

# Gender equality in Public Place Naming – the Australian Capital Territory and Victorian Case Studies

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## SUMMARY

The names of men dominate public place names across Australia. Women and gender-diverse peoples are significantly underrepresented. This disparity reflects policies and procedures from past place naming practices and accepted societal norms where the names of persons famous in the fields of exploration, pioneering, colonisation and politics are prevalent. These are largely male dominated fields. More recently, policies and procedures have been updated to provide a greater representation of women and gender diversity in place names. The Australian Capital Territory and Victorian governments are taking proactive roles in addressing change in public commemoration, including place naming. In 2002, the ACT Place Names Act 1989 was amended to include consideration of the number of women and men after who divisions (suburbs) or public places have been named in the last 10 years; and whether the names of women are well represented. In 2020, Geographic Names Victoria (GNV) commenced a review to focus on encouraging greater gender equality and diversity when deciding on names for future place names. In 2021, the ACT Government held an “Inquiry into Memorialisation through Public Commemoration” to report on equality and diversity in the people recognised through public commemoration, the prominence of women and non-binary people in place naming conventions across the ACT, and the opportunities to receive suggestions and increase representation. In 2022, the Victorian Local Government Place Naming and Commemoration research project identified that 1 in 5 places across the state commemorate a person and 1 in 10 of those commemorative place names honour a woman. The Victorian Government has since set a target of 70 per cent of new commemorative place naming after women and the GNV leads the “Our Equal Places” programme to increase diversity in commemorative place names in Victoria. This paper discusses the initiatives of two Australian place naming authorities, ACT Place Names and Geographic Names Victoria, and the improvements they have made toward advancing equality and gender diversity in public place names. ACT Place Names has achieved parity in the names of women and men commemorated in

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public place names over the past ten years, while Geographic Names Victoria has made significant advances in achieving the target of 70 per cent women's names. These initiatives address the disparity in gender diversity and equality in place naming. Our goal is for place naming to be representative of Australia's inclusive and modern society. □

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