

2014 Victorian Election Statement

Women with disabilities in Victoria often miss out on social and economic opportunities because of a range of barriers at both individual and systemic levels. They are also subject to high levels of discrimination and ignorance, violence and abuse, and poor health care.

At the 2014 State Election we call on political parties to commit to three vital areas of action:

- 1** Address the high rates of violence against women with disabilities.
- 2** Make sure women with disabilities have full and appropriate access to health care and health promotion.
- 3** Commit to equal access for women with disabilities in education, housing, employment and support services.

Women with Disabilities Victoria is a not-for-profit organisation run by women with disabilities for women with disabilities.

We urge all parties to adopt these strategies in their 2014 election platforms.

Key facts

- More than 500,000 Victorian women (nearly 1 in 5 of the female population) have a disability, with higher rates in rural and regional Victoria, among cultural communities, and among Indigenous Victorians.
- Women with disabilities are more likely to be poorer than men with disabilities, and less likely to be in work.
- Women with disabilities experience higher rates of violence, for longer periods of time. They also encounter significant barriers to receiving services and justice responses to their experiences of violence.¹
- Women with disabilities are often not recognised in their role as primary carers.
- Women with disabilities who are, or want to be, parents face barriers to adequate health care and other services for themselves and their children.
- Women with disabilities are more exposed to practices which qualify as torture or inhuman or degrading treatment such as medical interventions to control their fertility, forced medication, and chemical restraint.

AREA OF ACTION



Address the high rates of violence against women with disabilities.

Discrimination based on gender and disability increases the risk of violence for women with disabilities. They experience extremely high levels of violence and abuse – in their homes and in the wider community, including in health settings – yet remain largely excluded from violence prevention and response services and supports.

How should the next Victorian Government address this issue?

1. Commit to the whole-of-government responses identified in the *Voices Against Violence* Research Project undertaken by Women with Disabilities Victoria in collaboration with the Office of the Public Advocate and the Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria.
2. Fund the Gender and Disability Workforce Development Program to promote gender sensitive practice in disability services and violence prevention education programs for women with disabilities.
3. Fund face-to-face education, training and resources to disability, mental health and aged care workforces on risk assessment and violence against women with disabilities.
4. Improve data collection to help prevent and respond to violence.
5. Provide full access to justice through an Independent Third Person Program referral service and strengthen the investigatory powers of the Office of the Public Advocate.
6. Fund Family Violence Applicant Support Workers in all magistrates courts.
7. Fund women's support groups and accessible information on awareness of violence for women with disabilities.

For further information go to www.wdv.org.au
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Women with Disabilities
Victoria is a member of the
No More Deaths Coalition
Election Campaign.

AREA OF ACTION

2

Make sure women with disabilities have full and appropriate access to health care and health promotions.

Women with disabilities spend a large part of their income on health related expenses yet they are less likely than other women to receive appropriate health services. They have difficulty accessing breast, cervical and bowel cancer screening programs, are more likely to be unlawfully sterilised and are more likely to face medical interventions to control their fertility.

How should the next Victorian Government address this issue?

1. Ensure Women with Disabilities Victoria is adequately funded to provide advice to government and health services on policy, planning and service delivery for women with disabilities.
2. Fund the Women with Disabilities Victoria *Healthy Services, Healthy Women: Making Health Care Services Accessible* Program to increase the capacity of staff in mainstream health services to better understand and respond to the needs of women with disabilities.
3. Improve the co-ordination of health services by monitoring and evaluating the health co-ordination actions identified in the Victorian Disability State Plan 2013-2016.
4. Collect data on the use of health services by women with disabilities to make their needs more visible. Currently there is no data available.
5. Fund gender-sensitive health education for women with disabilities to ensure they know how to maintain their sexual and reproductive health.

For further information go to www.wdv.org.au or contact: Keran Howe, Executive Director, *Women with Disabilities Victoria* **Ph:** 9286 7800
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Women with Disabilities Victoria is a member of the Women's Health Association of Victoria, endorsing the *Priorities for Victorian Women's Health 2015–2018*.

AREA OF ACTION

3

Commit to equal access for women with disabilities in education, housing, employment and support services.

On socio-economic indicators, women with disabilities fare far worse than other women and men with disabilities. They have lower personal income and are less likely to complete year 12, live in private rental or be in paid employment.² Their rates of participation in the labour market – the primary determinant of life chances³ – have deteriorated in the past 10 years.

How should the next Victorian Government address this issue?

1. Adequately resource and maintain advocacy services for people with disabilities to ensure both systemic and individual advocacy influences policy and service delivery.
2. Fund and encourage leadership programs that include women with disabilities.
3. Empower women with disabilities by providing avenues for them to participate actively in decision-making and planning – individually and systemically.
4. Establish building regulations that require accessible design in housing.
5. Ensure service planning, service delivery and evaluation for all services and support is both accessible and appropriate for women with disabilities, particularly in education, housing, employment, transport, health and family support.
6. Support the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), and ensure that its safeguards are adequate for women with disabilities receiving services.
7. Monitor the socio-economic circumstances of women with disabilities to inform policy development and to evaluate the impact of the NDIS and other reforms.

1 Healey, L, *Voices Against Violence: Paper 2: Current Issues in Understanding and Responding to Violence Against Women with Disabilities*, Women with Disabilities Victoria, Office of the Public Advocate and Domestic Violence Resource Centre, Melbourne, 2013, available at <http://www.wdv.org.au/voicesagainstviolence.html>

2 Kavanagh et al, 'Time trends in socio-economic inequalities for women and men with disabilities in Australia: evidence of persisting inequalities', *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 2013 12-73

3 Andersen, E, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 1990, cited in Kavanagh et al.