

Victorian Election 2010

Key Issues for Women with Disabilities

Women with Disabilities Victoria is a not for profit organisation of women with disabilities who support women with disabilities to achieve their rights.

Our vision is “a world where all women are respected and can fully experience life”. We are committed to a human rights approach where women with disabilities are involved in all aspects of community life and the planning, delivery and evaluation of community services.

For Victorian women, the rate of disability is 20.1 per cent of the population and the rate of profound or severe disability is 7.1 per cent of the populationⁱ.

It has been demonstrated extensively that people with disabilities experience significant discrimination in relation to employment, housing, education, transport, income and violence - and this disadvantage is compounded for women with disabilities.

This document outlines some simple, but powerful actions that the Victorian Government can take to address the disadvantage experienced by Victorian women with disabilities across the state every day.

This statement is endorsed by:

Centre for Women’s Health, Gender and Society
Council to Homeless Persons
Domestic Violence Victoria
Federation of Community Legal Centres
Victorian Council of Social Services
Victorian Disability Advocacy Network
Victorian Women and Mental Health Network
Women’s Health Victoria

What policy change does *Women with Disabilities Victoria* advocate?

1. An effective response to violence against women with disabilities

Research undertaken by Women with Disabilities Victoria confirms that women with disabilities are more vulnerable to all forms of violence than other women or men with disabilities and yet are less likely to receive access to appropriate support.ⁱⁱ

How can the Victorian Government address this issue?

Women with Disabilities Victoria has identified five key actions the Victorian Government can take to address violence against women with disabilities:

- ❖ Develop an active protocol between family violence services and disability services. This would enable the sort of co-operation that disability and family violence services must adopt to provide an effective service to women with disabilities.
- ❖ Improve standards of practice, in particular the Victoria Police Code of Practice and Homelessness Assistance Support Standards, to make women with disabilities more visible.
- ❖ Most agencies do not collect adequate data on the incidence of violence against women with disabilities and so the problem remains hidden. Government can address this with better data collection across family violence and disability services.
- ❖ Fund family violence services to respond to women with disabilities including increased intensive case management, brokerage funds for early intervention and other risk management services and capital funding for improved housing accessibility.
- ❖ Fund research on the help seeking experiences of women with disabilities and the extent and prevalence of violence against women with disabilities. This would provide the evidence that is most needed about ways to more effectively improve services to women with disabilities who experience violence.
- ❖ Fund specific initiatives for women with disabilities as part of the implementation of *the Right to Respect: Victoria's Plan to Prevent Violence against Women 2010-2020*.

2. An informed community sector responding to the health and human rights of women with disabilities in Victoria

Despite the fact that women with disabilities spend a greater proportion of their income on medical care and health related expenses they are less likely than women without disabilities to receive appropriate health services, particularly breast and cervical screening programs, bone density testing, menopause and incontinence management. Women with disabilities are more likely to be unlawfully sterilised and are more likely to face medical interventions to control their fertility.

How can the Victorian Government address this issue?

- ❖ To achieve improved access to health services there is a clear need to shift attitudes amongst health practitioners. Government must:
 - Fund women with disabilities to represent the issues confronting all women with disabilities in health planning and service delivery.
 - Fund the development of an education program on gender and disability that women with disabilities will deliver to community and health professional to raise awareness of these issues.
- ❖ Fund research to explore the issues facing women with disabilities in accessing health services in Victoria. There is much anecdotal evidence about the poor access to health services. Further research is needed to understand the nature of the barriers to women accessing health.
- ❖ Collect data about the incidence of people with disabilities' utilisation of health services. Currently there is no data available about the numbers of people accessing health services who have a disability. This data would make the needs of this population group more visible.

3. Victorian social policy must respond to diversity and disadvantage

On socio economic indicators, women with disabilities fare worse than other women and men with disabilities: Women with disabilities are less likely to be in paid work than other women, men with disabilities or the population as a whole and are less likely than their male counterparts to receive a senior secondary and/or tertiary education.ⁱⁱⁱ

How can the Victorian Government address this issue?

Australian governments are mandated to recognise Article 6 of the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability* to “take all appropriate measures to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women, for the purpose of guaranteeing them the exercise and enjoyment of the human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

To achieve this government and service providers must consider the impact on women with disabilities of new and existing policies. This applies particularly in relation to housing, education, employment, transport, health, family support and other human services.

Government should apply a gender and diversity lens to all service planning, service delivery and evaluation. The effect of adopting this approach would be that all new policy would incorporate accessibility and appropriateness for both women, people with disability and other marginalised groups.

**We urge all parties to consider these strategies
and to adopt them as part of their policy platform.**

For further information go to www.wdv.org.au or contact:
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References:

ⁱ Selina Tually, Andrew Beer and Debbie Faulkner *Too big to ignore - A report on future issues for Australian women's housing 2006-2025*; AHURI Southern Research Centre. 2007

ⁱⁱ Healey, L et.al *Building the Evidence: A Report on the status of policy and practice of family violence services response to violence against women with disabilities in Victoria*.
<http://www.vwdn.org.au/publications.htm#bte>

ⁱⁱⁱ Frohmader, C. WWDA Policy Paper No. 2, May 2010 <http://www.wwda.org.au/confpaps2006.htm>