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City of Moonee Valley Draft MV 2040 Strategy

Your neighbourhood, your vision

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Contents

Executive summary	3
About Women’s Health West	3
Feedback on Draft MV2040 Strategy.....	4
Principles to guide investment in the twenty strategic directions	4
Strategic Direction 1: A city that celebrates diversity.....	5
Strategic Direction 3: A city where people are healthy and safe.....	6
Action 3.2.6	6
Action 3.2.4	6
References	8

Executive summary

Women's Health West (WHW) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on Moonee Valley City Council's Draft MV2040 Strategy. We commend council on developing this long term plan to achieve the vision to improve health, vibrancy and resilience within Moonee Valley through the five themes for action: fair, thriving, connected, green and beautiful. Local government is the tier of government closest to our community and as such plays an integral role in community health, safety and wellbeing through sustainable and appropriate public health planning, development and delivery. We are a proud partner of council and support the important work Moonee Valley City Council plans to undertake in collaboration with WHW and other partners.

WHW's recommendations for the draft MV2040 Strategy:

1. Council embed gender responsive budgeting principles into financial and non-financial resource allocation as part of council's budget process and financial and non-financial resource allocation for achieving its vision and the twenty strategic directions outlined in the strategy.
2. Council include specific gender equity actions in the strategy and its associated action plans.
3. Council amend action 3.2.6 to read 'Support a strong prevention system to ensure child safety and to address men's violence against women'
4. Further to action 3.2.4, council commits to endorsing and partnering in the implementation of *Action for Equity 2018-2022: A sexual and reproductive health strategy for Melbourne's west*.

About Women's Health West

WHW has actively contributed to the health, safety and wellbeing of women in the western region of Melbourne since 1988. We do this through a combination of direct service delivery, research, health promotion, community development, capacity building, group work and advocacy. Our health promotion, research and development unit offers a range of programs and projects targeted to prevention and early intervention strategies to improve outcomes for women's health, safety and wellbeing. We are leaders in the development of regional strategies to further our work, seeing partnership within and outside the health sector as crucial for bringing about effective and sustainable outcomes for women and children.

In 1994 we expanded our organisation to encompass delivery of family violence services for women and children. Our services include crisis outreach and court support, housing establishment and crisis accommodation options, and counselling and group work programs for women, children and young people. WHW has been an active and strong supporter of family violence reform at a regional and state-wide level, integrating and coordinating family violence services in our region, and ensuring the integration of those services with a range of sectors.

Redressing the gendered and structural inequalities that limit the lives of women and girls is at the core of our business as a feminist organisation. WHW's work is underpinned by a social model of health, which recognises the important influence of, and aims to improve, the social, economic and political factors that determine the health, safety and wellbeing of women and girls in our region. By incorporating a gendered approach to our health

promotion practice with women and girls, WHW's interventions have demonstrated effective and sustainable outcomes.

WHW's work is informed by our vision of equity and justice for women in the west, guided by the following five strategic goals:

- Deliver and advocate for accessible, culturally appropriate services for women and children in the west who experience family violence
- Undertake health promotion and primary prevention actions to redress gender inequity and improve the health, safety and wellbeing of women, young people and children
- Collaborate with others to achieve our goals
- Promote good health, safety and wellbeing in our workplace
- Enhance the long term sustainability of our work.

Feedback on Draft MV2040 Strategy

Principles to guide investment in the twenty strategic directions

WHW strongly recommends that Moonee Valley City Council action and embed gender responsive budgeting in its investment strategies across the strategic directions. This mechanism is essential to ensure a fair and equitable community for all. Gender responsive budgeting refers to the integration of a gender equality and equity perspective into all budgetary processes, decisions and outcomes. It supports budgetary decisions and processes that are responsive to the different needs and interests of women and men, and ensures that women and men benefit equitably from the allocation and use of resources, facilities and services (Quinn 2009). Gender responsive budgeting has three broad, overarching goals or purposes, which are to:

- Raise awareness and understanding of gender concerns and the impact of budgets and policies on women and men respectively
- Make governments accountable for their gender budgetary and policy commitments
- Change and refine government budgets and policies to promote gender equity (Sharp, 2003).

Good practice in government budget revenues, expenditure and decision-making requires a series of principles to be embedded within resource allocation and the strategic resource plan to ensure equitable outcomes for all members of our community. WHW strongly recommends Moonee Valley City Council embed and action gender responsive principles in budget revenue processes that include:

- How are women and men affected differently by the kind of revenues raised?
- How are women and men impacted differently by 'user-fees' for facilities and services?

This is important as women earn less than men, have less superannuation for retirement, are the majority of single parents, and are more likely to have caring responsibilities for elderly relatives and people with a disability.

- Gender responsive budgeting considerations for budget expenditures include:
 - How are women and men benefiting from the current expenditure on the public services provided?
 - In what ways are the budgets and associated resource allocations likely to reduce or increase gender inequalities?
 - How do budget and resource allocations reflect women's and men's different needs and priorities?
 - How do women and men benefit from the expenditure invested into council infrastructure and facilities?
 - Does council provide information on the actions to reduce gender inequality in its annual budgeting and fiscal reporting processes?
 - How do women and men as employees benefit from expenditure on staff-focused initiatives, i.e. professional development budgets, child care provision, development and upkeep of office grounds and facilities.

Recommendation 1: Council embed gender responsive budgeting principles into financial and non-financial resource allocation as part of council's budget process and financial and non-financial resource allocation for achieving its vision and the twenty strategic directions outlined in the strategy.

Strategic Direction 1: A city that celebrates diversity

WHW commends council's acknowledgement of gender diverse community members within the strategy. We note however, the absence of any actions across the strategy to promote gender equity. Gender equity is the process of being fair to women and men with the aim of achieving equal outcomes for all. To ensure fairness, measures are needed to compensate for historical and social disadvantage that have prevented women from operating on a level playing field with men. Public health planning and program and service delivery that take a gender equity approach recognise that women and girls experience different and often heightened risk factors for poor health compared to men and boys. This is the result of structural and social factors that continue to marginalise women and girls, such as the unequal distribution of power and resources between women and men, and rigid gender stereotypes and norms that assign women and men to certain areas of responsibility in society (Our Watch, VicHealth & ANROWS, 2015). These factors intersect with the social determinants of health, such as power, income, employment, education and housing, which compound the disadvantage experienced by women and girls. To ensure Moonee Valley City Council delivers on State government requirements as part of the Royal Commission into Family Violence, *Safe and Strong: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy*, and the *Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women*, WHW recommends that council include actions to promote gender equity.

Recommendation 2: Council include specific gender equity actions in the strategy and its associated action plans.

Strategic Direction 3: A city where people are healthy and safe

Action 3.2.6

WHW commends council on the inclusion of action 3.2.6 to support a strong prevention system to ensure child safety and to redress family violence.

In Australia one woman is killed every five to six days by her male partner and one in four women has experienced violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (Australian Institute of Criminology, 2015). The notable increase in reported family violence incidents in Moonee Valley over recent years demonstrates that violence against women remains a significant and growing concern that requires action. This comes at a high health, social and economic cost and affects women, their children and our broader community.

WHW commends Moonee Valley's commitment to the regional partnership and strategy that guides the primary prevention of men's violence against women in the west, Preventing Violence Together.

WHW recommends council strengthen the wording of action 3.2.6 in the draft MV2040 Strategy from 'Support a strong prevention system to ensure child safety and to address family violence' to 'Support a strong prevention system to ensure child safety and to redress men's violence against women'.

Recommendation 3: Council amend action 3.2.6 to read 'Support a strong prevention system to ensure child safety and to address men's violence against women'.

Action 3.2.4

WHW welcomes the inclusion of action 3.2.4, 'to promote sexual and reproductive health'. Improving sexual and reproductive health is a priority in the *Victorian public health and wellbeing plan 2015-2019*. Victoria also now has a state-wide strategy *Women's sexual and reproductive health: key priorities 2017-2020*.

WHW congratulates Moonee Valley City Council on its leadership relating to sexual and reproductive health, including its commitment to *Action for Equity: A sexual and reproductive health plan for Melbourne's west 2013–2017*. A second iteration of this strategy has recently been launched. *Action for Equity 2018-2022: A sexual and reproductive health strategy for Melbourne's west* incorporates primary prevention initiatives that work to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for the community by redressing the social, cultural and economic drivers of sexual and reproductive health inequities. We encourage Moonee Valley Council to continue this commitment to sexual and reproductive health by endorsing this strategy and committing to collaborative action for a further four years.

Sexual and reproductive health is integral to supporting a fair municipality. The population of Victoria is one of the healthiest in the world but despite this, the burden of disease associated with poor sexual and reproductive health continues to increase (Department of Education and Training, 2016). Low condom use, poor Pap screening rates, and sexually transmitted infection notification levels all highlight the sexual and reproductive health of women, particularly young women, in Moonee Valley as a significant health priority. For example, the participation rate for Pap screening among eligible women aged 20-24 years in Moonee Valley between 2012 and 2013 was 39 per cent; this is slightly higher than the western region average of 31.8 per cent (Victorian Cytology Service 2016). In 2012, less than half (47.6 per cent) of sexually active adolescents in Moonee Valley practiced safe sex

with a condom, which is lower than the Victorian average (58.1 per cent) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012).

Key areas of sexual and reproductive health that must be redressed to improve women and girls' health across Moonee Valley include: access to affordable contraceptives and fertility control; access to surgical and medication termination of pregnancy; improving the sexual and reproductive health knowledge of young people with a specific focus on young people from migrant and refugee communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and promotion of the sexual and reproductive rights of people living with a disability.

Recommendation 4: Further to action 3.2.4, council commits to endorsing and partnering in the implementation of *Action for Equity 2018-2022: A sexual and reproductive health strategy for Melbourne's west*.

In conclusion, WHW again congratulates Moonee Valley on the Draft MV2040 Strategy. WHW is a proud partner of Moonee Valley City Council. We wish council every success implementing this long term plan and look forward to strengthening our partnership into the future.

Please feel free to contact Louise Sadler (Acting Director - Strategy, Advocacy and Community Engagement) at Louise@whwest.org.au should you require further information about this submission.

References

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