

# Media Release

The Hon Natalie Hutchins MP

Minister for Education

Minister for Women



Friday, 18 August 2023

## STEM SISTERS SHARE THEIR SCIENTIFIC STORIES ON SOAPBOX

Members of the public will be able to hear from 12 women leaders in STEM this Friday in Melbourne's State Library Forecourt as part of National Science Week, thanks to support from the Andrews Labor Government.

Organised by STEM Sisters, Melbourne's second annual free *Soapbox Science* event is designed to inspire young women to pursue careers in STEM – featuring leaders from diverse backgrounds who will share their research discoveries and experiences in the field of science.

The Labor Government is backing the event as part of \$400,000 in funding announced earlier this year for the *Investing in Women's Grassroots Grants Program*. The program is supporting 44 organisations throughout Victoria with up to \$10,000 for their work to advance gender equality.

STEM Sisters was founded by Ruwangi Fernando six years ago to break through the barriers that prevent women of colour from pursuing and excelling in STEM fields. It offers programs to support women at every stage of their career, from students to leaders.

Dr Fernando is an information technology specialist with experience in broader IT technologies, including artificial intelligence, which has come under the microscope for its inherent gender and racial bias.

Women made up only 15 per cent of people in STEM-qualified occupations in 2022. While 56 per cent of Australian women with a university level STEM-qualification were born overseas, these women experience unemployment rates almost five times higher than their Australian-born counterparts.

Barriers to women of colour advancing in STEM careers include biases and stereotyping that assume some STEM fields are a better fit for men, especially by influential people like parents, educators and careers counsellors.

Supporting women and girls from all backgrounds to participate equally in STEM has benefits such as diverse teams making products that are useful and inclusive to more people, research that is informed by the experiences of a greater portion of the population and key industries that are resilient to skills shortages.

The Labor Government is committed to supporting women into male-dominated industries and is developing strategies for the construction and energy industries. For more information and to register visit [stemsisters.org.au/event](https://stemsisters.org.au/event).

### Quote attributable to Minister for Women Natalie Hutchins

*"Victoria has so much to gain if we remove barriers for women of all backgrounds to participate in STEM – and we're proud to support these events."*

### Quote attributable to STEM Sisters founder and director Dr. Ruwangi Fernando

*"STEM fields thrive on innovation, where diversity is the essential catalyst. While every woman confronts the barrier of a glass ceiling, women of colour are met with an even more formidable concrete ceiling."*

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