

A photograph of several women in a professional setting, possibly a conference or networking event. One woman in the center is smiling and looking towards the right. The background is slightly blurred, showing other people and a bright light source.

sh=qual

ADVERTISING EQUALITY

# Project *Evaluation*

*June 2024*



Women's  
Health Vic





# About Women's Health Victoria

Women's Health Victoria is a statewide, feminist, non-profit organisation working with government, the health sector, and the community to improve health outcomes for women (cis and trans inclusive) and gender diverse people. We advocate for healthcare rights and access, deliver health promotion resources, and operate vital information and support services, so that all Victorians have the opportunity to access optimal health and wellbeing, free from bias and discrimination.



This report was prepared by Trezona Consulting Group for Women's Health Victoria



shEqual was supported by the Victorian Government

# Acknowledgement of Country

Women's Health Victoria acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Owners of the land that our offices are situated on, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. As a statewide organisation, we also acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters across Victoria. We pay our respects to them, their cultures and their Elders past and present.

*Artist: Madison Connors - Yorta Yorta, Dja Dja Wurrung, Gamilaroi*



## Our Commitment to Gender Diversity & Inclusion

Women's Health Victoria's focus is women (cis and trans inclusive) and gender diverse people. We address feminist health issues and are committed to supporting all people impacted by gender inequity who can benefit from our work. As a proud intersectional feminist organisation, Women's Health Victoria is working towards meaningful inclusivity, guided by and supporting people who identify as women, trans, intersex and gender diverse.

# Executive Summary

*shEqual is a primary prevention initiative managed by Women's Health Victoria (WHV) and funded by the Victorian Government. The initiative is the only one of its kind in Australia. It uses a settings-based, whole of system approach to promote gender equality in advertising settings, and to address the gendered drivers of violence against women.*

The shEqual initiative's key project objectives were to:

1. Establish a sound evidence-base for primary prevention in the advertising setting
2. Increase understanding among stakeholders of the role/contribution of sexist advertising to gender inequality and violence against women
3. Mobilise and support industry and community engagement in action to promote gender equity in advertising and prevent violence against women
4. Build the capacity of ad agencies to promote gender equality and provide safe and respectful workplaces.

# *Evaluation*

WHV commissioned Trezona Consulting Group (TCG) to undertake an independent evaluation. The evaluation covers the 2020-2024 implementation period and seeks to address the following:

- What is the evidence of the project's progress towards its stated objectives and expected outcomes, including alignment between the program, its output, and departmental objectives and Government priorities?
- Has WHV demonstrated efficiency in the delivery of the project?
- How has the project work, including industry engagement, impacted gender equality in the advertising sector?
- To what extent has the project successfully engaged the advertising sector and what learnings can be drawn from it to enhance the work of gender equality/prevention violence against women sector in engaging new industries?

Evaluation activities commenced in March 2023 and included developing a Theory of Change with project stakeholders, reviewing project documentation, developing and implementing surveys, interviews and focus groups, and analysing quantitative and qualitative data. A total of 12 people participated in qualitative evaluation activities, and 97 people responded to the shEqual Impact Survey 2023. Forty-five training surveys were also analysed for this evaluation.

## Evaluation findings

### Effectiveness and efficiency

# 1

The shEqual initiative demonstrated effectiveness and efficiency in its implementation by successfully delivering extensive activities and achieving good reach across its strategy areas as intended, as evidenced through the direct engagement of over 2,000 industry professionals and other stakeholders through project governance, research and capacity building activities, digital engagement of 238,844 stakeholders through social media accounts, including followers, content and campaign interactions, 4,210 downloads of its research, resources and tools, and interest from key influencers and decision makers including Federal Members of Parliament in its recent advocacy efforts.



The shEqual initiative's activities and outputs are aligned with and make a significant contribution to key state and federal strategies to achieve gender equality and prevent gender-based violence, including the Victorian Government's strategy for gender equality, Our Equal State, and the Australian Government's National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children (2022-32) and First Action Plan (2023-27), and Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality.

# 2



# 3

The shEqual initiative has demonstrated efficient use of its financial resources by using its funding as intended and successfully delivering on planned activities and outputs.

As the only initiative of its kind in Australia, shEqual has demonstrated value for money through its contribution to policy priorities and outcomes, establishment of relationships with industry professionals, its efficient and cost-effective design and implementation, and the establishment of an online resource hub that provides ongoing benefits.

# 4



# 5

The shEqual initiative has either partially or fully achieved its four objectives:

- shEqual has successfully achieved its first objective to establish the evidence-base for promoting gender equality in advertising. The initiative consulted more than 700 industry professionals and published seven reports which contributed new evidence to the field.
- shEqual has made progress on objective two by increasing awareness and understanding of the link between sexist advertising, gender inequality and violence against women among industry stakeholders directly involved in the initiative.
- shEqual has made substantial progress on objective three in relation to industry engagement. It has successfully supported existing champions to take action to promote gender equality and built momentum for a movement for change. Work to support community action has been limited to date due to resourcing constraints.
- While objective four has not been fully achieved, progress is underway to support to agencies to improve the workplace systems and processes needed to fully realise it. Key resources have been developed to support this work, such as training packages and workplace gender equity audit tools.



## Impact

1. Through its advocacy, the shEqual initiative influenced the ACA and AANA to adopt changes to advertising industry policy and regulations. This is a key success of the shEqual initiative.
2. The shEqual initiative has contributed to a shift in the discourse around gender equality in the advertising industry. The shEqual National Survey 2020 was a key driver of this change.
3. The shEqual initiative's impact on workplace culture has been limited.
4. The shEqual initiative's impact on gender equality in ads is unclear, with varying perceptions among stakeholders.
5. Achieving gender equality takes time and requires long-term commitment and investment.



## Strengths and benefits

shEqual's key strengths and benefits were:

- i) involving industry professionals in its governance structures;
- ii) government support and commitment,
- iii) the impartial status of WHV as the lead organisation; and
- iv) the research, rigour and expertise of the project team.

## Challenges and limitations

The key challenges that limited the shEqual initiative's capacity to achieve its objectives, progress gender equal content creation and inclusive workplaces, and to engage more broadly with industry were:

- i) resistance and backlash within the industry;
- ii) uptake and implementation of the initiative's research and resources
- iii) branding and messaging;
- iv) the initiative's scope of focus and influence; and
- v) resourcing and capacity.



## Conclusion and recommendations

As the only dedicated, evidence-based initiative in Australia working with the advertising industry to promote gender equality and prevent gender-based violence, the shEqual initiative is creating a unique settings-based movement for change and presents a feasible approach to do so. The momentum and relationships built through the initiative, the research, resources, and tools produced, and the team's expertise and skillset could be effectively leveraged to expand the shEqual initiative to achieve industry-wide change, with significant implications for gender equality. The following recommendations are based on the evaluation findings:

### Funding

Secure long-term and ongoing funding for the shEqual initiative to maintain existing partnerships and momentum, build on successes to date and achieve sustained change across the three pillars identified in *Seeing is Believing*.

### Policy and regulation

Expand the shEqual initiative's remit to include all forms of advertising and paid content, noting the importance of online and social media advertising and influencers in the context of harmful advertising.

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Broaden the shEqual initiative's scope to include harmful advertising targeted to men that includes rigid and limiting male stereotypes.

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Capitalise on momentum built in 2024 engaging key influencers and decision makers, including Federal Members of Parliament and stakeholders with public profile, to continue raising awareness of the impacts of sexist ads and lead advocacy work to generate support for and drive legislative and regulatory reform.

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Ensure the shEqual initiative aligns and contributes to key federal government policy frameworks, including the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 and Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality, as well as reforms to address online harms and other advertising regulation, such as gambling.

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Continue to undertake relevant research to support legislative and regulatory change, including an analysis of current regulatory codes and community/industry consultation on other proposed models of regulation.

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## Communications

Develop a comprehensive communication strategy and plan in consultation with industry professionals that articulates clear key messages to be embedded across all communications, identifies targeted audiences for specific activities to recognise the breadth and diversity within the industry and the need for tailored approaches, and which contains clear guidance on the voice and tone to be used in communications.

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Rebrand the initiative so that it is inclusive and does not reinforce gender binaries.

## Industry engagement and partnerships

Continue momentum built in 2024 through capacity building activities, including Gender Equality in Advertising and Gender Equality in Advertising Workplaces training packages, and harness existing policy levers to drive industry engagement with the shEqual initiative as an available resource to support the industry to meet existing obligations, including under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 and the Gender Equality Act 2020.

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Build on, formalise and expand partnerships with grassroots gender equity initiatives to coordinate collaborative action and develop and implement industry campaigns.

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Develop initiatives to engage men in the industry, such as allyship programs.

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Implement an industry award and ceremony for progressive portrayals in advertising and/or a scorecard system for gender equality in advertising to showcase good practice examples.

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Continue momentum built in 2024 through capacity building activities, including Gender Equality in Advertising and Gender Equality in Advertising Workplaces training packages, and harness existing policy levers to drive industry engagement with the shEqual initiative as an available resource to support the industry to meet existing obligations, including under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 and the Gender Equality Act 2020.

## Monitoring and evaluation

Subject to sufficient longer-term funding, build the evidence-base demonstrating the frequency of exposure to harmful ads, and how this contributes harmful attitudes and behaviours, and poorer health outcomes.

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Review and refresh the shEqual initiative's objectives as needed to ensure that they are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound for effective evaluation, and consider separating out objectives for industry and community engagement.

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Use the Theory of Change to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan with a strengthened focus on impact measures and outcomes, and including appropriate systems for streamlined and consistent program monitoring and evaluation.

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 [whv.org.au](http://whv.org.au)

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