

Media Release

Hon Jacinta Allan MP
Premier



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THE GENDER PAIN GAP REVEALED – AND WOMEN AREN'T SURPRISED

The release of a landmark survey dedicated to Victorian women's health has confirmed what women already know: their pain is real – and regularly overlooked.

The results of the survey, undertaken by the Allan Labor Government, show that close to half of all women are impacted by issues related to their periods, pregnancy, birth and postnatal care, or conditions like endometriosis.

Nearly 60 per cent of participants reported having had positive healthcare interactions. But one in three said they'd experienced insensitive and disrespectful practitioners who left them feeling dismissed and unheard.

Sharing the findings today, Premier Jacinta Allan and Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas also announced the new *Inquiry into Women's Pain* – the next stage of the Labor Government's nation-leading \$153 million women's health transformation.

The Inquiry will examine systemic issues and solutions and hear directly from women across Victoria. Led by a panel of experts and overseen by the Women's Health Advisory Council, submissions are set to open on 30 January.

Putting women's voices at the heart of the Government's reform, the *Listening to Women's Voices* report comprises the insights of more than 1,700 Victorian women who shared their personal experiences of our health care system. Findings from the survey include:

- Four in 10 Victorian women live with chronic pain
- Around half of participants reported that period-related conditions (heavy periods, cramping, PMS) affected their health and wellbeing
- Similarly, about 50 per cent said that pregnancy and birth complications continued to impact their health
- Around 30 per cent said they were affected by the symptoms of perimenopause or menopause
- 30 per cent said conditions such as endometriosis, menopause and chronic pain led to poor mental health
- One in three have health conditions that affect their ability to work and keep a job
- 20 per cent said they missed out on social connections because of their health

The report also includes participants' personal stories. In an all-too-common occurrence, one woman said she was prescribed antidepressants when she had acute pelvic pain that was stopping her sleeping and working – but was later diagnosed with advanced endometriosis.

Victoria has a proud track record of work to improve women's health outcomes – from establishing Victoria's first clinic for women's heart health, delivering 11 sexual and reproductive health hubs, and launching the state's first ever sexual and reproductive health phone line. But as today's results show, there is still more to do.

Work is underway to establish 20 new comprehensive women's health clinics, which will be crucial to overcoming some of the barriers women face in accessing healthcare.

Offering free, wide-ranging care and support, the clinics will allow women to see specialists – gynaecologist, urologist, specialist nursing and allied health – in one spot, making it easier and faster to access the world-class care for conditions like endometriosis, pelvic pain and polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS).

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An additional nine sexual and reproductive health hubs are also being established across Victoria, adding to the 11 already operating. Offering free or low-cost services and advice on contraception, pregnancy termination and sexual health testing and treatment, three new hubs have been announced for Mildura, Mill Park and Wallan.

The Labor Government is also doubling the number of endo and associated surgeries, delivering around 10,800 extra laparoscopies over the next four years – as well as providing scholarships for 100 more women's healthcare specialists.

Submissions can be made to the *Inquiry into Women's Pain* from 30 January at health.vic.gov.au/public-health/inquiry-into-womens-pain.

Quotes attributable to Premier Jacinta Allan

"This won't be a mic drop moment for the majority of Victoria's population, because every woman has either experienced it for herself or knows someone who has. But now we have the evidence to prove it."

"It's time we stopped treating women's health like some kind of niche issue. We deserve to have our pain believed and relieved."

Quotes attributable to Minister for Health Mary-Anne Thomas

"The survey results have highlighted that sadly, a systemic gender pain gap still exists."

"It's why we are transforming our health system – delivering new women's health clinics, recruiting more women's health specialists and establishing more dedicated sexual and reproductive health hubs across the state."

Quote attributable to Parliamentary Secretary for Women's Health Kat Theophanous

"This important reform will undoubtedly change the lives of countless Victorian women, who for far too long, have lived with pain in silence."