



# Brimbank City Council

## Community Vision 2040

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## Executive summary

Women's Health West (WHW) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on Brimbank City Council's Community Vision 2040. 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. WHW is a proud partner of council and support the important work Brimbank City Council plans to undertake in collaboration with WHW and other partners.

In response to Brimbank City Council's Community Vision 2040 WHW recommends that:

1. The vision statement includes a focus on inclusion and equity to show a commitment to all members of the community and to promote a fairer and more equitable municipality.
2. The safety strategic direction identifies men's violence against women as an indicator and area for action.
3. The healthy behaviours strategic direction supports sexual and reproductive health initiatives and programs for all population groups disproportionately affected by poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes and not just young people.
4. Brimbank City Council include commitments to a health equity and a gender equity approach in Brimbank's health and wellbeing priorities.
5. All indicators to measure whether Brimbank City Council is meeting its strategic directions are sex-disaggregated.

## 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 strategy, advocacy and community engagement stream 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.

# Feedback on Brimbank City Community Vision 2040

## What would you add or change about the Brimbank Community vision?

WHW commends Brimbank City Council on their vision for 2040, and particularly the focus in the vision statement on empowering people through opportunity, and the commitment for a 'healthy, safe and united' community. WHW recommends that the council's vision also includes a focus on inclusion and equity to show a commitment to value all members of the community, and to promote a fairer distribution of economic resources and power between all people in the municipality. Our suggested changes are in bold below;

*'In 2040, the Brimbank community will be healthy, safe and united through a sense of belonging and pride. Our city will be resilient, **inclusive and equitable** and our people will be empowered through opportunity. The environment will be protected and enhanced and Brimbank's neighbourhoods will offer quality lifestyle for everyone'*

**Recommendation 1:** Brimbank City Council's vision statement includes a focus on inclusion and equity to show a commitment to all members of the community and to promote a fairer and more equitable municipality.

## Are there any Strategic Directions that you would change or anything that you would add? If yes, what would you change or add?

WHW commends Brimbank City Council for the inclusion of safety as a strategic direction in the Community Vision 2040, and specifically the focus on family violence as an indicator to measure safety in the community. The reported incidence of family violence has remained high across the Brimbank municipality for many years. In 2017 police attended 1,792 incidents where the victims of violence were women and 497 where the victims were men.<sup>1</sup> The number of incidents attended by police where a female was the victim was also higher in the municipality of Brimbank than both the state and western region average in 2017.

Given that data demonstrates that victims/survivors of family violence are overwhelmingly women and children, and the majority of perpetrators are men, WHW recommends that Brimbank City Council specifically identifies men's violence against women as an indicator and area for action within the safety strategic direction, as well as family violence. This will also align with Brimbank's commitment as a partner in *Preventing Violence Together: Western Region Strategy to Prevent Men's Violence Against Women*, together with *Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia* and *Safe and Strong: A Victorian gender equality strategy*, by recognising the overwhelmingly gendered-nature of family violence. Subsequent actions will also need to redress the key drivers of men's violence against women, which include the unequal power relations between women and men and rigid gender roles and stereotypes.

**Recommendation 2:** Brimbank City Council specifically identifies men's violence against women as an indicator and area for action within the safety strategic direction.

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<sup>1</sup> Crime Statistics Agency Victoria 2017, Family Violence Affected Family Members by LGA and sex January 2017 to December 2017, accessed on 3 June 2018 at: [www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au](http://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au)

WHW commends Brimbank City Council for their long-term commitment to mental health and the sexual and reproductive health of young people by including these as key indicators for the healthy behaviours strategic direction. These are important health concerns that are known to disproportionately affect women and girls in Melbourne's west. Specific areas of sexual and reproductive health that need to be prioritised to improve women and girls' health across Brimbank 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.

We note that Brimbank City Council has included a sexual and reproductive health indicator that focuses on young people. Literature shows that poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes disproportionately affect young people but also other specific population groups. These groups include: women and girls, people living with HIV and other blood borne viruses, people from refugee and migrant backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people with a disability, sex workers, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and gender diverse, intersex and queer communities, people experiencing homelessness, mid-life and older adults, people who misuse alcohol and other drugs and people in or being released from prison.<sup>2</sup> We therefore recommend that Brimbank City Council does not limit this indicator under the healthy behaviours strategic direction to young people, and ensures subsequent action plans will also reach other population groups at risk of poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes.

WHW would also like to take this opportunity to encourage Brimbank City Council to continue its commitment to the Action for Equity partnership, of which Brimbank is a valued partner. Now in its second iteration, *Action for Equity 2018-2022: A sexual and reproductive health strategy for Melbourne's west* is a four-year sexual and reproductive health promotion plan and partnership for Melbourne's west, led by Women's Health West. The strategy incorporates tailored primary prevention initiatives that work to achieve health equity for the above mentioned population groups.

**Recommendation 3:** Brimbank City Council's healthy behaviours strategic direction supports sexual and reproductive health initiatives and programs for all population groups disproportionately affected by poor sexual and reproductive health outcomes and not just young people.

### **Do you have any other comments on the Draft Brimbank Community Vision 2040?**

WHW congratulates Brimbank City Council for adopting an environments for health approach in Brimbank's Health and Wellbeing Priorities (which integrates the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan into the Community Vision 2040), and for recognising that the environment

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<sup>2</sup> Women's Health West 2018, *Action for Equity 2018-2022: A sexual and reproductive health strategy for Melbourne's west*, Women's Health West, Melbourne.

or living conditions in which a person is born, grows, lives, works, plays and ages has a significant impact on their health and wellbeing.

To further strengthen Brimbank's health and wellbeing priorities, WHW recommends that Brimbank City Council commits to taking a health equity approach. This approach acknowledges that socioeconomic, political and cultural factors determine an individual's social position and subsequent health outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability, people with a migrant or refugee background, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer people, older people and those in low socio-economic communities are all at greater risk of experiencing compounding disadvantage and poor health outcomes due to their lower position on the social gradient. A health equity approach aims to redress some of these structures and processes that drive the unequal distribution of power, money and resources which lead to persistent health inequities.

WHW also commends council for including preventing violence against women, sexual and reproductive health for young people and mental health as priority areas for the next three years in Brimbank's Health and Wellbeing Priorities. These priority areas align with the *Victorian Public Health and Wellbeing Plan 2015-2019* and the *Free from violence: Victoria's strategy to prevent family violence and all forms of violence against women*. This also shows a commitment to redress health priorities that are known to disproportionately affect women and girls.

WHW recommends that council also commits to taking a gender equity approach in Brimbank's health and wellbeing priorities. 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.<sup>4</sup> 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. By taking a gender equity approach, council's work will also closely align with *Safe and Strong: Victoria's Gender Equality Strategy*.

**Recommendation 4:** Brimbank City Council include commitments to a health equity and a gender equity approach in Brimbank's health and wellbeing priorities.

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<sup>3</sup> VicHealth 2015, Fair Foundations: The VicHealth framework for health equities, accessed on 4 June 2018 at: [file:///C:/Users/Emma/Downloads/Web-Fair-Foundation-VicHealth-framework-for-health-equity%20\(3\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Emma/Downloads/Web-Fair-Foundation-VicHealth-framework-for-health-equity%20(3).pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Our Watch, VicHealth & ANROWS 2015, Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia, Our Watch, Melbourne.

WHW advises Brimbank City Council to sex-disaggregate all data collected across each of the strategic directions. Research shows that women and girls experience different and often heightened risk factors for poor health compared to men and boys. Public health planning and program and service delivery that incorporate a gender equity approach and disaggregate data by sex are more likely to recognise these differences in experience, assist in evidence-base planning and programmatic design, and as a result council is better equipped to combat such inequities. Sex-disaggregated data is also critical to measuring the level and changes in health outcomes between genders across the municipality.

**Recommendation 5:** All indicators to measure whether Brimbank City Council is meeting its strategic directions are sex-disaggregated.

WHW commends Brimbank City Council for identifying the importance of collaboration and working with key partners to achieve their goals in this vision. We would like to take this opportunity to thank council for their valued partnership in *Preventing Violence Together: Western Region Strategy to Prevent Violence Against Women* and *Action for Equity: A sexual and reproductive health strategy for Melbourne's west*. We look forward to continuing to work together in the future to further create a safe, equitable and inclusive community for all.

WHW would like to again congratulate Brimbank City Council on their Community Vision 2040. WHW is a proud partner of Brimbank City Council and we wish council every success implementing this long-term plan and look forward to strengthening our partnership into the future.

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