



Promoting gender equality to prevent
violence against women in the Grampians Region

THE FIRST FOUR YEARS
2016-2020



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Women's Health Grampians

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Acknowledgements

Women's Health Grampians acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we provide our services, and pays respect to their Elders, past and present.

Table of Contents

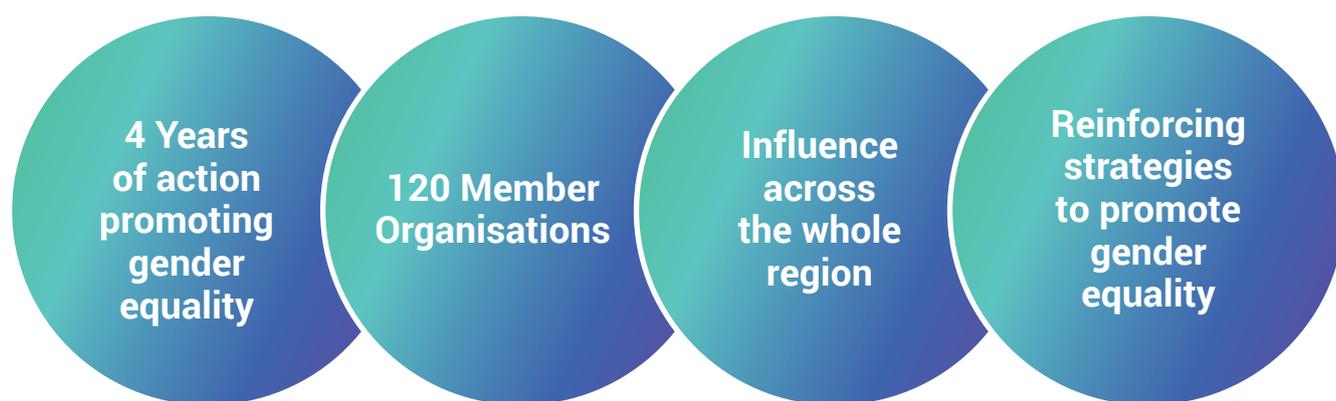
What is CoRE?.....	4
Why was CoRE established?	5
The issue	5
The solution.....	5
The CoRE model.....	6
Operations and governance.....	6
Membership requirements	7
Member support.....	8
Theoretical basis	9
Evaluation.....	9
The CoRE Story.....	10
How did the first four years of CoRE unfold?	10
Membership profile	11
Member progress.....	12
What have we learnt?.....	14
Next steps	16
References.....	18

What is CoRE?

Communities of Respect and Equality (CoRE) is an alliance of organisations, businesses, clubs and groups that share a vision for safe, equal and respectful communities.

Members of CoRE commit to the CoRE Regional Plan to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children (2016-2020). The plan guides individual organisations and collective action to promote gender equality and counter discrimination, sexism and gender inequality. It is based on the belief that the reach and influence across society of CoRE's wide and diverse partnership will help to drive cultural change, reduce barriers to gender equality and re-frame cultural norms and acceptable behaviour – important steps in preventing violence against women and children.

Led by Women's Health Grampians (WHG), CoRE operates across the Grampians Region: an area in western Victoria spanning more than 48,000 square kilometres with a population of around 240,000.¹ Regional Consultants build the capacity of CoRE members to implement sustainable changes that support gender equality within their organisations and spheres of influence.





Why was CoRE established?

THE ISSUE

Violence against women is a serious and widespread problem in Australia.

On average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner.² One in three women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15.³ Victorian police respond to over 82 000 family violence incidents each year, and the rate is increasing.⁴ Of these, 72% of the victims are female.⁴

Women living in rural areas are more likely than women in urban areas to experience family violence, and they face additional barriers to reporting and escaping abuse.⁵ Parts of the Grampians Region, such as the Horsham and Ararat local government areas, have family violence reporting rates amongst the highest in Victoria.⁶

THE SOLUTION

Although violence against women is a complex social problem, it is preventable.

In 2016, the Victorian Government funded each of the nine regional women's health services across Victoria to develop regional prevention partnerships to prevent violence against women – in the Grampians region, this was CoRE.

Informed by the national framework: Change the Story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children, CoRE acknowledges that the underlying drivers of violence against women are gendered, culturally embedded and complex.⁷ They include beliefs and behaviours reflecting disrespect for women, low support for gender equality, and an adherence to rigid gender roles and identities. Addressing these drivers and encouraging transformative change requires a long-term, population level approach that includes addressing the structures, policies and practices that support such behaviours and beliefs.

The CoRE model

CoRE takes a systems approach to promoting gender equality. Its open engagement, member-based model, with an emphasis on securing leadership involvement, ensures members are fully committed to the initiative and are able to effect sustainable changes in their organisations.

CoRE is based on the following strategic goals:

1. Improved systems, structures, policies and practices that address gender equality in organisations, and collectively;
2. Increased ability to challenge the drivers of gender inequality and violence in our social and professional settings, including sexism, discrimination and stereotypes;
3. Stronger partnerships that include a broad range of participants, united to address the drivers of violence against women; and
4. Better shared information about what works and what doesn't, to inform and encourage continued action.

OPERATIONS AND GOVERNANCE

Operationalising the CoRE strategy involves action at three levels, ultimately seeking to drive a shift in attitudes and behaviours at the community level.

- Commitment to systems-level changes by CoRE Alliance members: All organisations, businesses, clubs, groups and networks that become members are encouraged and supported to embed policy and practice-level changes within their workplaces and across their organisations.
- Oversight of CoRE is provided by the CoRE Leadership Group: a representative group of members who guide the initiative, particularly in relation to its growth, quality, sustainability and relevance.
- Management and support by WHG: This includes the provision of backbone support for members and the CoRE Leadership Group by way of expertise, resources, support and coordination.

WHG manages all CoRE activities within a moderate annual budget and a staffing allocation of approximately four equivalent full-time (EFT). Member organisations fund their own CoRE activities and CoRE Leadership Group membership is sustained with in-kind support. Training is provided through a fee-for-service model. Additional projects such as Equality for All have been made possible through philanthropic funding.

MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS

CoRE membership is open to any organisation, business, partnership, network or group within the Grampians region that is willing to commit to the vision, principles and goals outlined in the CoRE Regional Plan. Members agree to:

- Work collaboratively with other partners to build momentum, gain strength, share knowledge, resources and ideas;
- Integrate and resource relevant activities and changes to the organisation's planning, policies and operations; and
- Communicate on progress, insights and challenges that will help monitor and build the capacity of the CoRE Alliance.

Members must secure leadership commitment (CEO or equivalent, and Leadership Team) for the initiative, appoint a CoRE Liaison (internal CoRE co-ordinator or champion) and develop an organisation-wide plan and actions.





MEMBER SUPPORT

WHG's team undertakes a range of strategies to support the development and growth of CoRE. Activities include:

- Leadership Briefings to ensure the CEO and Leadership Team understand and are fully committed to CoRE;
 - Provision of individualised-support for all members to ensure planned CoRE activities align with the five essential action areas outlined in Change the Story;
 - Distribution of national and localised resources to members;
 - Community of Practice Forums for members to connect, learn, share experiences, identify common challenges, trouble shoot, generate solutions, and learn from one another;
 - Delivery of a suite of training programs: Introduction to the Prevention of Violence Against Women; Intensive Bystander training; and Gender Equality for Manwgers.
 - Delivery of the Act@Work Program^A: an intensive workplace culture change program designed to fast-track progress towards gender equality and the prevention of violence against women.
- Collation and sharing of success stories from member organisations, highlighting changes they have undertaken to promote gender equality;
 - Webinars to explore contemporary issues, such as WHG Conversations: A gender spotlight on COVID 19;
 - Media activities promoting gender equality;
 - High profile public events; and
 - Delivery of associated projects, such as:
 - » the Equality for All program, with its team of Equality Advocates – eleven women with diverse experiences who inspire and assist organisations to consider how intersectionality influences gender equality and to develop effective strategies to reduce discrimination;
 - » Act@Play – a program for sporting clubs conducted in partnership with Sports Central; and
 - » CoRE Hi-Vis – a project aimed at supporting construction and manufacturing businesses in the Central Highlands region to attract and retain female staff.

^A It is estimated that over 5,000 employees have participated in the Act@Work Program, with considerable reach into the wider community as participants discuss the issues raised with friends, family and across their networks.



THEORETICAL BASIS

The CoRE model, based on the collective action of an alliance of organisations committed to social change, has a strong theoretical foundation. It is built around three concepts:

1. The Diffusion of Innovation Theory - This theory explains how, over time, an idea gains momentum and diffuses (or spreads) through a specific population or social system. The end result of the diffusion is that people, as part of a social system, adopt a new idea, behaviour, or product. When the innovation is widely adopted, it can become self-sustaining.⁸
2. Adoption of evidence-based actions - CoRE encourages activities in-line with the national Change the Story framework.⁷ CoRE members are encouraged to be flexible and innovative in the actions they choose, however, all actions need to be consistent with the five essential action areas outlined in Change the Story.
3. Theories of organisational change highlight the importance of 'engagement' and 'leadership' at an organisational level for sustainable change to occur. Engaging leadership and securing the support of senior staff is the key first step to change. Their influence on staff broadly, and access to resources and decision making power, is essential for change to be meaningful and accepted by staff.⁹

EVALUATION

Ever-evolving, the CoRE initiative remains responsive and flexible. With a commitment to action research, WHG regularly reflects on how the model could be adapted to better-meet the needs of its members and to strengthen actions to promote gender equality.

A detailed Evaluation Plan supports the monitoring and evaluation of CoRE over time. It sets a framework for the regular collection of data from a variety of sources and for assessing the impact of the initiative. Evaluation activities include:

- Collation and analysis of annual reports from CoRE members, with questions designed to track progress at an organisation-level;
- Analysis of in-house records on members;
- Facilitated, annual reflections by WHG and the CoRE Leadership Group;
- Mapping and analysis of CoRE member activities against the five essential action areas for reducing violence against women (as defined in the Change the Story Framework); and
- Regular reporting on regional indicators of change, including gender equality measures.

The CoRE Story

HOW DID THE FIRST FOUR YEARS OF CORE UNFOLD?

CoRE has made solid progress in its first four years.

By 2020, CoRE had moved through three stages of development.



1. Establishment

The establishment phase included research and consultation to inform development of the model, as well as stakeholder engagement activities to build local interest. A Reference Group of 26 organisations provided guidance and local insights.

The CoRE initiative was launched in May 2016 by the Honourable Minister Jaala Pulford with over 100 dignitaries from across the region in attendance. It formed part of the Victorian Government’s Women’s Health Services Leading Regional Action to Prevent Violence against Women and Children Project.

2. Growth

The launch spurred significant interest. Membership growth was fastest in the first six months, during which time 50 members signed up. Within its first year of operation, all local councils, Primary Care Partnerships and community health centres in the Grampians region became members of CoRE.

While organisations from the health and community services sectors formed the bulk of initial members, over time, membership has diversified considerably, in response to senior leaders from a range of industries and settings being targeted with information about CoRE.

The support and capacity building of members has been a key component of the initiative throughout. The content and issues covered in events and through the suite of resources available became increasingly sophisticated over time – evolving from initial education and awareness raising into more detailed gender equality work.

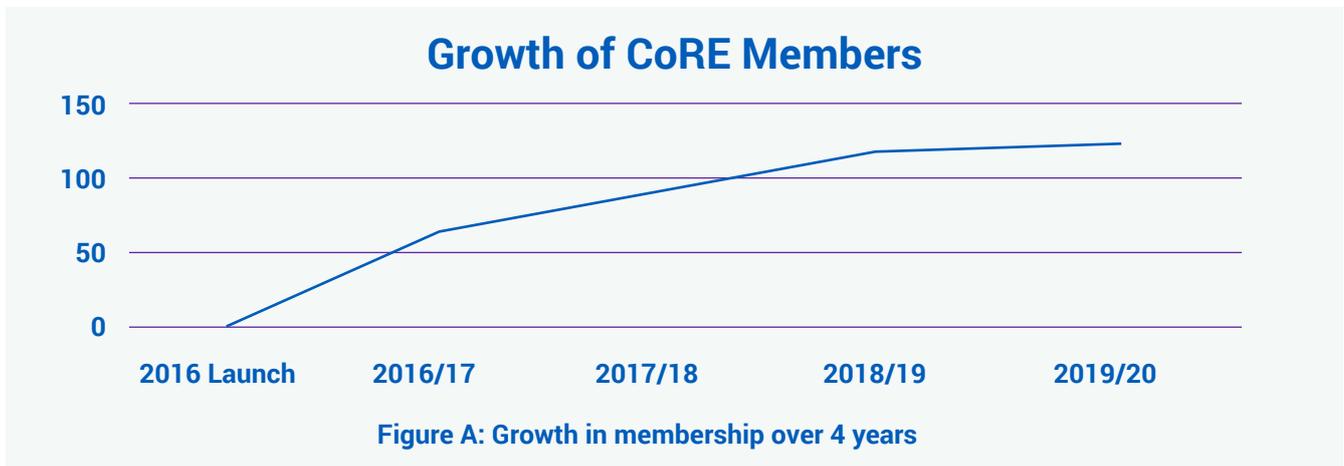
3. Quality Improvement

In 2018 WHG's focus moved from growth to consolidation. There was a focus on quality improvement and supporting existing members to maximise their commitments by undertaking meaningful actions to promote gender equality. Therefore, membership grew slowly in response to opportunistic and organisation-driven membership requests. This phase included closer engagement with members that had made minimal progress, as well as the development of resources to support more sophisticated actions (e.g. gender audit tools) and an increased focus on intersectionality.

Efforts to increase membership were targeted to attract members from key sectors that would add value to CoRE, including sports, business, education and training.

Leading Change events were hosted across the region, and on-line engagement through a series of webinars helped maintain connection with members during CoVID 19 lockdowns.

As expected, member growth slowed in Years 3 and 4, but by mid 2020, 120 members were engaged.



MEMBERSHIP PROFILE

Of the 120 members (mid 2020), 78% are organisations or businesses, 18% clubs or networks with individual members and 4% networks of organisations.

The sector profile of CoRE members has diversified across the years but the early adopters, being the Health, Community Health and Social Services sector and Community Organisations continue to be amongst the most common member sectors. Together with Sports, they make up over half the membership base.^B

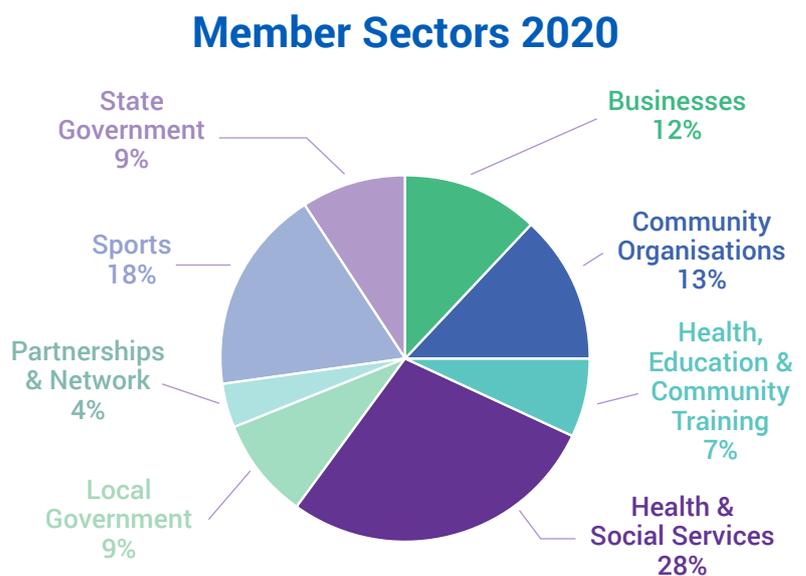


Figure B: Members by sector

^B From 2018-20 WHG significantly increased its foothold in the sport and recreation sector, with the introduction of the Act@Play program

MEMBER PROGRESS

On the whole, CoRE members are making good progress with their CoRE commitments and translating their intentions into quality actions.

CoRE members are expected to develop a CoRE Action Plan to progress gender equality within their organisations. Some members dedicate resources to this task immediately, while others take longer to develop and document their intentions. Many make progress before formalising their actions in a Plan.

Around two-thirds of current members have an Action Plan, are in the process of developing one or have mapped their actions against the 5 Essential Action Areas in Change the Story.

A 5 point scale is used by WHG to classify members' progress. As shown in Figure C, 58% of members have either made significant progress or have an Action Plan and are starting to put things in place.

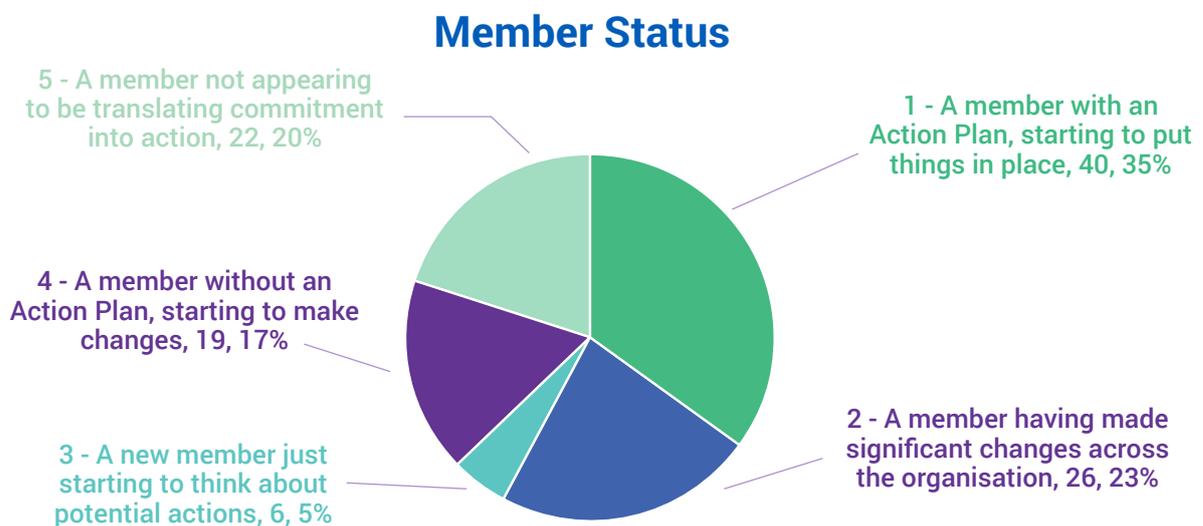


Figure C: Member status as classified by WHG staff

WHG appreciates that CoRE members' engagement will peak and trough over time, influenced by many factors. However, in mid 2020 one in five members were reported as not appearing to be translating their commitment into meaningful action. This is of some concern. Although CoVID 19 will have impacted on many members, it cannot fully explain this number. Some members move in and out of this category, while others have not shifted since joining CoRE. It is hoped that new onboarding processes, with clearer expectations of new members, will help ensure organisations have a better appreciation of what will be required of them before they join. More effective strategies to engage and support members that are not reporting any activity will also be explored.

Reach

The combined reach of CoRE is challenging to measure, but is undoubtedly large, given the spheres of influence of the combined membership. At a conservative estimate, the 120 CoRE member organisations, businesses, clubs, groups and networks from across the Grampians region have a combined reach of over 18 000 employees, 15 000 volunteers and in excess of 75,000 individual club or network members. These figures do not include the wider circles of member influence, such as their clients, patients and students.

Another way of looking at reach is to focus on the 11 Local Governments Areas that make up the Grampians Region. With all local councils being CoRE members, CoRE has the potential to reach every resident of the region - over 200 000 residents.

As membership grows and becomes more diverse, actions by members will create an overlay where community members will be influenced multiple times. This is part of the design of the initiative which promotes mutually reinforcing actions from CoRE members across the settings where people live, work and play and is likely to have more impact on individual behaviours than a single dimension of contact.

CoRE has also achieved extensive brand exposure in the Grampians region, with strong take up of the suggestions to use the CoRE logo on organisational communications and to publicly display messaging within workplaces.

Changes since becoming a CoRE member

The actions undertaken by members to promote gender equality and help prevent violence against women are varied and influenced by the length of membership and the resources available for CoRE. Members choose actions that fit with their business model and capacity.

Reports received from 50 members in 2018/19 showed that:

- Eighty-three percent of responding members had embedded at least some communication processes to ensure CoRE actions are regularly monitored and progressed, such as regular reporting to CEO/Exec or embedding regular reporting into organisational plans.
- Almost half the responding members (43%) had conducted at least one type of gender audit, and around a third (29%) were planning to undertake audits.
- Half the responding members (50%) had taken action to systematically recruit, mentor and retain a representative number of women on their boards and/or in senior management roles.

- An increasing number of members were undertaking efforts to address intersectionality, specifically, the additional challenges faced by women from diverse backgrounds and cultures, those living with disabilities, older women and women from the LGBTIQ+ community.

When asked in 2020 about changes and highlights in their organisations since joining CoRE, member comments included:

“There’s been an increase in female participation in the Senior Leadership Team, following a change in recruitment practices.”

“We now have a strategic approach to inclusive imagery and language.”

“We’ve seen improved behavior and respect within the organisation.”

“We’ve hired 20 female staff into an oil refinery.”

“88 of our female employees have participated or are currently participating in development programs at various levels designed specifically for women. This is to create more opportunities for women to progress within Council.”

“We’ve reached a 40% female board member quota.”

“We have addressed the gender pay gap at the executive level of the organisation.”

What have we learnt?

Much has been learnt during the first four years of implementing CoRE as a regional response to the prevention of violence against women.

In assessing the initial and ongoing challenges, as well as the factors that have helped establish CoRE as effective, well-recognised regional initiative, WHG is confident that the CoRE model and approach to the primary prevention of violence against women is the right one for the region.

SUCCESS FACTORS

Several factors have supported growth of the CoRE Alliance and members' ability to transform their CoRE commitment into meaningful actions.

LEADERSHIP ENGAGEMENT

Engaging and securing the commitment of CEOs, organisational leadership and workplace Champions has helped ensure CoRE is 'driven from within'.

INDIVIDUALISED SUPPORT

Regional Consultants build relationships with each member and offer tailored, practical guidance – a necessary and valued component of the model.^c

SUSTAINABILITY

Members embed the organisation's commitments into policy and procedures and establish succession plans for key contacts and champions.

RESOURCES, PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

Members have significant choice in the way they embrace CoRE. They attend events, have access to a wide range of resources and training programs^d, and can draw support from the Community of Practice. Success stories and ideas are regularly shared.

STRATEGIC GROWTH

WHG has focussed on supporting members to undertake meaningful action - quality over growth.

CHANGING UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENDER EQUALITY

Media campaigns, the Royal Commission and awareness raising events have increased community understanding of gender-based issues, creating a more supportive environment for change.

^c In the 2018/19 and 2019/20 member surveys, all (100%) responding members were either very or mostly satisfied with the support provided by WHG.

^d The Act@Work Program has been particularly effective in building members' commitment and capacity for sustainable change.

CHALLENGES

In establishing and growing CoRE, WHG has worked with members to help overcome several common challenges.

SUPPORT CAPACITY

WHG provides a range of supports for CoRE Alliance members. Its small team works individually with each member and conducts wider-scale capacity building activities through training, resource development, Communities of Practice, local events and communications activities.

The growing number of CoRE members stretches the support capacity available for individual members, and so, support for new members is prioritised.

THE COMPLEXITIES OF PRIMARY PREVENTION

Many members have begun by focussing on communications and messaging. While important, awareness raising and participation in events are perhaps easier to undertake than systemic change. Regional Consultants continually reinforce the need to address the drivers of violence and help members focus on primary prevention by working 'upstream' on actions that support gender equality.

Adding to the complexities, there are now multiple organisations focussing on PVAW. While additional work in this area is welcomed, established local organisations with a strong feminist grounding, such as WHG, must now compete for funding and advocate for a feminist approach to achieving gender equality.

COMPETING DEMANDS

Members' usual business will always be their top priority. Capacity, time and competing demands often limit what can be achieved within an organisation in relation to gender equality.

MEMBER STAFF TURN-OVER

CoRE progress requires a driver/s. When key staff leave, or responsibilities are re-allocated, members can lose momentum. This is less of an issue when a member has a Working Group and/or succession plan for its CoRE Contact/Champion.

MEMBER DIVERSITY

CoRE's open-engagement model has attracted a diverse range of members that face unique challenges in promoting gender equality. Imagine, for example, the differences between a large, multi-site, multi-region organisation, a sole-trader and a sporting club with hundreds of individual members.

As standard approaches are not possible, WHG remains flexible, tailoring its support and offering ideas and suggestions for different types of member to consider.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES

Although all members have good intentions when they join CoRE, many do not maintain regular communication, making it difficult for WHG to monitor their progress and determine their support needs.

New, clearer, on-boarding processes emphasise communication and reporting expectations.

"I love that CoRE are ready and available to assist, with great ideas and contributions whenever I've asked for guidance."

CoRE Member

Next steps

At the four year mark, CoRE is established, membership is slowly growing and most members are making a solid contribution to gender equality, undertaking meaningful actions aligned with the Change the Story framework.

As CoRE moves into its next chapter, priorities for the initiative will include:

- Diversifying the member base by strategically attracting new members from a wider variety of sectors;
- Maintaining momentum for the initiative whilst supporting the changing needs of long-term members;
- Setting firmer minimum requirements of members to strengthen the integrity of the program;
- Increasing the focus on addressing gender inequality and intersectional discrimination; and
- Building flexibility and innovation into the model to adapt to unexpected changes, such as those arising from the CoVID 19 pandemic

Although the hope is for CoRE to reach critical mass and to become self-sustaining, cultural change and the primary prevention of violence against women require long-standing commitments by a range of players. WHG provides the ongoing support and direction required to maintain momentum and the CoRE Plan acts as a roadmap for change that is relevant and applicable to the Grampians region. It is a long-term strategy that sets the course towards a gender equal world, and unites organisations, businesses and networks on that path.



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