

Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)
Advancing Workplace Equality in the “New Normal” – A Panel Discussion
Wednesday, 10 March 2021

KRISTEN HILTON: Good afternoon, everyone. And welcome to our first Equality Talks event for 2021. I'm so pleased that so many of you have been able to join us today. We've had over 300 people register for today's event which I think speaks to both the calibre of the panel that we've assembled and the high interest in this topic that we will be discussing today. My name is Kristen Hilton and I am Victoria's Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commissioner and I want to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land that I'm presenting on today which is the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, here in Melbourne. I want to acknowledge their continuing connection to land, and their ancient and beautiful culture from which we can all learn so much. I pay my respects to their Elders, past, present, and emerging. I also want to recognise the Victorian Government's recent establishment of the Yoo-rook Justice Commission and the many First Nations' people who have fought long and hard for this truth telling inquiry to be established.

So, we are here two days after International Women's Day but in many places around the world this has become a week – and not just a week actually but something that us at the Commission are continually advocating for and that is equality of all people and obviously the equality of women. The focus of today's conversation is really around what the impact of COVID-19 has been on women with a particular focus here on work and also a particular focus here on what we've experienced here in Victoria. I think for every one of us there has been tremendous and very rapid change and a great deal of uncertainty and that's characterised our professional lives over the last 12 months.

Few things have been certain but one of them that I think is certain is that work will never look the same as it did 12 months ago. And I was reflecting that it's almost a year ago that we went into Melbourne's first lockdown and I actually recall having feelings of, in the first couple of weeks, in some ways beneficial change to my working conditions because I had a lot more flexibility, I wasn't commuting, that started to change when I was also home schooling three children and I think for many of who are continuing to work from home, which is full time at the moment for many of us still, perhaps the initial positive changes of working from home full-time have started to peter out.

We certainly experienced here at the Commission and also heard anecdotally from many people that the flexibility that they have enjoyed, which might have been logging on early to clear out emails from your inbox, taking a break in the afternoon, and then logging back on at night, has given people a certain flexibility and autonomy over the way that they work. And I think that's particularly true of us who have been fortunate for us to keep working during the pandemic, it really has been like proof of concept and an experiment in flexible work. But that hasn't been the case for everyone.

Many sectors and workplaces have experienced large scale disruption and almost everywhere women have been impacted most keenly. It's women who have shouldered the additional burden of caring and working when home schooling became the norm and when childcare wasn't available. It's women who are overrepresented in frontline essential roles, in nursing, aged care, social assistance and community welfare - roles that have exposed them day in and day out to a heightened risk of contracting COVID-19. And it's women who now and previously most often navigate insecure work conditions that can make it difficult to speak up about unfair treatment or unacceptable demands or risk losing their livelihood.

We also know from our own survey and from other surveys that have been conducted that more women than men have lost their jobs or have had their working hours drastically reduced because of COVID-19. And this of course has significant and immediate consequences for pay and economic security but also long-term consequences for economic security when you take superannuation and time out of the workforce into account. Research by the McKell Institute found that the rate of job loss for Victorian women was almost five times that of men. And the result of that is that the highest number of Victorian women are facing unemployment. During this period, more men than women reported a reduction in their pay but the women who did report a reduction in income lost much more. Women's pay cut on average by 46 percent compared to 37 percent for men. Part-timers experienced a 39 percent hit to their pay and that rose to 65 percent for casual employees. These are not new issues - rather the pandemic has magnified and exacerbated deep pre-existing and structural gender inequalities. And the impacts that women are feeling now will be long-lasting and likely to cement long-term disadvantage and economic insecurity.

As we approach COVID-19 normal, we are at a crossroads. What lies before us is a rare opportunity not just to rebuild the workplaces and way of working we relied on before but to imagine something new and better and something that much more carefully supports the needs of women and men. It's an opportunity to confront the structural gender inequalities that brought us to this point and to be brave and inventive in addressing them. It's an opportunity to forge a new normal that embeds gender equality. And critical to this process will be finding ways to retain the flexibility that has become commonplace for many workers over the last 12 months.

Embracing flexible work as part of the new normal may seem obvious but it's important to remember that even today flexible is still tangled up in stigma. In many workplaces, particularly those with outdated gender stereotypes, access to flexible work is still constrained by deeply entrenched attitudes about parenting and caring roles being a women's responsibility. Our recent survey also shows us that men who request flexible work are more likely to have their requests denied - also reinforcing a stigma around how men are able to participate in caring responsibilities. Men were also less likely to request flexible work than women because they thought it would be considered that they don't take their job seriously or have their request denied.

So, we see entrenched attitudes about who should and shouldn't be requesting flexible work and those attitudes don't just affect women's participation in the workforce and their own career

progression, they also limit men's ability to make a meaningful contribution to their family life or to other interests. If you've ever felt your work/life balance was out of kilter, you'll understand how workers feel when their employer doesn't give them the flexibility to manage their parenting and caring responsibilities. We've heard that they feel stressed, overwhelmed, exhausted. They feel a sense of guilt. They feel like they are never being fully present at work or at home. But we also see and have seen that a shift, a fundamental shift, can occur that can have benefits for men and women in the workplace.

We saw this firsthand with our work with Victoria Police. When we began our work with Victoria Police more than 5 years ago now, there was a very low uptake of flexible work arrangements that was partly due to outdated notions of who is and what makes a good cop. But also, there was a real lack of clear guidance within the organisation for managers about how they respond to flexible work requests. Victoria Police adopted an all roles flex policy and that was really a turning point for the organisation. They also invested resources into back-filling and making sure that part-time work arrangements worked for people. When we finished our work flexible work for women was up by 10 percent and 9 percent for men, so almost a 20 percent increase in uptake of flexible work in just 12 months. And that example really shows how even in a quite rigid and traditional organisation, a sense of innovation and a sense of what is possible can help you break down those real structural inequities.

So, as we continue towards a 'new normal' what foundations will help us address the gendered impacts of the pandemic? Within workplaces, organisational leaders have to commit to equal representation for women, ensuring the voices of women from diverse backgrounds can help shape decision making. We need to focus on a better collection gender desegregated data to help ensure policies, budgeting and recovery planning consider the impact of the pandemic of women. We need political leaders to ensure that stimulus measures and economic initiatives target industries that benefit women as well as men. We need free universal childcare. We need to make sure that our workplaces are safe for women. And central to all of this will be making sure that there are new jobs and reskilling opportunities that are not just limited to traditional male-dominated sectors. These are big challenges, but they can dramatically transform Victorian workers lives for the better.

Over the next hour or so we're going to hear from three exceptional speakers with expertise in organisational change and workplace equality. And each speaker will deliver a short keynote address in the style of a TED Talk before we move onto a Q & A session towards the end of the event. And I really encourage you to join the conversation online. If you'd like to share your reactions or reflections on Twitter or Facebook, you can use the hashtag #Equality Talks and hashtag #BackToTheFuture and if you have a question for our panellists, we'd love to hear it. You can submit your question's using Zoom's Q & A function.

So, let's get started. I am thrilled to introduce our first speaker today and that is Sara Charlesworth who is the Professor of Gender, Work, and Regulation, and Director of the Centre for People, Organisations and Work at RMIT University. Gender inequality in employment is the focal point of Sara's research interests and she explores the persistence of sex discrimination, the gender pay gap, gender-based violence, and the prevalence of low paid and precarious work

in feminised sectors. Much of Sara's recent research has also focused on pay inequalities and how women in care sectors, including migrant workers, are poorly paid. Sara has written widely on these topics and is sought-after speaker. She also participates in a number of a key gender equality policy reviews and debates and is a member of the Victorian Government's Workplace Advisory Council. Please welcome Sara Charlesworth.

SARA CHARLESWORTH: Thank you Kristen. And I'd also like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the various lands on which we are meeting today and pay my respects to Elders, past, present, and emerging.

So, this International Women's Day has been unlike any other in recent memory. All the attention, commentators, and the media, particularly on Monday, was on sexual violence within Australia's Parliament, within Secondary Schools and on a historical allegation of rape against the Attorney General. On the same day, much less remarked, business unions and think tanks produced snapshots and reports that set out some of the other broader contours of gender inequality at work. Which shows not only just how poorly Australia fared before the pandemic in terms of women's access to decent work - that is to good quality secure jobs but also the extent to which much of the social, economic and employment disruption of COVID has fallen on women in the most precarious poorly paid jobs and that's something that Kristen touched on.

As the Grattan Institute pointed out, much like the McKell Institute, women were much more likely to lose their jobs, to lose hours of work, to do a lot more unpaid work, but they were also much less likely to get government support than men. And these gendered impacts were felt hardest in low-paid feminised industries such as retail and hospitality. Care-workers such as those in early childhood education care and aged care –parodically deemed essential workers during COVID – were also hit very hard with negative employment effects amplified in Victoria with the partial closure of childcare centres and the loss of hours as aged care providers shut its services and cut shifts.

Now, I'm assuming Adam and Fiona will address our theme today at the sectorial and organisational level, so I want to take a more macro focus on flexible work for worker/carers in the new COVID normal. What I think has been really shocking during COVID has been the exposure of the threadbare nature of Australia's Institutional Support, particularly for the many women and increasing number of men who both work and care. Now flexible work, particularly in reduced hours, is often held out as a panacea for worker/carers. However, whose flexibility we're talking about is often left undefined. And while perhaps binary, it is worth assessing the particular flexibility in question as whether it is worker oriented or whether it is employer or indeed organisation oriented. This is not to say that flexibility can't be both. However, multiple Australian studies including my own how that the price paid to access reduced or flexible hours of work, to try to juggle paid work with unpaid car responsibilities, is often poor-quality insecure part-time jobs and being stuck career ghettos with what may also be unpredictable hours of work which not surprisingly, make it even harder to do that work/care juggle.

Now, the new flexibility in the context of COVID is overwhelmingly understood as working from home. However, the Centre for Future Work estimates that only around 30 per cent of the

Australian workforce could conceivably work from home. It's those workers, like many of us here, who have got more autonomy and independence in their work and who use a computer for much or all of it, are able to work from home. This group of workers are mainly professionals and managers, although there are also lower paid jobs such as clerical and administration jobs which also might be able to be undertaken from home. However, many workers particularly in the sectors where the women predominate, such as the care and service sectors, are in jobs which by their very nature are public and people facing, which cannot be done from home.

So how can flexibility, whether it's reducing hours or on different schedules of hours be better harnessed for these workers? While action at the workplace or sectoral level is to ensure good quality, flexible work is available to all workers is vital, if flexible work is to contribute to advancing gender equality for worker/carers, rather than undermining it, such work must be supported through government investment and decent care infrastructure. In its COVID-19 statement of late 2020, the Australian Work and Family Policy Roundtable, which is a network of gender, work and care scholars which I co-convene, argue that governments have a vital role to play in providing increased and sustained investment in equitable, high-quality care systems and yes, that includes free childcare. That includes decent wages and secure employment for the care workforce and equitable access to paid leave for all workers. Only public investment in high quality care infrastructure, in combination with strong supports for individuals who take on unpaid care work and appropriate regulatory and governance arrangements can address the diverse needs of women, men and families on an equitable basis.

Now, this is not a pipedream, in the context of COVID, economist Jerome De Henau and Susan Himmelweit have modelled the differential economic and social impacts of additional government investment in the care economy on one hand and in construction on the other. And they've found that public investment in high-quality care services, and better conditions for care workers, in terms of better paid secure jobs can indeed build a more gender equal caring economy. Their analysis also shows that care-led recovery has superior employment outcomes to investment and construction, even when wages and hours are matched. Such investment in social and physical care infrastructure could provide crucial institutional support for flexible work, whatever it takes, which will enable that flexibility to be realised at the workplace level.

Now some years ago U.S. feminist Catharine MacKinnon produced a brief but powerful treatise rhetorically entitled 'Are Women Human?' Her concern was more with the question of whether or not women are seen as human in International Law with full access to the fundamental human right of living a life of human dignity, but the social and economic and regulatory recognition of women as fully human also would represent the achievement of substantive gender equality. That is, women will be treated as fully human when they can work and be educated without fear of sexual violence and when women and worker/carers become the normative worker around whom employment protections and care infrastructure are built and work is organised. Thank you.

KRISTEN HILTON: Thank you very much, Sara. And I think there is a lot in that that raises questions for many of us who are interested in this area, particularly as I reflect on the inhumane

treatment that we've heard so much about that's been directed to women in the last few weeks. I'm looking forward to having discussion with you about some of those issues at the end of the panel session.

Our next speaker will be a familiar face to many of you, it is Victoria's Public Sector Commissioner, Adam Fennessy. Adam has over 20 years' experience across the public sector at both the state and the federal level. He spent four years as the Departmental Secretary of the Victorian Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and prior to that, at the Department of Environment and Primary Industries. Adam has also worked in the private sector, before he was lured, or found his way back to the public sector with an advisory firm, Ernst & Young and has served on several boards including the Victorian branch of the Institute of Public Administration of Australia. He's also been on the Monash Sustainable Development Institute and Women and Leadership in Australia. Adam is also a member of the Champions of Change group here in Victoria and in 2018, received a public service medal for his leadership in the Victorian public sector. Adam Fennessy, welcome to the virtual stage.

ADAM FENNESSY: Thank you very much, Kristen. Thank you to all those who are participating virtually in today's event. I'd like to start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the lands in which we all respectively gathered and pay my respects to Elders, past, present, and emerging and any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander that are with us on the call today.

For me the opportunity around the new normal and gender equality is both exciting and daunting. It's exciting that we have such opportunities in front of us to be brave and bold and to think differently and one reason I have seen is working with public sectors across Australia and New Zealand, Victoria was in a unique challenging space – we had the deepest lockdown and we've already heard Kristen reflect on the realities of day-to-day life under deep lockdown. What that meant is we had to disrupt ourselves more so than any other government or parts of Australia. We had to work completely remotely and digitally for people who were otherwise in office bound activities. We had to rethink our direct service delivery roles if we were working in continued contact in the community. This presented a big challenge, but the Victorian Government on the whole was able to step up and continue to deliver services throughout the last year working in completely different ways. In my role as the Victorian Public Sector Commissioner, I have oversight over the quality, the capability and the integrity of 50,000 people in the public service and also 330,000 public sector workers across schools, hospitals, TAFES and utility providers and the rest of the government-owned sector.

So, the Victorian public sector being about ten percent of the Victorian economy has a profound opportunity to reshape how we work and in doing so, reshape the new normal and think about things like gender equality and doing that. A lot of the work that we are leading is very specifically focused on that. There has been a lot of discussion about flexible and hybrid ways of working as we come out of deep lockdown. Sara has already pointed out that it's not a simple proposition; it's not simply taking the best of remote and flexible ways of working and embedding that in how we work, it's all the systems around that and it's asking ourselves the questions of what were the benefits? And the empirical evidence of benefits from remote and flexible working.

What were the disbenefits and what were the challenges? And address both of those sets of issues.

We did find, both anecdotally and in the research that we continue to collect in the Commission, there were significant benefits from flexibility that in many cases have a direct link that supporting more diverse, inclusive and gender equal organisations. That's not to say there were not disbenefits and challenges, but what we found is Victoria was somewhat like a laboratory in that we had to experience different ways of working and thinking about service delivery because of that deep lockdown. Some of the work I'm now doing is looking at and leading work on what new flexible and hybrid ways of working look like in the public sector and implementing them and using them as a leadership opportunity so we can learn from other sectors but also lead and provide examples to other sectors that we can support more flexible, more diverse ways of working while not only maintaining, but in many cases improving the performance of organisations and the quality of our service delivery.

The work we're leading very much takes an employee lens, again Sara made this point: how do we think about it not just to the benefits of an employer organisation but for the benefits of our people. So, we're taking a very humanistic people-driven approach to this, including detailed data collection and surveying of our people across the public sector to work out what works, what didn't work, and in particular the well-being impacts and issues we have to keep a very close eye on. So that's very much driven by employee needs to think about the opportunities to recalibrate and rethink the way we work.

For example, for people who would in the past have worked five days a week in an office environment at the very least, now our assumption and what's moving into our flexibility policy is that might be two to three days a week in an office and the rest of the time working from home. But also thinking about distributed access to workplaces: we have rolled out and are piloting localised hubs where people from public service can drop in and work much closer to home, so that if you choose, and if it works for you to spend some time during your week in an office environment you might only have to travel a couple of kilometres rather than all the way into the CBD, if that's where you did work.

So, these are examples of innovations that we are trialling and piloting so that we can develop and lock-in new normal ways of working and provide leadership as the public sector to other sectors. This is a big challenge, and I don't want to understate that challenge - it's not just about new systems and new ways of working. It's the leadership and cultural settings that underpin this. If we have new policies about flexible work, they will not succeed unless we bring a leadership approach to that. So, all the way to the CEO level within public sector organisations, we need to be leading and modelling new ways of working, new ways of providing services from what we learnt during deep lockdown and go do things that Kristen mentioned in her introductory remarks: normalising this, destigmatising this and indeed, from the perspective of the Victorian Government, share this with our colleagues around Australia so it is a national conversation and not just something we're doing in Victoria.

So, in doing the work I am leading in the Victorian Government as Victorian Public Sector Commissioner, I'm already in deeper conversation with my colleagues around Australia and New Zealand so that we can learn from each other but also model different ways of working, not just for the benefit of people in Victoria or Victorian Public Sector, but from that national perspective as well. So that is not just rethinking the broader systems but thinking about how we, if we are in specific leadership roles, or whatever role we are in within our organisations, how we bring our own behaviour change to these new ways of working as well as developing the underlying systems, policies and programs to lock in the benefits of flexible and hybrid work.

The last point I will make is that accountability and change through action is critical. This is one thing I learnt from working in diversity and inclusion for many years and learning from others who do it well and also learning from where it's not working. Measurement, data, research is critical to doing this right. We are going to pilot and try lots of things, learn from what works, learn from what doesn't work and critically, have those very close feedback loops from staff so this is employee-driven, again going back to Sara's points so we're thinking about the needs of people in organisations including well-being, engagement, high performance that comes from a purpose-driven organisation, but also how do we institutionalise that measurement, that data collection. As part of this I am now working very closely with Victoria's inaugural Commissioner for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, Dr. Niki Vincent with whom some of you will be familiar. She is working to implement the new Victorian Gender Equality Act. This is very important, significant and exciting because it puts into legislation the requirement to report on gender-equality action plans, gender equality data within the public sector and Victoria so we can replicate and build on a lot of the learnings in National reporting through institutions such as WGEA where we have national data to hold ourselves to account, learn and drive better performance and better outcomes.

So, I think for me, it's about learning from the deep lockdown, learning from what we had to endure in Victoria and turning that into a positive. Acknowledging that strong link between new, better, and more flexible ways of working and gender equality and also acknowledging that there are challenges within there that Sara talked about today. But my final reflection is that we have made a lot of progress and there are things that are working very differently and very beneficially now, but progress is not success. I think it was Dr. Anne Summers that said this many years ago, that there is still a lot more work to be done.

So, I remind myself that while we are learning and bringing the benefits out of the challenges of COVID lockdown into how we work differently in the public sector, progress is not success. So, we've got to keep listening and learning from our organisations, learning from others, supporting others, and supporting each other and driving that longer-term research so we can systematise, institutionalise these new ways of working. So, I thank you for the opportunity to be part of the discussion today and I'm looking forward to your questions later on in this session.

KRISTEN HILTON: Thanks very much, Adam. I think it's fantastic that we've got you and Niki leading some of this work across the Victorian public sector, so we look forward to hearing more about that in the Q&A. Our final - sorry, I had my video off - I'm back. Our final speaker for today

is Fiona Vines who is the Head of Inclusion & Diversity and Workforce Transition at BHP. Fiona is a human resources executive, and she has experience across operational, talent, culture and change management aspects of both financial services and the resource sectors. Fiona has particular expertise in developing inclusive workplaces and customer services and she was previously head of global diversity at ANZ bank. In 2016, BHP set an aspirational goal to achieve gender balance by 2025 and since then female representation has increased from 17% to 27% and there are over 4000 more women working at BHP today. That is no small feat. In addition to her professional achievements, Fiona is a member of Victorian Government council on Women's Equality and Board Member of General Surgery at the Royal Australasian College for Surgeons. Fiona, welcome.

FIONA VINE: Thanks, Kristen and hi everybody, it's an absolute pleasure to be with you all today. Can I also start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners on the lands on which we are all coming together, and I pay my respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging.

I'd like to start my talk by I guess, picking up where Adam left off in relation to leadership accountability and I think that in order for us to really recover from COVID in a way that is gender beneficial for both men and women we really need to focus our effort on accountability and on measurement. And I think that the story from BHP, if you'll bear with me for a couple of moments needs to go back about four years when we set our target as Kristen just referred to – to achieve gender balance by 2020. And I always say that a goal for gender balance without a target is just a hope. But once you actually have a target, you'll more likely to create a plan and you're more likely to take the actions that are needed to meet the goal. And that has definitely been our experience at BHP.

So, we have seen a significant increase in the number of women that have come into our organisation. And of course, the most important thing about that is when you hire a lot more women into an organisation that was built by and for white men you learn a lot about the changes that you need make in that organisation. And one of the first things that we learnt after about a year was the two main reasons that we had higher female turnover. So, we were hiring a lot more women, but we were also losing women at a higher rate than men. And what we learned was there were two main reasons for that. One was the lack of true flexible working options for women and the other was the existence of disrespectful and unsafe workplace cultures.

We took action four years ago to implement a similar all roles flex policy to what Kristen described in the police force and it had a huge and almost immediate impact on culture. Because when you say to your people you can work flexibly, we trust you, it doesn't just improve their work/life balance, it also improves the way they feel about working for an organisation that so overtly says 'we trust you'. So, we found within a year we had 46 percent of our people working flexibly which in a mining organisation is significant. Because a lot of people in our organisation work at mine sites where there's a lot less flexibility, perceived to be anyway, and certainly not the opportunity to join work from Zoom like we are today.

So really if we fast forward then to COVID, really what COVID did was significantly accelerate our goal to become a truly flexible workplace. It was an evolution not a revolution that we already started and then really what COVID did is it significantly accelerated us to the next level of performance. And what we learnt is that the benefits are real. There are significant benefits when you really think about: where does a person need to be to do that particular task? How can we use technology to give us more options? How can we reduce the amount of travel need to do and how can we keep people safer? And we definitely found at BHP that there were more upsides than downsides but to Adam's point there were some downsides and that's what we are learning from at the moment.

Our approach to baking in or I guess locking in values of flex working through COVID is to go to the next stage of our cultural evolution which is, our philosophy now is work where you get great outcomes. So, we don't have rules that say you have to spend X amount of time at an office or X amount of time at home, what we're saying to our people is we trust you to work with your manager to decide where you need to locate yourself to get great outcomes. And the reality is if you work at a mine site and you need to be on a piece of an equipment, the only way you're going to get a great outcome is to be at that mine site and operating that piece of equipment. However, we can offer you a variety of flexible rosters, we can look at seasonal type rosters to enable people to manage work and life demands. So, this tag line of 'work where you get great outcomes' has been a really critical part of us locking in the value from the COVID disruption. However, there are real challenges, there is still ingrained bias in a lot of our leaders about really are people going to be working, are we going to see the value continue to be generated. And even though during COVID, we actually saw higher levels of productivity, there's still this strong reinforcing bias that says people aren't always productive if I can't see them. So, as well as all the structural changes that you need in terms of HR policies, health, and safety policies, use of technology, et cetera.

The single biggest challenge, I think for us, is building leader capability. Building leader capability on how to manage people to outcomes, not to inputs, presenteeism. But also, really challenging leader's bias. We did have some leaders in our organisation who admitted: look, I just don't feel comfortable with this. I feel like I need to see people in order to know that they are working. What about development of young staff? How are all these things going to work? And essentially what you're looking at there is a completely different way of working that is different from how a lot our leaders grew up and developed themselves. And so, anything that is different is automatically I think, to an extent to be feared. So, there's a huge piece of work that needs to be done in relation to building leader capability.

The other component that I think is important to talk about particularly in the current climate is disrespectful and unsafe work cultures. As I said at the beginning, there was two reasons why we were losing women in our organisation and the second was this existence of this disrespectful behaviour. So, we've taken a whole system approach to really understand the prevalence of this type of behaviour. We've done a complete risk assessment of the risks of sexual harassment and assault occurring in our workplace. In a similar way that we assess other safety risks. So, we categorise this issue as workplace health and safety risk and that then

requires us to understand what the causes of that risk are, what the controls are, and to put in place very clear accountability mechanisms, with the right part of the organisation to adequately control for that risk. So that's a range of preventive measures around appropriate security at our workplaces, appropriate training, and awareness for our leaders, and it also requires us to have a very comprehensive response mechanism. Which means that when people come to us and say something has happened to them, the way that we respond is absolutely critical. And our philosophy is that we respond in a way that says we believe that something happened to you, we want to support you in a way that will help you to recover, and if we also think that's appropriate, we'll do an investigation and ensure that the person who perpetrated that type of conduct is held accountable for breaching what's expected of them in our workplace.

And that extends beyond sexual harassment and extends into other types of disrespectful behaviour, such as racism, homophobia and other types of bias and discrimination that can happen in our workplace. So, I think for me in closing, the key to all of this is leadership commitment and accountability to change an organisation so that it is safe, inclusive, respectful, and flexible, not to expect people to change to fit us. And I think taking in the value from the COVID disruption can help us all accelerate to truly flexible workplaces. And I very much look forward, Adam, to seeing the work that your organisation will do on that and at the same time, we have to remain completely vigilant and committed to the hard work of making our workplaces safer and more respectful, particularly for women but for other groups who experience marginalisation as well. Thank you for the opportunity to talk today Kristen and I really look forward to the Q and A section.

KRISTEN HILTON: Thank you so much, Fiona. I've got so many questions for all of you as a result of those talks. And we've had quite a few coming through on the feed as well. If I could just pick up on a few of the things that Fiona has talked about and one of the challenges that she mentioned was some of the reactions to less presence in the office and what that means for rather traditional notions of professional development. And one of the things that I've heard, as we return to our workplaces, is that it tends to be men that are returning to the workplaces at a more rapid rate, and for longer periods of time than women and that we need to be very mindful of not defaulting to the way in which sometimes opportunities were handed out, whereby if you're around the boss more, or if you're around people who are making decisions, then you're more likely to receive some of those formal or informal opportunities – that idea of just you're there so you're seen and so presenteeism, in a sense.

Given that our workplaces, our physical workplaces have sort of hollowed out to an extent over the last 12 months, if there is an imbalance in terms of who is returning to the physical workplace what does that mean for those formal or informal opportunities and I just wondered given you are changing perhaps the way in which you look professional development whether or not that is something that you've contemplated in a COVID-19 normal workplace?

FIONA VINES: Sure. I'm happy to talk about what we are thinking about in terms of that at BHP and it's definitely of huge concern to us. For me, it goes to the question of leader capabilities, leaders are the ones who are accountable for developing talent and for developing their people. So, the very first step is, and it'll be my answer to almost every question is gender disaggregate

all of your data. Which includes who's returning to the office and who is not and who is attending development activities and who is not and who is being promoted versus stagnating.

So gender disaggregation is the first step because what it will do, is enable you to see the problems of where you're seeing these different experiences for men and women. And then it is really about when leaders are talking to their direct reports about talent pipelines and diverse pipelines coming through, using the data to say, look, I think I've got a problem here because we are seeing many more of your male teammates coming along to these development activities and not so many in women. And, of course, the answer is once you realise there is a gap, what do you do to close it? But once leaders realise there is a problem, they will pull on the HR teams in their organisations, they will pull on different ways to develop their people and there's plenty of innovative ways that can happen. But until they realise there is a problem, they won't do anything about it until it's too late and we realise that our talent pipelines are even shallower from a diversity perspective.

KRISTEN HILTON: Thanks, Fiona. And Adam, this is one that you might want to comment on. It's a question that's come through on the chat about the different messages that were receiving around flexible work and being able to work from home and of course we should acknowledge that flexible work is not just working from home, it's part-time arrangements, it's job share, it's compressed working week, it's a range of different things.

But there is a push from some employers that say that we want to ensure that the benefits of flexibility remain but also a push from others to say you must return to your workplaces, particularly in CBD, I think which has felt the impact of the absence of so much employment traffic over the last 12 months and the benefit of increasing economic activity in areas where all of the employment real estate is. So how do you work -- how do you have those conversations at the same time with employers about making sure that their workplaces are flexible but also the drive to regenerate areas that have been kind of crippled by the fact that we have been out of them?

ADAM FENNESSEY: So, they are some of the balancing issues that we're working with across public servants in Victoria and there has been a lot of public discussion about the role of major CBD employers to help the CBD economy and of course, that is a very important driver. The principal driver for us, in the work we are doing, is the well-being support and performance of the workforce before we think about the specific economic impacts. We've got to do both but what we're seeing as well, particularly in some of the work we are now piloting about distributed work, is we're seeing more benefit to other local economic catchments across metropolitan Melbourne and regional Victoria.

And we're already hearing about, anecdotally the shift of some people working more into peri-urban, regional parts of Victoria. So, we're seeing people starting to change their own activities and behaviours. It's a complex issue because there is a trade-off: do you support economic drivers in Central Melbourne, in Metropolitan Melbourne, in Regional Victoria? Our starting point is about the well-being and support for staff. So, the starting point is more focused on what we're doing within organisations. And I think also it goes to Fiona's point that we need relentless

analysis of data and find out what is motivating people, what people want to do, so it's employee-driven rather than employer-driven. And we're starting to see some innovation out of businesses within the CBD about different value propositions to attract people into the city, that's not always tied to work. So, I think in Melbourne there is a recognition that work is changing, it has changed, it is changing, and it will change. And the way we worked and the way we then socialised and did other things in and around our workday, they are all going to change.

There's also been discussions about cities in Australia, including Melbourne and Sydney in particular, that they're congested cities we're seeing very interesting impacts on different work patterns and travel patterns. So, there is a profound set of risk and opportunity for how our cities in fact work and I'd like to think as well that flexibility can also mean if you are deciding to go into the office it might be for a two or three-hour session for interaction because that's important about your job, but it won't be the traditional 9:00 to 5:00. And all of infrastructure over decades has been set up on basic patterns on how the city works. So, the way I like to think about it is how do people like to work and then how do cities and spaces and workplaces work in and around that. Now that's not a simple issue because there's a lot of economic investments and interests around how we're set up across, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia but it is very important that I think from the Victorian Government, the principle driver going into COVID-normal has been health and safety of our people regardless of where they work and I think that was a very important fundamental driver for moving to COVID the normal has been the health and safety of our people regardless of where they work, and I think that was a very important fundamental driver for moving to COVID normal.

And then we're thinking about what did we learn in the COVID normal phase moving into a post vaccine world. So, I think things are going to be very different and in order to navigate that it's going to require a significant collection of data, qualitative and quantitative. Overall, I agree with Fiona that this comes to attitudes and cultural views around this. I love that idea of work where you get great outcomes. But how do you bring your best self to work?

Interestingly, in a lot of conversations with my colleagues in the public sector, usually it's men who are saying to me, oh, we have to get back into the office. So, I think there is a gendered aspect to this but that might be because people are just used to working in certain ways and there were more men in those positions, so we're going to have to really challenge ourselves and as we role this out in Victorian Government, there's a lot to take from what Fiona said around supporting our middle and senior managers to change the way they work because it is about outcomes.

And there's been some really interesting more recent of productivity of organisations during deep lockdown and in fact in some parts of their business they became more productive, in other parts not so but it's not a simple matter that you've got to turn up to be productive. I think that's been a myth that's been around for a long time. We've been able to really explode that myth with data and evidence. So, I think that the most significant challenge I'm feeling in the work I'm doing in the public service is very similar to Fiona. It's the cultural pushback. We do have a clear level of support from Victorian Government and a commitment within the public service to work differently. And, even what I said before, that it might be two or three days a week, that doesn't

address the fact that in fact people should work to get the best outcomes for communities around Victoria, given we're the public service.

So, it's about continually shifting and challenging ourselves to think how our workforce get the best support and outcomes, so we can deliver for Victorians. So, there's a couple of reflections, Kristen, on what I'm seeing and hearing and you know, why it's a significant challenge but it's one that I think we're really up for if we're pushed into the space and be bold.

KRISTEN HILTON: Thanks, Adam and there were a few things in there, you used the importance of reimagining work differently and also shifting cultural attitudes and outdated norms. And I was very hopeful that we would start to see that through the visibility of care during COVID-19 and just how important our care-workers were. And for a very long time, Sara, you may have been hopeful as well. Suddenly, there was a greater emphasis on the role that so many women play in jobs that are perhaps less visible in supporting the economy, supporting our children, supporting people who need health support and I worry that those roles that were very visible and very lauded for a certain period of time when we were in crisis may disappear from public sight again.

So, my question to Sara is: how do we make sure that those workers that were seen to be truly essential to everything that we do, how do we make sure that they are valued not just through murals or a day to thank health care workers but economically valued and recognised for the important work that they do? And also, how do we get, just as we talk about getting more women into particular positions, how do we get more men into caring roles as well?

SARA CHARLESWORTH: Thanks. Those are very good questions and I think for a brief moment there in Victoria, we actually thought that we might be having free childcare. It seemed like a marvellous idea, although in fact while parents didn't have to pay it was on the back of childcare workers, who still had to open their doors and we had a lot of international students, a lot of working holidaymakers in fact, who work in childcare and work in residential age care who had no government support, they were the ones who tended to lose out. So how do we do it? Well, that's partly what the care economy argument is about. It's actually saying, in the modelling that Jerome De Henau and Susan Himmelweit has been based on making these good jobs that men want to come in to. Men don't want to come into these jobs because they are extremely poorly paid but it's not just that they are poorly paid on a per hourly basis, they tend to have fragmented working hours.

One of the dirty secrets, if you like, of aged care was revealed during COVID when we found the one worker working across two or three nursing homes and that's because, the way the industry is organised, they keep people on short part-time hours contracts and with the promise of maybe extra shifts, so people are always hungry for hours and they go elsewhere, and they go elsewhere etcetera. And so, then all of a sudden, the edict during COVID was that you could only work one facility, but no one quite worked who was going to be paying the difference. So, this was a bit messy, the Victorian Government did come in with some funding but there's been

interestingly a case before the Fair Work Commission where someone got dismissed because she left one job to try and concentrate on another job, to do what she was supposed to do as an aged care worker. And when she went back to her former employer, she found there was no longer a job.

But look, if we have a care economy that actually then provides good quality jobs not just for care workers and good quality jobs are more likely to encourage men into them, we're they've got not just decent rates of pay but also, you've got joined up hours -- there's an interesting campaign in the UK now: 'not just a living wage but living hours'. And living hours means hours that make it possible for you to organise the rest of your life.

Your broader question Kristen, is how we value these workers? One of our good things out of the Royal Commission's Report on Aged Care Quality and Safety was actually to see the workforce being central to good quality care so that the conditions of work are truly the conditions of care. And they have made various recommendations. Now, we'll have to see if they're taken up, but one is going through more a collaborative, collective agreement between providers and unions and indeed the government to have a better paid structure. Already the health services union have taken a work value case for residential aged care workers. So, things are starting to move there.

But I think with the care economy, perhaps something that we don't think of is that the care economy is allowing women often to engage in paid work, but it also allows men who tend to be looked after by women traditionally, to engage in paid work. So, it allows people who wish to, to engage with paid work, to the extent to which they actually want to do it – the extent to which they freely choose to do this. So, it's not to say that men don't want flexibility, they do. And I think, Kristen, you cited that data. In some earlier work that I've been involved with, showed absolutely men are much more likely to get rejected when they ask for flexibility. I think we have to look for the little cracks and hopeful openings where they are. There is now a movement around free childcare and hopefully that'll get leagues. I'm very aware though that we're running out of time, so I might stop there.

KRISTEN HILTON: It's a really good note to end on Sara, because I've heard often in times over the last couple of weeks that we're at a particular turning point. And that has been said in relation to things happening nationally but my response to that has been it's only a turning point if you keep pushing and I think that is true of the situation in relation to valuing care workers but also the situation in relation to ensuring that we have the right conditions that are going to enable everyone to thrive in their workplaces.

We have run out of time for questions, there's someone bringing me lunch which is excellent. There's only 300 people watching, Jack. I lost my train of thought. What I wanted to say was to thank everyone for joining and we aren't able to get through all the questions but there's been a really lively discussion on the chat and some of the issues that have been brought up have referenced both what Fiona and Adam in particular have been saying which is this is also about leadership capability and leadership accountability and I'm going to use that as a promo for our session at 2 o'clock today which is a more practical webinar about how you can actually build

leadership and management capability around issues like flexible work, how you make requests for flexible work, how you respond to requests for flexible work and in relation to sexual harassment. And we haven't really had an opportunity to talk today about how those two things intersect with each other, but can I guarantee you that they do, and I really encourage you, if you have the opportunity to log back on at 2 o'clock and get more practical example and perhaps assistance about how you can use some of the tools we've developed to help in your workplace.

But can I conclude by thanking all of our panellists, Sara Charlesworth, Adam Fennessy, Fiona Vines. And to thank you all for your contribution today, it was a really fantastic discussion and to implore you all, if you are employees or employers or people who are interested in these issues to keep pushing because there is opportunity, and we are in a place where I think more than ever we're able to reimagine what work and care and respect and fairness looks like. Thank you, everyone.

(End of transcript.)