

Advancing Women's Leadership Summit

Communique

On 8 September 2022 the Victorian Government's Gender Equality Advisory Committee (GEAC) hosted the Advancing Women's Leadership Summit at the Melbourne Town Hall.

The Summit brought sector leaders and innovative speakers together, capturing emerging strategies that work towards achieving the Government's target of 50:50 female Councillors and Mayors by 2025. The Summit explored reasons why women don't stand for, or seek re-election to local council, and identified solutions to address these issues.

The Minister for Local Government, the Hon Melissa Horne MP spoke to the role of the Summit in encouraging women to engage in public office and understanding the barriers to ensure the Victorian Government meets the 2025 target.

The Hon Julia Gillard AC 27th Prime Minister of Australia, delivered a keynote address, highlighting the emerging research surrounding gender equality and the impacts this has for local government more broadly. Ms Gillard commented on the experience of women in elected positions and what is needed to drive gender equality in the future. Ms Gillard reflected on the combative nature of political debate and strategies on how to recognise and call out disrespectful behaviour. Ms Gillard commented on the importance of competency and empathy in strong leadership, to support the creation of positive change.

The Minister for Women, the Hon Natalie Hutchins reflected on the progress that has been made in the local government sector so far, and announced the successful recipients of the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector's 2022 Research Grants Program. The recipients will share in \$300,000 to analyse data across the public sector and form projects to help reduce gender inequality and discrimination. The grant program forms part of the Government's \$8.3 million investment to implement the Gender Equality Strategy, including training and resources to progress gender equality and support the implementation of the *Gender Equality Act*.

Summit attendees participated in collaborative conversations with a selection of experienced and emerging leaders, including individuals like Coral Ross AM, Vivienne Nguyen AM and Dr Niki Vincent. These conversations focused on strategies and ideas to further women's leadership in local government. Corrina Bertram, Partner and Board Member at KPMG, summarised these discussions, focusing on the key issues of councillor conduct, improved diversity representation and the need for stronger network pathways to increase participation in local government.

The Solutions for Change session provided attendees with an opportunity to discuss topics that were most important to them for advancing women's leadership. Attendees were provided with an opportunity to deep dive into areas of priority, including how best to involve young people in local government, mentorship and sponsorship programs and implementing gender equality as key performance indicators. **Local Government Gender Equality Expert, Ms Ruth McGowan OAM** reflected on the key emerging themes that surrounded strategies for action. Ms McGowan commented on the interconnected relationship of communities, local government and state government in working together to solve shared challenges of gender equality and representation.

The Summit concluded with an evening networking event where participants heard from the inspirational Licia Heath, CEO of Women for Election. Ms Heath spoke to the importance of more women standing for office and supporting each other in order to increase the levels of gender diversity seen in public office. Ms Kat Henaway CEO of Politics in Colour and Ms Brenda Gaddi founder of Women of Colour Australia, both spoke to the improvements to democracy when elected representatives can more accurately reflect the wider community.

The themes and outcomes of the Summit will inform the GEAC's future work and advice to the Minister for Local Government and the Minister for Women. For further information on the GEAC, please go to <https://www.localgovernment.vic.gov.au/our-programs/gender-equity>

GEAC Co-Chairs

Kat Theophanous MP and Juliana Addison MP

