



## Fact Sheet:

# Health promotion and gender equality



## What is health promotion?

As a health promotion organisation, our way of working is guided by some key evidence-based principles:

- The term health refers to the 'state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease'. Good health is a fundamental human right. (WHO 2021)
- Our individual and community health outcomes are heavily influenced by a whole lot of non-medical factors called the social determinants of health. (WHO 2021a)
- The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, learn, play, work and age, as well as their access to money, power and other resources.
- Gender is a key social determinant of health, influencing all other determinants (WHO 2021b).
- Inequality based on gender and other social determinants drives unequal health and wellbeing outcomes.
- By addressing these inequities, we can improve health and wellbeing outcomes and support people to have more control over their health.

As a women's health organisation, we work to address gender inequities in health by supporting our region to take action to promote gender equity and improve women's health, wellbeing and safety.

## Gender inequality and health

Gender inequality occurs across all levels of society, from our individual beliefs and personal relationships through to our workplaces, laws and systems. We use the socio-ecological model to help identify the many different forms that gender inequality takes in our society, as well as explore opportunities to take action.



### The social determinants of health

*Dahlgren G, Whitehead M. 1991. Policies and Strategies to Promote Social Equity in Health. Stockholm, Sweden: Institute for Futures Studies.*

The impacts of each layer include:

**Individual:** Considering factors such as age, education, income, and substance use. These factors are shaped by personal attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours.

**Interpersonal/Relationship:** Considering factors such as intimate relationships, peer relationships and family members with shared expectations, sometimes values and behaviours.

**Community/Organisational:** Considering broader settings, such as schools, workplaces, neighbourhoods with more social relationships and norms.

**Societal:** Shaped by law, policy and social and cultural norms (with this policy and legal setting spanning health, economics, education and social factors).

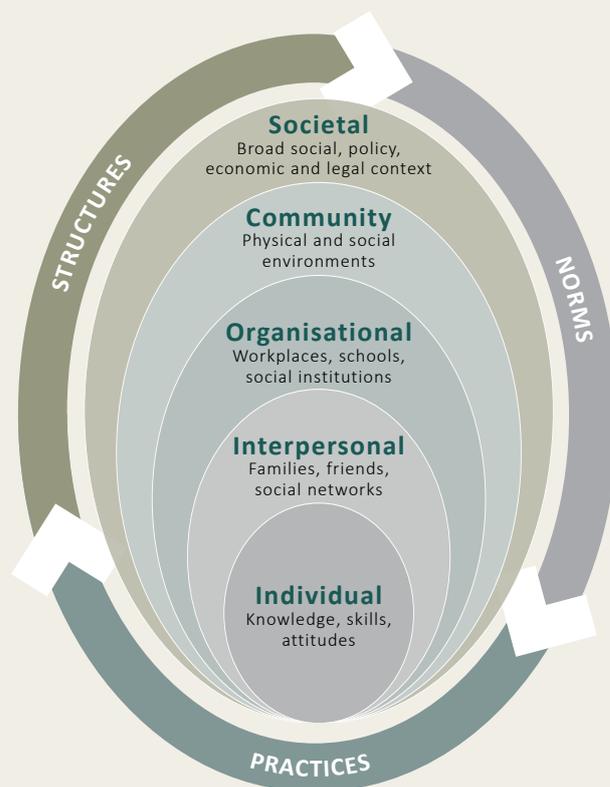
The model also helps demonstrate how these many different forms of gender inequality occur simultaneously, reinforcing and strengthening each other. This means that if we want to see real change occur, it is necessary to take coordinated action so that gender inequality is addressed across all levels of society. For instance, a training program seeking to increase the number of women standing for parliament is less likely to be effective if nothing is done to improve the safety and treatment of women in politics or if women are unable to engage with the program due to lack of affordable childcare.

We also know that alongside gender, other forms of inequality shape individuals' health and wellbeing outcomes. As an intersectional feminist organisation, we also seek to address other intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination such as those based on race, sexuality, disability, age and class. This means focusing on amplifying the voices and experiences of women who face the most disadvantage and discrimination in society to ensure no women are left behind.

## What this means for our work

As a leading expert organisation, we support our partners to deliver coordinated, best-practice health promotion action across all the levels of the socio-ecological model. This includes building health promotion skills and expertise across that region so that more workplaces can advocate for and contribute to improving women's health and wellbeing outcomes.

We support work to reduce health inequities across three priority areas: advancing gender equity, preventing violence against women, and improving sexual and reproductive health.



### The Socio-Ecological Model of Health

*Adapted from Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*

## References:

- World Health Organisation (2021), Constitution. Available at: <https://www.who.int/about/governance/constitution>
- World Health Organisation (2021a), Social determinants of health. Available at: [https://www.who.int/health-topics/socialdeterminants-of-health#tab=tab\\_3](https://www.who.int/health-topics/socialdeterminants-of-health#tab=tab_3)
- World Health Organisation (2021b), Gender and health. Available at: [https://www.who.int/healthtopics/gender#tab=tab\\_1](https://www.who.int/healthtopics/gender#tab=tab_1)