

Media Release

The Hon Mary-Anne Thomas MP

Leader of the House

Minister for Health

Minister for Ambulance Services

Minister for Women



Monday, 2 March 2026

LABOR LAUNCHES THE NEXT GENERATION OF FEMALE LEADERS

The Allan Labor Government is backing young women to advance their leadership careers.

Minister Thomas today opened applications for the 2026 Joan Kirner Emerging Leaders Program.

Honouring the legacy of Victoria's first female Premier, the program equips participants with practical skills and strategies to overcome gendered barriers and unlock their full leadership potential.

Women are still underrepresented in leadership roles across Victoria.

Too often women are stuck in lower management – even in sectors where they make up the majority of the workforce.

This limits their influence, locks them out of decision making and increases long-term social and economic disadvantage.

The Government is changing this by supporting emerging leaders on their leadership journey.

Women and gender diverse voices deserve a seat at table – and to be heard.

Labor continues to back the economic, health and safety outcomes for women, girls and gender diverse people.

Victorian women and gender-diverse people working in the for-purpose sector between the ages of 22 and 40 are encouraged to apply.

This year's program focuses on those from organisations that might not have the support for formal leadership training.

Applications are now open and close on 30 March 2026.

To find out more and apply, visit vic.gov.au/joan-kirner-emerging-leaders-program.

Quote attributable to Minister for Women Mary-Anne Thomas

"When women lead, organisations benefit from broader perspectives, stronger collaboration and improved outcomes for their communities."

Quote attributable to Institute of Community Directors Executive Director Adele Stowe-Lindner

"Leadership shouldn't require courage – but for many, it still does. We want to change that."