

Tip sheet: Engaging leaders

This tip sheet is for anyone tasked with promoting gender equality and respect in their workplace. Please note that this tipsheet is for general information only and does not constitute legal advice or material that is tailored specifically for your organisation or circumstances.

The commitments and actions that senior executives and board members make are critical to changing the attitudes, behaviours and structures that drive violence against women. Engaging leaders is, therefore, vital for ensuring that efforts to achieve equality and respect are successful and sustained.

Engaging leaders, including boards, CEOs and other senior executives, helps to:

* bring others on board with organisational change, as the leaders can leverage their positional power to mandate change as well as actively model equality and respect
* reinforce the workplace’s commitment to achieving equality and respect by highlighting what needs to be changed and resourcing efforts to drive organisational change.
* empower staff across the workplace to speak up or act when they see sexist or discriminatory behaviours occurring, knowing they have the support of leaders and policies making it clear such behaviours are unacceptable.

# Tip 1: Use your understanding of the impacts of violence against women in the workplace (including sexual harassment) to bring senior executives on board

Familiarise yourself with key facts on what drives violence against women, including sexual harassment, and how this can be prevented by using the Workplace Equality and Respect Standards and supporting tools. Consider focusing on training senior executives or engaging them in conversation about this issue before you train other staff so you can be sure there is a strong shared understanding of the need for change before questions or critiques arise.

# Tip 2: Identify individual champions in your workplace

Individual champions can play a big part in challenging the attitudes, behaviours and structures that drive violence against women. However, driving change alone can be challenging, and people can feel overwhelmed when encountering the barriers that may arise. Consider establishing a small team that has the responsibility to work towards achieving the Workplace Equality and Respect Standards. Choose people who show leadership and have the authority to change strategies, policies and procedures.

# Tip 3: Build a business case

Your business case should make an ethical case for preventing violence against women, including sexual harassment, alongside highlighting the following:

* the ways that gender inequality impacts your workplace and your core business
* opportunities for change
* the benefits of taking active steps to address the drivers of violence against women
* the risk and cost of inaction.

## Pointers for building a business case

**Highlight** how promoting gender equality and preventing violence against women, including sexual harassment, aligns with existing organisational values, goals and priorities.

Draw attention to legal obligations. The new Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Bill 2022 (Cth):

* prohibits conduct that subjects another person to a workplace environment that is hostile on the grounds of sex.
* introduces a positive duty on employers to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate unlawful sex discrimination, including sexual harassment, as far as possible.

**Show senior leaders that gender inequality exists**. What’s happening in your workplace is what will interest them the most. They must be convinced of a problem before supporting a change initiative. Use facts and figures to make your case.

**Consider consulting** with your employees (via employee surveys, focus groups, and informal consultations) to understand their experience of equality and respect in your workplace and identify how gender influences and shapes their working lives. Examine any data you regularly collect and report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (see the [Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) website](https://www.wgea.gov.au) and resources for more information).

**Call attention to** the financial and non-financial costs of inaction. Violence against women affects workplaces in many costly ways, including increased absenteeism and staff turnover, lost productivity, and decreased job satisfaction and staff morale. There is also evidence that promoting gender equality and respect can have significant financial benefits for workplaces. According to Deloitte Access Economics, in 2018, workplace sexual harassment cost $2.6 billion in lost productivity and $0.9 billion in other financial costs. Each case of harassment represents around four working days of lost output. Employers bore 70% of the financial costs, the government 23% and individuals 7%. On average, lost well-being for victims was an additional $250 million, or nearly $5,000 per victim.

**Underscore** the fact that employees and stakeholders expect action to prevent violence against women, including sexual harassment. A VicHealth study showed that:

* 98% of respondents expect employers to ensure women have the same opportunities as men.
* 94% of respondents agreed that employers should take a leadership role in educating their workforce about respectful relationships between men and women.

**Showcase examples** of what other workplaces and individuals are doing. There is considerable commitment and momentum within Australian society for equality and respect and the prevention of violence against women, including sexual harassment – including at all levels of government, the media, workplaces, sports organisations, communities and individuals. In building your business case, it may be strategic to highlight examples, case studies and learnings of workplaces and individuals to help drive leaders’ commitment and engagement in this work. WGEA collates data and benchmarks for gender equality indicators, like flexible work, the representation of men and women in senior leadership, and how many workplaces have family violence leave policies. The data is presented nationally and by industry (see the [WGEA Data Explorer](http://data.wgea.gov.au)).

# Further information and support

**For more information, tools and resources** on how to prevent sexual harassment in your workplace, visit [Our Watch – Workplace Equality and Respect](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au) <workplace.ourwatch.org.au>

**For more information and frameworks for addressing sexual harassment as a workplace risk**, visit [Our Watch – Practice guidance: Reducing risk in workplace initiatives to prevent violence against women](https://workplace.ourwatch.org.au/resource/practice-guidance-reducing-risk-in-workplace-initiatives-to-prevent-violence-against-women) <workplace.ourwatch.org.au/  
resource/practice-guidance-reducing-risk-in-workplace-initiatives-to-prevent-violence-against-women>

**For support, contact** Our Watch’s Workplace Team at [equalityandrespect@ourwatch.org.au](mailto:equalityandrespect@ourwatch.org.au)

# Acknowledgements

Our Watch acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land across Australia on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples past and present, and we value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge.

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 Australian Government

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