



8 October 2012

For immediate release

Women's Health Victoria Reg. No A0029795W ABN 33365284944  
Level 8, 255 Bourke Street, Melbourne VIC Australia 3000  
T (03) 9662 3755 F (03) 9663 7955 E whv@whv.org.au W www.whv.org.au  
Postal Address GPO Box 1160, Melbourne VIC Australia 3001

## WHY FOOD IS A GENDER ISSUE

Women's Health Victoria is calling for greater understanding and awareness of the link between women's mental health and their relationship with food, in their *Women and Food Issues Paper*, published today. The 'war on obesity' is becoming personalised as the 'fight against fat women'.

'Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa are serious mental illnesses, affecting more women than men. Women struggle with unhealthy eating behaviours, many from a young age, in an attempt to fit a culturally acceptable slim ideal. This ideal is completely out of reach for most women', said Women's Health Victoria Policy and Health Promotion Manager, Rose Durey.

'What many people don't know is that by strict dieting or skipping meals, women may be setting themselves up for a lifetime of weight gain and poor nutrition', she said.

Eighty-six percent of Victorian women do not eat the recommended quantity of fruit and vegetables as recommended by the Australian guidelines for health eating and 56 percent of Victorian women are overweight or obese.

'Women who are overweight or obese experience various forms of stigmatisation that stop them participating in healthy pursuits such as physical activity and social events', Ms Durey said, 'In turn this has further negative impact on their mental health.'

'We know that the other barriers to a healthy diet and exercise are related to women's social and economic environment. Income is a key factor in food insecurity and this affects more women than men. The risk of obesity is estimated to be 20 to 40 percent higher for women who experience mild to moderate food insecurity. Food insecurity is associated with anxiety and depression.'

'We need to look at the underlying forces at play that keep women on the merry-go-round of body dissatisfaction and poor mental health. These forces are complex. We need to challenge gender stereotypes and ensure women have equal access to economic opportunities.'

Women's Health Victoria has explored the relationship between women and food in the *Women and Food Issues Paper* published today: <http://whv.org.au/publications-resources/publications-resources-by-topic/post/women-and-food-ip/>

- Ends -

**For further information contact:**  
**Rose Durey**  
**Policy and Health Promotion Manager**  
**03 9664 9300 or 0403 619 840**

A  
M  
E  
D  
I  
A