

# Fact sheet 9.

## Council as a workplace



Local government comprises a significant workforce, with almost 200,000 people employed in 537 councils across Australia, the majority of which (55%) are rural, regional or remote.<sup>1</sup> Most people employed in councils also live locally and have capacity to influence change beyond their workplaces in their communities – for example, in sports clubs, schools and faith-based settings.<sup>2</sup>

### Gender inequality in the workplace

While women's participation in paid employment has increased in recent decades, many gender inequalities continue. Women continue to be underrepresented in leadership positions, they experience pay discrimination,<sup>3</sup> and workplace gender discrimination and sexual harassment remain significant problems.<sup>4</sup> As a workplace that connects directly with communities and other levels of government, councils should internally reflect equality and respect in order to support their communities to do so.

### Workplace Equality and Respect Standards in local government

Our Watch's [Workplace Equality and Respect](#) resource offers a step-by-step process to guide organisational change to promote and embed gender equality. Below is a brief overview of the five standards that all organisations can work towards, particularly as they apply to the council context.

#### 1. Commitment:

Councils demonstrate an ongoing commitment to workplace gender equality and preventing sexual harassment and other forms of gender-based violence. Ways they can do this include:

- securing the commitment of elected representatives, CEO and leadership
- dedicating adequate time, staffing and financial resources to prevention work
- developing internal and external communications and campaigns, commitment statements, strategies and action plans.

#### Examples

- City of Melton (Vic) – [Equality and Respect 2030 Strategy](#)
- City of Ballarat (Vic) – [Prevention of violence and gender equality leadership statement](#)
- Townsville City Council (Qld) – [completion of White Ribbon Australia accreditation](#).

#### 2. Conditions:

Councils apply an intersectional gender lens to their workplace policies and practices to ensure they are fair and equitable. This can include: reviewing and developing relevant workplace policies and strategies that embed gender equality; unconscious bias training for all staff involved in recruitment; benchmarking and monitoring gender equality indicators against clear goals and targets; and flexible work policies, including parental leave for all parents and carers.

#### Case study

Bass Coast Shire Council (Vic) removed the difference between primary and secondary carers in its [Equal Parental Leave](#) policy, meaning that mothers, fathers and same-sex partners are now entitled to the same paid leave. The council also set a new industry standard by increasing paid parental leave from 14 to 16 weeks.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2020–21). [Employment and earnings, public sector, Australia](#); Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). (2018). [Local government workforce and future skills report Australia](#).

<sup>2</sup> ALGA. (2021). [ALGA's position on domestic violence and our call for dedicated funding](#).

<sup>3</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA). (2022). [Gender pay gap data](#).

<sup>4</sup> Judd, B. (2021, 1 March). [Sexual harassment affects workplaces across Australia. So what can we do better?](#) ABC News.

Superannuation contributions are also made for everyone on unpaid parental leave for a full year.

See the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's (WGEA) [Designing and supporting gender equitable parental leave](#) for insights into the benefits and impacts of parental leave for men and partners.

### 3. Culture:

Council promotes a workplace culture where all people feel safe, confident and supported to actively challenge gender bias and discrimination, gender stereotypes and harmful gender norms without adverse consequences. All leaders and council staff are supported with information, training and opportunities to reflect on how stereotypical and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours might be perpetuating the status quo. Internal and external communications use inclusive language and images that proactively challenge stereotypes and harmful gender norms. Feedback from people about their experiences and perspectives is regularly listened to and acted upon.

#### Case studies

- At the City of Casey (Vic), 16 staff were recruited from different teams in council and trained as **Champions of Change**. Their role was to be advocates for gender equality and prevention by 'putting gender on the agenda' and organising active bystander training for their teams. This has grown into a group of over 60 staff who continue to meet regularly and advocate for gender equality and prevention.
- At Glenelg Shire Council (Vic), the [Gender Equality Plan](#) drives council's leadership and advocacy role in addressing gender inequities as an employer, service provider and community stakeholder.

### 4. Support:

Councils listen to, respect and support people who experience sexual harassment and gender-based violence (including domestic and family violence) through policies and practices

that consider the impact of trauma. Human Resources, executive leaders and managers ensure there are adequate policies and a workplace culture that effectively supports staff who are experiencing violence. It involves delivery of specialised training; establishing and supporting workplace contact officers; developing family and domestic violence leave and sexual harassment policies; and partnering with specialist family and domestic violence organisations.

Our Watch's [Workplace support for staff who experience family violence](#) provides information and examples of policy and practice, as well as examples of what to include in enterprise agreements.

#### Case studies

- Darebin City Council (Vic) developed [a video](#) outlining their commitment to supporting staff who experience family violence and creating a workplace that is respectful and non-violent.
- The City of Parramatta (NSW) [2022–2025 Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan](#) outlines how council will respond to, and prevent, domestic and family violence within the workplace and the community. This includes training for staff and establishing a working group which works across council to increase prevention capacity.
- See MAV's [council produced resources](#) for examples of policies, strategies and plans.

### 5. Our business:

Councils promote intersectional gender equality in their external engagement with customers, stakeholders and the community. This standard asks councils to use their reach and influence within communities to apply a gender lens to their partnerships, programs, services and functions in a way that reflects council's commitment to promoting gender equality. Council regularly and publicly reports on their performance against gender equality indicators and their prevention of violence efforts.