

Hello to all involved in the citizens assembly. How lucky we are in Ireland to have such a public forum that enables the voices of all citizens to be heard. I would like to submit an observation to the assembly on gender equality. My name is Breeda Bermingham I am the founder of the Mid Life Women Rock Project and the Midlife Women Rock Cafes in 2019. They are forums to open the conversation surrounding menopause and inform and empower women to pro- actively and positively manage menopause. As one of the objectives of the present assembly is to challenge barriers, social norms and attitudes, from my research, I am a masters student in Maynooth University I see a massive injustice to menopausal women in Ireland.

Approximately 400,000 women are transitioning through menopause in Ireland today, yet support and information is sorely lacking. Statistics show 80% of women experience symptoms, with 25% (1 in 4) taking time off work or giving up work during this life phase. Lack of open discussion along with a dearth in information as to what is actually happening physiologically and psychologically at this phase in life is contributing to these statistics. Fear shame and denial are narratives I frequently hear from women, silence is feeding these narratives. Women to women support in a safe space such as a café is proving very beneficial in enabling and empowering women to pro- actively manage this life stage.

Noting another objective of the assembly [*to seek to ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in the workplace, politics and public life*]. When many women should be actively forwarding themselves for promotion at work in their mid to late 40's menopausal symptoms arrive which for many directly impact their confidence and self -esteem. Understanding what is happening is key, as symptoms do pass once managed appropriately enabling women enter one of the most powerful periods in their lives in their 50's. By the time women reach 50 years they have acquired a massive skillset from managing homes, relationships, families as well as working outside the home for many. I feel those who are not working presently are a massively untapped resource for our economy and society. The research points to the huge leadership potential of midlife women, supporting these women during menopause is paramount for an equal diverse and more inclusive Ireland.

Thank you for taking time to read this submission and best wishes in the work that you do. Should you require any further information on the projects I am involved in I would be delighted to oblige, or possibly speak to the assembly if required.

Breeda Bermingham.