

Fact sheet 12.

The role of community spaces and places



Council's role in gender equitable planning, design and management of spaces

Planning policies and processes can unintentionally exclude or discriminate against different groups of people in the community and can ignore the fact that women and men use public spaces differently. Cities and towns have historically been planned and designed by men and for men, reflecting traditional gender roles and division of labour. In general, cities and towns are more accessible for heterosexual, able-bodied, cisgender men than they are for women, girls, LGBTIQ people, and people with disabilities.¹

Local government can advance gender equitable land-use planning and design by:

- undertaking a gender audit on existing policies and strategies to improve the understanding of gender equity and how it relates to planning and design
- improving knowledge of how gendered needs can influence building requirements, for example location and access, childcare, baby changing facilities, public toilets, lighting, and accessible facilities
- undertaking gender impact assessments to assist with decision-making and planning
- collecting sex-disaggregated data and research that highlights the different experiences and needs of women and men
- ensuring consultation includes gender equality considerations – see Fact sheet 3 for more information

- considering the criteria for allocating council resources such as halls and centres, sport and recreation facilities, and grants to groups, clubs, associations and community gardens. Do they provide for all genders?

For examples relating to community centres, maternal and child health, youth facilities, community pavilions and aquatic and leisure facilities, see City of Whittlesea (Vic), [Gender equity in design guidelines](#).

Resources

[She's A Crowd](#) offers data insights to local government and city planners to be able to view incidents of gender-based violence in their community. This data can help decision-makers ensure that their policies apply a gender lens and promote the safety of women and gender diverse people.

[YourGround](#) engaged 25 Victorian councils in a social research project, surveying women and gender-diverse people to map their perceptions of safety in open spaces. The aim of the YourGround project was to understand equity and access to, and use of, public spaces, particularly for exercise and recreation.

Monash University's [XYX Lab](#) offers [Gender-Sensitive Training for Inclusive Placemaking](#) online for professionals involved in planning, design and policy-making. It aims to develop a more complex understanding of gender-sensitive issues and the importance of responding to these issues through the creation, maintenance and redesign of public spaces.

A [short video](#) from the City of Edmonton (Canada) illustrates what an intersectional gender lens is, and how it can be applied in open space planning for new developments, projects and rehabilitation.

¹ The World Bank. (2020). [Handbook for gender-inclusive urban planning and design](#).

Transport

Council has a role to play in creating and maintaining transport infrastructure with a focus on access and useability in local communities. People move across areas in very different ways and this movement is strongly influenced by gender and other factors such as physical ability. Disaggregated data and widespread consultation is crucial in council's development of transport strategies, in its provision of infrastructure, planning and development, and in advocacy.

The importance of libraries

Libraries can be important places and resources for women escaping domestic and family violence – see the MAV's [The role of libraries](#) for further information. Council's commitment to preventing violence against women can be promoted on library noticeboards, computer screens, bookmarks and library bags. Events can be held at libraries to recognise significant dates such as 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, International Women's Day, NAIDOC Week, Refugee Week, and International Day of the Girl Child.

Children's books can be procured and promoted that challenge gender stereotypes and rigid gender roles. The [Picture booklist](#) from City of Monash (Vic) provides parents, teachers and carers with a range of stories which provide broader ideas about who girls, boys, women, men and people who identify as diverse genders can be, what they can be interested in, and what they can achieve.

Sport and recreational spaces and facilities

Councils have significant influence over sports and recreation settings through the management of infrastructure, facilities and public spaces. By considering the needs of women and girls in planning and design, councils can ensure that they provide safe, welcoming and inclusive spaces for women and gender diverse people, and people from all backgrounds, with all levels of ability.

When councils are developing or upgrading sporting pavilions, open spaces or recreation facilities, they can consult a range of community members and groups on things like their perceptions of how safe, welcoming and family-friendly the environment is, and whether there are toilets and changing facilities for people of all genders. In developing sport and recreation strategies or grounds allocation policies, councils can analyse the proportion of male and female teams that access council facilities, and whether these are equal. Strategies can be considered to ensure more equal access to these facilities, including ways to support local sports clubs to increase women's and girls' teams – see Fact sheet 10 for an example from Merri-bek City Council.

Case studies

- Glenelg Shire Council (Vic) conducted [gender impact assessments](#) at Portland Leisure and Aquatic Centre to improve the user experience and attract new users of all genders.
- Geelong City Council (Vic) conducted a [gender impact assessment](#) on mountain biking facilities, leading to recommendations for future open space planning.
- Bass Coast Shire Council undertook a [gender impact assessment](#) on its public place names to address the gender imbalance of place naming and recognise the contribution many notable women have played.