

# Fact sheet 10.

## Council as a service provider



Councils provide a wide range of services and facilities in partnership with the local community, state and federal government, and other agencies. These include property, economic, human, recreational and cultural services. Councils are also responsible for assets and infrastructure including roads, bridges, drains, town halls, libraries, sport and recreation facilities, community centres, kindergartens and childcare centres. Councils have a role in enforcing state and local laws for environment, public health, traffic, land use planning and animal management. They have significant reach within the community and can use a gender equality lens when planning, implementing and evaluating programs and services.

### Why gender is relevant to accessing local government services

Gender affects women and men's experiences of accessing local government services. Other factors such as age, disability, ethnicity, cultural and religious background, socioeconomic status and literacy also shape people's ability to access and use services. Barriers include, but aren't limited to, inaccessible venues; council services or activities being held at times or venues that are not family-friendly or perceived to be safe; communications that use wording or images that unintentionally indicate they are only for one part of the community; and services and programs that promote rigid gender stereotypes. Considering gender and other intersecting factors is crucial when designing services that meet the needs of all people in the community and promote inclusion and equity.

Examples of how local government can advance gender equality through services include the following.

### Sport and recreation

Rigid gender stereotypes continue to shape society's attitudes and expectations about what sports people should be interested in and play, including the idea that some sports are feminine or masculine. While women's participation in sport and recreation is increasing, inequalities remain. Councils have the power to influence gender equality in their provision of a wide range of sports and recreation programs and services and infrastructure, and with local sporting organisations through their contractual relationships. Councils can promote and support the participation of women and girls at all levels – as players, coaches, administrators and umpires. Councils can work in partnership and support local sports clubs to promote gender equality and respect through their club cultures, policies and communications. They can undertake an audit of programs and identify opportunities to ensure services and facilities are inclusive of all people – see Fact sheet 12 for more information. Examples include:

- Merri-bek City Council (Vic) – the [Active Women and Girls Strategy](#) addresses inclusivity of women and girls, people with a disability, and people from culturally diverse communities in sport.
- City of Moonee Valley (Vic) – the [Ready, Set, Equity! project](#) aims to increase the visibility, profile, representation and participation of girls and women at all levels of sport.

### Early years

Nillumbik Shire Council (Vic) – the [Gender Equity in the Early Years policy](#) recognises the important role that early years services play in promoting gender equity and preventing violence against women.

This sample policy can be adopted, adapted and used by early years services to inspire their own service-specific policies and work in promoting gender equity. Other examples include: City of Darebin (Vic), [Creating Gender Equity in the Early Years](#) project outline and [resource for local government; Level Playground](#), which encourages children to develop personal identities that reflect their true selves and enables them to create healthy, safe and respectful relationships; and Our Watch, [Because Why](#) should gender stereotypes limit our children?

## Maternal and child health

Healthability's [Baby Makes 3](#) promotes equality in parenting by increasing the capacity of maternal and child health services to integrate gender equality principles, practices and structures so they can support new parents in ways that challenge rigid gender expectations of parenting. An example of this initiative in Victoria is [Baby Makes 3 in the City of Melton](#). An example of challenging gender stereotypes by creating inclusive parenting groups is from Merri-bek City Council (Vic), [Dads of Moreland](#).

## Youth services

A respectful relationships campaign to promote healthy and equal relationships between young people and to reinforce understandings of consent can be developed and delivered by engaging with young people, local partners and a youth advisory group. [Active bystander](#) training can be delivered to encourage young people to take bystander action when they see disrespectful behaviours. Council can support positive male peer relations by working with young men on healthy masculinities.

## Aged and disability services

Within aged and disability care, male and female clients may have different needs and preferences and require a workforce that reflects this. Given the high rates of abuse that occur in aged and disability care

services and facilities, abuse prevention policies and training can be developed and delivered for workers and carers. Given that older women experience high rates of homelessness, council services could consider connecting them with other community services such as food vans and outreach support.

## Emergency management

Rates of family violence increase after disasters and emergencies, and there are significant differences in how men and women experience and recover from disaster.<sup>1</sup> Through their role in planning for, responding to, and recovering from disasters, councils can ensure that emergency management committees include a range of community organisations, including family and domestic violence organisations and women from different backgrounds. Community consultations can be held at accessible and child-friendly facilities and at places or events where a cross-section of the community will be. MAV's [Gender and emergency management](#) webpage is designed to help councils and their partners improve their understanding of gender and incorporate gender considerations into emergency management policy, planning, decision-making and service delivery. For an example of this, see Macedon Ranges Shire Council (Vic), [Prevention of Violence Against Women in Emergencies Action Plan](#).

## Animal management

Given the link between animal abuse and family violence,<sup>2</sup> ensure strategies are in place to address this risk in your animal management services. Strategies could include training local laws officers so that they understand violence against women, recognise risks, and are able to make appropriate referrals; updating policies and operating procedures; developing partnerships with the local Police Family Violence Unit; and supporting housing of animals during periods of relocation following family violence. See MAV's [Responding to family violence: The role of animal management](#) for more information.

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<sup>1</sup> Gender and Disaster Australia (GADA). (n.d.). [All on board: Incorporating national gender and emergency management guidelines](#).

<sup>2</sup> Domestic Violence NSW. (2020). [Animals and people experiencing domestic and family violence](#).

