



Engender
Equality

Submission to the Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-2027

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Introduction

Engender Equality is Tasmania's state-wide specialist family violence service, providing frontline counselling and support to all people affected by family violence and abuse, alongside advocacy, community education and training to address gender inequality and gendered violence in all its forms. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the draft *Tasmanian Women's Strategy 2022-2027* (the Strategy).

General Comments

Engender Equality commends the Tasmanian Government's commitment to addressing the impacts of gender inequality in Tasmania and its recognition of the need for cultural change to improve outcomes for women and girls across the state.

In many ways the Strategy achieves its objectives in reflecting critical life domains in which women's experiences are far from equal – in relation to safety and economic security, for example. In our assessment, however, the Strategy falls short of translating these objectives into realisable outcomes for the women we know and work alongside across Tasmanian communities.

In relation to the broader Australian population, Tasmanian population characteristics are unique, as we know. Of the Australian states and territories, Tasmania has:

- the highest rural population (ABS, 2016);
- the highest population of people over the age of 50 (ABS, 2018);
- the highest population of people with a disability (TasCOSS, 2018);
- the highest unemployment rate and the lowest weekly earnings (ABS, 2021);
- the lowest levels of literacy and educational attainment (UTAS, 2018);
- the highest levels of smoking and obesity (ABS, 2018);
- the highest pre-term birth rate (AIHW, 2019);
- the lowest rates of internet access (National Black Spot Database, 2022);
- the highest level of gun ownership (University of Sydney, 2021); and
- higher than average rates of mental illness and suicide (Tasmanian Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2016-2020).

Against this backdrop, women who present to Engender Equality with experiences of family violence often experience a range of additional disadvantages and/or marginalisations, as a result of chronic experiences of abuse.

These include isolation from family and social supports; homelessness or insecure housing; persistent, high-level safety concerns; welfare dependency; disrupted education or workforce participation; limited or no access to childcare; and complex physical and emotional impacts of trauma.

From the vantage point of this cohort, and with the bigger picture of Tasmania's socio-economic landscape in mind, the draft Strategy proposes a range of activities that bear little relationship to the everyday lives of many Tasmanian women, and which speak only in vague terms to the Strategy's own identified Outcome Areas in relation to economics, health and safety.

Specifically, the focus on activities that aim to increase women's representation on boards, honour rolls and in leadership positions, and that rely on mechanisms such as workplace frameworks and industry-specific employment pathways, while commendable, are far from attainable for the majority of women who make up Engender's client cohort.

In essence, there is a great deal of work to be done to meet the basic needs and rights of Tasmanian women before they can hope to access, much less attain equitable outcomes, within the Strategy's highlighted domains.

Recommendation 1. Review the Strategy’s Outcome Areas and activities through the lens of Tasmanian-specific population characteristics, with a view to prioritising the basic needs and rights of women across the lifespan.

Response to the Discussion Paper

Question 1: Do you have any comments about the proposed Goals?

i. Cultural Change

Engender Equality supports the Strategy’s proposed goal of achieving “transformative cultural change so that all Tasmanians enjoy the same rights and freedoms” together with the acknowledgement that the Tasmanian Government must “lead the way” in creating this culture change.

We commend the Strategy for recognising that “not all women have equal opportunity to education, workforce participation, leadership roles, safety, good health and recreation” because they do not have “the resources to access them.” We strongly recommend the Strategy provide further information about how it intends to offer the same rights and freedoms to Tasmanian women who lack these resources as a result of intersecting disadvantage and/or marginalisation.

In its role as culture change leaders, we also recommend the Tasmanian Government require all its representatives to make a public commitment to the Strategy, given individual members have in the past taken public positions that directly contradict the “fundamental human right that women, men and gender diverse people participate equally in all aspects of life.” For the Strategy to offer more than lip service, the Tasmanian community deserves to know that all members of our Government support the goals and principles of equality.

Recommendation 2. Provide further information about how the Strategy will offer the “same rights and freedoms” to Tasmanian women who lack the resources to access education, workforce participation, leadership roles, safety, good health and recreation.

Recommendation 3. The Tasmanian Government require all its representatives to make a public commitment to the Strategy, its goals and principles, in support of the “fundamental right that women, men and gender diverse people participate equally in all aspects of life.”

ii. Empowerment

Engender Equality supports the proposed goal of challenging and reforming the “traditional attitudes, norms, practices, structures and power imbalances that limit women’s participation” and “equal opportunities to influence decision making and exercise choice and control.”

Ironically, the term ‘women’s empowerment’ can be disempowering itself, as a result of its over-usage in the context doing-to women rather than women self-empowering. For this reason, we recommend replacing the term ‘empowerment’ with the term ‘sovereignty’ within the Strategy.

We strongly endorse the Strategy’s statement about the importance of victim-survivors of family and sexual violence being “at the centre of justice and service responses” and the acknowledgement that “this is especially important for women and girls who experience multiple forms of discrimination... such as ableism and racism.”

We recommend the authors of the Strategy elaborate on the intersectional intent of this goal with a clear description of the ways in which the Strategy will address the empowerment/sovereignty of women experiencing multiple forms of discrimination.

Recommendation 4. Replace the term ‘empowerment’ with the term ‘sovereignty’ within the Strategy.

Recommendation 5. Provide further information on the intersectional intent of the ‘empowerment’ goal with a clear description of the ways in which the Strategy will address the empowerment/sovereignty of women experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage.

iii. Visibility and Awareness

Engender Equality disagrees with the statement that “awareness of women’s participation and successes in social, economic and community life inspires other women to follow in their footsteps. This is especially important for women who face barriers that may make this harder to achieve, including women with disability, Aboriginal women, trans women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.”

The implication here is that barriers to ‘success’ for women experiencing intersecting forms of disadvantage and/or marginalisation might be overcome given sufficient encouragement to “follow in the footsteps” of their peers. In reality, entrenched ableism, racism and heteronormativity within our social and economic structures preclude marginalised women from getting anywhere near the spheres in which able-bodied, white, straight women might flourish.

While visibility and awareness matter, we recommend replacing this goal with a more direct objective that speaks to the self-determined priorities of Tasmanian women with disability, Aboriginal women, trans women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Recommendation 6. Replace the ‘visibility and awareness’ goal with an objective that speaks to the self-determined priorities of Tasmanian women with disability, Aboriginal women, trans women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Question 2: Do you have any comments about the proposed Outcome Areas, including opportunities for strengthening the relationship between each area?

4

In principle, Engender Equality supports the proposed Outcome Areas but suggests that few of the activities and strategies identified on pages 18-21 of the Strategy directly address these Areas in tangible ways. Without the provision of further detail, such as clear indicators and measures of progress for each Outcome Area, it is impossible to assess the Strategy’s rigour in relation to its own intended outcomes.

We recommend that for the Strategy’s Outcome Areas to be meaningful, an Evaluation Framework be developed and released in conjunction with the Strategy – rather than at a later date – and that this Framework be publicly reported against by an independent steering committee throughout the life of the Strategy.

Recommendation 7. Develop and release an Evaluation Framework in conjunction with the Strategy that includes clear indicators and measures of progress for each Outcome Area that will be publicly reported against by an independent steering committee throughout the life of the Strategy.

Question 3: What are your views about the proposed principles for guiding the implementation of activities for achieving gender equality?

The Principles for Implementation are satisfactory in theory but without an Implementation Plan they do not convey an awful lot. How does the Government intend to provide transparent and accountable governance and whole-of-government commitment to gender equality? Why is the Government developing a Strategy that names person-centred design as a key principle when community consultation and engagement is yet to occur?

Much like providing Outcome Areas without an Evaluation Framework, releasing Principles for Implementation without an Implementation Plan is insufficient in terms of providing insight into the

work of the Strategy. Engender Equality is in favour of delaying the release of the Strategy until the necessary development work has been done to make public an Implementation Plan and an Evaluation Plan that deliver on the intent of the Strategy.

Recommendation 8. Develop and release an Implementation Plan in conjunction with the Strategy that details the Government’s approach to delivering accountable governance, person-centred design and transparent evaluation.

Recommendation 9. Delay the release of the Strategy until the necessary development work has been done to make public an Implementation Plan and an Evaluation Plan that deliver on the intent of the Strategy.

Question 4. Do you have feedback on the proposed actions?

Please refer to above Recommendations 1, 2, 5 and 6.

As previously stated, without access to plans for implementation and evaluation it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of proposed actions in achieving the stated objectives of the Strategy. At this stage, described actions and activities seem mostly oriented towards women who have a certain degree of agency and access already with regard to health and wellbeing, educational and professional attainment. Actions to support women who experience multiple forms of disadvantage and/or marginalisation and whose basic needs and rights remain unmet on a daily basis, including women experiencing family violence and abuse, are missing within the current level of detail.

Question 5. Any other feedback?

Engender Equality notes within the Strategy an emphasis on developing employment pathways for girls and women into male-dominated industries such as building and construction. We suggest that for this workforce reorientation to be successful, it must be accompanied by strategies that aim to support men and people of diverse genders into traditionally female sectors, such as community services. Currently, the ‘caring’ and ‘support’ sectors rely on workforces that are almost entirely female, and that are, typically, less permanent, of lesser status and lesser paid. Dismantling the gender divide across industries relies on increasing the appeal of employers and sectors for all genders, not only on encouraging women into workplaces that are still heavily male, both statistically and culturally.

Recommendation 10. Include strategies that aim to increase the appeal of traditionally female sectors for men and people of diverse genders, such as community services.

Please see over page for a Summary of Recommendations.

Summary of Recommendations

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Recommendation 2	Provide further information about how the Strategy will offer the “same rights and freedoms” to Tasmanian women who lack the resources to access education, workforce participation, leadership roles, safety, good health and recreation.
Recommendation 3	The Tasmanian Government require all its representatives to make a public commitment to the Strategy, its goals and principles, in support of the “fundamental right that women, men and gender diverse people participate equally in all aspects of life.”
Recommendation 4	Replace the term ‘empowerment’ with the term ‘sovereignty’ within the Strategy.
Recommendation 5	Provide further information on the intersectional intent of the ‘empowerment’ goal with a clear description of the ways in which the Strategy will address the empowerment/sovereignty of women experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage.
Recommendation 6	Replace the ‘visibility and awareness’ goal with an objective that speaks to the self-determined priorities of Tasmanian women with disability, Aboriginal women, trans women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
Recommendation 7	Develop and release an Evaluation Framework in conjunction with the Strategy that includes clear indicators and measures of progress for each Outcome Area that will be publicly reported against by an independent steering committee throughout the life of the Strategy.
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Recommendation 10	Include strategies that aim to increase the appeal of traditionally female sectors for men and people of diverse genders, such as community services.