



Guideline for Gender Equity and Respect for Women and Girls

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Introduction

Surf Lifesaving can and should be a movement which empowers women and girls, provides a platform for enhanced physical and mental health, community cohesion and assists them to excel on the beach, in the oceans and in life beyond.

However, we know that there is the potential to allow harmful gender stereotypes to flourish in words, attitudes and behaviours, which can result in decreased participation by women and girls and leave a lasting mental and emotional impact.

The purpose of this guide is to enable a respectful and equitable Surf Life Saving community in which all genders can thrive within the movement and beyond.

Scope

This guideline covers strategies and practices for promoting welcoming, respectful and inclusive communities which embrace the participation of all who identify as a woman or girl, in all aspects of surf lifesaving activities, including training, competitions, and community engagement initiatives. The target audience includes SLSA employees, volunteers, members, stakeholders, and external partners involved in surf lifesaving activities.

This guideline supplements and supports the SLSA Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Policy and supports achievement of the goals and objectives outlined in the SLSA DEI Framework and Strategy.

Understanding Gender Equity and Respect for Women and Girls

Defining women and girls

References to Women and Girls include anyone who identifies as a woman or girl, regardless of the sex they were assigned at birth.

Note: Guidelines for participation in surf sport by people whose sex at birth is different to their gender can be found in the SLSA Trans and Gender Diversity Participation Guidelines.

Equity

Equity refers to the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals, regardless of gender. It involves identifying and addressing barriers that have historically disadvantaged certain genders, striving for equal outcomes, and ensuring that everyone has the resources and support they need to thrive.

In sport, recreation and volunteering, women are generally under-represented in leadership and governance roles. This is due to a range of factors including social, cultural and sometimes procedural barriers.



Fact: In 2022, 40% of Australians aged 15+ who participated as a coach, instructor, trainer or teacher in the sport and recreation sector were women while 44% of Australians aged 15+ who participated as officials were women.¹

Respect

Respect is all about recognising the inherent worth, dignity, and rights of all individuals, regardless of their gender. It involves treating others with kindness, consideration, and understanding, and valuing their perspectives, experiences, and contributions. Respect also involves actively listening to others, acknowledging their boundaries, and refraining from engaging in behaviours that may cause harm or offence.

Violence against women

Violence against women is a pervasive and deeply entrenched issue in Australian society. It includes physical, sexual, emotional, and economic abuse perpetrated against women and girls simply because of their gender. This violence can occur in various settings, including homes, workplaces, schools, and public spaces, and it has devastating consequences for individuals, families, and communities.

We know that violence against women is much more likely when men and women are not treated equally and when women are valued and respected less than men.

- Women are nearly three times more likely to have experienced violence from a current or former partner than men²
- One in five Australian women have experienced sexual violence compared to one in 20 Australian men³
- A recent Victorian survey reported 64% of women experience bullying, harassment or violence in their workplace⁴
- 30% of workers in a national survey reported having experienced domestic violence during their lifetime⁵

¹ [AusPlay data portal](#), Australian Sports Commission, accessed 5 April 2023.

² ABS, 1 in 5 women have experienced sexual violence, url: <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/1-5-women-have-experienced-sexual-violence>, accessed 23 July 2024.

³ Ibid

⁴ Victorian Trades Hall Council, Stop Gendered Violence at Work Report: Women's Rights at Work Report (2016).

⁵ McFarren L., Gendered Violence & Work Key findings – Safe at Home, Safe at Work? National Domestic Violence and the Workplace Survey (2011).



- Some population groups experience higher rates or more severe forms of violence, such as women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and LGBTIQ people⁶(AIHW, 2019)

There are 4 main drivers⁷:

Condoning violence against women

Attitudes, words and actions that trivialise, make light of or justify violence against women allow people to think violence is acceptable or excusable.

Rigid gender roles and stereotypes about masculinity and femininity

Strict ideas about women and men's roles, identities and relationships can contribute to a culture that supports violence. When male dominance is normalised, violence can be used to 'punish' women who don't conform to expected roles.

Men's control of decision making and limits to women's independence

When men control decisions and resources in the home, workplace or community, they have an opportunity to abuse power with violence, while women have less power to stop it, call it out, or leave.

Men disrespecting women to bond with other men

When aggression and disrespect towards women are seen as natural parts of being 'one of the boys', it is more likely violence towards women will be excused - by the perpetrator, their peers and the wider community.

Where to get help

If you, a child, or another person is in immediate danger, call 000

1800RESPECT | 1800 737 732

If you or someone you know is impacted by sexual assault, domestic or family violence, call 1800RESPECT on 1800 737 732 or visit 1800RESPECT.org.au. For more information about a service in your state or local area download the DAISY App in the App Store or Google Play.

No to Violence Men's Referral Service (MRS) | 1300 766 491

No to Violence provides anonymous and confidential telephone counselling, information and referrals to men to help them take action to stop using violent and controlling behaviour.

Kids Helpline | 1800 55 1800

⁶ AIHW, Family, domestic and sexual violence – Population groups, url: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/population-groups/key-findings>, accessed 23 July 2024.

⁷ Our Watch, Equality and Respect in Sport Standards, url: <https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2020/10/15021520/Equality-and-Respect-in-Sport-1.pdf>, accessed 23 July 2024.



Kids Helpline is a 24/7 counselling service for Australian children and young people aged between 5 and 25 years.

QLife | 1800 184 527

QLife provides anonymous and free LGBTIQ+ peer support and referral for people in Australia wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships.

The National Disability Abuse and Neglect Hotline (The Hotline) | 1800 880 052

The Hotline is for reporting abuse or neglect of people with disability. The Hotline is closely aligned with the Complaints Resolution and Referral Service supporting the needs of people with disability.

ELDERHelp | 1800 353 374

Call the national 1800 ELDERHelp (1800 353 374) line to talk to someone about potential or actual elder abuse. This service provides information on how you can get help, support and referrals.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a critical concept in understanding and addressing gender equality. It acknowledges that the experiences of discrimination and oppression faced by women and girls are not uniform, as they intersect with other dimensions of identity such as race, class, sexual orientation and physical ability. This means that individuals may face multiple layers of marginalisation based on their intersecting identities. These guidelines emphasise the importance of adopting an intersectional lens to address inequalities and injustice faced by women and girls. By recognising and understanding the complex ways in which different forms of discrimination intersect, organisations can develop more inclusive and effective strategies to promote gender equality. This includes considering the specific needs and experiences of marginalised groups within the broader context of equality efforts.

Overcoming Barriers

Principles of inclusion apply to everyone within the SLSA community. Here are some common issues and recommendations for taking action.

Recognise that we do not have equal experience

It was only in 1980 that women received the right to become active surf lifesavers in Australia. Women and girls remain underrepresented in many aspects of our community today. Acknowledging that opportunities and obstacles to participation in the sport at all levels are experienced differently by different groups including women and girls, is a foundation upon which we can begin to understand and take action to tackle inequality.



Suggested solutions:

- **Mentorship Programs:** Establish mentorship programs pairing experienced lifesavers, regardless of gender, with women and girls to share knowledge and skills.
- **Historical Education:** Incorporate the history of women in surf lifesaving into training programs to raise awareness of past struggles and achievements.
- **Inclusive Training Opportunities:** Offer targeted training sessions and workshops to address gaps in experience and build confidence in women and girls.
- **Experience Acknowledgement:** Recognise and celebrate the contributions of women and girls in surf lifesaving through awards and public acknowledgments.

Understand and challenge your bias

We all have biases embedded in our beliefs and attitudes that impact our language and behaviours. This can be difficult to identify and can manifest in many different ways. Gender bias, for example, may paint an automatic picture in your brain that an ideal club president or high-performance coach is a male. This bias can play out in our day-to-day words and actions which enables that stereotype to be perpetuated. Breaking the cycle of gender bias will help to challenge norms.

- **Bias Training:** Implement mandatory unconscious bias training for all members to help identify and challenge their own biases.
- **Diverse Leadership:** Promote diverse representation in leadership roles to challenge stereotypes and provide role models.
- **Inclusive Policies:** Develop and enforce policies that ensure recruitment, promotions, and opportunities are free from gender bias.
- **Regular Reflection:** Encourage regular self-reflection sessions where members can discuss and address any biases they might have identified.

Consider your words carefully.

The language we use matters greatly in shaping the views and norms of those around us. It is often less necessary to gender terms than we think. For instance, it's irrelevant to refer to 'Chairwoman' or 'Chairman' when a simple 'Chair' will do. Common phrases such as 'man up' or 'be a man about it' reinforce stereotypes that are harmful to both men and boys as well as women and girls by equating stoicism and emotional suppression to masculinity.



- **Language Guidelines:** Create and distribute guidelines on inclusive language to all members.
- **Workshops on Communication:** Hold workshops focused on the impact of language and how to use it inclusively.
- **Role Modelling:** Leaders should consistently model the use of gender-neutral and inclusive language.
- **Feedback Mechanism:** Establish a system where members can anonymously report non-inclusive language and receive feedback on better practices.

Be a part of the change

Stamping out discriminatory behaviours, not just towards women and girls but towards all members of the community, is everyone's responsibility. It should not be the responsibility of those at the receiving end of discrimination also be asked to 'fix the problem'. If you see something that's not right, it's time to take action.

- **Active Bystander Training:** Provide training on how to intervene and address discriminatory behaviours safely and effectively.
- **Zero Tolerance Policy:** Implement and enforce a zero-tolerance policy for discriminatory behaviours with clear consequences.
- **Inclusivity Champions:** Designate members as inclusivity champions to promote and monitor inclusive practices within the club.
- **Community Engagement:** Engage with the broader community to raise awareness and support for inclusive practices in surf lifesaving.

Recognise we're all learning

If you're offered feedback in relation to something you have said or done that may be perceived as harmful or discriminatory, take the time to consider the impact this may have had. Take steps to correct the situation and see it as an opportunity to learn. We should all continuously reflect on our inclusivity, every day.

- **Continuous Learning Programs:** Offer ongoing educational opportunities about diversity, equity, and inclusion.
- **Feedback Channels:** Create multiple channels for providing and receiving feedback on inclusivity, ensuring anonymity and safety.
- **Reflective Practices:** Integrate reflective practices into regular meetings where members discuss their experiences and learnings.
- **Celebrate Growth:** Acknowledge and celebrate personal and organisational growth in inclusivity efforts.



Communication and Awareness

The cumulative success of gender equality efforts at all levels of Surf lifesaving comes down to the community's collective awareness of the issue, ensuring it is kept front of mind with reminders to act, continuously delivered in the right places.

- **Regular Updates:** Provide regular updates on gender equality initiatives and progress through newsletters, meetings, and social media.
- **Awareness Campaigns:** Run continuous awareness campaigns highlighting the importance of gender equality in surf lifesaving.
- **Visible Commitments:** Display commitments to gender equality prominently in club materials, websites, and facilities.
- **Feedback Integration:** Actively seek feedback on gender equality efforts and integrate this feedback into ongoing initiatives.

Responsibilities

Beyond these everyday initiatives, there are specific tactics different roles can employ to grow and nurture an environment where all women and girls can reach their potential.

Leaders: Promote and socialise gender equality guidelines, appointing Women and Girls' champions to ensure best practices. Implement inclusion training, enforce Zero Tolerance policies, and frequently review gender balance and partnerships.

Managers/Supervisors: Enforce policies, model inclusive practices, and champion gender equality efforts. Recognise educational efforts and inspire community action and celebration of inclusion.

Employees/Volunteers/Members: Adhere to gender equality guidelines and actively participate in inclusion training. Report discrimination and support colleagues in gender equality efforts.

External Partners: Ensure values and practices align with SLSA gender equity standards and collaborate on gender equality initiatives. Provide equal opportunities and establish feedback mechanisms for continuous improvement.



Raise Awareness

Campaigns

Below are some campaigns everyone in the Surf Lifesaving community can support to help promote inclusion of women and girls and address sexism, inequality and respect.

- <https://www.whiteribbon.org.au/>
- <https://www.march4justice.org.au/>

Days of significance

There are many Days of Significance relevant to promoting inclusion and advancement of women and girls. Everyone in the Surf Lifesaving community can acknowledge, celebrate and promote these days to build greater awareness.

- [International Women's Day](#), March 8th.
- [International Day of the Girl](#), October 11th
- [International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women](#), November 25th.

More help and resources

The following courses, guidelines and resources may assist to grow your/your community's knowledge of gender inclusion and assist you to take action towards a more gender equal community.

Organisations

- <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/>
- <https://championsofchangecoalition.org/>
- <https://www.respect.gov.au/>

Supporting resources

- The Australian Institute of Sport's AIS [Female Performance & Health Initiative](#) and training courses
- Play by the Rules [Inclusive Coaching Course](#)
- <https://genderequality.gov.au>
- [IOC Portrayal Guidelines](#) for gender-equal, fair and inclusive representation in sport
- Our Watch's [Preventing Violence Against Women and Girls in Sport](#) guideline
- UNESCO's [Tackling violence against women and girls in sport](#): A handbook for policy makers and sports practitioners.
- [Volunteering & Gender Key Statistics - Volunteering Australia](#)