *Changing the picture: A national resource to support the prevention of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their children*, Our Watch, Melbourne.

¹⁴ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. *'Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes'*, viewed 9th December 2025, retrieved from <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>

¹⁵ SNAICC. (2025). *'Our Ways- Strong Ways- Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety Plan'*, SNAICC.

¹⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission. (2020). *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future*.

wellbeing. Findings from the Man Box and Adolescent Man Box studies are helpful in understanding gender equality in the context of the general population, however, more research is needed to understand norms and pressures within other communities and cultural groups in the Northern Territory.

Recommendation 3: *For the Strategy to centre evidence of intersectional experiences of gender inequality, including the experiences of First Nations women and girls and LGBTQIA+SB (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Sistergirl and Brotherboy) communities; identifies gaps in programs and practice; and invests in tailored prevention and early intervention initiatives, including initiatives with a focus on engaging boys and men.*

Link between gender equality and climate justice

Gender equality in the context of climate change is intersectional. It is shaped by exposure to climate and disaster risks, but also by those with power, resources, and voice in responses and recovery¹⁷. Social norms around masculinity influence the ways in which men, women and LGBTQIA+SB peoples are at risk, their help-seeking behaviors, and participation in community responses. Nationally, the nature of the gendered impacts of climate change and disaster are well documented¹⁸, including links between bushfires and domestic violence,¹⁹ gendered dimensions of risk during heatwaves,²⁰ psychological burden carried by women through recovery²¹ and the importance of planning evacuation centres as inclusive, safe spaces²².

In the Northern Territory, climate change and socio-economic disadvantage intersect to amplify existing inequalities, particularly for First Nations communities living in remote areas, with women, children, and the elderly experiencing disproportionate risks to health, safety, and economic security. Recent extremes from the latest-recorded monsoon onset in the Top End to the hottest summer on record in Alice Springs illustrate how climate impacts compound these structural vulnerabilities.

Severe and increasingly more dangerous climate change impacts are further driving high levels of social inequity including gender disparities. Strengthening community resilience to recognise and address gendered impacts of climate change as well as prepare for escalating risks must involve not only adaptation of our built environment and infrastructure but also strengthen communities' capacity to prepare for and respond to local risks through a gendered approach. This requires investment in community service organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) who can support communities to do this work. First Nations lived experience and perspectives must be centred and prioritised.

Embedding/integration of climate change into the Northern Territory Gender Equality Strategy is essential to ensure that adaptation measures and policy responses strengthen

¹⁷ Erman et al., (2021). *Gender dimensions of disaster risk and resilience*.

¹⁸ Foote et al., 2023; Parkinson, 2022

¹⁹ Parkinson, 2019

²⁰ Hine et al., 2023

²¹ Parkinson et al. 2014, 2022

²² Nicholson, 2022; Williamson & Quinn, 2021

equitable access to services, participation in decision-making, and resilience for those most affected by climate-related risks. Approaches that prioritise inclusive and representative decision-making, place-based responses, alongside broader climate justice frameworks—will help to advance gender equality by addressing structural inequities and strengthening social, economic, and community resilience across the Northern Territory.

Recommendation 4: *For the Strategy to integrate climate risk and disaster resilience considerations across all priority areas of the Northern Territory Gender Equality Strategy, recognising the impacts of extreme weather, disasters, and environmental change on safety, health, economic participation, care, and access to services for people of all genders*

1.2 Ways to improve community led initiatives to drive gender equality

Strengthening ACCO capacity and capability including resourcing to adapt and deliver initiatives that promote gender equality

When sufficiently resourced, ACCOs are best placed to improve outcomes for First Nations children, families and communities. Our experience shows there is significant demand from small and emerging ACCOs for capacity and capability building including staff training, professional development, organisational infrastructure and data and evaluation capability. Building workforce capacity to engage on issues related to gender inequality and harmful masculine norms, including both research and service delivery, is critical for promoting safety and gender equality. Culturally safe, place based, community led research and evaluation on the impacts of gender and harmful rigid gender norms should be undertaken with First Nations girls, boys, women, men and LGBTQIA+SB people.

This echoes Recommendation 7 from the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Womens Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future²³ report, calling for local and regionally focused engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, girls and their communities, with better mapping, priority setting, funding allocation and capacity building of local and regional areas.

Recommendation 5: *For the Northern Territory Government to invest in resourcing and equipping Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to design, deliver and strengthen community initiatives to promote gender equality including building their organisational capacity to create safe and inclusive workplaces*

Engaging men and boys to achieve social and cultural change

Men and boys have an essential role to play in working towards gender equality. An effective Gender Equality Strategy should therefore establish the foundations for engaging with men and boys to drive social and cultural change in this area. At a Commonwealth level 'engaging men and boys' is identified as a priority in the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032, however there is limited clarity regarding how to do this effectively. While efforts to engage adolescent boys in respectful relationships

²³ Ibid, pg.100

education, mental health support and violence prevention have expanded, and there is a need for more evidence on the effectiveness of these efforts.²⁴

Progress towards gender equality requires confronting patriarchal systems, supporting boys and men to take responsibility for challenging harmful attitudes, and supporting pro social behaviours. This includes shifting culture to increase routine surfacing and critical reflection on implicit gender bias.

Foundations to achieve change include;

- Building the evidence base and workforce capacity to engage men and boys in gender equality, violence prevention and early intervention initiatives
 - Engaging role models to demonstrate positive alternatives
 - Building organisational capability to create gender equitable workplaces and industries
 - Building inclusive workplaces through corporate diversity partnerships.
- a. *Building the evidence base and workforce capacity to engage men and boys in gender equality, violence prevention and early intervention initiatives*

Efforts to end men’s violence by working with men and boys have increased in recent years and, together, governments and the community sector across Australia are continuing to build the evidence base about what’s needed and what works. But our efforts in promoting gender equality, preventing men’s violence and intervening early with people at higher risk of using violence come nowhere near matching the scale of the problem.

Further work is needed to build the evidence base, translate evidence into practice, and scale up promising initiatives if we are to make meaningful progress towards gender equality and ending violence against women and children. This includes investing in high quality program evaluation so we can target resources to interventions and approaches that work, It also includes building the capability of workforces across sectors to ensure people who work with men and boys – especially men and boys at higher risk of using violence – adopt evidence-based strategies for engagement.

Recommendation 6: *For the Strategy to include investment in high quality program evaluation, workforce capability-building and up scaling of promising initiatives to ensure approaches to engaging men and boys are evidence-based*

²⁴ Casey, E. A., Graham, L. M., & Greer, K. (2022). Efficacy of sexual assault prevention with men and boys. In L. M. Orchowski & A. Berkowitz (Eds.), *Engaging Boys and Men in Sexual Assault Prevention* (pp. 265-283). Elsevier. Verbeek, M., Weeland, J., Luijk, M., & Van De Bongardt, D. (2023). Sexual and dating violence prevention programs for male youth: A systematic review of program characteristics, intended psychosexual outcomes, and effectiveness. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10508-023-02596-5>.

b. Engaging role models to demonstrate positive alternatives

Our practice expertise and research by The Men’s Project suggest that engaging role models to demonstrate healthy and positive alternatives to rigid and outdated masculine norms is a crucial strategy to reduce violence, improve outcomes for men and boys and promote cultural and attitudinal change. Modelling respect and equality can expand understandings of masculinity and provide the opportunity to embrace, encourage and celebrate a wide range of expressions of masculinity. For this reason, Jesuit Social Services commenced the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program in Victoria, aiming to develop strong role models to lead change in the places where boys and men live, work and meet.

CASE STUDY: MODELLING RESPECT AND EQUALITY (MoRE)

Our MoRE program supports role models who interact with boys and men on a regular basis so they can challenge limiting and harmful stereotypes and promote respect and equality towards women. The program supports participants to develop greater awareness of masculine norms and their impact, learn how to model and promote positive change, and recognise and challenge problematic attitudes and behaviours. Participants include teachers, social workers, sports coaches, leaders in workplaces, and leaders in faith communities. [An evaluation of MoRE](#) found significant change in the level of knowledge, confidence, and motivation to bring about change among the men and boys that the participants worked with.

Recommendation 7: *For the Strategy to include specific actions to engage and build the capability of role models such as teachers, Elders and sports coaches in promoting healthy and positive expressions of masculinities and identities*

c. Building organisational capability to create gender-equitable workplaces and industries

The refreshed Gender Equality Strategy has a role to play in breaking down barriers to gender- inclusive workplace including addressing gendered norms (such as sexist attitudes), practices (such as recruitment or promotion practices that explicitly or implicitly discriminate against or disadvantage women and LGBTQIA+SB people) and structures (such as workplace policies or physical infrastructure that do not meet the needs of different genders). Building safe, inclusive and gender-equitable organisations and workplaces requires a whole-of-organisation approach and government commitment. Both with strong leadership to create the authorising environment for change and to role model equitable attitudes and behaviours.

Building organisational and workforce capacity to challenge harmful gender norms – including rigid ideas about masculinity – is an important part of creating safe and inclusive workplaces for women and people who identify as LGBTQIA+SB and increasing their representation and leadership in workplaces. This is particularly relevant for male-dominated industries such as the construction sector.

The Men's Project currently delivers a range of evidence-based programs for workplaces, including the construction sector (see case study in Focus Area Four: Economic Security). These programs aim to equip men in leadership roles with the tools to challenge outdated ideas of masculinity, promote wellbeing, and create safer, more inclusive environments for women, girls, and people who identify as LGBTQIA+SB. This work includes building workers' bystander skills and confidence to challenge rigid ideas about masculinity, recognising that men and boys who conform strongly to rigid masculine norms are more likely to experience poor mental health and suicidality, alcohol and drug abuse, and risk-taking behaviour, and are more likely to use violence including workplace bullying and sexual harassment²⁵. Organisations with workplace cultures that are not safe and inclusive for women and LGBTQIA+SB people are also more likely to experience low female and LGBTQIA+SB workforce participation and higher rates of absenteeism²⁶.

d. Building inclusive workplaces through corporate diversity partnerships

Through our Corporate Diversity Partnerships in Victoria, Jesuit Social Services proactively works with organisations to assist with the delivery of their diversity and inclusion initiatives through supported employment programs. We have had particular success supporting women seeking work from culturally diverse backgrounds, into meaningful and ongoing employment in historically male dominated industries such as engineering and emergency services.

Through our Pathways program partnership with Melbourne Water, we have placed 16 Participants from culturally diverse backgrounds into on-going roles as Project Engineers, 6 of who identify as female. Through our delivery of the Victoria Police Diversity Recruitment Program, we have worked with 127 Participants, of whom 32 identify as female. Victoria Police has employed their first female Ethiopian police officer and a second female participant of South Sudanese background has recently been offered a position to train at the Academy as a police officer.

The above two examples are proactively challenging the internal attitudes and norms held in both organisations and supporting the adoption of more inclusive workplace policies and practices including:

- Encouraging flexible working hours and part time roles for applicants with caring duties
- Pay equity
- An understanding of barriers for women in the workplace – leading to the provision of vehicles for those who may be unable to attend site otherwise
- Encouraging female participants to apply for leadership roles during and after placement
- The use of female guest speakers throughout Participant Preparation Training

²⁵ The Men's Project 2025, The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14-18 years, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

²⁶ Workplace Gender Equality Agency. *Gender equality and intersecting forms of diversity*, Australian Government, retrieved from <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/gender-equality-and-diversity>>; Diversity Council Australia (D'Almada-Remedios, R.) (2024) Inclusion@Work Index 2023-2024: Mapping the State of Inclusion in the Australian Workforce, Sydney: Diversity Council Australia; Australian Human Rights Commission 2018, *Sexual harassment in Australian workplaces: impacts and prevalence*, AHRC, Sydney.

- Commitment to putting placement opportunities on hold for participants who go on maternity leave mid-placement, to ensure they return to the role post maternity-leave.

Our proactive partnerships with male-dominated industries enable us to advocate and support employers to build their internal capacity to provide safe and inclusive workplaces for our female participants. This creates a positive experience for participants and increases the likelihood of ongoing engagement and employment.

Recommendation 8: *For the Strategy to outline actions for organisations – particularly within male-dominated industries – to build safe, inclusive and gender equitable workplaces by addressing gendered norms, practices and structures that disadvantage, discriminate against or exclude women, girls and LGBTQIA+SB communities, including those from culturally diverse backgrounds*

Focus Area 2 – Health And Wellbeing

Gender inequality is increasingly recognised as a social determinant of health and wellbeing, with the greatest burden falling on women, girls and members of the LGBTQIA+SB community²⁷. Jesuit Social Services welcomes the health and wellbeing initiatives introduced as part of the previous Action Plan, however notes there is a gap in trauma informed, gender responsive initiatives aimed at addressing health and wellbeing issues impacting boys and young men.

Our Man Box and Adolescent Man Box studies found that boys’ and men’s endorsement of rigid masculine norms (The “Man Box rules”) is associated not only with violence-supportive attitudes and behaviours impacting women and girls in particular, but also with a range of adverse health and wellbeing outcomes for men and boys themselves. For instance, boys who most strongly endorsed the Adolescent Man Box rules were more likely to have consumed alcohol in the previous 12 months, to have gambling problems and to report getting into a serious physical fight.²⁸

While women and girls experience poorer mental health and wellbeing overall, they are more likely than boys and men to seek help. Over one-third of adolescent boys surveyed in the Adolescent Man Box study reported they had not sought any support for an emotional or personal issue in the past six months. The Adolescent Man Box pillars of ‘constant effort to be manly’ and ‘emotional restriction’, ‘self-sufficiency’ and ‘acting tough’ may discourage or stigmatise help-seeking and displays of vulnerability among men and boys¹⁵. In addition, while it is not deterministic, exposure to domestic, physical or sexual violence in childhood has been found to be a risk factor for future perpetration of violence,²⁹ highlighting the

²⁷ World Health Organization (WHO) 2022, Gender and health, WHO, Geneva; Department of Health. (2018). *National Womens Health Strategy 2020-2030*, Commonwealth of Australia, retrieved from <<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-womens-health-strategy-2020-2030?language=en>>.

²⁸ The Men’s Project 2025, The Adolescent Man Box: Findings from a survey with Australian adolescents aged 14-18 years, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne.

²⁹Papalia, N., Sheed, A., Fortunato, E., Turanovic, J, T., Mathews, B, & Spivak, B. (2025). Associations between childhood abuse, exposure to domestic violence, and the risk of later violent revictimization in Australia, *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 161, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2025.107314>.

importance of supporting boys and young men to heal and recover from violence and abuse.

In order to both prevent violence against women, girls and people who identify as LGBTQIA+SB and improve the health and wellbeing of boys and men, there is a need to increase boys' and men's access to supports and services. This should include encouraging both formal and informal help-seeking – particularly among adolescent boys – including for mental health concerns, among those who have experienced and/or who are at risk of using violence, and for other troubling behaviours including harmful pornography use and gambling. Services should be available Territory-wide and include specialist supports for healing and recovery from violence and abuse, as well as general mental health support. All services must be gender- and culturally responsive and trauma-informed.

Recommendation 9: *For the Strategy to include an investment in trauma informed, culturally and gender responsive initiatives to increase help-seeking among boys and men*

Recommendation 10: *For the Strategy to ensure all Territorians have access to specialist trauma-informed services to support healing and recovery from violence and abuse, as well as general/mainstream mental health services*

Focus Area 3 – Safety

Progress towards gender equality is a critical part in ensuring safety in communities, schools, and workplaces. Primary prevention strategies across each of these settings must underpin the work in order to prevent and disrupt the likelihood of harm occurring.

As described above, Jesuit Social Services' Man Box research shows that men who most strongly conform to rigid masculine norms are more likely to perpetrate intimate partner violence, experience poor mental health, and engage in risky behaviours. This highlights the need to continue to invest in evidence-based, culturally safe violence prevention initiatives that address the drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence, including rigid gender norms. These initiatives should be implemented across a range of settings, including schools, workplaces and community settings such as sports clubs, concurrently with a focus on intervening early with boys and men using or at risk of using violence through programs like Change Makers (see page below).

Creating safe, inclusive and equitable workplaces includes addressing gender-based harassment in male-dominated industries – harassment that is not necessarily sexual in nature, but is targeted at individuals, or a group of individuals, because of their sex or gender³⁰. Gender-based harassment can be much less overt than sexual harassment and often involves women being made to feel like unwelcome outsiders who will never be 'one of the boys'.³¹

³⁰ Foley, M., Oxenbridge, S., Cooper, R., & Baird, M. (2020). 'I'll never be one of the boys': Gender harassment of women working as pilots and automotive tradespeople. *Gender, Work & Organization*.

³¹ Foley et al., 2020

Whilst there is limited data on prevalence of gender-based workplace harassment and assault, there is evidence of an acceptance and tolerance of sexist behaviours, that often goes unnoticed and unaddressed within male dominated industries such as the construction industry³². This type of behaviour manifests in a culture that normalises traditional masculinity and places women and gender-diverse people at risk.

School settings and sporting club programs also provide an opportunity to critically engage with masculine stereotypes, gender norms and gender inequality, and promote help-seeking, in everyday settings. The Adolescent Man Box research highlights the importance of ensuring that school- and sports-based prevention programs, such as Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) and Active Respect (see page below), respond to young people's concerns and the social pressures they face and give them the tools and support they need to deal with issues emerging from the research such as coping with rejection, safely navigating digital environments and mitigating the impacts of harmful pornography.

It is also important to ensure that gender equality and violence prevention programs are culturally safe for First Nations communities. The case study below provides an example of adapting a violence prevention project targeting the role of harmful gender norms for a First Nations community in Western Australia.

CASE STUDY: MIDWEST ABORIGINAL MEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

In 2023, the Geraldton Aboriginal Men's Group sought to address a lack of information and support in relation to family and domestic violence in their community. They approached the WA Centre for Rural Health who teamed up with The Men's Project at Jesuit Social Services to deliver the Modelling Respect and Equality (MoRE) program to Aboriginal men of all ages across Geraldton and Mullewa.

The project facilitated yarning related to gender norms, healthy and respectful manhood, role modelling, emotions, trauma and violence – and around connection to country, culture and tradition. The yarns worked best when held in familiar outdoor settings around a campfire. Over 20 men participated in the program, sharing experiences of what it is like to be a Yamatji man today.

Success factors for the program included flexibility in delivery approach; following where yarns were going; Elders sharing stories and knowledge; and use of visual metaphors such as 'planting the seed' for guiding young males on a path towards healthy and respectful relationships. Comments from men who participated included 'We need more programs' and 'Yarning with other men going through the same thing makes you feel like you're not alone.'

³² Galea, N., Powell, A. (2018). Women in construction: government can do more to shake up the boys club. ABC new.

Recommendation 11: For the Strategy to include an investment in evidence-based, culturally safe violence prevention initiatives across a range of settings, including schools, workplaces and sports clubs, that address the drivers of domestic, family and sexual violence, including rigid gender norms, and equip boys and young men with tools and resources to address concerns identified in the Adolescent Man Box research.

3.1 Promising practice programs to ensure safety and achieve lasting change

Change Makers, The Mens Project

Funded by the Victorian Government, Jesuit Social Services is piloting an early intervention program, 'Change Makers' which aims to empower at-risk boys and young men with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to live safer, fuller lives, free from violence and other harmful behaviours.

Change Makers focuses on helping boys and young men live their lives free from violence by increasing protective factors like attendance at school, healthy relationships, association with pro-social peers, connection to a caring adult (including help-seeking), and non-violent problem-solving skills. It also aims to decrease risk factors for violence like antisocial beliefs and attitudes, with a focus on harmful gendered beliefs and involvement in gangs.

We achieve this through:

- Delivering small group work programs with young people aged 12–25 over multiple sessions to build young people's knowledge, skills and confidence to prevent violence.
- Strengthening the capacity of partner organisation staff, who are already engaged with the young people, to work with young people in violence prevention.
- Building the evidence base to understand effective early intervention to prevent violence.

We co-deliver Change Makers in collaboration with community partners, including specialist schools, secondary schools, and community organisations – often with cultural brokers who can support the relationship between facilitators and the young people in their cultural context. Programs run for between 8 and 16 weeks.

Interim evaluation findings show improvements in participants' emotional literacy, empathy for others, non-violent problem-solving skills, help seeking behaviours, and understanding of gender norms and societal pressures related to masculinities. Program impacts also include stronger social connections and behavioural changes for participants, such as improved attendance and behaviour at school.

Active Respect Program, The Men's Project

Active Respect is an evidence-based program in Victoria funded by the Federal Government designed especially for adolescent boys which helps sports coaches build

inclusive, respectful, and positive team culture. Active Respect has been adapted from the internationally recognised violence prevention program 'Coaching Boys into Men' (CBIM) and explores the pressures boys and men face to conform to certain behaviours, how these pressures affect mental health, and their links to issues like sexual harassment and violence against women.

Through Active Respect's season-long peer learning approach, participants (coaches) gain practical skills and knowledge through tools and training to lead weekly training talks that create healthier, more positive environments. This program is available for school sporting clubs as well as community clubs.

Focus Area 5 – Leadership And Participation

We welcome the Strategy's focus on improving pathways and experiences for women and gender diverse people in male-dominated industries. As outlined in our response to Focus Area 1, building safe, inclusive and gender equitable organisations and workplaces that promote the participation and progression of women and people who identify as LGBTQIA+SB requires a whole-of-organisation approach underpinned by strong leadership and supported by capability-building across organisations.

The Strategy should have a focus on the leadership, participation and recruitment of women and people who identify as LGBTQIA+SB to industries in which they are under-represented, but also on strengthening retention and promotion of diverse staff by ensuring they feel safe and supported to remain in the industry. This includes addressing gendered stereotypes about participation in particular industries or occupations.

Improving gender equality within male-dominated industries

Rigid adherence to stereotypical ideas about what it means to be a man is prevalent amongst male-dominated industries and affects workplace culture and contributes to greater risk taking behaviours¹⁶. The construction sector has been identified as one of the highest occupational risk sectors in Australia¹⁷ where women are at particular risk of experiencing gendered violence in the workplace.¹⁸ This often drives women to resign from their jobs, with women leaving the construction industry 38% faster than men.¹⁹ In the Northern Territory, the construction industry employs approximately 8.8% of the workforce (~13,000 main jobs), but only 1.3% of employees are female³³.

³³ Australian Bureau of Statistics 2025, Modelled state and territory industry estimates: jobs and hours worked, ABS, viewed 2 December 2025, <<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/modelled-state-and-territory-industry-estimates-jobs-and-hours-worked>>.

CASE STUDY: THE MEN'S PROJECT'S ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

In Victoria, The Men's Project has partnered with ICON Construction to deliver a whole-of-organisation approach to Inclusion, Equality and Safety through tiered training and support for leaders, project managers, site managers, other key influencers, contractors, and on-site staff. The partnership aims to generate positive cultural change, towards inclusion, gender equality and safety (including violence and harm reduction). The partnership project incorporates:

- a two day intensive training for leadership teams to empower them to model and advocate for positive change
- establishment of a network of 'site champions' to receive bystander intervention training to equip them to challenge and influence their peers
- regular toolbox talks to reinforce key messaging and embed a culture of accountability and respect across the workforce
- an induction video series that introduces key concepts and complements the broader project.

Recommendation 12: *For the Strategy to include a commitment from the Northern Territory Government to invest in initiatives that promote the participation of women and people who identify as LGBTQIA+SB in male-dominated industries and workplaces, including through targeted recruitment, retention and progression strategies*

Procurement is an influential lever through which government can promote gender equality in the private sector. The Northern Territory Government should include gender equality as one of the procurement principles within its Procurement Framework, with clear targets addressing discrimination against and promoting the participation of women, LGBTQIA+SB communities and other minority groups in male dominated industries. For example, the Victorian Government's social procurement framework requires suppliers to demonstrate what action they are taking to promote gender equality within their organisation.³⁴

Recommendation 13: *For the Strategy to promote inclusion of gender equality as a principle in the Government Procurement Framework, requiring suppliers to demonstrate action to promote gender equality within their organisation*

³⁴ See, for example, the Victorian Government's social procurement guide: <https://www.buyingfor.vic.gov.au/womens-equality-and-safety-social-procurement-guide>