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Major employers commit to eliminating everyday sexism in their workplaces

100+ chiefs of some of Australia's largest employers and most influential organisations are taking practical steps to identify and eliminate everyday sexism in the workplace, inviting all leaders to join them.

More than 6,000 employees across a range of sectors were consulted as part of work led by the Male Champions of Change coalition to understand what everyday sexism looks like; its impact on employees, career advancement and productivity; and actions that can be taken to address the often insidious and harmful workplace dynamic.

The outcomes are captured in a report released today by the Male Champions titled: *"We Set the Tone: Eliminating Everyday Sexism."*

According to the report, there are six common manifestations of everyday sexism which include: insults that masquerade as jokes; devaluing women's views or voices; role stereotyping; preoccupation with physical appearance over competence; assumptions that caring and careers don't mix; and unwarranted gender labelling such as when women are diminished for being 'too aggressive' or men because they 'lack competitive edge'.

It's been a sensitive and highly-nuanced topic to work through according to Graham Ashton, Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police who says: "Most people don't want to be accused, let alone guilty, of sexist behaviour while some often dismiss the subject as political correctness gone mad."

"Yet we see it play out every single day in the media, in politics, in our workplaces and in the community. What we learned is that underlying or 'everyday' sexism impacts women and men and – whether intentional or not – it can take a significant and cumulative toll on the personal lives and career progression of employees and also the effectiveness of organisations."

Kate Jenkins, Sex Discrimination Commissioner says while we have seen sectors respond decisively to more explicit forms of sexual harassment, everyday sexism is still evident in workplace interactions, systems, policies and decisions that affect both individual careers and organisational cultures.

"Typically people don't raise it because it can be seen as too small to make a fuss about and few want to be seen to be 'rocking the boat'. But consistently in my work - with Victoria Police, the Australian Defence Force, the Universities and Male Champions of Change - we hear that these things do matter. They are out-dated at best, harmful at worst. Unless we tackle everyday sexism, the most innovative policies and initiatives designed to advance gender equality and inclusive and effective organisations will not deliver the change we need."

Having developed a framework and language to identify and respond to everyday sexism, the Male Champions emphasise the importance of open discussion, goodwill and leadership in taking steps to eliminate it.

"As leaders we have a responsibility to set the tone for what is and isn't acceptable behaviour within our organisations," says Medibank CEO Craig Drummond.

"A culture that does not hold people to account on everyday sexism – be it conscious or otherwise – is not a healthy one. Australian businesses need to look at themselves with a more critical eye and ask themselves if they are enabling the wrong behaviours."

Actions recommended in the report include: not supporting sexist ‘humour’ by laughing or staying silent; including and valuing women’s voices in meetings and decisions; challenging role stereotyping; and supporting the personal choices employees make about caring and careers.

Gillon McLachlan, CEO AFL says “AFL prides itself on being an inclusive sport, but for so long social norms and traditions have indicated that it's a male-only game, effectively excluding half the potential playing population. There was no reason not to establish a women's league and, since its launch, AFLW has exceeded our competition, commercial and community expectations.”

James Fazzino leads global explosives and fertiliser company Incitec Pivot in a traditionally male-dominated industry and has seen the direct benefits of a changed approach.

“Men in our industry clearly don’t experience everyday sexism in the way that many women do. We found that assumptions about the roles that were suitable for women and men in our organisation influenced everyday decisions about advancement and promotions and were reinforced by our talent management systems. By understanding and addressing the problem we have enabled more women to take up non-traditional leadership roles in areas such as chemical facilities management, engineering and distribution.”

Signatories to the report include Victoria Police, NAB, Incitec Pivot, AFL, Medibank, La Trobe University, Qantas and AGL.

‘We Set the Tone: Eliminating Everyday Sexism’ is available on the [Male Champions of Change website](#)

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For more information to arrange and interview with:

- Kate Jenkins, Sex Discrimination Commissioner
- Graham Ashton, Chief Commissioner Victoria Police
- James Fazzino, CEO Incitec Pivot
- Craig Drummond, CEO Medibank

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