# Creating sexual harassment-free workplaces and communities

## Community and Legal Sector Roundtable Report

**Held on 13 November 2018, Melbourne**

### Background and summary

* Everyone deserves to feel safe and respected at work and to live free from sexual harassment. We know that we need to do more to prevent and respond to sexual harassment in Australia. Despite being outlawed for over 25 years, we continue to see concerningly high numbers of perpetrators of sexual harassment across all industries and jobs. The Fourth National Survey on Sexual Harassment at Work released this year by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) shows that one in three Australians have experienced sexual harassment in the past five years.
* The AHRC’s National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces is a great opportunity to raise the profile of the issues and key solutions, and ultimately learn from the AHRC’s findings, but collaboration and advocacy beyond the scope of the Inquiry will be needed to secure reforms.
* On 13 November 2018 a range of legal and community sector stakeholders held a roundtable to explore key issues and how we can work together to create sexual harassment-free workplaces. The roundtable was hosted and chaired by Victoria Legal Aid at the Melbourne office.
* The preliminary group discussion at the roundtable revealed that there is:
	+ widespread agreement amongst stakeholders about some of the key issues to be addressed and potential solutions, and
	+ significant appetite to work together to amplify each other’s voices and increase our impact.
* Organisations keen to join the discussion and explore opportunities for collaboration can express their interest by contacting Victoria Legal Aid.
* Consultations for the AHRC are in progress, with submissions to the AHRC National Inquiry currently due at the end of January 2019, and the report is expected in late July 2019, which means that opportunities for collaboration extend into the second half of next year.

#### Sharing resources and building consensus

One of the key purposes of the roundtable was to share resources and if possible generate some consensus about the key issues and solutions. A significant amount of work has already been done by a range of organisations which helped to inform the discussion. Many of the organisations at the roundtable are still finalising their positions on reforms that are needed and it was useful to have a preliminary discussion about solutions and share perspectives with the group.

The key potential solutions emerging from the discussion included:

1. Consensus that we need a stronger regulatory response to sexual harassment to reduce the burden on individuals who have experienced sexual harassment to enforce the law. There was a high level of support for a positive duty on employers to ensure a sexual harassment-free workplace and a regulator that has the full suite of regulatory tools and resources necessary to properly tackle sexual harassment. There was some debate as to which regulator is best placed to address sexual harassment, primarily whether it be workplace health and safety agencies or human rights commissions, and this is a discussion that will continue following the roundtable.
2. A strong primary prevention strategy to change gendered attitudes that lead to sexual harassment, integrating sexual harassment into existing funding programs and initiatives that address violence against women. One of the key ways to achieve this is seen as lobbying government to include sexual harassment as a priority issue in the Fourth National Action Plan on Violence Against Women.
3. Stronger mental health supports for people who have experienced sexual harassment, including a central service which is appropriately trained and resourced.

A range of other solutions have been flagged by stakeholders and there was a high level of support for sharing submissions to the AHRC’s National Inquiry so we can continue to learn from each other’s perspectives and experience and amplify each other’s voices.

#### Working together to increase our impact

The more we can work across sectors, across skills, and across expertise the stronger our case for change will be. Stakeholders at the roundtable demonstrated a high level of engagement and enthusiasm for working together on a campaign for change.

A range of opportunities for collaboration were discussed at the roundtable including forming a coalition, establishing a hashtag-based campaign such as #metooatwork, and meeting regularly to share information and discuss messaging.

Victoria Legal Aid is circulating an online survey which gives stakeholders the opportunity to express interest in a range of levels of involvement in a campaign for change. We will share the results of the survey with everyone who has completed it and propose a way forward based on the responses.

#### How to get involved

If your organisation is interested in getting involved in a campaign for change please contact us to express your interest.

It is incredibly important that the stakeholders involved in the campaign reflect the communities most impacted by sexual harassment including women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Diverse, Intersex and Queer) people, and people with a disability. We are actively ensuring our consultation and collaboration with organisations that represent or serve these communities and particularly welcome any new connections stakeholders may have.

Organisations are welcome to contact Victoria Legal Aid to discuss the roundtable and way forward:

**Kamna Muddagouni, Senior Lawyer, Equality Law Program**

**Email:** kamna.muddagouni@vla.vic.gov.au

**Phone:** (03) 9269 0515