

# National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality: Consultation – Engaging Men in Gender Equality Meeting Summary

2 DECEMBER 2022

*The government is developing a new* [*National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality*](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality)*. The National Strategy will guide whole of community action to help make Australia one of the best countries in the world for equality between women and men.*

*Consultation with diverse stakeholders is key to developing a strategy that speaks to the experiences and ambitions of women and girls around Australia. The first phase of consultation took place in late 2022 and summaries of these discussions are shared to support further consultation and input into the development of the National Strategy.*

*This note summarises a consultation meeting held on 2 December 2022 focused on engaging men in gender equality, which included representatives from peak bodies, advocacy groups, not-for-profit organisations, non-government organisations, and community service organisations. The consultation drew on a* [*discussion paper*](https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/Roundtable-Discussion-Paper_Engaging-Men-in-Gender-Equality.docx) *prepared by the Office for Women. This summary note reflects the discussion amongst the participants. These are not the views of Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.*

### Summary of key points raised by participants:

* 1. Gender equality work should consider all genders and the voices of men too, with an ultimate goal of gender mainstreaming.
  2. Gender equality barriers and policy levers come down to gender norms, and these must be changed in order to have a meaningful impact on gender equality outcomes for men and women.
  3. Consider ways to increase men’s contribution to the care economy and care responsibilities, and changes to Paid Parental Leave (PPL) should be considered as an option.

### Discussion at this roundtable focused on four questions.

### What aspect of Australian society impacts men’s ability to reach out for support, play a greater role at home, and take up parental leave?

Gender stereotypes and norms are deeply imbedded from school age. Gender stereotypes are reinforced through multiple avenues including education, parenting, large content creators and marketing (including messaging around the ‘clumsy and incapable’ father).

Men’s help seeking has been shaped by masculine norms of invulnerability and stoicism.

Men often misperceive other men’s views on gender roles and act accordingly, and fear being ostracised if men do not conform to perceived stereotypes of what it means to be a man. Participants discussed that this discourages men from taking PPL even when structural changes encourage them to take it. Men are stopped by the perception that their peers will look down on them, despite admitting that they would not look down on another man for doing so.

PPL beginning when children are born, as opposed to during pregnancy, establishes the perception of men as supportive parents rather than active parents.

### What are the barriers and opportunities to achieving gender equality for men and boys?

The gender pay gap, and the targeting of PPL at women, are structural barriers that can lead households to bias men’s employment. Men also face other physical barriers, for example, the lack of access to change tables in men’s public toilets.

Some men misunderstand what gender equality is about and do not actively engage with it. This can lead to perceptions that gender equality is only about ‘women’s empowerment’.

Participants noted that men may be encourages to see the National Strategy as ‘women’s business’ if it is embedded in the Office for Women. Participants suggested focusing the National Strategy on gender mainstreaming (when gender equality considerations are built into mainstream policies) rather than having separate policy structures for men and women. Participants also suggested explicitly naming the role of men and boys in achieving gender equality and how gender equality benefits men and boys.

Senior management in companies can role model and clearly communicate the benefits and availability of flexible work arrangements.

### What are the concrete approaches that should be considered as part of this strategy to engage men and boys in gender equality – including targeted interventions?

Involve states and territories through education curriculums with a feminist focus on gender stereotypes. This curriculum should not be delivered through gender segregated lessons. Delivering this curriculum should start in states and territories with significant variability in respectful relationships education.

Implement programs and services for men on respectful relationships, anger management, emotional intelligence and fatherhood. Programs could include ‘men circles’, where men have a safe place to share experiences. Interventions should be culturally responsive for First Nations and migrant communities. These programs are limited for men. This is a failure as women return from seeking help in a shelter, and the men have not had access to similar support services so their behaviour does not change.

Participants discussed the need to provide funding capacity for community grass-roots programs to mobilise men in a way that is relevant to people’s lives and experiences. The presence of good civil society advocacy on men’s roles in gender equality can make a significant difference. For example, sporting codes could expand on their work in the domestic violence space to broader gender equality, such as the Man with a Pram program.

Implement an advisory group on issues in First Nations communities, such as the lack of support for male domestic violence victims.

Look at interventions in online settings where men and boys are recruited into misogyny, incorporating a life‑course lens to account for the opportunities for intervention at different stages in a man’s life.

Increase data focused on the perpetrators of domestic violence and not solely on victim survivors. This will increase understanding of the size of the problem and measures required to address it.

Recognise the role of unions in delivering change through PPL negotiations and delivering political education to large parts of the workforce.

Employers should top up what PPL employees are receiving from Centrelink, and implement ‘use it or lose it’ provisions to normalise uptake. Government should consider tax deductions for those who take parental leave.

### What will progress look like for men and boys, and how can that be measured and evaluated?

Australia could report its progress on gender equality against the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

Participants also discussed the following proposed measures of success:

* Improvement in attitudes and norms, as measured in the National Attitude Survey to gender roles and stereotypes.
* Increase in men’s involvement in fatherhood.
* Increase in men’s uptake of parental leave and flexible work.
* Increase in men’s participation in home labour and the potential to include a measurement of this in the Census.
* Increase in men’s help seeking.
* Decrease in men’s suicidal ideation.