

STARTS WITH US

Legal & justice sector action to prevent violence against women

What is Starts With Us?

Starts With Us is a project that aims to support and encourage Victorian legal and justice professionals and organisations to take action to prevent violence against women. The project is for everyone working in legal and justice – lawyers, judges, administrative staff, paralegals, policy advisers, legal educators, court staff and more.

The project has four distinct phases: 1) sector research on sexism and gender inequality; 2) a forum, attended by legal and justice sector leaders, to discuss the research and commit to action; 3) action planning by the sector to remedy sexism and gender inequality in legal and justice workplaces; 4) sector-wide implementation of the action plan.

Starts With Us is funded by the Victorian Government as part of the [Free From Violence](#) strategy and is part of a state-wide coordinated effort to prevent violence against women.

Who participated in the Starts With Us research?

We gathered qualitative data, via an online survey, from 294 professionals who work, or have previously worked, in the legal and justice sector in Victoria. We heard from professionals in the private sector, government and statutory authorities, community and not-for-profit organisations, the judiciary and court services.

Key findings of the research

- Sexism and inequality is entrenched in the legal and justice sector.
- An enduring and powerful 'boys club' culture provides the backdrop for sexual harassment and gendered bullying that is 'pervasive' and 'normalised' within the sector.
- Discrimination against women with children is occurring in workplaces that formally offer staff flexible work arrangements, gender equity policies and maternity leave provisions, and promote themselves as 'equitable'.
- Discrimination against women 'of childbearing age' – whether they have children or not – is widespread.
- Men are favoured over women for promotion and leadership opportunities, mentoring by senior colleagues and during the recruitment process.
- Junior female staff are expected to do the less substantive, clerical and administrative tasks at the expense of more meaningful legal work, impacting their ability to build their experience.
- Inadequate organisational and sector-wide responses to sexism and gender inequality effectively condones, or at least minimises, violence against women.

Who is attending the Starts With Us forum on April 30?

The forum will be attended by 70 leaders from across the legal and justice workforce. Attendees include judiciary, leading barristers and CEOs/executive leaders from the corporate, government, statutory and not-for-profit sectors. Presenters include: The Hon. Justice Maxwell, President of the Court of Appeal; Fiona McLeay, Legal Services Commissioner; Tracey Gaudry, CEO of Respect

Victoria; Cara Gleeson, Director of Practice Leadership, Our Watch; and Naty Guerrero-Diaz, lawyer, Slater & Gordon.

Who is involved in Starts With Us?

Women's Legal Service Victoria is leading the project, in collaboration with project partners: Federation of Community Legal Centres, Victorian Women Lawyers and Women's Health in the North. The project Advisory Committee is made up of executives and senior practitioners from organisations such as Victoria Legal Aid, Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Law Institute of Victoria and the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

About Women's Legal Service Victoria

Women's Legal Service Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation that has been providing free legal services to women for more than 35 years. We use the law to help disadvantaged women rebuild their lives after family violence or relationship breakdown, and also fight to change laws and policies that disadvantage women. Our education team trains other professionals to identify legal need and our new primary prevention work, Starts With Us, engages the legal and justice sector to take action to prevent violence against women.

Where can I find out more?

- The Starts With Us research paper can be accessed [here](#).
- Follow us on Twitter @WomensLegalVic
- Follow news about Starts With Us at #PVAWstartswithus

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