This paper considers the meaning of the term ‘gender transformative policy and practice’ and how it fits into existing approaches to gendered policy and practice. The paper sets out Women’s Health Victoria’s understanding of these approaches, and discusses the aim and importance of gender transformative policy and practice.

Policy and practice can perpetuate, increase or challenge existing inequalities between women and men. At one end, policy and practice can be harmful to gender equality (gender exploitative) and at the other end, gender roles and relations can be positively changed and gender equality improved (gender transformative). The diagram overleaf describes the different approaches, and provides examples of how each approach may work in practice. Policy and practice can incorporate elements of all of these approaches.

Gender transformative policy and practice is regarded as most effective at transforming harmful gender norms and restructuring the determinants of gender inequality. Gender sensitive policy and practice can also challenge gender inequality and improve women’s health outcomes.
## Approaches to gendered policy and practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender blind</th>
<th>Gender exploitative</th>
<th>Gender sensitive</th>
<th>Gender transformative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender blind policy and practice either ignores or deliberately does not address gender, on the assumption that no gender-based differences apply. It is often based on the principal of treating everyone the same.³</td>
<td>Gender exploitative policy and practice takes advantage of rigid gender norms, harmful gender stereotypes and unequal power relations between women and men to achieve policy or program goals. <strong>Example:</strong> A previous version of the ‘Feeling Good’ tobacco cessation campaign delivered by the Queensland Government and Quitline was designed specifically for young women. It featured images of beautiful, popular and healthy young women who were ex- or non-smokers, prioritizing women’s role as objects of desire.⁹</td>
<td>Gender sensitive policy and practice takes gender into account, acknowledging the different experiences, expectations, pressures, inequalities and needs of women, men, transgender and intersex people.⁴ <strong>Examples:</strong> The Victorian Government’s Service guideline for gender sensitivity and safety for mental health and alcohol and other drug services sets out what is required of services and individual practitioners to provide gender-sensitive care for women, men and people who identify as transgender or intersex.¹¹</td>
<td>Gender transformative policy and practice examines challenges and ultimately transforms structures, norms and behaviours that reinforce gender inequality, and strengthens those that support gender equality.¹⁻³,⁵ <strong>Example:</strong> Women’s Health Victoria’s <em>Take a stand against domestic violence – it’s everyone’s business</em> workplace program aims to strengthen the organisational capacity of male-dominated workplaces to promote gender equality and non-violent norms, and provide staff with practical skills to challenge sexism.³ The campaign to achieve equal pay for community sector workers who are predominantly women is another example of gender transformative policy and practice.⁸</td>
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What is the aim of gender transformative policy and practice?
The aim of gender transformative policy and practice is to enhance gender equality by changing the way communities view, value and assign roles to women and men. It redefines harmful gender norms and develops and strengthens equitable gender roles and relationships. It emerged from the international development context and the prevention of HIV/AIDS.

What does gender transformative policy and practice do?
Gender transformative policy and practice:
- interrogates the different gender norms and roles that affect women and men;
- addresses the causes of gender inequality;
- develops strategies to promote gender equality; and
- creates conditions that increase shared power, control of resources and decision-making between women and men.

Why is gender transformative policy and practice important?
The importance of addressing gender inequality to improve women’s health is widely recognised, although few gender-based interventions have challenged the stereotypes or power dynamics that create inequality. Gender transformative policy and practice considers the way traditional gender roles and stereotypes impact on how women and men control and improve their health. By addressing the values and behaviours associated with ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’, gender transformative policy and practice aims to redefine gender roles and relationships and transform unequal gender relations. This may take time, but the changes achieved are more likely to bring long-term and sustainable benefits. Many gender transformative interventions are already happening, although they may not be framed as such.

Developing gender transformative policy and practice
- Advocate for policy and legislative change that supports equitable social systems.
- Develop programs that encourage critical awareness of gender roles and norms.
- Address the structural level, not solely the individual or small group level.
- Promote the position of women across policy, programs and advocacy.
- Ensure that policy and practice challenges the imbalance of power, distribution of resources, and allocation of duties between women and men.
- Address the unequal power relationships between women and healthcare providers.
- Engage men in women’s empowerment approaches through information sharing, raising interest and support, or empowerment strategies for less empowered men. This may also reduce backlash against gender equality policy or programming.
- Work with men to improve gender equality and health, leading to better health outcomes for both women and men.
- Consider how women and men adjust to and use redefined gender norms through evaluation.
References


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