

Gender Equality

Statement of Commitment

Territory Families
WE CARE



A message from the Minister for Territory Families

Gender equality is a human right and fundamental if we are to progress social wellbeing, social justice and community cohesion here in the Northern Territory.

Gender equality is linked to many positive economic outcomes and social benefits. Progressing gender equality benefits everyone, including men. Through increased community understanding and awareness, eliminating discrimination, preventing gender-based violence, addressing unconscious bias in systems and challenging harmful stereotypes faced by people of all genders, we can create a foundation for all Territorians to lead happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives.

The Northern Territory has a diverse and unique population. This means each person experiences gender equality differently. As a community we must recognise and respond to the many ways that gender norms and stereotypes are interrelated with, and often compounded by, other forms of disadvantage and discrimination.

Over the past century many positive developments have improved the circumstances of women, girls and people of diverse genders and sexualities. Over the past twenty years we have seen the first Australian female Prime Minister, the first female Chief Minister of the Northern Territory, and the first female Administrator of the Northern Territory. This government also made Australian history in 2016 by announcing a female majority Cabinet.

This Gender Equality Statement of Commitment illustrates our undertaking to create a Territory that is fair, inclusive and safe for all Territorians. We have listened to what Territorians have told us about gender inequality here in the Northern Territory throughout the consultations held to develop this Statement of Commitment.

Gender equality is linked to many positive economic outcomes and social benefits. Progressing gender equality benefits everyone, including men.

There are five areas of focus that we will work across government and with key stakeholders to develop actions for. The Northern Territory Public Service will seek to be a gender equality role model for business and not-for-profit areas to emulate and follow.

This Statement of Commitment seeks to focus our work on creating a more gender equal and inclusive Northern Territory. By developing a local culture that values and upholds equality in all its forms, the Northern Territory can be a place where all people feel respected as equals.

Hon Dale Wakefield MLA
Minister for Territory Families

The Northern Territory Gender Equality Statement of Commitment

The Northern Territory Government believes that gender equality is fundamental to improving the lives of all women, men, girls, boys and people of diverse genders and sexualities, and to creating an inclusive and thriving Northern Territory.

We believe that everyone should have equal access to power, resources, and opportunities. A person's gender and sexuality should never be a barrier to participate and be included in Territory life.

We will work to reduce gender-based disadvantages and create greater opportunities for all Territorians to reach their full potential.

Increasing gender equality will help make the Northern Territory a welcoming place where all people are treated with dignity, respect and fairness and all voices are heard.

Our approach to improve gender equality will be grounded in the lived experiences of Territorians. To develop our gender equality initiatives we will seek out, listen to and include the voices of Territorians, especially those from marginalised groups who are most at risk of experiencing compounded and multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage.

The Northern Territory Government recognises that people's identities and backgrounds are diverse and multiple with respect to age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, disability, religion, citizenship status, socioeconomic status, and location among other factors. The *Northern Territory Gender Equality Statement of Commitment* undertakes to address the barriers to equality experienced by Territorians.

Through a sustained and collaborative approach we will create a more equal Northern Territory that is safe, inclusive and economically secure for all.

Vision

Territorians enjoy a safe, and economically secure Northern Territory where gender, sexuality or background is never a barrier to full participation and inclusion.

Principles

Actions to achieve this vision will be guided by the following principles:

- Encourages inclusive and intersectional approaches.
- Supports the inclusion of gender equity measures.
- Builds evidence to find what works to improve gender equality in the Northern Territory.
- Challenges rigid gender norms and stereotypes.
- Focuses on long-term systemic, attitudinal and behavioural change.

Key focus areas for action

There are five key areas the Northern Territory Government will focus on to improve gender equality for Territorians of all genders, sexualities and backgrounds:

- Community Engagement.
- Health and Wellbeing.
- Safety.
- Economic Security.
- Leadership and Participation.

These key areas were developed from consultations across the Northern Territory with individuals, community and government organisations, the responses received on the 'Have Your Say' website, and the 21 submissions received during the consultation process.

We heard that any commitment to gender equality must recognise and situate gender inequality in the historical and social context, inclusive of the ongoing impact of colonisation. All policies and actions must address the role that poverty, including housing insecurity and homelessness plays in driving and compounding people's experiences of gender inequality. We also heard that people understand that gender inequality is complex and multifaceted and affects people in many different ways, which means that innovative, community developed and community led solutions are needed.

Focus area

Community Engagement

Health & Wellbeing

Goal

Territorians' knowledge about gender equality, gender diversity, diverse sexualities and the drivers of gendered violence is improved.

Territorians have every opportunity to be well and live healthy, balanced and active lives.

What we heard from Territorians

Community education and media campaigns help increase awareness of gender equality and gender diversity and to promote respectful relationships.

Respectful relationships and gender equality education programs are needed, particularly for young people in schools and people in the youth and criminal justice systems.

Local research will help to increase understanding of and improve gender equality in the Northern Territory.

Training and education needs to address the role of unconscious gender bias in decision making.

Promote gender equality role models.

Recognise gender as a key determinant of physical and mental health.

More needs to be done to build understanding about the mental health consequences of gender inequality, including alcohol and drug abuse and suicide.

People from lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) communities should have support to access safe public spaces, health and counselling services.

Strengthen the men's health sector, particularly with respect to healthy lifestyles, nutrition and mental health.

Access to affordable and appropriate sexual health services is important, particularly among LGBTQIA+ communities.

Encourage more equal sharing between genders of unpaid work and childcare.

Support men in their roles as fathers, grandfathers, father-figures and positive role models.

Increase targeted preventive health information and advice, particularly for older men.

All Territorians, particularly women, girls and seniors, should be encouraged to participate in sport and exercise.

Invest in and develop clubs and groups, particularly for seniors, youth, Aboriginal and multicultural communities, to reduce social isolation and foster support networks.

Safety

Territorians are safe, feel respected and are free from violence in all aspects of life.

The broad and underlying conditions that support violence against women and perpetuate gender inequality need to be challenged.

Domestic, family and sexual violence needs to be prevented and responded to earlier.

Undertake local research on the factors that lead to gender-based violence.

Men need support for behaviour change and access to healing spaces.

Sexual harassment in all areas of life should not be tolerated.

Employees who are experiencing domestic violence, workplace bullying or sexual harassment need support.

The issue of economic violence needs to be addressed to improve gender equality.

Public spaces must be safe for people of all genders and sexualities.

Appropriate housing underpins safety.

Economic Security

Territorians are supported to achieve their full potential and be more economically secure at each stage of life.

When people aspire to non-traditional industries and fields for their gender, they need to be supported.

It is important for young parents, particularly those in rural and remote communities, to stay in the education system.

Childcare that is more affordable and accessible will support gender equality.

Gender equality measures in the workplace including workplace flexibility and addressing unconscious bias need to be implemented.

Gender equality measures should be included in government contracts.

Leadership & Participation

Territorians are able to fully participate in all aspects of life and are able to influence the decisions that impact them.

Gender equality reporting and accountability mechanisms encourage diversity in leadership positions.

Support gender equality in leadership and value diverse leadership styles.

Senior leaders should be encouraged and supported to set good gender equality examples, including normalising and encouraging the uptake of flexible work and parental leave, especially by men.

Leadership initiatives for women, gender diverse people, and men, particularly those from Aboriginal, migrant, refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, youth and people with disabilities are important.

Create and encourage leadership and participation opportunities for women and girls in sport.

Governance, research, policy and project development need to ensure the ongoing input of women, men and people of diverse genders and sexualities, particularly those who are most at risk of compounded disadvantages.

Why gender equality is important

Gender is how a society or culture describes and constructs the different roles of men and women. It is not the same as sex, which refers to the biological characteristics of females and males. Gender refers to the tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in public and private life. Gender roles, and the opportunities and expectations attached to these roles, can change over time. The term 'gender' also refers to the way in which a person identifies or expresses their masculine or feminine characteristics. A person's gender identity, or gender expression, is not always exclusively male or female and may or may not correspond to their sex.

Action to achieve gender equality aims to provide equal opportunities for all people to access social, economic and political resources, including protection under the law. It is important to understand that gender equality does not mean that all genders must be treated the same.

The benefits of gender equality are increasingly being realised by governments, businesses, and communities around the world. In addition to being a fundamental human right and a prerequisite for social justice,¹ gender equality is linked to many positive economic outcomes and social benefits. Countries with greater gender equality are more cohesive and connected. People who live in societies with a high degree of gender equality can experience better quality of life, lower levels of depression, and lower incidents of violence.²

To make the Northern Territory socially and economically prosperous, and a place where people are happy to live and raise their families, we need to remove the gendered barriers that prevent people from participating fully in all areas of life.

Gender equality has also been conclusively shown to stimulate economic growth. It is predicted that the Australian economy would increase significantly if gender equality is advanced.³

Territorians have diverse gender identities, sexualities and backgrounds and we cannot take a one-size-fits-all approach to improving gender equality in the Northern Territory. An intersectional approach will be taken to understand the compounded and multiple levels of disadvantage and discrimination experienced by Territorians from all walks of life. We recognise the social and historical context of gender inequality in the Northern Territory, in particular the ongoing impacts of colonisation for Indigenous people, families and communities. We understand that gender equality work must involve finding ways for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to heal and connect. We will need to find locally driven and culturally appropriate ways to improve gender equality.

Gender inequality can prevent people from reaching their full potential. To make the Northern Territory socially and economically prosperous, and a place where people are happy to live and raise their families, we need to remove the gendered barriers that prevent people from participating fully in all areas of life.

What we will do

The next steps in progressing the Gender Equality Statement of Commitment are:

- Work across government and with stakeholders to develop actions that respond to and progress equality in the five focus areas.
- Review existing data, identify data sources and undertake baseline data analysis to tell us the current status of gender equality in the Northern Territory and to measure and monitor progress over time.
- Explore further areas of research.

Focus Area 1

Community Engagement

Goal: Territorians' knowledge about gender equality, gender diversity, diverse sexualities and the drivers of gendered violence is improved.

Focus Area 2

Health & Wellbeing

Goal: Territorians have every opportunity to be well and live healthy, balanced and active lives.

Territorians believe that there is a significant need for education and awareness raising in relation to gender equality, gender diversity and diverse sexualities. It is important that we engage the community to learn about and have public discussions about gender equality to gain broad community support and provide safer spaces for people of all genders and sexualities.

Work is needed to promote the social and economic benefits of gender equality, and increase Territorians' understanding of gender and sexual diversity. Promoting gender equality is an essential component of violence prevention; therefore, an increased awareness and understanding of what equality is and why it is important can have a positive impact on reducing violence and the drivers of violence.

Early actions undertaken will ensure that the community understands what gender equality is and how everyone can benefit from it. Raising awareness about gender equality underpins the success of future initiatives to reduce gender-based barriers that prevent people from living safe, healthy, prosperous and fulfilling lives.

A person's gender is a powerful social determinant of their health and wellbeing. This is the case for men, women as well as transgender, gender-diverse and intersex people. Our biological sex also plays a factor in how prevalent certain diseases may be or how they present or manifest. Gender roles and norms influence how we access health services and how health services respond to our needs. There are differences in the health and welfare needs of women, men and people with diverse genders and sexualities. These differences are illustrated by different rates of injury, physical and mental illness and mortality, different attitudes towards health and healthy activities, as well as the different ways in which health services are accessed.

For intersex, gender-diverse and transgender people, the experience of stigma and discrimination from health services and health professionals can negatively affect their wellbeing. A lack of specialist health services, which is of particular concern in rural and remote locations, can make it more difficult for intersex, gender-diverse and transgender people to feel safe accessing health services and supports.

Men in the Northern Territory face many challenges to maintain positive mental health and wellbeing. These challenges are particularly compounded for Aboriginal men living in regional and remote areas. There is a need to raise awareness about mental health and to make talking about mental health acceptable for men. It is also important to increase the social connections between men and to celebrate the positive contribution the roles of fathers, grandfathers and father-figures make to Northern Territory communities and families.

Access to trauma informed mental health services, particularly for LGBTQIA+ communities and for those who have been victims of domestic, family or sexual violence is important. There is also a need to focus on illness and disease prevention through increased healthy behaviours and increased participation in sport and physical activity.

Territorians sometimes prefer to access health services from medical professionals of the same gender. This is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Focus Area 3

Safety

Goal: Territorians are safe, feel respected and are free from violence in all aspects of life.

Gender is one of many aspects of a person's life that can place them at higher risk of experiencing violence. People's experiences of gender-based violence can be heightened and compounded by other characteristics such as age, ethnicity, cultural identity, race, language, migrant and citizenship status, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, disability, religion and location.

Women and girls are the most adversely affected by gender-based violence. The Northern Territory has the highest rates of domestic, family and sexual violence in Australia. Aboriginal women account for 89 per cent of all victims of domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory.⁴

Certain groups of culturally and linguistically diverse women are more at risk of experiencing trafficking, forced and servile marriage, female genital mutilation or honour killings.

People from LGBTQIA+ communities also run a high risk of experiencing physical or verbal attacks because of their gender identity or sexuality. Many LGBTQIA+ young people can experience verbal and physical homophobic abuse and other kinds of transphobia and homophobia, including cyberbullying, social exclusion or humiliation. LGBTQIA+ people are more likely to experience poor mental health including depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts than the general population.⁵

Men are also victims of violence. In 84 per cent of instances of physical assault against a man, the assault was committed by another man.⁶ Gender norms around being a 'real man' can pressure men and boys to act tough and seek to be in control. As a society we must challenge social pressures and gender norms around being a 'real man' that can lead some men and boys to perpetrate violence against girls, women, other men and boys, and people with diverse genders or sexualities.

Focus Area 4

Economic Security

Goal: Territorians are supported to achieve their full potential and be more economically secure at each stage of life.

Economic security is when people have financial independence through a stable income or other resources to support a standard of living across the life course. Economic security is important for overall wellbeing and provides people with the ability to fully participate in all aspects of life. However, access to employment and financial security can be difficult for some groups such as people who live in remote places, people on visas that restrict them from working or accessing financial support, and for people who cannot access childcare or caring respite.

The Northern Territory has a workforce that is markedly divided by gender with more men working in higher earning industries, such as mining, and more women working in lower-paid industries, such as childcare, other caring professions and social services. More women than men work in lower-paid, part-time, and casual employment. Children and adults should be encouraged to consider non-traditional areas of study and occupations for their gender, so there are more women and girls in the science, technology or engineering fields and more boys and men in teaching and caring fields.

Young parents need to be encouraged and supported to remain in training or education so that they are able to pursue their full potential as well as be supported in their parenting.

Australia's gender pay gap for full time employment has hovered between 14 to 19 per cent for the past two decades. Currently, the national gender pay gap is 14 per cent and the Northern Territory's gender pay gap is 13.4 per cent. Unpaid caring work, especially child rearing, is one of the largest contributors to this gap in earnings between men and women. Access to affordable, quality childcare has been cited as the biggest barrier to women entering or re-entering the workforce or working more hours.⁷

The availability of flexible work options has been recognised as being one of the most important factors in increasing workforce participation. Due to social norms that presume women are the primary provider of unpaid care and unpaid work, flexible work options are mostly taken up by women. Nationally, around 95 per cent of parental leave is taken by mothers with only one in 20 fathers taking up parental leave options.⁸ We must place higher value upon unpaid caring and domestic work, as it supports all aspects of social and family life. To achieve gender equality workplaces must acknowledge that all people need to be supported to fulfil their paid and unpaid work responsibilities.

Over the course of a lifetime, workplace segregation, the gender pay gap and unpaid caring work economically disadvantage women, especially when they approach retirement. Women in the Northern Territory over the age of 55 have almost 50 per cent less superannuation savings than Territory men.⁹

Focus Area 5

Leadership & Participation

Goal: Territorians are able to fully participate in all aspects of life and are able to influence the decisions that impact them.

Diversity on decision-making bodies such as boards and advisory groups can bring alternative experiences and fresh perspectives to the table and can drive innovation and foster economic growth. Balanced representation can also ensure that the decisions made are more reflective of the communities they are being made for. Although our society has many diverse aspects this is not reflected in the makeup of our political and businesses leadership in Australia. As is the case in many countries around the world, women and people from other marginalised groups, including LGBTQIA+ communities, Aboriginal people, multicultural communities and those with disabilities remain significantly underrepresented on Australian decision-making bodies.

The Northern Territory has made considerable progress achieving gender equality in political leadership. In 2016, the Northern Territory Government made Australian history by announcing a majority female Cabinet, electing five women to its eight person leadership team.

This is the highest proportion of women to ever be introduced into an Australian Cabinet. In 2020, 13 of the 25 elected members in the Legislative Assembly are women and one member openly identifies as a member of the LGBTQIA+ community. However, sustained effort is required to maintain gains that have been made.

Many actions can be taken at the local level to encourage people to participate in decision-making and leadership positions. As gendered ideas about leadership begin at an early age, schools and youth services are important places for challenging gender stereotypes and teaching children that leadership and decision-making can—and should—be done by people from all genders, sexualities and backgrounds. Governments, businesses and communities can help increase the visibility of diverse leaders and role models to encourage all people to participate in decision making and leadership positions.

What we will build on

The Gender Equality Statement of Commitment aims to expand and build on the successes of past policies and the work already being done to improve gender equality including:

The Northern Territory Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Reduction Framework: *Safe, Respected and Free from Violence* and Action Plan seeks to challenge and change the social and cultural attitudes, values and structures that support domestic, family and sexual violence. The Framework commits, as part of this focus, to developing gender equality initiatives for the Northern Territory and a strong focus and new investment in violence prevention to address the factors that lead to or condone violence.

Minister for Territory Families Scholarships for Women: are provided through Charles Darwin University. Over \$45 000 is made available each year in scholarships for both VET and Higher Education streams to improve employment and general life outcomes for Territory women. There is a focus on women entering Science, Information Technology and Engineering occupations and streams.

Northern Territory Health Inclusion Strategy 2019-2022: promotes the health and wellbeing of sexuality and gender diverse people, families and communities and seeks to improve services and workplaces to become more aware and inclusive of sexuality and gender diverse people.

Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement: In partnership with Aboriginal Territorians, the Northern Territory Government is developing the Northern Territory Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The Agreement outlines how the NT Government and Aboriginal Territorians will work together to improve justice outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Women in Sport Committee: was established in 2017 to raise the profile of Northern Territory women in sport and promote gender equality in sport and recreation. The Committee advises the Minister for Tourism and Culture on actions to increase participation by women and girls including their engagement in leadership and governance roles in sport.

Amendments to the NT Adoption of Children Act: were passed in the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly in March 2018, allowing same sex and de facto couples the right to legally adopt children in the Northern Territory.

50:50 by 2020: The Northern Territory Government has committed to having a 50:50 female/male representation on NT government boards and committees by 2020.

Glossary of terms

The term **Aboriginal** is used throughout this document to refer to all people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent who are living in the Northern Territory. The use of this term reflects the wishes of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

Domestic, family and sexual violence (DFS) is a pattern of behaviour aimed at controlling a partner or family member through fear, for example by using behaviour which is violent and threatening, and to place at risk their immediate and longer-term safety and wellbeing. The violence can take the form of physical, sexual, stalking, emotional or psychological and financial abuse and it can include criminal and non-criminal behaviour.

Gender is how a society or culture describes and constructs the different roles for women and men. It refers to the tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in public and private life. Gender identity is how people express their masculine and/or feminine characteristics. Gender roles, and the opportunities and expectations attached to these roles can, and do, change over time and between different societies and cultures. Gender is not the same as sex, which refers to the biological characteristics of females and males.

Gender diverse refers to someone who does not identify as exclusively a man or a woman. Someone who is gender-diverse might feel like a mix of genders, or like they have no gender at all.

Gender equality refers to equal chances or opportunities for people of all genders to access and control social, economic and political resources, including protection under the law. Gender equality does not mean that all genders must be treated the same.

Gender equity refers to the allocation of resources, opportunities, programs and decision making according to the level of gendered disadvantage. As people face different kinds of disadvantage and discrimination, treating everyone as equals does not produce equitable results. 'Gender equity' is a mechanism by which 'gender equality' may be achieved.

Gender norms or stereotypes are preconceived notions informed by history and culture of what the characteristics, attitudes, behaviours, roles and occupations of people should be based on their gender. For example, 'women are nurturing' and 'men are strong.'

Gender pay gap is a measurement of the difference between women's and men's average weekly full-time equivalent earnings, expressed as a percentage of men's earnings.

Intersectionality refers to multiple forms of discrimination leading to compounded disadvantage. Intersectional approaches recognise and respond to multiple and compounded forms of disadvantage and discrimination. For example, an Aboriginal woman may face compounded levels of inequality due to racial discrimination as an Aboriginal person and gender discrimination as a woman.

LGBTQIA+ is an acronym that is inclusive of sexual orientation and gender identity. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex and asexual. The plus symbol at the end of the acronym is open to interpretation; however, it is generally considered a symbol of inclusion.

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