



Australian Government

# Working FOR Women

A Strategy for  
**Gender Equality**

A Strategy for Gender Equality  
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Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality

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# Acknowledgements

This Strategy was developed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lands. The Government acknowledges and pays respect to all First Nations peoples across Australia, who are the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters and are the oldest continuous living cultures on Earth. We pay respect to Elders past and present. We honour and respect the rights of all First Nations peoples to individual and collective self-determination and agency, and to lead action on gender justice and equality in their communities. The strength, leadership, skills and lived experience of First Nations women must be central to decision-making that affects their lives.



## The voices that informed this work

We acknowledge and value the efforts and dedication of women, and the broader Australian community, who generously shared their lived experience, knowledge and expertise to inform this Strategy.

This Strategy is informed by the voices of thousands of people and groups from across Australia including women's advocacy groups, businesses, unions, and civil society. It has also taken into account academic research, submissions to the Australian Government's ***Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities***, as well as the ***National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032***, the ***National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030*** and the ***Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report***.

We would also like to thank members of the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce for their report, ***Women's Economic Equality: A 10-year plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy***, which informed the direction of this Strategy, and the National Women's Alliances for their contributions to this Strategy. We also acknowledge the ongoing leadership of state and territory governments.

This Strategy builds on the work of those people across the centuries who have advocated for gender equality in Australia and around the world. Thousands of women and their allies have fought for women's rights, safety and equality throughout Australia's history and worldwide. Australia has a long way to go to achieve gender equality, but – because of these women – that vision is closer than ever.

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***'We can't ignore the strong link between women's economic insecurity and violence. Australian women continue to experience shocking levels of violence and abuse, whether that's in their homes, workplaces or in the public realm.'***

— Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, final report

***'We need to eliminate the gender pay gap and superannuation gaps. We need to value female-dominated industries [such as] health, aged care and education. [These industries] are essential but continue to be underpaid, undervalued and under-resourced.'***

— Respondent, public survey April 2023

***'I think men are given a raw deal when it comes to parenting, whether it be leave or access, which I feel is extremely unequal.'***

— Respondent, public survey April 2023

***'All women and girls deserve access to the best possible health and health care across the lifespan, no matter what their socio-economic, geographic or educational status, physical, mental or intellectual ability, cultural background, practices or beliefs. Investing in the health of women leads to healthier and more stable families, communities and economies.'***

— Respondent, national strategy discussion paper, April 2023

***'We need to see more women across all sectors with a voice and the willingness to use it! I don't want to be quiet, I want to see passionate women with great leadership from all backgrounds (religion / sexual orientation / privilege / culture).'***

— Respondent, public survey, April 2023

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# Minister's Foreword:

## A message from the Minister for Women

Fifty years ago, Elizabeth Reid, Australia's first advisor on women's affairs, embarked on a countrywide listening tour to hear from women directly about the issues that affected their ability to live freely.

It was a time when women weren't able to secure a bank loan or a mortgage without a male guarantor. The minimum wage for women was pegged at 85 cents in the dollar to men's wages. Single women weren't eligible for government homeowner grants. And married women who went overseas with their husbands weren't even able to fill out their own quarantine forms when they came back into the country.

We've come a long way since then, with successive governments continuing to deliver changes that have made women's lives safer, fairer and more equal – key reforms like the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*, the Parenting Payment (Single), Commonwealth Paid Parental Leave Scheme, the Family Law Court and no-fault divorce.

In 2010 we had our first woman prime minister and, in 2022, our first majority-women government.

*Working for Women*, our gender equality strategy, would not and could not exist without these hard-fought wins over the past decades. But although progress has been undeniable, from where we stand in 2024, we still have a way to go before we can say that things are actually working for women in this country.

Like Elizabeth Reid did half a century ago, I've spent the last 18 months listening to women across Australia, hearing what isn't working for them and asking them what we, as a Government, can do better.

I know there is no 'average' or 'typical' Australian woman. Each of us has different responsibilities, comes from different backgrounds and has unique dreams and aspirations. Still, across the board, the same themes kept coming up – themes that aren't new, but which reflect the enduring challenges that persist for so many women.

That women just want to be safe – at home, at work, in the street.

That women don't want to be crushed under the weight of juggling caring responsibilities and work, navigating complex systems and picking up the lion's share of the load at home.

Women want equal pay. And they want to retire with enough superannuation in their bank accounts to provide some economic independence.

And they want government systems to work for and with them – not against them.

Women want to see violence against women eliminated.

And they – we – don't want to wait for another generation to see all of that happen.

Since coming to Government, we have laid foundations that have started to address these concerns. We have already made significant investments in areas to improve the lives of women by delivering more tax relief to women and making it easier to work more, making child care cheaper, expanding the Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme, investing in women's safety and improving pay and conditions in the care economy.

But without a clear vision and concentrated effort, the path to equality may still be another 50 years away.

As a Government, we understand that Australian women cannot wait that long – nor should they be expected to.

That's why this Strategy sets out a path to get us there over the next 10 years, with a focus on driving action in 5 priority areas: ending gender-based violence, unpaid and paid care, economic equality and security, health, and leadership, representation and decision-making. It identifies the work underway to deliver on these priorities, as well as areas where the Government intends to focus its attention and future reforms.

Importantly, it sets out indicators of change and measures that will be used to track the success of this Strategy over time. Because standing still is not an option.

My heartfelt thanks go to every person who contributed to the development of this Strategy – particularly the women who have so generously shared their thoughts and time during public consultation. Their input reflects the richness and diversity of perspectives that make up the fabric of our country and that will shape the trajectory of women's equality in Australia over the next decade.

Through this Strategy, our Government is making clear that we understand the challenges facing women across this country, and we know the priority areas for change. These priorities have, and will continue to, inform the work we do.

This isn't a Strategy that outlines every single policy solution – but it does set out a clear commitment from the Albanese Government to work for women. It pays homage to the women who have paved the way before it, and it looks toward a future where we can, and will, fulfil Australia's potential to lead the world on gender equality.



**Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher**

Minister for Finance, Minister for Women and Minister for the Public Service

# Working for Women

## Strategy overview

The Australian Government is committed to creating a better, gender equal Australia for everyone. *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* outlines where the Government will focus its efforts over the next decade to achieve its vision – **an Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender.** This Strategy is underpinned by Australia’s longstanding international commitments to human rights and gender equality.

This Strategy responds to what women and others across the Australian community told the Government in a consultation process involving thousands of people and organisations. The lived experience and expertise shared in these consultations made it clear that – while Australia has come a long way in recent years and decades – there is an urgent need for change. There are persistently high rates of gender-based violence, damaging attitudes and stereotypes, and gender pay and earning gaps. Women feel exhausted and under appreciated. They must be constantly vigilant about safety, take on the pressure of navigating work and care, and shoulder the greater burden of unpaid labour; all of which puts pressure on their financial security, independence and choices.

This Strategy is intended to bring people together and acknowledge that people have different experiences because of their gender. In large part, reaching a gender equal Australia means improving outcomes for women – to benefit all Australians. Across history, gender inequality has overwhelmingly affected women more than men, with women who are marginalised because of their class, race and other factors facing even greater barriers. The data clearly demonstrates this continues to be the case – and nothing shows it more than the epidemic rates of violence against women.

Gender inequality and stereotypes also constrain men, limiting their choices, supports, and opportunities. Men are also victims of men’s violence, and experience poorer education and health outcomes in a range of areas. They can feel unable to take on caring or traditional ‘feminine’ roles in their households and communities, and can miss out on connection with their families and friends.<sup>1</sup>

More gender-equal systems, structures, policies and attitudes will work better for everyone – women, men, people of all genders.

## Key elements of this Strategy

This Strategy outlines how harmful **gender attitudes and stereotypes** are the **foundation** of gender inequality. It identifies 6 long-term **ambitions** that are needed to reach the Strategy's overarching vision. It then sets out 5 **priority areas** for action – **gender-based violence, unpaid and paid care, economic equality and security, health, and leadership, representation and decision-making**. It shows how the Government has already taken action to drive change under these priority areas, and where there are further opportunities to act. It also outlines **principles** to guide action that has impact.

## How it fits together: the Strategy's approach

The **priority areas** in *Working for Women* are closely tied to one another. This Strategy recognises, for example, that women's safety cannot be separated from their caring responsibilities, economic equality, health, or involvement in decision-making. The absence of action in any of these areas will limit how far Australia can move towards gender equality, and how well it can work for women.

This Strategy does not exist in isolation. The Government has significant national commitments on women's safety and health, led through the **National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032** and the **National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030**. *Working for Women* draws these commitments together, along with valuing and sharing care, advancing economic equality and improving leadership and representation. It sets bold new ambitions over 10 years to better balance unpaid work and care, and close the gender gaps in pay, retirement income and leadership and representation in Australia. This builds on the report from the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce and **Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities**. The Strategy will also support and engage with similar state and territory government plans.

This Strategy recognises that achieving gender equality requires effort across Government, and for gender equality to be considered in all aspects of the Government's work.

## Monitoring progress

The **reporting framework** at the end of the Strategy contains **outcomes** and **indicators** that will be used to track the success of the Strategy over time. While there are a range of relevant outcomes and indicators available, this Strategy uses those that, taken together, will demonstrate fundamental shifts are happening. Under each priority area, the reporting framework also identifies the interconnected **actions that drive change** – these are actions that can be taken across government, employers, media, sport and the community that are necessary to achieve these shifts.

Achieving gender equality in Australia is a long-term goal – but it must be pursued with urgency to improve people's lives as quickly as possible. This Strategy sets a **framework for action over the coming 10 years**. The Australian Government's actions are focused on the next 5 years. The Strategy will have a mid-point review in 2029 where progress, focus and further action will be considered. This recognises that, while this Strategy starts with a set of priorities that are most pressing to address first, further opportunities to drive progress will emerge over the life of the Strategy and may become a focus for future effort.

Annual reporting mechanisms, alongside the periodic reviews will track progress and report Government's investments and efforts to drive progress towards the Strategy's ambitions and vision.

This Strategy endeavours to include data and analysis to demonstrate the outcomes experienced by different groups of women, including First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women with disability, women of different ages, and LGBTIQ+ people. There are, however, limitations to data in some cases, particularly small population or sample sizes. The Government will work to improve data to help inform better outcomes for all Australians, noting that this needs to be culturally appropriate and protect the right to privacy.

Achieving **gender equality** in **Australia** is a **long-term goal** – but it must be **pursued with urgency** to **improve people's lives** as quickly as possible.

## How the Australian Government will use this Strategy

### **This Strategy will provide a framework for the Australian Government to drive gender equality through its policies and programs.**

The Government has already made significant structural changes towards gender equality in anticipation of this Strategy. This includes investments to improve women's safety, increasing paid parental leave and early childhood education and care support for families, and industrial relations reforms. It also includes committing to cost of living support through tax cuts – particularly for those on low and middle incomes, who are primarily women; efforts to address gender bias in the health system; and strengthened targets for women on Government boards.

This Strategy points to what more the Government can do to shift outcomes – including through the way it governs, its policies and investments, legislation and regulation, partnerships with states and territories, representation of women in leadership and as an employer and purchaser.

Core to driving gender equality is gender responsive budgeting. Gender responsive budgeting puts consideration of gender impacts at the heart of policy design and Budget decisions across Government's policies and investments. This underpins informed and practical decisions to close gender gaps. Gender responsive budgeting is a key tool to implement the Strategy.

## How the community can use this Strategy

**Gender equality cannot be achieved by Government alone.** While this Strategy focuses on how the Australian Government can drive change, it is also a call to action for every part of the community. Changing attitudes and stereotypes takes more than Government action, and it will take a collective effort to achieve gender equality.

**Every institution, organisation, community and individual has a role to play.** This Strategy sets out the roles and responsibilities of different parts of society to take action and drive change. This Strategy is an invitation to all parts of the community and economy to focus energy, efforts and resources towards achieving the Strategy's ambitions. Collectively, everyone needs to pull together for a gender equal Australia.

# What's underway: Recent Commonwealth actions

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*This Strategy is not the beginning. The Australian Government has already undertaken a range of actions and investments to progress gender equality.*

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## Priority area 1: Gender-based violence

- **Released the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032**, along with states and territories, to guide actions towards ending violence against women and children in Australia, as well as the First Action Plan and dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan. The National Plan is supported by \$2.3 billion in funding commitments.
- **Invested to support First Nations women's safety** through the development of a standalone First Nations National Plan for Family Safety, and by providing over \$200 million for a range of initiatives to address family safety and to Close the Gap. This includes for cultural healing services, to support National Family Violence Prevention Legal Service providers, to address safety and early intervention initiatives for First Nations Australians in Central Australia, to enable place-based initiatives in regional and remote Central Australia, and to fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service.
- **Taken action to improve consent and support respectful relationships**, including investing in consent and respectful relationships education, social media resources for young people on consent and community-led sexual violence prevention pilots and releasing the Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework.
- **Improved criminal justice responses to sexual violence** and reduced trauma for victim-survivors by supporting the Australian Law Reform Commission to undertake an inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence, informed by a national roundtable and a lived experience expert advisory group of victim-survivors and their advocates, and by developing an Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education to address sexual assault on campuses and improve student and staff safety.

- **Invested to prevent violence from happening in the first place**, providing \$104.4 million to Our Watch, Australia's national leader for the primary prevention of gender-based violence.
- **Reformed the Family Law System** so that it is simpler, safer and more accessible for separating families and their children, including making changes to the *Family Law Act 1975* and expanding programs in the Federal Circuit and Family Law Court of Australia. The Government has also supported Australia's implementation of the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction to make it safer for women and children impacted by international parental child abduction.
- **Acted to prevent and respond to sexual harassment** by supporting implementation of all recommendations of the *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report*. This includes the introduction of a new positive duty on employers to prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and harassment under the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*. The Government is also supporting implementation of the *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*.
- **Invested in access to housing for women and children experiencing family violence** by establishing a \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund. This will support 30,000 social and affordable homes, with an intent to provide 4,000 homes for women and children impacted by family and domestic violence and older women at risk of homelessness. The Government has continued the Safe Places program, to increase crisis or emergency accommodation places for First Nations women and children, women and children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and women and children with disability. The Government has also provided investment to support homelessness services through the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement, alongside developing a new National Housing and Homelessness Plan.
- **Helped ensure women don't have to choose between their work and their safety** by amending the *Fair Work Act 2009* to introduce an entitlement to 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave.
- **Supported migrant and refugee women who experience violence** by expanding family violence provisions within the *Migration Regulations 1994*, supporting visa holders experiencing domestic and family violence. The Government is also establishing a Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program.

- **Invested in frontline services for women experiencing domestic and family violence**, extending the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses to provide \$159 million for an additional 2 years and funding 500 frontline service and community workers, with support targeted to women and children in rural, regional and remote areas; First Nations people; the culturally and linguistically diverse community; women with disability; and the LGBTIQ+ community.
- **Supported a range of early intervention efforts to address violence, engage with men and boys and stop violence escalating**, through a healthy masculinities project trial to combat harmful gender stereotypes perpetuated online; funding a new national early intervention trial for young men and boys who present with adverse experiences, including family and domestic violence, and who are at risk of perpetrating family, domestic or sexual violence; funding No to Violence for the Men's Referral Service and Brief Intervention Service; developing a perpetrator risk assessment framework for frontline service providers; extending the MensLine Changing for Good service; and developing a national perpetrator referral database of services to improve uptake of intervention services. Funding is also being provided to partner with states and territories to trial innovative responses to address the behaviour of perpetrators.
- **Improved data and reporting on domestic, family and sexual violence**, by establishing a new statistical dashboard to provide more timely reporting on intimate partner homicide, to be introduced by mid-2024, and by working with states and territories to improve data sharing and support women's safety through the Data and Digital Ministers Council and Women and Women's Safety Ministers Council.
- **Released the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence**, to inform more effective and consistent responses to family and domestic violence.
- **Invested in actions to prevent and respond to technology-facilitated abuse**, including through the Preventing Tech-based Abuse of Women Grants Program; a National Roundtable on Online Dating Safety to improve safety for Australians using online dating platforms; and establishing the Online Harms Ministers Meeting to coordinate policy across the Australian Government to address online harms experienced by Australians.
- **Committed to establish a National Student Ombudsman**, as part of an Action Plan to address gender-based violence in higher education, which has been agreed with state and territory Education Ministers.
- **Supported the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission** to promote coordination across government and communities, monitor progress of the National Plan, and amplify the voices of people with lived experience, including by establishing a lived experience advisory committee.



## Priority area 2: Unpaid and paid care

- **Improved and extended Paid Parental Leave**, investing \$1.2 billion over 5 years to make the scheme more accessible, flexible and gender equitable, and increase the length from 20 to 26 weeks by July 2026, with 4 weeks reserved for each parent and up to 4 weeks that parents can take together. The Government also completed a review of the *Maternity Leave (Commonwealth Employees) Act 1973* in 2023.
- **Invested \$4.7 billion to make it easier and cheaper for parents to access early childhood education and care.** This is supported by investment in the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission inquiry into the cost of child care, and the Productivity Commission inquiry to undertake a broad review of the childcare system to help chart the course for universal, affordable early childhood education and care. The Government has also provided families with First Nations children access to a minimum level entitlement of 36 hours per fortnight of subsidised early childhood education and care from July 2023. An investment of \$72.4 million will build and retain the early childhood education and care workforce, 92% of whom are women. The Government is also developing an Early Years Strategy 2024-2034 to focus on the development and wellbeing of children in their early years.
- **Advocated for and invested in a pay rise for aged care workers**, providing \$11.3 billion to fund this increase for this workforce, which is overwhelmingly made up of women.
- **Invested to better value paid care work and feminised industries**, by developing a National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy, which will set a vision for a sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care with quality jobs. The Government is establishing an Expert Panel on the Care and Community Sector in the Fair Work Commission; investing to address acute bottlenecks in the psychology training pipeline, with 80% of psychologists being women; expanding the Australian Apprenticeship Support Loans Scheme to provide interest-free loans of up to \$24,492 in areas such as early childhood education, aged care and disability care; and supporting the delivery of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. The new 5-year National Skills Agreement includes up to an additional \$2.4 billion to support state and territory training systems including in critical industries such as essential care services.



### Priority area 3: Economic equality and security

- **Delivered tax cuts through a gender lens** to support participation and deliver a fairer share of tax relief and a tax cut for all women who pay tax.
- **Put gender equality at the heart of economic policy and decision-making** through the reintroduction of gender responsive budgeting and gender impact assessments to the Commonwealth Budget process, and making gender equality a priority **at the 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit**, and in *Working Future: the Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities*.
- **Established a Women's Economic Equality Taskforce** to provide advice to Government on key priorities for the 2023–24 Budget and recommendations for immediate and long-term actions in its final report, *Women's Economic Equality: A 10-year-plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023–33*.
- **Put gender equality at the heart of the workplace relations system**, making gender equality an objective of the *Fair Work Act 2009*, banning pay secrecy, legislating a statutory equal remuneration principle and establishing an Expert Panel on Pay Equity in the Fair Work Commission. The Government has introduced new protected attributes in the *Fair Work Act 2009* on breastfeeding, gender identity, subjection to family and domestic violence, and intersex status. The Government is providing funding for the Fair Work Commission to undertake a review of modern awards with priorities including consideration of the impact of workplace relations settings on work and care, and consideration of the need to improve access to secure work across the economy. The Fair Work Commission is also conducting a research project about occupational segregation and gender undervaluation. The Government introduced changes to unpaid parental leave to complement improvements to the Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme and help families share work and caring responsibilities.

- **Improved support for women through the payments system**, including the \$1.9 billion expansion in the eligibility of the Parenting Payment Single to single principal carers, the majority of whom are women, with a youngest dependent child aged 8 to under 14 years of age. The Government has also provided \$2.7 billion to increase the maximum payment rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 15% for all recipients, with single women making up the largest proportion of recipients, and provided \$4.9 billion to increase support for people receiving working age and student payments, including JobSeeker.
- **Made the child support scheme fairer** by implementing legislation to improve the timely collection of child support owed to parents – who are overwhelmingly women – and help prevent future debt among low-income parents. The Government is building the evidence base for longer term improvements, looking at issues like noncompliance as a means of financial abuse, whether the child support formula reflects the current costs of raising children in Australia, and what can be done to support parents where private collect arrangements have broken down.
- **Announced the abolishing of the ParentsNext Program** and the development of a replacement voluntary program to be introduced on 1 November 2024. As a first step, compulsory aspects of ParentsNext were paused from 5 May 2023.
- **Improved transparency and reporting on the gender pay gap**, passing legislation to give effect to a range of recommendations from the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* Review, including to publish gender pay gaps of employers with 100 or more workers – these were reported for the first time on 27 February 2024.
- **Invested in feminised industries** to improve women's wages, including \$560 million to support community sector organisations to meet additional cost pressures and through the Government's changes to indexation, including for organisations delivering women's safety initiatives. The Government has also introduced reforms so that, from 1 July 2026, employers are required to pay their employees' superannuation at the same time as their salary and wages, which overwhelmingly benefits women in service industries.

- **Supported women’s representation and opportunities in traditionally male-dominated industries** through the Australian Skills Guarantee, which includes national targets for women in apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships. The Government is investing in Australia’s vocational education and training (VET) system and addressing skills shortages; commissioning an independent Pathway to Diversity in STEM Review to evaluate existing women in STEM programs and make recommendations on the most effective approaches to improve equity and representation of women and other under-represented groups in STEM education and work; and also providing further funding for the Women in STEM and Entrepreneurships Grants program. The Government is supporting new digital career opportunities in the Australian Public Service (APS) through the APS Digital Traineeship Program, which supports priority groups – including women returning to the workforce or seeking a career change – to undertake a Certificate IV qualification and is funding support for women in male-dominated trade apprenticeships. Through its Cyber Security Strategy, the Government has committed to improving diversity of the cyber security workforce, and established a workstream for industry leaders to develop initiatives to improve the diversity of the cyber workforce. The Government has released a Women in Aviation Initiative to improve retention in the industry and increase visibility and awareness of the sector among girls and women, and is working with states and territories regarding options to increase women’s participation in major Commonwealth-funded infrastructure projects.
- **Supporting women’s access to housing**, through the \$2 billion Social Housing Accelerator and the National Housing and Homelessness Agreement. The Home Guarantee Scheme has already helped over 13,000 women buy their own home since May 2022.
- **Invested in fee-free TAFE**, supporting almost 300,000 students to enrol in 2023 (to 30 September) and making a further 300,000 places available for 2024 to 2026 – with women making up 60% of enrolments.
- **Investing up to \$12.6 billion over 5 years through the National Skills Agreement**, to support state and territory training systems and address national challenges such as sustaining essential care services, and to deliver reforms, for example to improve VET completions, including for women and others who face completion challenges.



## Priority area 4: Health

- **Established the National Women's Health Advisory Council** to provide advice to the Government on priority health issues for women and girls in Australia.
- **Invested in women's reproductive health** through a \$58.3 million package for endometriosis and pelvic pain, including the delivery of 22 Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinics across all states and territories and investing in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to develop 'MenoPROMPT', a menopause assessment tool for women and general practitioners to improve perimenopause and post-menopause care.
- **Invested in support for positive body image**, including for children to build and maintain positive body image and provided funding to enable Australians to continue to access support for eating disorders.
- **Supported women's health needs**, introducing a new Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) item to determine a patient's risk of recurrent breast cancer and expanding access to critical drugs for treating women's cancers on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). The Government is also providing funding for the Glen for Women, which provides First Nations women with culturally appropriate alcohol and other drug treatment services.
- **Investment in pregnancy and peri-and post-natal support**, including to extend the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood's role to maintain and expand delivery of donor milk across Australia, and to support the Australian Breastfeeding Association's National Breastfeeding Helpline. Funding is being provided for 12 new perinatal mental health centres across Australia and to expand the pregnancy and postnatal guidelines for expectant parents, including resources for healthcare workers supporting culturally and linguistically diverse people and First Nations people. The Government is also enhancing support for bereaved parents, and increasing the number of autopsies and investigations undertaken after a stillbirth. Support for First Nations mothers is provided through a dedicated Birthing on Country Centre of Excellence to be built in Nowra, NSW.
- **Improved access to medical support and advice**, by introducing a new MBS item for consultations of 60 minutes or more, which are often used by women, to support improved access and affordability for patients with chronic conditions and complex needs.
- **Invested in research and data lead by women health researchers**, creating targets for the NHMRC to award equal numbers of Investigator Grants to women and men, leading to 2023 being the first year that women applicants will receive an overall greater proportion of the funds, and investing in health and medical research and data collection focusing on women's and girls' health outcomes.



## Priority area 5: Leadership, representation and decision-making

- **Lifted Australia's overall ranking in the World Economic Forum Gender Gap Report to 26th out of 146**, compared to 43rd in 2022.
- **Improved representation of women in parliament**, as the first majority woman Commonwealth Government. In the 47th Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia 44.5% of seats across both chambers are held by women – the highest recorded number of women in an Australian parliament.
- **Invested to equip and encourage women across the political spectrum to run for public office** at local, state and federal levels, providing \$5 million to Women for Election Australia.
- **Increased the representation of women on Australian Government boards** to a record 51.6% in 2023.
- **Supported an increase in nominations of women for the Order of Australia**, leading a targeted communications campaign to encourage more nominations for women. Women made up more than 50% of award winners for the first time since 1975 at the King's Birthday Honours in 2023, then again in the Australia Day 2024 Honours List.
- **Supported representation of women and girls in sport**, through establishing the \$200 million Play our Way program to promote equal access, building more suitable facilities, and supporting grassroots initiatives to get women and girls to engage and participate in sport throughout their lives. The Government is also developing a national sports plan, which envisions enhancing diversity, inclusion and equity in sport for all Australians, including women and girls, and supporting women's and girls' participation in talent and development programs to increase female representations in coaching, officiating and sports administration. To help protect sporting participants against discrimination, abuse and mistreatment, the Government is establishing a Safety in Sport Division for Sport Integrity Australia.

- **Implemented a transparent and merit-based judicial appointments process** which ensures all candidates from a diversity of backgrounds have the opportunity to apply, in response to recommendations under the Australian Law Reform Commission's report, *Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Impartiality and the Law on Bias*.
- **Endorsed the Equal by 30 campaign** to work towards equal pay, leadership and opportunities for women in the clean energy sector.
- **Established a new Centre for Arts and Entertainment Workplaces** to ensure creative workers are paid fairly and have safe workplaces free from harassment and discrimination.
- **Supported delivery of Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)**, which was led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO.
- **Been a committed global champion of the United Nations Women, Peace and Security agenda**, which aims to ensure equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making.

Equality cannot be achieved without **women from a range of backgrounds** meaningfully participating in **decision-making**.

# Gender equality in Australia

## **All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.<sup>2</sup>**

Gender equality is a human right. It gives all people more choices and opportunities to reach their potential and live happy and fulfilled lives. Freedom from violence is also a human right, and is inextricably linked to gender equality because gender-based violence is both a driver and a consequence of gender inequality.<sup>3</sup> Gender equality is also good for the community and for the economy.<sup>4</sup> More equal societies are more cohesive, and gender equality boosts economic growth.<sup>5</sup>

Gender equality cannot be achieved without addressing the rigid attitudes and stereotypes that affect people over their lifetime. Gender stereotypes see girls and boys treated differently from when they are babies. They shape the vocational aspirations of school-aged children, relationship dynamics for young people and adults, and can lead to women and men taking on roles at home and at work that flow through to economic security at retirement. These attitudes can be produced and reinforced in households and institutions and are experienced differently across communities and cultures.

These individual experiences translate up to the national level. Compared with men, women experience much higher rates of gender-based violence, take on more paid and unpaid care work, earn less money, have very different experiences of the healthcare system, and are less represented in leadership and decision-making. Men are also constrained by rigid expectations, including to be the primary breadwinner, be less involved in care work and not seek help when they need it.<sup>6</sup>

Not all people experience gender inequality the same way. Their experiences are influenced by factors including gender identity, race, disability, religion, culture, education, socio-economic status, age, location and sexual orientation. The way these characteristics interact mean people can experience overlapping forms of disadvantage and discrimination.

Australia has come a long way in its journey to gender equality, with gains in women's electoral rights, education, economic participation, reproductive rights and legal protections that are the result of energetic

and persistent advocacy from women across the country. These gains cannot be taken for granted and significant challenges remain. No country has achieved gender equality and global shocks and crises – like COVID-19, climate change and conflict – show how easily progress can stall and regress.<sup>7</sup> Globally, many countries are now winding back women’s rights.

The shifts needed to achieve gender equality can generate backlash, which can manifest in harmful ways – including violence. For example, in countries where gender equality is high, alarming rates of intimate partner violence against women persist.<sup>8</sup> The relationship between gender equality and violence is complex. Action to advance gender equality must bring the whole community along.

This Strategy builds on past gains and efforts and outlines where further work needs to be done. Gender roles, behaviours and attitudes have been shaped over generations and systems have been built up around them. There is no single simple action to close gender gaps and progress is neither inevitable nor irreversible. Sustained, methodical commitment and effort is required, within and outside of government, over the 10 years of this Strategy and beyond.



Gender equality  
gives all people  
more **choices** and  
**opportunities** to  
reach their potential  
and live happy and  
**fulfilled lives.**

# Centring First Nations women and girls

As one of the world's oldest continuing living cultures, the strength and leadership of First Nations women in Australia is undeniable. Rooted in connection to culture, land, water and community, First Nations women have faced adversity with resilience, and have driven hard-fought victories. First Nations women are not a homogenous group – across First Nations communities, there are a multitude of nations, each with unique languages, cultural connections and deep connections to lands, skies and waterways.<sup>9</sup>

Despite struggle and determination, the experiences and voices of First Nations women and girls have been excluded from historical efforts to advance gender equality. For First Nations women, gender inequality intersects with the impact of racism and ongoing injustice. The prejudice and systemic disadvantage that First Nations women face stems from the specific combination of gendered and racist assumptions. This is reflected in First Nations women experiencing alarming rates of violence, having unequal access to safe and culturally appropriate healthcare and education, being overrepresented in the justice system and their children being overrepresented in child protection and out-of-home-care, and facing socio-economic disparities.

The Government is committed to listening to and working with First Nations women to achieve change. This Strategy builds on the Australian Government's investment in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's work to develop **Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)**. This work aims to elevate First Nations women and girls' voices, leadership, determination and human rights in recognition of the intergenerational exclusion of their voices and experiences across the policy landscape. It is underpinned by the principles outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples of self-determination, participation in decision-making, respect for and protection of culture, and equality and non-discrimination. It builds on the first ever national consultation with First Nations women commissioned by the then Office for the Status of Women in 1986. The Women's Business<sup>10</sup> report led to the recognition by Government that specific investment was needed to address the systemic disadvantage experienced by First Nations women.

First Nations women are leading a significant body of work to address their unique experiences in relation to racism and gender inequality. This includes through the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap**, the **Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report** and its Implementation Framework and Change Agenda, and the dedicated **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025** under the **National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032**. The Government has also committed to developing a standalone First Nations national plan to end violence against women and children, and established a First Nations National Plan Steering Committee. This Strategy integrates and complements these existing efforts across each of its priority areas and seeks to be a Strategy that responds to the needs of First Nations women and girls, while working alongside actions and frameworks for First Nations gender justice.

**Gender equality** in Australia cannot be achieved without **reconciliation** and **equality for First Nations** women and girls.

# Guiding principles for gender equality

The Australian Government can and should be ambitious in driving change. The Government will be **guided by 6 key principles** as it implements this Strategy. These are also relevant for people and organisations outside of Government who want to drive progress towards gender equality.

These principles can be applied in different settings, and even in times of crisis and emergency where circumstances change rapidly. They provide a starting point for enduring and impactful action to drive gender equality.

1. **Gender equality is a human right.** It is necessary for the dignity and full potential of **all people**.
2. **Gender equality benefits everyone**, and **everyone** is responsible for bringing about change.
3. **Efforts to drive gender equality** must be **inclusive and intersectional**.
4. Efforts to drive **gender equality** for **First Nations Australians** **must be led by First Nations Australians**.
5. Action on **gender equality** must be **evidence-based and informed by lived experience**.
6. **Gender equality must be considered from the outset**, and must include diverse **representation** in **decision-making, design** and **implementation** of solutions.

The **Government alone** cannot change individual attitudes. The **collective action of communities, workplaces and individuals** is needed to address the barriers that hold Australia back from making gains towards **gender equality**, and retaining this progress into the future.

# Working for Women at a glance

**Vision:** The long-term goal of the Strategy. **An Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender.**

**Foundations:** The foundational shift needed to achieve this Strategy's ambitions and vision for gender equality. **Positive gender attitudes and an end to stereotypes**

**Ambitions:** The long-term ambitions necessary to achieve the Strategy's vision.

- End violence against women
- Balance unpaid work
- Close the gender pay gap
- Close the retirement income gender gap
- Gender equity in healthcare access and outcomes
- Close leadership and representation gender gaps

**Priority areas:** The key areas where action is needed to achieve gender equality.

- Gender-based violence
- Unpaid and paid care
- Economic equality and security
- Health
- Leadership, representation and decision-making

**Principles:** The guiding principles for effort to achieve the Strategy.

- Gender equality is a human right. It is necessary for the dignity and full potential of all people and is an inherent good.
- Efforts to drive gender equality must be inclusive and intersectional.
- Action on gender equality must be evidence-based and informed by lived experience.
- Gender equality benefits everyone, and we all are responsible for bringing about change.
- Efforts to drive gender equality for First Nations Australians must be led by First Nations Australians.
- Gender equality must be considered at the beginning of everything we do. It is necessary to how we respond to every challenge and take advantage of every opportunity.

**Reporting framework:** The approach to monitoring and measuring progress.

Annual reporting tools			Periodic reporting tools		
Status of Women Report Card	Women's Budget Statement	Departmental Annual Reports	Baseline Data Report (Year 1)	Mid-point review (Year 5)	End-point review (Year 10)

# Foundation: Gender attitudes and stereotypes

Gender attitudes and stereotypes can and do shift over time. To achieve gender equality in Australia, rigid attitudes and behaviours around gender need to keep changing. This means challenging stereotypes that limit how people behave, are perceived and are treated at work, at school, in relationships, in their homes, online and by their communities.

Every priority area in this Strategy is underpinned by gender attitudes and stereotypes.

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*Modelling from Deloitte Access Economics shows that abandoning prescriptive gender norms could grow Australia's economy by on average at least \$128 billion a year.<sup>11</sup>*

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While there have been improvements in recent years, shifting attitudes around gender can be a slow and stubborn process.<sup>12</sup> A 2023 Plan International survey found that 17% of people believe gender equality is no longer an issue in Australia and that change for equality for women had gone too far.<sup>13</sup> Almost one in 4 people believe that much of what is called domestic violence is a normal reaction to day-to-day stress and frustration.<sup>14</sup>

Gender attitudes impact choice, behaviour and outcomes:

- Women and girls have historically been seen as caregivers and raised to be polite, accommodating and nurturing. These stereotypes can contribute to women and girls spending more time doing unpaid care at home and being less seen in leadership positions.
- For men and boys, pressure to be dominant, commanding and stoic can impact physical and emotional health – in particular, their willingness to seek health care for mental health conditions. Stereotypes can dissuade men from taking on care roles and can shape career choices, including by steering them away from roles and interests that are traditionally considered feminine.
- For all people, especially gender diverse people, identifying and expressing gender outside the traditional gender binary can result in violence, discrimination, stigma and exclusion. This can limit people's participation in society and lead to poorer economic, health and social outcomes.
- Gender stereotypes can interact with other stereotypes, including those perpetuated by racism, ableism, ageism, homophobia and prejudice about socio-economic status, compounding the discrimination a person experiences. Cultural and religious beliefs interact with gender norms in a complex and nuanced way.

- Rigid attitudes and stereotypes can lead to sexism and are a driver of men's violence against women. They can be internalised by boys and girls from a young age and guide what they see as acceptable behaviour. They can encourage some boys and men to be dominant, aggressive and controlling towards women in both private and public life.

Government action across priority areas can help to drive practical change on gender norms. This includes work under the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*; the Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme, which has been reformed to encourage uptake from men and more shared care between partners; and efforts to reduce gender segregation in industries and workplaces. The Government can further develop the evidence base on how society views women and girls, demonstrate equality in its leadership and public service, and explore options to improve the representation of women in media and advertising reforms.<sup>15</sup>

**But the Government alone cannot change individual attitudes.**

The collective action of individuals, families, communities, workplaces and institutions is needed to address the barriers that hold Australia back from making gains towards gender equality and retaining this progress into the future.

**Change is needed at a community level – with families, educators and community leaders modelling positive attitudes and challenging rigid ideas about gender in homes, educational institutions and neighbourhoods.**

Shifting how children understand stereotypes from an early age can have long-term impacts by changing how boys and girls view themselves and opening up more choices later in life.

All workplaces have a responsibility to ensure that decisions on recruitment, promotion, role allocation and access to flexible work are not influenced by gender bias or assumptions.

There are a number of industries with significant influence over gender norms. These industries produce and amplify content that shapes people's ideas about what it means to be a woman or a man, and attitudes towards gender. For example, the tech industry is responsible for many products that change the way people think about gender and must be proactive in ensuring gender bias is not built into new technologies. Adopting Safety by Design principles, including through the guidance offered by the eSafety Commissioner,<sup>16</sup> would contribute to this effort. The media and entertainment industry, also, must consider how depictions of gender affect and reinforce people's attitudes.

**Over the course of the Strategy, the Government will measure progress towards attitudinal change in Australia through the following key outcomes:**

- community attitudes and beliefs in Australia reject gender inequality
- people are not limited by gender roles.

# How gender norms can shape people's lives: The story of Priya and Luca

This is the story of 2 children – Priya and Luca – and how their lives unfold when there are limiting societal gender norms and when there are no limiting gender norms. This is an illustrative story only. Not everyone goes through each of these life stages in the same way and how gender norms might shape a person can also change depending on their unique experiences and identities.

## In a world with limiting gender norms

Priya and Luca grow up in the same city. In both homes, their parents have a 'traditional' division of labour – their dads work during the week, and their mums are primary caregivers who do all the cooking and cleaning.

On weekends, their dads mow the lawn, wash the car and watch sport with the children. Their mums do the groceries, using the housekeeping money allocated by their dads. Their mums also take on more of the 'mental load' of running a household, organise birthday parties and costumes for school events, and take them to the doctor if they are sick. Their dads decide where they go for holidays and what they watch on TV.

Priya and Luca learn men should be strong, competitive, and the breadwinners and decision-makers for their family. They learn that women are better at caring, housework and organisation. The chores Priya and Luca do at home are consistent with what their parents do. Priya helps in the kitchen and Luca works outside. Luca receives pocket money for his chores because they are set jobs, whereas Priya is just helping mum out.

Priya thinks that boys are smarter than her, even though she gets better grades. She also experiences racism on the playground. She becomes less confident and quieter in class.

Luca doesn't study the subjects he finds most interesting in school because he thinks they are 'girly'. He is interested in teaching, but doesn't think he can do it because most of his teachers are women and he thinks he's not 'naturally caring'.

At school, Luca learns woodwork while Priya learns textiles.

Priya graduates from university and gets a job as an office manager at a law firm. There are no men working in the administration of the office, and only a few female partners. At work, one of Priya's bosses sexually harasses her. She is uncomfortable and frightened, but doesn't want to make a fuss, especially after another manager insists it's 'not a big deal' and she should 'learn to take a compliment'. She doesn't lodge a formal complaint.

Luca becomes a tradesperson at his dad's company and is quickly promoted to a senior position. The long hours and leadership pressures take a toll on Luca's mental health, but he doesn't seek professional help because he thinks it is a sign of weakness. He also doesn't know where he can get help since none of his friends or role models ever talk about their own mental health.

Priya and Luca get married and have 2 children, a boy and girl.

Luca's male co-workers didn't take parental leave when they had babies, so Luca doesn't either. Luca really loves his children, but doesn't feel comfortable caring for them without Priya. He doesn't know many dads and isn't sure he's a good dad.

Priya takes the bulk of parental leave as the 'primary carer' in their home, just like her mum did. She doesn't receive superannuation while on leave. The cost of child care means the family choose to have one parent work part-time. Priya decides to work part-time since she is 'naturally better' with the children and Luca's job doesn't support part-time work. When the children get sick, Priya stays at home. Priya arranges child care, then school and school holiday care. She organises the children's birthday parties and extracurricular activities, while Luca takes them to play sport. Priya balances this with looking after her aging parents.

When a promotion opportunity comes up at work, Priya's male colleague – who recently graduated from university and joined the administrative team in the firm – gets it. Priya has more experience, but is seen as less ambitious due to her part-time arrangements and time away from work on parental leave.

Priya has much less superannuation than Luca, but retires earlier than planned to help look after her new grandchild. Priya knows this means that she will be financially dependent on Luca later in life.

Priya and Luca move into an aged care facility, where a majority of their care workers are women. Their daughter visits them regularly and helps with their groceries and medical appointments. Their son visits occasionally since he is very busy with work.

## In a world without limiting gender norms

### Childhood and home life



Priya and Luca's parents share housework and caring equally. Each parent spends time caring for their children solo, as well as taking their children to school, sports practice, birthday parties and the doctor. Both children do activities that interest them.

Priya enjoys learning about dinosaurs and playing with trucks and dolls. Luca talks about his emotions with his parents and friends because it helps him understand his feelings and be happier. They both learn to cook and wash a car from an early age. They decide as a family what to watch on TV and where to go on holiday.

Priya and Luca both receive equal pocket money for doing chores around the house. Priya mows the lawn and takes the rubbish out, and Luca does the dishes every night after dinner.

Both children know their parents do important work.

### Education



Priya and Luca learn from their teachers that men and women are equally capable. They see their role models working in a diverse range of fields. Both children have the chance to learn a lot of skills, including life skills like cooking, sewing and car maintenance. Priya and Luca are encouraged to take up hobbies, subjects and jobs that align with their interests. Priya takes physics and plays mixed rugby in a culturally diverse team, while Luca chooses to take a visual arts elective and joins the choir and the basketball team.

### Career



Priya pursues her interest in advocacy and becomes a lawyer. She is respected by her colleagues, and speaks up and takes on new leadership positions. Her firm has strong policies around safety, respect and inclusion that are part of its workplace culture.

Priya is regularly promoted. Her salary rises in line with her male colleagues, which she knows since her firm publishes its gender pay gap information to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency.

Luca pursues his interest in helping others and becomes a teacher. He feels comfortable talking about his mental health and reaches out for professional help when he needs. He enjoys teaching drama and science.

### Relationships and having children



Priya and Luca support each other and their ambitions. They both take parental leave to care for their children, and join a local parenting group together where they make friends with other new mums and dads. They both form strong relationships with their children. Luca enjoys cooking dinner and reading the children bedtime stories, and Priya loves taking them for swims at the local pool.

When they return to work, Priya and Luca both work part time for a while. They continue to split domestic work and caring responsibilities equally. When the children are sick, they take it in turns to take time off to care for them. They both work flexibly to share school pick and drop off, and participate in school activities. Luca volunteers for canteen duty once a week and Priya coaches the soccer team.

Priya and Luca value each other's perspectives. When making decisions, they discuss and agree them together, including how to manage their finances and how to raise their children. They are openly respectful and caring, and are positive role models for their children.

### Retirement and later life



Priya and Luca both retire from fulfilling careers. They feel that they have made an impact through their careers. Priya has a healthy superannuation balance and feels confident in her retirement plans.

Priya and Luca move into an aged care facility, where there is gender diversity across their care workers. They have a strong relationship with their children, who both visit them regularly and support them as they age.

Source: This diagram is based on the life course model in *Breaking the Norm*<sup>17</sup> and the drivers of violence in *Change the Story*.<sup>18</sup>

# Priority area 1:

## Gender-based violence

Rates of violence against women in Australia have remained alarmingly high over recent decades, in spite of increased efforts across the country.

Equality cannot be achieved when so many women are experiencing violence at the hands of men and – often from men they know. This violence can be deadly. The threat of violence alone affects women’s lives and the choices they make.

Gender-based violence – including sexual violence and harassment, and domestic and family violence – is complex, intricately linked to women’s position in society and is a product of power imbalances between men and women. This is exacerbated by systems that fail to hold perpetrators to account, enable violence to continue or put the onus for change on the women it has affected.

Many women, including First Nations women, migrant and refugee women, and women with disability experience unique and compounding forms of violence, and greater barriers to justice and recovery. Children – girls and boys – who witness or experience violence can face lifelong impacts.

These experiences of violence are often a driver of economic inequality and can be a consequence of it. The impact of violence can be immediate, enduring and intergenerational, with long-term health, wellbeing and economic consequences. For too many women, seeking justice when they’ve experienced violence only leads to more trauma.

To achieve gender equality, men’s violence against women must end, so women can be and feel safe – at home, at school, at work, in their communities and online. The Government is committed to implementing effective interventions to help stop violence against women.

See *Data snapshot – gender-based violence* for further analysis.

### What have we heard?

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*‘The experience and threat of violence significantly curtails women’s safety and equality, limiting their full and equal participation in public and private life as well as their health, wellbeing and economic outcomes. If women and gender diverse people are not safe, they are not equal.’*

— Respondent, public survey April 2023

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## What we'll do: Australian Government actions

The Government is committed to effective action, including working with states and territories, examining systems, and challenging gender attitudes and stereotypes to improve women's safety.

### Actions under way

To end gender-based violence, the Government has already made a number of investments and reforms. The Government has:

- ✓ released the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 jointly with states and territories, and is working in partnership with states and territories on its implementation. The Government has invested \$2.3 billion towards achieving the outcomes of the National Plan across the 2022–23 and 2023–24 Budgets
- ✓ amended the Fair Work Act 2009 to introduce an entitlement to 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave, expressly prohibit sexual harassment in the workplace and make subjection to family and domestic violence a protected attribute
- ✓ placed a positive duty on employers to prevent sexual harassment and discrimination under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984, as recommended under Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report
- ✓ reformed the Family Law Act 1975, including the establishment of enhanced information flows between the family law courts and state and territory child protection, policing and firearms agencies to improve safety
- ✓ released National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence, to inform more effective and consistent responses to family and domestic violence
- ✓ highlighted the need for tailored, culturally appropriate services and supports for diverse communities, including for men who seek to address their use of violence, through the National Plan.

## The Government will continue to:

- develop a standalone national plan to address violence against First Nations women and children through genuine partnership and shared decision-making with First Nations communities, and align this plan with key principles under Closing the Gap (including target 13) and *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)*
- support Australia's national Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission to amplify the voices of people with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence; provide evidence-informed policy advice; and promote coordination and accountability towards ending gender-based violence
- further embed the voices of lived experience, including through work of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Lived Experience Advisory Council
- support delivery of crisis and transitional housing options for women and children impacted by family and domestic violence, and older women experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- fully implement the recommendations from the *Respect@Work* report, and recommendations from *Set the Standard: Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces*
- provide access to financial and other support to people experiencing family and domestic violence, to reduce financial insecurity when leaving a violent intimate partner relationship
- take action to improve the experiences of victim-survivors of sexual violence in the justice system. This includes progressing reforms under the Standing Council of Attorneys General's *Work Plan to Strengthen Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Assault 2022–27* and through establishing and responding to an Australian Law Reform Commission inquiry into justice responses to sexual violence
- address online child sexual abuse material and children's access to pornography through the eSafety Commissioner, supported by consent and respectful relationships programs
- set expectations of digital platforms for user safety under the Basic Online Safety Expectations
- develop a successor plan to the *National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians (Elder Abuse) 2019–2023*
- increase safety in higher education, including through the Australian Universities Accord and through the *Action Plan to Address Gender-based Violence in Higher Education*, to recognise the leading role the higher education sector can and should play to prevent and respond to gender-based violence
- address gender-based violence among young people and improve prevention and early intervention practices, including through the release of the *Commonwealth Consent Policy Framework*.



## **What structural change looks like: reforming the family law system**

In 2023, the Government made changes to reform the *Family Law Act 1975* to make it simpler and safer for parents and children. It repealed complex and confusing provisions around parenting orders, including the 'presumption of equal shared parental responsibility', which was often misinterpreted as entitling each parent to equal time with their child. These have been replaced with a simpler and clearer set of considerations focused on what is in the child's best interests. The Government also introduced new powers for courts to address systems abuse and improved the use of Independent Children's Lawyers.

Processes for the division of property after separation must be responsive to family violence, including economic coercion. With that in mind, the Government has increased services for separating couples with small property pools. The Family Law Priority Property Pools program that provides quick, fair and affordable resolution of small property disputes is now accessible throughout the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia and has been extended to the Family Court of Western Australia. For couples seeking resolution outside court, the Lawyer-Assisted Family Law Property Mediation program provides separating couples with support to reach agreement safely and fairly on small property disputes.

The Government has also made a suite of changes to Australia's domestic framework that supports the Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. These changes make it clear that allegations of domestic violence are considered before return orders are made for children, make it easier for children's voices to be heard and for Independent Children's Lawyers to be appointed in these difficult proceedings. In addition, the Government has introduced a financial assistance scheme to enable eligible respondent parents to have equivalent access to legal representation as applicant parents.

For many women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, a protracted family law case only adds to the trauma they have experienced. These structural changes streamline the system and address harmful misconceptions, helping to ensure that the family law system is more responsive to the needs of women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.

## Future directions

To further accelerate progress, directions for future effort include:

- continuing to invest in evidence-based approaches to ending gender-based violence by responding to what's working
- implementing further reforms to the family law system to better support those impacted by family violence, and considering improvements to how the family law system responds to victim-survivors, including ensuring cultural safety for First Nations victim-survivors
- responding to the Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations women and children, following delivery of the report
- building women's safety online through improving policies and practices, providing support services for victim-survivors, working with industry to provide greater transparency about harms, and responding to new technologies like generative artificial intelligence
- responding to the National Disability Insurance Scheme Review with initiatives designed with a gender lens, and responding to the Disability Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability
- ensuring legal mechanisms and Commonwealth–state partnership agreements, like the National Legal Assistance Partnership, can support women's justice outcomes, particularly for women who experience intersecting forms of disadvantage and discrimination
- considering how the Government's powers as a regulator can be used to improve women's safety, including on alcohol, gambling and pornography
- considering how Government's role in service delivery can be enhanced to support people experiencing violence
- improving the national evidence base by working towards consistent terminology and strengthening collection and sharing of data, to better prevent and respond to violence.

## **What others can do:** action outside of government

Ending gender-based violence requires combined and concerted effort from and in all parts of society, including people and families; education settings and communities, businesses and workplaces; the domestic, family and sexual violence sector; frontline workers; media; and all levels of government.

Attitudes and behaviours play a vital role in challenging attitudes and stereotypes that help to prevent gender-based violence in relationships, families and communities.

Community organisations, education settings and workplaces can take action to improve women's safety, from prevention through to recovery. To change community attitudes around violence, sporting bodies and community organisations can use their influence to set an expectation of zero tolerance for violence. Schools and education institutions, in particular, can engage young people on the subject of respectful behaviours and relationships, and challenge gender norms in classrooms and the broader education environment.

Businesses and organisations must create workplaces that proactively address violence against women, including having clear and effective ways to respond to sexism, discrimination, harassment, bullying and abuse at all levels of their organisation. Staff can be trained in positive bystander behaviour to call out these behaviours, with role modelling from senior leadership. Employers can introduce or enhance workplace policies to assist employees experiencing or recovering from violence, such as communicating the entitlement to 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave or offering additional paid family and domestic violence leave, and ensuring they adequately respond to perpetrators of violence within their workforces. The Respect@ Work and Our Watch websites have resources to support people and organisations to understand, prevent and address violence against women and workplace sexual harassment.

Systems and institutions beyond government also have a role to play. The legal and justice systems must respond to violence in a trauma-informed way and hold perpetrators to account. To complement government funding, a gender lens can also be applied to philanthropy to increase investment in the critical issues, such as safety, which affect women and girls.

## How we'll measure progress

The Government will measure and report on the following ambitions and outcomes to demonstrate that change is happening. Where applicable, these ambitions and outcomes align with the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*.

**Ambition:** End violence against women.

**Key outcomes:**

- all people live free from violence and are safe at home, at school, at work, in the community and online
- employers support an end to gender discrimination, and sexual harassment and violence in the workplace.

To achieve gender equality,  
**men's violence against women must end**, so women can be and feel safe – at work, at school, at home, online and in their communities.

## Data snapshot – gender-based violence

Violence against women is a problem of epidemic proportions in Australia – with at least **2,369 women killed by intimate partners or other family members in Australia** between 1989–90 and 2022–23.

- One in 3 women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15.<sup>19</sup>
- One in 5 women has experienced sexual violence since the age of 15.<sup>20</sup>
- One in 2 women has experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime.<sup>21</sup>
- Women are 3 times more likely than men to experience violence by an intimate partner.<sup>22</sup>
- One in 2 women has experienced technology-facilitated abuse at least once in their lifetime.<sup>23</sup>

Violence against women is experienced **at all ages and stages of life, and in every location across Australia.**

It is experienced differently based on people's identities, backgrounds, and social positions.

- First Nations women are more than 33 times more likely to be hospitalised, and 6 times more likely to die from assault related to family violence than non-Indigenous women.<sup>24</sup>
- Women with disability experience higher rates of intimate partner violence, sexual violence and physical violence.<sup>25</sup> They can also experience specific forms of gender-based violence, including forced sterilisation, forced medical interventions and reproductive coercion.<sup>26</sup>

- Women from culturally, racially, linguistically and religiously diverse communities and migrant and refugee women face higher rates of violence and barriers to accessing services. They may also experience specific forms of violence, including migration-related abuse, dowry abuse, forced marriage, female genital mutilation and trafficking.<sup>27</sup>
- For older women, violence includes elder abuse, which can occur in non-family or domestic settings, such as from paid carers and sexual violence in residential aged care.<sup>28</sup>
- Girls experience much higher rates of sexual abuse and emotional abuse, and are more likely to experience multiple types of maltreatment compared to boys. More than one in 3 (37%) have experienced child sexual abuse compared to almost one in 5 boys (19%).<sup>29</sup>
- Women identifying as bisexual or lesbian are more likely to report having experienced sexual violence in their lifetime than those who identify as heterosexual.<sup>30</sup>
- 23% of women living outside major cities have experienced violence from a current or previous partner since the age of 15, compared with 15% of women living in major cities.<sup>31</sup>
- 70 to 90% of women in custody have experienced domestic, family and/or sexual violence.<sup>32</sup>
- Some people can experience multiple intersections of discrimination and violence, such as transgender women of colour who are more likely to report being assaulted by a stranger.<sup>33</sup>



**Consultations** for this Strategy heard that the justice system is failing women who have experienced violence, and that too many perpetrators are not held to account. For victim-survivors of sexual assault who do report, prosecution rates are low and conviction rates are lower. Women who report intimate partner violence, particularly First Nations women, risk being misidentified as perpetrators. Seeking justice can be impeded by structural and institutional challenges, and financial, geographical, cultural or linguistic barriers,<sup>34</sup> as well as trauma.<sup>35</sup> Participation in the justice system can also result in financial determinations that ingrain women's poverty.<sup>36</sup>

The Government is committed to **effective action**, including working with states and territories, examining systems, and challenging gender attitudes and stereotypes to **improve women's safety**.

## Priority area 2: Unpaid and paid care

Despite increases in workforce participation in recent decades, women continue to shoulder the majority of unpaid care in Australia. The economy and many Australian workplaces have been built around and uphold traditional, gendered divisions of paid and unpaid work. Paid work is more highly celebrated and the economic and social contribution of unpaid work is undervalued. This unpaid care is not just for children, but also aging parents, other family members and people with disability. Paid care work is also dominated by women and migrant workers – in part due to attitudes about women being ‘natural carers’ – and is also undervalued and often low paid and insecure.

Equality cannot be achieved without addressing who takes on, and who is expected to take on, caring responsibilities. Nor can it be achieved without valuing the substantial contribution unpaid and low paid care makes to families, the community and – notably – the Australian economy, which increasingly relies on paid and unpaid care and is facing care and support workforce shortages. This contribution is overwhelmingly powered by women.

Gender stereotypes and expectations contribute to the imbalance in caring responsibilities in families. These expectations can leave women feeling exhausted and guilty. Some women have greater caring responsibilities that stem from cultural, religious or community expectations. Men who want to take on more care may face difficulty or discrimination accessing leave or flexible work. This can stop men from sharing equally in caring and household responsibilities – and in the joy of family life. Here, kids also miss out on the benefits of having more engaged dads.<sup>37</sup>

Gendered assumptions about parenting can also make it harder for some sex and gender non-binary parents to navigate care roles, parenting services and workplace entitlements and support.

The imbalance in unpaid care undermines women’s lifelong economic security by limiting their participation in paid work and leadership roles. Women with caring responsibilities who want to work more hours can be prevented from doing so by lack of access to formal care and flexible work, and structural barriers like high effective marginal tax rates.

To achieve gender equality, unpaid and paid care responsibilities need to be more equally shared, and care needs to be valued and celebrated. The Government will prioritise policies that support families to make choices that work for them, and policy settings that don’t entrench inequality.

See *Data snapshot – unpaid and paid care* for further analysis.

## What have we heard?

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*'Despite women's work, both paid and unpaid, acting as the backbone of our economy during the COVID-19 pandemic, today women's work is still undervalued.'*

— Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, final report<sup>38</sup>

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## What we'll do: Australian Government actions

The Australian Government is committed to helping families balance caring responsibilities and juggle work and care, and to value unpaid and paid care and support work in Australia.

### Actions underway

To drive action to share and value care, the Government has already made a number of investments and reforms. The Government has:

- ✓ committed to making the Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme longer, more flexible, accessible and gender equitable, sending a strong signal that both parents play a role in caring for their children
- ✓ strengthened rights to access unpaid parental leave and flexible work, and made breastfeeding a protected attribute through reforms to the Fair Work Act 2009
- ✓ improved affordability of early childhood education and care through the Cheaper Child Care reforms; invested in childcare accessibility for First Nations families; initiated the Early Years Strategy 2024–34 to focus on the development and wellbeing of children in their early years; tasked the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) with an inquiry into the cost of child care and the Productivity Commission with an inquiry into early childhood education and care, charting a course towards universal access
- ✓ established an expert panel in the Fair Work Commission to help address low wages and workplace conditions faced in the care and community sector
- ✓ supported and funded an uplift in wages for aged care workers, and implemented skills and training initiatives to increase the diversity and profile of the aged care workforce.

### **In addition, the Government will continue to:**

- develop a National Carer Strategy to deliver a national agenda to support Australia's carers
- deliver the National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy, setting out a road map of actions to a sustainable and productive care and support economy that delivers quality care with decent jobs
- fund programs to build the confidence and engagement of men as caregivers.

### **Future directions**

To further accelerate progress, directions for future effort include:

- ensuring Government programs, processes and resources do not reinforce gendered assumptions about caregiving
- evaluating the operation of the expanded Paid Parental Leave Scheme, including men's uptake of paid parental leave, and working with employers to expand employer provided paid parental leave and improve uptake
- exploring how social security settings (along with tax) can more comprehensively recognise the economic participation of those performing unpaid care
- responding to Productivity Commission and ACCC inquiries into early childhood education and care, to make it more affordable and accessible
- taking action to attract and retain workers, including men, in the care and support economy
- exploring options to ensure there are not financial disincentives for students pursuing qualifications to enter professions and occupations in care and support
- considering how best to regulate migration for lower paid workers with essential skills in the paid care and support economy.

## **What others can do:** action outside of government

All people can consider how their own attitudes about care impact their choices, judgements and opportunities. The way care and unpaid work responsibilities are shared within families is a decision for individual households, but is upheld by – and can influence – gender stereotypes and expectations. Within households, families can have conversations about how work is split at home and recognise that paid and unpaid work both contribute to the household. Equally, families can consider early childhood education and care as a household cost, not a trade off against one parents' wage. Families can also challenge gendered assumptions about 'natural caring' ability, request flexibility from employers and access community resources and education around parenting. When allocating chores to children, parents can make sure these are not allocated on gender lines and that boys and girls are taught household skills and get equal pocket money.

Employers can go beyond their minimum obligations and attract the best talent by transforming workplaces into great, flexible places for parents and carers to work. They can support men to take a more equitable share of parenting and unpaid care by encouraging use of flexible or part-time hours and parental leave. They can also ensure that working flexibly is not a barrier to promotion or leadership by supporting flexible arrangements in leadership roles and promoting workers with a history of working part-time and taking breaks to care. Many employers are using paid parental leave and flexible work to attract and retain workers. Increasingly, this means not distinguishing between 'primary' and 'secondary' carers, and paying superannuation on parental leave. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency has resources to support gender best practice by employers.<sup>39</sup>

The media and entertainment industry can challenge stereotypes through authentic and diverse representations of parenting and caregiving in the content they produce.



## What structural change looks like: valuing and sharing care

Governments and employers play a role in better valuing and sharing care through the design of their paid parental leave schemes, especially in ways that encourage men to take leave and that minimise the long-term impact on women who take leave.

The Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme provides a minimum entitlement that employers can build on. The Government is modernising and expanding the scheme through a range of reforms that aim to make the leave more accessible and flexible, encourage men to take leave and provide more support for caring.

To reinforce the value placed on caring, key reforms include expanding the number of weeks available from 20 weeks per family in 2023 to 26 weeks per family by 2026. From 1 July 2025, the Government will also pay superannuation on its Paid Parental Leave Scheme to signal that taking time out of paid work to care for children is a normal part of working life for both parents; help normalise parental leave as a workplace entitlement, like annual and sick leave; and reduce the impact of parental leave on retirement incomes.

To support sharing of care, the Government's scheme is now also gender neutral so that either – or both – parent can claim through the same scheme. The reforms introduce 'reserved leave' which means that from 1 July 2026, each parent will have 4 weeks of leave for their exclusive use, with the remaining 18 weeks available to be shared. Reserved leave encourages *both* parents to take leave, and sends a signal, especially to men, that their role as carers is valued. Other changes include expanding access to more parents with a family income limit of \$350,000, which particularly benefits women who are the primary income earner in their family.

This combination of reforms is designed to support women's economic participation, signal that caring is valued and support men to take up a greater caring role. Employers are building on the Government's Scheme, with around 63% of Australian employers with 100 or more employees offering their own paid parental leave, with 33% of these offering paid parental leave regardless of gender, while 86% of employers who offer their own paid parental leave also pay superannuation on that leave.

As an employer, the Government has reviewed the *Maternity Leave (Commonwealth Employees) Act 1973* and will introduce a range of changes to modernise the scheme and make it more gender equitable. In parallel, the Australian Public Service through its enterprise agreements is phasing in a consistent 18 weeks for both parents to be fully in place by February 2027.

## How we'll measure progress

The Government will measure and report on the following ambitions and outcomes to demonstrate that change is happening.

### Ambitions:

- Balance unpaid work
- Close the gender pay gap.

### Key outcomes:

- the unpaid work and care gap between women and men narrows
- parents and carers have access to affordable and high quality early childhood education and care services
- the gap between women and men working part-time or flexibly narrows
- the gender gap in use of and access to paid parental leave narrows
- men's representation in the care and support workforce increases.

Equality cannot be achieved without **addressing** who takes on, and who is expected to take on, **caring responsibilities**.

## Data snapshot – unpaid and paid care

Women spend **9 hours a week more** than men on **unpaid work and care**, and **83% of one parent families are single mothers**.<sup>40</sup> For some **First Nations women**, caring responsibilities extend to protecting and caring for Country, which remains an important part of daily life and practice.<sup>41</sup>

Unpaid care and support work impacts economic security, including the **gender pay gap**, with one-third of the pay gap attributed to the time spent caring for family and interruptions in full-time employment.<sup>42</sup>

- In 2022–23, 35.7% of women and 7.3% of men who did not work full-time and wanted a job or preferred to work more hours reported the main reason they were unable to start work was ‘caring for children’. This was higher for mothers with children under 15 years old (75%).<sup>43</sup>
- Only 14% of employer funded paid primary carer leave is taken by men.<sup>44</sup>
- 61% of First Nations women provide support to someone living outside of their household and two-thirds of these women also live in a household with dependent children.<sup>45</sup> First Nations women with caring responsibilities are also more likely to be in culturally-unsafe and unsupported employment, and have higher cultural loads.<sup>46</sup>
- There are more than 235,000 young carers in Australia who provide unpaid care and support to family members or friends who have a disability, mental illness, chronic condition, an alcohol or other drug issue or who are frail aged.<sup>47</sup>
- Women make up 72% of primary carers to people with disability and older people,<sup>48</sup> and 35% of female primary carers have a disability themselves.<sup>49</sup>

- Many men who take parental leave report discrimination when returning to work,<sup>50</sup> and those who access flexible work in the form of reduced hours experience higher levels of discrimination and/or harassment.<sup>51</sup>
- For fathers, greater involvement in their children's lives increases ongoing participation in child care and other forms of unpaid work, heightens relationship satisfaction, and enhances their ability to balance work and family commitments.<sup>52</sup>
- For children, having an engaged and involved father increases the likelihood that the child will thrive across all areas of their life including their physical and mental health, self-esteem, educational outcomes and career prospects.<sup>53</sup>
- Primary carers are nearly twice as likely to be in the lowest income quintile compared to non-carers (14.5% compared to 8.3%) and are also twice as likely to rely on the income support system compared to non-carers.<sup>54</sup>
- Unpaid care work makes a substantial contribution to Australia's economy – estimated at the equivalent of 50.6% of the GDP.<sup>55</sup>

**Policy settings and systems** create barriers to people with caring responsibilities **participating in work**.

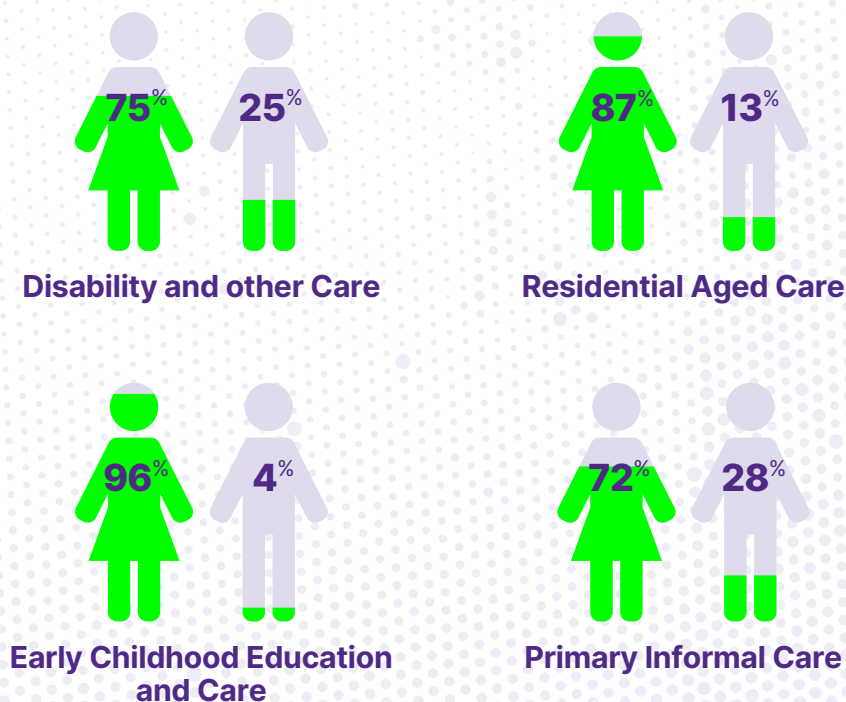
- The loss or tapered reduction of government support as income increases, along with taxation and childcare costs, can outweigh the financial benefit of a secondary earner returning to work or increasing hours after having children.<sup>56</sup>



- For many working parents – particularly those based in rural, regional and remote areas, or working in shift or fly-in/fly-out roles – the limited accessibility of early childhood education and care impacts workforce participation.
- The Productivity Commission also found that 28% of Australian parents stayed out of the workforce to care for children in 2022, and they most commonly did so because the cost of early childhood education and care was too high.<sup>57</sup>

The paid care and support workforce remains **female-dominated, undervalued and insecure** – factors that are key drivers of the gender pay gap.<sup>58</sup> With people living longer and healthier lives, Australia will need **more care and support services**, and a larger workforce.<sup>59</sup>

**Figure 1:** The majority of care and support workers and informal carers are female.<sup>60</sup>



- It is estimated the care and support workforce will grow from around 657,200 to 801,700 workers by 2033. The demand for workers is likely to be higher than this – illustrating the importance of being able to attract workers of all genders to fill jobs.<sup>61</sup>
- Migrants make up large portions of the care and support workforce, especially in aged care.<sup>62</sup> Healthcare and social assistance is also one of the most common industries of employment (16%) for working age First Nations people in 2021.<sup>63</sup>
- An increasingly diverse Australian population will require a diverse workforce, as this enhances capability in meeting the varied needs of consumers.

Women continue  
to shoulder  
the majority of  
**unpaid care**  
in Australia.

## Priority area 3: Economic equality and security

There have been substantial improvements in women's economic equality in recent decades with increases to women's workforce participation, growth in women's level of educational attainment, reductions in the gender pay gap and narrowing of the retirement income gap. However, this progress has been slow and uneven, and more work is needed to achieve economic equality.

Equality cannot be achieved while there is still a high gender pay gap and women experience higher levels of poverty.

These gender gaps are driven by patterns of work and care; women's over-representation in part-time, low-paid, and insecure jobs; and barriers to career advancement. Australia's industry and occupational segregation also contributes to gender pay gaps.<sup>64</sup> Women tend to study or train in areas that attract debt or require unpaid placements to qualify, creating inequality from the start of their careers. Women-led businesses and startups also attract less investment, restricting their ability to drive entrepreneurial initiatives in Australia. While men continue to have greater economic security overall, boys' education outcomes require attention – girls are regularly outperforming boys in literacy, and more women than men enrol at university.

Gender discrimination and harassment contribute to the gender pay gap and inequality at work as well. Gender discrimination can be compounded by other forms of discrimination such as racism, ableism and homophobia. Relationship breakdown and violence can also worsen women's economic insecurity.

Experiences of economic inequality have lifelong impacts, including an inability to escape and recover from violence, housing insecurity and homelessness, and lower superannuation balances and less security in retirement.

To achieve gender equality, there needs to be a sustained reduction in the gender gaps in pay and retirement incomes. The Government can use its levers to create safe, secure and flexible workplaces; support equitable access to education and skills building; and remove disincentives and inequities that perpetuate occupational and industrial gender segregation and sustained pay and wealth gaps.

See *Data snapshot – economic equality and security* for further analysis.

## What have we heard?

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*'Women's labour force participation and workplace experience is typically worse than their male counterparts. It is characterised by disparity in paid working hours; vertical labour market stratification; horizontal labour market segmentation; the undervaluation of feminised work; insecurity and precarity; and discrimination and disrespect.'*

— Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, final report<sup>65</sup>

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## What we'll do: Australian Government actions

The Government is committed to improving women's economic equality across their lifetimes.

### Action underway

To improve economic equality in women's daily lives, the Government has already made a number of investments and reforms. The Government has:

- ✓ committed to tax relief that supports participation and lowers barriers to work where they matter most – especially for women on low and middle incomes – while delivering a tax cut for all women taxpayers
- ✓ driven transparency and action by amending the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012, enabling the Workplace Gender Equality Agency to publish the gender pay gap of employers with 100 or more employees
- ✓ made gender equality an objective of the Fair Work Act 2009 through the Secure Jobs, Better Pay reforms so the Fair Work Commission can better consider gender equality in its decision-making, and established expert panels on pay equity and the care and community sectors within the Commission
- ✓ supported private sector action to embed gender equality in pay, leadership and opportunities, including in emerging industries like clean energy, and the Equal by 30 campaign on women in the clean energy sector

- ✓ prioritised action on gender segregation of the labour market by recruiting and retaining more women into trades and other occupations through apprenticeship supports, fee-free TAFE places and targets in the Australian Skills Guarantee
- ✓ agreed, with states and territories, to include gender equality as a national priority in the National Skills Agreement, which provides funding to support state and territory skills sectors to deliver skills for critical and emerging industries, including care and support services
- ✓ expanded eligibility to Parenting Payment Single, so that single parents, who are overwhelmingly mothers, can access increased support until their children are 14
- ✓ improved the child support system, implementing legislation to improve the timely collection of child support owed to parents – who are overwhelmingly women – and help prevent future debt among low-income parents.

To achieve gender equality, there needs to be a **sustained reduction** in the **gender gaps in pay and retirement incomes.**



## **What structural change looks like: targeted tax reform to assist with the cost of living and lower barriers to work**

The 2022–23 Tax Expenditures and Insights Statement included – for the first time – distributional analysis of tax expenditures by gender, contributing to the evidence base on interactions between gender, earnings and the tax system. Gender pay and earnings gaps partially drive women’s over representation in lower taxable income deciles, and this contributes to the distribution of relief that is delivered through the tax system.

Although specific action is needed to close gender pay and earnings gaps, tax policy can be designed in a way that is responsive to the gendered distribution of income. The Government is delivering tax reform that aims to incentivise women’s workforce participation and will deliver more tax relief to women. From 1 July 2024, the Government will lower the 19% tax rate to 16% and the 32.5% tax rate to 30%, and lift the \$120,000 threshold to \$135,000 and the \$180,000 threshold to \$190,000.

Under the changes, all 6.5 million women who pay tax will receive a tax cut from 1 July 2024 – leaving them around \$1,650 better off, on average. People in women-dominated occupations, such as teaching, nursing and aged care, are among the most likely to benefit, with over 95% of these taxpayers receiving more tax relief.

Apart from making up a larger share of taxpayers in low and middle income deciles, women tend to be more responsive to changes in their after tax incomes when making decisions about work and care. By directing more tax relief to people on low and middle incomes, the reforms increase the financial reward from taking on additional hours where these incentives matter most – and are estimated to result in an additional 630,000 hours worked per week by women. These changes complement the participation benefits of the Government’s Cheaper Child Care reforms.



## **What structural change looks like: making workplace relations work better for women**

The *Fair Work Act 2009* and Fair Work Commission set out Australians' rights at work and govern how workplace relations decisions are made. Historically, these structures have not been designed to consider the unique experiences of women – including the fact women are more likely to work in feminised industries, and in jobs with less security and less pay. This has made it much more difficult for women to use these structures to support their claims for equal pay and conditions such as flexible work. The Government has reformed the *Fair Work Act 2009* to ensure the workplace relations system works better for women. Key changes include:

- making gender equality an objective of the *Fair Work Act 2009* and setting up expert panels in the Fair Work Commission on gender pay equity and the care and community sector
- banning pay secrecy
- removing barriers to bargaining in low-paid, feminised sectors through the supported bargaining stream, to boost both wages and productivity
- reforming how the Fair Work Commission considers equal remuneration to remove the need for a 'reliable male comparator' as reference point for value – a practice that had constrained the commission from assessing the value of work in feminised occupations and industries
- introducing an entitlement to 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave
- introducing a workplace duty to protect employees, prospective employees, and persons conducting a business from third party violence and sexual harassment
- making breastfeeding, gender identity and experience of family and domestic violence protected attributes.

The Fair Work Commission is now supported to make gender equality-informed decisions about pay and conditions, and can enforce additional workplace protections for women. Changes like this demonstrate the value of viewing the Government's legislative and institutional structures through a gender lens, in this case helping ensure the workplace relations framework operates fairly for all workers.

### **In addition, the Government will continue to:**

- take further action to address gender segregation of industries and occupations, including through responding to recommendations of the Pathway to Diversity in STEM Review and improving the diversity of the cyber security workforce through the Cyber Security Strategy
- end the ParentsNext program and implement a replacement program that genuinely responds to the needs of parents of young children and supports them to prepare for or return to work, while prioritising their caring roles
- implement recommendations of the Workplace Gender Equality Act Review to drive action across the private sector on gender equality and collect data to understand how employees experience multiple and intersecting forms of bias, discrimination, and disadvantage at work
- scope a First Nations Economic Partnership with the Coalition of the Peaks and other organisations, to boost labour force participation and economic outcomes – including for First Nations women
- improve the economic outcomes and safety of migrant women through system reform outlined in the Migration Strategy
- support women's access to housing through the development of the National Housing and Homelessness Plan, building on delivery of the Social Housing Accelerator and the establishment of the Housing Australia Future Fund, which also includes targeted support for women and children
- consider longer term improvements to the child support scheme, looking at issues like non-compliance as a means of financial abuse, whether the child support formula reflects the current costs of raising children in Australia, and what can be done to support parents where private collect arrangements have broken down.



## What structural change looks like: addressing industry gender segregation

Workforce gender segregation contributes to the gender pay gap, as men continue to dominate in industries and occupations with higher earnings. A highly gendered workforce also increases the risk of workforce shortages. Around 65% of occupations in shortage on the Skills Priority List have workforces that are over 80% men or women.<sup>66</sup> Government's efforts to address this include action across education, through procurement and in priority sectors. Fee-free TAFE targets priority groups including women facing economic insecurity, women undertaking study in non-traditional fields, people receiving income support payments and unpaid carers. The National Skills Agreement includes gender equality as one of the agreed inaugural national priorities and the Government has developed a new Australian Apprenticeship service delivery model with additional support for women in male dominated trades. The Australian Skills Guarantee includes targets for women for suppliers to Australian Government-funded major construction projects. At an industry level, the Government has joined the Equal by 30 campaign, which aims to close the gender gap across Australia's clean energy sector, and prioritised diversity and gender equality through the National Construction Industry Forum.

**A highly gendered  
workforce increases  
the risk of workforce  
shortages.**

## Future directions

To further accelerate progress, directions for future effort include:

- examining the gender and care interaction within the superannuation system to narrow retirement income gender gaps
- examining the social security system to better understand the impacts on gender equality and the intersections of safety, income support, and care for children and family members. This could include drawing on insights from the work of the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee, which may consider the impact of economic inclusion policies on people with barriers to work (including people with caring responsibilities) and on gender equality in reports to Government
- building capabilities of employment services to help women overcome barriers to work and break cycles of disadvantage, and ensuring employment services systems (such as Workforce Australia, Disability Employment Services, and the New Remote Jobs Program) can support women's economic participation
- ensuring housing policies are responsive to women, particularly those experiencing the highest need
- developing and promoting pathways for First Nations girls to access quality education that meets their needs and aspirations
- continuing efforts to improve job readiness, upskilling, workforce participation and economic security of women aged 40 and over
- exploring further options to embed gender equity in all forms of education, from early years to tertiary systems
- action to embed gender equality to support access and retention for women in emerging and growth industries, like clean energy, cyber security and naval ship and submarine building.

## **What others can do:** action outside of government

Families and schools can encourage kids' interest in all sorts of subjects, sports, hobbies, skills and occupations, making sure that children know that all options are open to them, and not making assumptions about their current or future skills based on their gender.

All employers have a role to play in supporting workplace gender equality, including to close the gender pay gap and reduce gender bias and discrimination in their workplace. While Government can implement enabling reforms, it is up to organisations to adopt policies, practices and structures that will assist women to achieve economic equality. This also includes addressing forms of discrimination that intersect with sexism, such as racism, homophobia and ableism.

Workplaces can act on their gender pay gap by conducting pay audits and committing to address their findings. They can address discriminatory approaches to hiring, promotion and access to professional development. Workplaces can also implement policies that respond to complaints about sexism and harassment in the workplace, including trauma-informed processes and providing access to expert support. Employers can create positive and respectful workplaces, including training staff to understand and respond to lower level sexism and harassment (such as sexist jokes and ignoring women in meetings) as this can become normalised in a workplace and have a detrimental impact on women's wellbeing and workplace engagement.<sup>67</sup>

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency has resources to support gender best practice by employers.

To further advance gender equality in entrepreneurship and business, investment funds and philanthropists can implement their own gender responsive procurement and investment processes.

## How we'll measure progress

The Government will measure and report on the following outcomes and indicators to track whether change is happening or to highlight where progress has stalled and additional effort is required.

### **Ambition:**

- Close the gender pay gap.
- Close the retirement income gender gap.

### **Key outcomes:**

- the gender pay gap closes
- industries and occupations are less gender segregated
- employers support an end to gender discrimination, and sexual harassment and violence in the workplace
- the retirement income gap closes
- women have access to homelessness services and secure long-term housing
- the proportion of women-owned businesses increases.

**All employers have a role to play** in supporting workplace gender equality, including to **close the gender pay gap** and reduce gender bias and discrimination in their workplace.

## Data snapshot – economic equality and security

In 2023, Australia had a **12% gender pay gap**, with women working full-time earning, on average, \$238.00 less per week than men.<sup>68</sup> This **pay gap is present across all industries** and varies significantly across different locations in Australia. The gap ranges from 5.2% in public administration and safety, to 22.7% professional, scientific and technical services.<sup>69</sup>

Australia's median gender pay gap is 19% for organisations with 100 or more employees, if overtime, bonuses, additional payments and the annualised wages of casual and part time workers are included in calculations. The **gender pay gap can be wider for women who experience other forms of discrimination**, such as First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse women and women with disability. These women can face a range of challenges seeking and progressing at work.<sup>70</sup>

**Drivers** of the gender pay and earnings gaps are **interrelated** and include:

- Gender segregation in the workforce, with female-dominated industries, such as the care and support economy, often characterised by low pay and job insecurity, while male dominated industries, like construction and mining, benefit from higher pay.<sup>71</sup> Within the broader Australian workforce, women are equally as likely as men to ask for a promotion or pay rise in their current job, but are less likely than men to be successful in their request.<sup>72</sup>
- Caring responsibilities for children and other family members – for example, women in Australia face a 'motherhood penalty' where their earnings are reduced by an average of 55% in the first 5 years of parenthood.<sup>73</sup> Women are often expected to trade off paid work for unpaid caring responsibilities.
- Women participating in paid work at lower rates than men. Women in Australia are much less likely to work full-time than women in many other OECD countries.<sup>74</sup> They are more likely to be underemployed, and be in insecure work.<sup>75</sup> Women are also more likely to retire earlier than men, which may be related to caring responsibilities or health challenges – this is explored further under Priority area 4.

- Gender discrimination, which is broadly defined and extends from systemic issues like the undervaluation of feminised work, through to workplace practices like allocation of less meaningful work to women, fewer opportunities for promotion, approaches to hiring and perceptions in pay negotiations.<sup>76</sup>
- Workplace harassment and violence, particularly in male dominated industries, which means women can feel unable to thrive and participate in the workplace. A 2022 Australian Human Rights Commission survey of over 10,000 people in Australia found that more than 2 in 5 women and one in 4 men have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the past 5 years.<sup>77</sup>
- In 2018, workplace sexual harassment cost the Australian economy \$2.6 billion in lost productivity.<sup>78</sup>

Women have **different experiences of economic equality** in the workforce.

- First Nations women are paid less on average than non-Indigenous women and First Nations men.<sup>79</sup>
- Women with disability who are employed are less likely to be employed in full-time jobs (46% compared to 71.7% of employed men with disability),<sup>80</sup> and have a larger weekly income gap than women without a disability, equating to \$363 (42.1%).<sup>81</sup>
- Migrant and refugee women are more likely to work in low income, low skill, insecure jobs,<sup>82</sup> and culturally and linguistically diverse women also have a significantly lower rate of workforce participation compared to culturally and linguistically diverse men.<sup>83</sup>
- In 2022, of the 10 localities with the highest gender pay gaps, 9 were in regional Australia.<sup>84</sup> The average pay gap in 2021 between women in major cities and regional and remote women was \$82/week.<sup>85</sup>
- Women who have been incarcerated experience particular barriers to work, given women are more likely to seek employment in care and support workforces, which are also more likely to include criminal record checks.

The gender pay gap, its drivers, as well as life events like relationship breakdown and experiences of domestic and family violence, contribute to **women being more likely to live in poverty than men**.<sup>86</sup> Households whose main earner is a woman have a higher average poverty rate than households headed by a male main earner (18% compared to 10%),<sup>87</sup> and the majority of recipients of most **income support payments** are women – for example, Parenting Payment Single (94.2%), Parenting Payment Partnered (90.3%), Carer Allowance (74.6%), Carer Payment (71.1%), ABSTUDY Living Allowance (59.6%), and Age Pension (55.5%).<sup>88</sup>

Women experience **poverty differently**.

- First Nations women are over-represented in most of the lower weekly income brackets and under-represented in the highest income brackets.<sup>89</sup>
- Divorced mothers are much more likely than divorced fathers to experience financial stress, with the financial vulnerabilities of divorced women being long-lasting after separation.<sup>90</sup>
- More than a third of single mothers live in poverty compared to 18% of single fathers.<sup>91</sup>

While women fare worse than men on most economic indicators, there are **gender gaps in education** where boys and men are worse off. Results from the 2023 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) indicate that **boys are falling behind girls academically**.

- Year 3 cohort data shows that the average NAPLAN scores of girls are significantly higher than boys in writing, and the percentage of girls at the 'needs additional support' level was lower than boys across all 4 literacy domains.<sup>92</sup>
- This academic gender disparity continues to widen as students progress through primary and secondary school (with numeracy being a key outlier where boys outperform girls).
- Men are also under-represented at university, comprising only 39.5% of domestic enrolments.<sup>93</sup>

**Access to capital** continues to remain a significant barrier for **women-led small businesses**.

- In 2022, almost one in 4 company founders were women.<sup>94</sup>
- In 2021, a survey found 43% of women-owned, women-led businesses identified access to capital as a central barrier to growth.<sup>95</sup>

**Inequalities compound over the life course**, with the gender pay gap, lower earnings, lower wealth more broadly, and higher lifetime likelihood of receiving government payments, meaning that **women aged 60 to 65** have, on average, **25.1% less superannuation** than men of the same age.<sup>96</sup>

These inequalities over a life also mean that women may experience **housing insecurity and homelessness**, which becomes more acute in retirement. Many women face additional challenges of finding safe and secure long-term housing earlier in life as well. This is particularly evident for single women, who experience additional financial barriers simply because they don't have the economic security of a dual income relationship.<sup>97</sup> This conversely impacts on women who are in dual income relationships, who may also be **unable to leave violent relationships** due to a lack of **economic independence and financial security or limited alternative accommodation options**.<sup>98</sup>

- Between 2016 and 2021, women accounted for 81.7% of the increase in people experiencing homelessness.<sup>99</sup>
- Older women are one of the fastest growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness. These women are more likely than older men to be in supported accommodation for homelessness, staying temporarily with other households or living in severely crowded dwellings.<sup>100</sup>



# Priority area 4: Health

Over many decades in Australia and around the world, women’s control over their health has been challenged, especially their sexual and reproductive health. Women also face gender bias in the health system, which can prevent or delay their health conditions being properly diagnosed and treated. Men experience challenges too, including attitudes and stereotypes that can deter them from accessing health services.

Equality cannot be achieved when women’s choices are constrained and men, women and gender diverse people are not receiving the health care they need.

A lack of support for women’s health not only affects their everyday wellbeing, it also impacts how they participate and thrive at work. Women who experience violence also have poorer health outcomes and the health system plays an important role in supporting women to leave and recover from violence. For First Nations women and girls, the enduring impact of intergenerational trauma and lack of access to culturally safe health care persistently contribute to poorer health outcomes. Migrant and refugee women; women with disability; culturally and linguistically diverse women; and people in regional, remote and rural communities also face additional barriers due to religious or cultural values and beliefs, language and communication challenges or a lack of access. Overall, men have much higher rates of suicide than women. Men are often expected to be emotionally stable, strong and self-reliant, which may prevent them from seeking help.<sup>101</sup>

To achieve gender equality, the health system needs to respond to the needs of women, men and gender diverse people. The Government must use its levers and work with states and territories to ensure all Australians can exercise choice and have healthy lives.

See *Data snapshot – health* for further analysis.

## What have we heard?

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*‘Whether it is health, medicine, housing, the office – it’s all designed for men. Air conditioning, desks are set for men. Medicines and treatments are tested on men. It’s like we don’t exist. So taking a gender-informed approach to tackling the systems and processes that hold women back is crucial.’*

— Respondent, public survey April 2023

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## **What we'll do:** Australian Government actions

The Australian Government leads a national approach on health through policies and programs, subsidies for health services and medicines, regulation of medical devices and treatments and work with states and territories to deliver a vision for greater health and wellbeing for all Australians – particularly those at greatest risk of poor health.



### **What structural change looks like: women's health**

Research indicates that closing the gap in women's health – namely through providing better, more targeted and effective treatments for women, improving care delivery and addressing a lack of data – could save the global economy USD \$1 trillion.<sup>102</sup> The Australian Government's National Women's Health Advisory Council will provide insights across these areas. In parallel, the Government is making targeted investments and broader health system reforms that aim to improve health outcomes for women.

As a targeted intervention for women's health, the Government has established 22 Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain clinics across every state and territory. The clinics will help women get the answers and help they need, and reduce the average time of 6 to 8 years that women spend waiting for a diagnosis. These clinics will help the one in 7 women who have endometriosis get early access to multidisciplinary intervention, care and treatment.

At a health system level, the Government has introduced a new Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) item for general practitioner consultations that are 60 minutes or longer. The longer consultations will provide improved access and affordability for patients with chronic conditions and complex needs. While this is a change available to all, historically longer MBS consultations are used by women.

To address gender inequities in research funding, in October 2022 the Government introduced targets for the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) to award equal numbers of investigator grants to women and men at senior levels of the Investigator Grant Scheme. By December 2023, the NHMRC had achieved gender equity in the scheme for the first time, reaching its target of 50:50 funding for men and women researchers.

## Actions underway

To ensure Australians have healthier lives, the Government has already made a number of investments and reforms, building on the *National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030* and the *National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030*. The Government has:

- ✓ established the National Women's Health Advisory Council to provide the Government with advice and recommendations to improve health outcomes for women and girls and address gender bias in the health system
- ✓ created a NHMRC target to award equal numbers of Investigator Grants to women and men
- ✓ established Endometriosis and Pelvic Pain Clinics to provide expert, multidisciplinary care to women seeking specialised care.

## In addition, the Government will continue to:

- implement *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031* to improve health and mental health outcomes for people with disability
- consider gender impacts in any future reforms to Australian Government health funding through Medicare and state and territory agreements under the National Health Reform Agreement so health systems can cover health needs equitably
- consider reforms to make access to sexual and reproductive health care easier
- support data that improves understanding of health outcomes for women
- develop a strategy to improve health outcomes for LGBTIQ+ people.

## Future directions

To further accelerate progress, directions for future effort include:

- further research, awareness and policy responses on the impacts of reproductive health issues and access to services, particularly in remote areas, and including peri-menopause and menopause, on women's health and wellbeing and economic security
- enhancing the evidence base used to support the safety, efficacy and quality of medicines and medical devices
- enhancing training for healthcare workers to identify and support victim-survivors of family, domestic and sexual violence
- improving culturally responsive health services and support for culturally and linguistically diverse women
- partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop and implement strategies, programs and initiatives to improve health and wellbeing that work towards the *Closing the Gap Priority Reforms* and socio-economic outcomes and targets 1, 2 and 14.

## What others can do: action outside of government

Within families and social groups, men can be encouraged and assisted to seek support for their health concerns. Men being open and transparent about health challenges, including mental health, can help break down the stigma associated with help seeking and shift gender norms.

The healthcare sector, including health care professionals, medical institutions, medical bodies and insurers, can identify and minimise gender bias in health practice, research and funding. This includes promoting gender equitable practices in leadership, training, clinical care and diagnosis. Health and training institutions, both public and private, must incorporate gender considerations into their policies and programs, acknowledging the varying risks, impacts and access to services experienced by different genders.

Health services can employ a strength-based model that focusses on empowering and harnessing the strengths of First Nations women and migrant and refugee women, and ensure health professionals are supported to engage culturally safe approaches.

Health institutions, employers and society can also play a key role to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health and seeking support, through awareness-raising and education initiatives in their communities, addressing barriers to help-seeking, and encouraging more men to come forward for support when they need it.

Employers can also support women to manage their health needs in the workplace, especially when related to chronic conditions and reproductive health, such as menstruation, menopause, and endometriosis.

## How we'll measure progress

The Australian Government will measure and report on the following ambitions and outcomes to demonstrate that change is happening. Where applicable, these ambitions and outcomes align with the *National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030*, the *National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030*.

**Ambition:** Gender equity in healthcare access and outcomes.

### Key outcomes:

- the health care system recognises and is responsive to gendered health issues, and provides women and men with increased access to information, diagnosis, treatment and services
- women have choice and access to safe and affordable maternal, sexual and reproductive health care
- the mental health of women, men and gender diverse people improves.

## Data snapshot – health

Sex and gender are key determinants of health and wellbeing, and men and women have very different experiences of **mental and physical illness** and the **healthcare system** in Australia.<sup>103</sup>

- Around one in 3 women experience trauma in childbirth, with one in 8 of these women experiencing symptoms of post-traumatic stress.<sup>104</sup>
- Approximately one in 7 women by the age of 44 to 49 are diagnosed with endometriosis – with diagnosis taking on average between 6 to 8 years.<sup>105</sup>
- Men experience higher rates of heart disease and more men die from heart disease than women.<sup>106</sup> Women who suffer a heart attack are half as likely to receive proper treatments and twice as likely to die as men.<sup>107</sup>

Medical research, diagnostic tools and treatment have historically been based on male physiology, and inaccurate and sometimes harmful assumptions about women's physiology. This means that health care providers may **disregard, minimise or not believe women's symptoms** and that knowledge about women's health has not been appropriately researched. Women, girls and gender diverse people often face challenges when it comes to getting the right diagnosis and treatment for health issues. Doctors may not recognise the problem, get it wrong, or take a long time to figure it out. As a result, women do not receive **adequate treatment**. Gender bias also impacts men. Research shows men admitted to hospital for illnesses that predominantly affect women, such as some metabolic disorders, face higher risk of death than women.<sup>108</sup>



While women are more likely to be diagnosed with depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and eating disorders and be hospitalised for self-harm, the **suicide rate of men is more than 3 times that of women in Australia**.<sup>109</sup> The suicide rate of First Nations people is approximately 2.5 times higher than non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>110</sup>

Women are more likely to have **higher costs for health care**, for example they are more likely to experience a chronic condition or see a general practitioner.<sup>111</sup> In addition to the cost of accessing health care, poor health can also impact economic security. Alongside physical and emotional impacts, the high cost of fertility treatments adds financial stress. It is estimated that 60% of Australian women will experience mild to moderate menopausal symptoms and 20% will have severe symptoms. The economic impact of menopause is estimated to add up to \$15.2 billion in lost income and superannuation for each year of early retirement.<sup>112</sup>

Women who experience **family and domestic violence** are more likely to report **poorer mental health and general health**.<sup>113</sup> The impact of family and domestic violence on women's illness, disability and premature death is particularly prevalent for young women and pregnant women.<sup>114</sup>

First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, migrant and refugee women, women with disability, people in regional, remote and rural communities, and sex and gender diverse people also face additional barriers to accessing **appropriate health care services** that are able to cater to their needs and provide **tailored support**.

# Priority area 5:

## Leadership, representation and decision-making

There have been remarkable improvements in women's representation in Australia's public life and key leadership roles over recent decades, particularly at all levels of government.<sup>115</sup> This is the result of concerted efforts to boost representation, but there is still a long way to go.

Equality cannot be achieved without women from a range of backgrounds meaningfully participating in decision-making and public life – in communities, business and government.

Perceptions of women's roles and capabilities, caring responsibilities and undervaluing the importance of lived experience in designing systems and policy responses contribute to women's under-representation in leadership and decision-making roles. Women can be deterred from participating in public spheres due to the abuse and violence they experience, including sexual violence and online abuse. Sexism, which is often compounded by other forms of discrimination and prejudice, can limit opportunities and career progression, as well as representation in leadership.<sup>116</sup>

When women are not involved in decision-making and design processes, systems, policies, services, technology and infrastructure will not meet their needs. It can limit women's access to resources and services, especially for women in rural and remote areas, women with disability, women living in poverty and women who do not have English as a first language. This creates extra work across the community to bridge access gaps. Given the unequal impact of crises like climate change and conflict on women, it is particularly critical women have a seat at the table in efforts to address these challenges.

To achieve gender equality, more women, including First Nations women and women from diverse backgrounds, need to be represented in decision-making and design, leadership and in public life. This would also help shift gender attitudes and stereotypes. The Government must represent the population, as a key decision-maker, and can role model the benefits of diversity in leadership.

See *Data snapshot – leadership, representation and decision-making* for further analysis.

## What have we heard?

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*'The Australian Government must undertake a long-term, targeted and deliberate investment program to ensure women are leading and building the economy in equal measure to men.'*

— Women's Economic Equality Taskforce, final Report<sup>117</sup>

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## What we'll do: Australian Government actions

Leading by example is critical for the Government, within parliament, Australian Government boards, and the Australian Public Service. Policy informed by the voices and lived experiences of diverse people ensures the Government makes good decisions.

### Actions underway

To improve representation, leadership and decision-making, the Government has already made a number of investments and reforms. The Government has:

- ✓ provided funding to support leadership programs for women to run for parliament to help continue progress made so that more women are able to enter into political roles
- ✓ supported delivery of Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices), led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner
- ✓ supported more women to participate in sport safely and promoted greater women's representation in sports leadership roles through government grants, and worked with state and territory governments to establish targets for women in leadership in sport
- ✓ been a committed global champion of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, which aims to ensure equal participation of women at all levels of decision-making
- ✓ in response to Recommendation 7 of the Australian Law Reform Commission's Report, *Without Fear or Favour: Judicial Impartiality and the Law on Bias*, the Government has implemented a transparent and merit-based judicial appointments process which ensures all candidates from a diversity of backgrounds have the opportunity to apply.

### In addition, the Government will continue to:

- set targets for gender representation on Australian Government boards to drive gender balance in chair positions and at the individual board level
- develop a new international gender equality strategy, recognising gender equality as central to Australia's foreign policy, international development, humanitarian, trade and security efforts.



### What structural change looks like: *Respect@Work*

For many women, discriminatory and unsafe workplaces impact not just their safety and wellbeing, but also their career opportunities, retention and progression. In 2020, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner inquired and reported on sexual harassment in Australian workplaces. The *Respect@Work* report revealed the extent to which workplace settings in Australia fail to prevent and respond to sexual harassment and related unlawful conduct. It found that 41% of women surveyed had experienced sexual harassment at work, and their harassment had impacted on their safety, wellbeing and ability to contribute. The Government is implementing all recommendations of the report, which include changes that mean workplaces now have a positive duty to prevent sexual harassment. This reform is supported by investment in resources for business, funding for services that provide advice and support to working women and *Fair Work Act 2009* reforms. The Government's reforms help create structural changes to how workplaces operate, and ensure that women will be safer at work.

**Media** has an important role in **elevating diverse talent and leaders**, delivering diverse stories and **promoting women's reporting** and participation in highly visible and influential areas, including sport.

## Future directions

To further accelerate progress, directions for future effort include:

- further work with the private sector to share good practice and learn what works, and encourage companies to boost representation on private boards and in executive positions
- working across all levels of government to identify opportunities to deliver on the priority reforms under Closing the Gap and ensuring First Nations women can be front and centre of driving change and gender equality
- ensuring gender is considered and women can lead action on climate change and are represented in disaster and crisis mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery efforts, including in leadership and advisory positions
- exploring options to improve the representation in media and advertising of the diversity of women and gender roles more broadly, including through improved media literacy.

## What others can do: action outside of government

To ensure that leadership reflects the diversity of Australia's population, community organisations, sporting and professional bodies, and industries can implement targets to achieve increased gender diversity and representation of women in leadership positions. Setting targets is an effective tool for spurring action and ensuring transparency and accountability. Targets must be supported by measures and programs that address barriers to leadership and offer training, networking, mentoring and scholarship opportunities to women, as well as succession and pipeline planning.

To increase representation and diversity in decision-making more broadly, organisations should be consulting widely, looking for gender balance in design and delivery teams, and committing to representative samples in research. Employers, particularly in large companies, have a critical role in ensuring gender equity in leadership – in C-suite positions, and on boards. Representation and visibility, particularly in ASX300 leadership positions, increases the likelihood of women considering leadership as a viable pathway.

Media is also significant in this priority area, as 'you can't be what you can't see'. Media has an important role in elevating diverse talent and leaders, delivering diverse stories and promoting women's reporting and participation in highly visible and influential areas, including sport.

## How we'll measure progress

The Australian Government will measure and report on the following ambitions and outcomes to demonstrate that change is happening.

**Ambition:** Close leadership and representation gender gaps.

**Key outcomes:**

- there are more women across all levels of political, judicial, and public service leadership and decision-making
- there are more women across all levels of non-government leadership and decision-making
- women's participation in sport increases across all levels, including in positions of leadership
- women are recognised equally through the Australian honours system
- more women influence and are represented in media.

## Data snapshot – leadership, representation and decision-making

It is critical for governments to represent the diversity of the population they serve. Of Australia's 31 prime ministers, **only one has been a woman**. Promisingly, the 47th Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia saw 44.5% of seats across both chambers held by women,<sup>118</sup> **the highest number of women in an Australian Parliament** on record. This is reflected in government administration, with the representation of women in APS Senior Executive Service roles increasing from 26% in 2001 to 53.4% in June 2023. Similarly, in 2023, 51.6% of people on Australian Government boards were women.

Women also made up 49.4% of Order of Australia (General Division) recipients in the combined Australia Day and King's Birthday honours lists, which is the highest proportion on record.<sup>119</sup> As at June 2023, 44.9% of judicial officers in Australia are women.<sup>120</sup>

In the private sector, there has also been change in recent years, but there is much more to do. In 2023, women made up **only 9%** of **CEOs in the ASX300**, and more than 4 in every 5 CEO 'pipeline' roles were held by men.<sup>121</sup> At the current rate, it could take up to **50 years** to achieve gender parity in CEO roles in corporate Australia.<sup>122</sup>

Representative leadership is about more than who is leading businesses and governments. Diversity in leadership at a community level is not well tracked but is critical – particularly in **First Nations communities**, where leadership supports belonging and connectedness to land.

Women have been historically under-represented in **sports, media and the arts**, particularly in relation to how these are publicly presented and appreciated:

- Women's sport does not get as much airtime as men's sport and women currently make up 18% of sports journalists, athlete pay disparities exist, and women are more prone to suffering common sports injuries.<sup>123</sup> These barriers affect the value placed on women and girls in sport and lead to inequitable participation, training, development and leadership opportunities.
- Over 70% of Australian art school graduates are women, yet women and gender diverse people continue to be significantly under-represented in leadership positions in the cultural sector, and in the collections and exhibitions of major visual arts institutions.<sup>124</sup>
- Women in the Australian music industry face high rates of sexual harassment, sexual harm and bullying. First Nations people face additional barriers in the music industry, including a lack of airtime, exclusion from line-ups and being under-represented in influential roles.<sup>125</sup>
- Women are quoted much less frequently in the media than men. When they are quoted, it is more likely to be in articles written by women than by men.<sup>126</sup>

Some groups of women face even greater barriers to being represented in leadership positions in Australian organisations and public life:

- Only 16% of women with disability feel represented in leadership roles, compared with 23% of men with disability.<sup>127</sup>
- The proportion of culturally diverse female ASX leaders doubled in the decade to 2015 – but they were appointed as ASX directors at half the rate of non-culturally and racially excluded women.<sup>128</sup>
- Only 5% of senior leaders in Australia represent the 24% of Australians from non-European and First Nations backgrounds.<sup>129</sup>
- One in 3 women experience online abuse in a work context. Rates of abuse are even higher for women with a public online or media profile, women with disability, younger women, and those who identify as LGBTIQ+.<sup>130</sup>

**Diverse leadership and representation** are important when communities and nations face events and crises that have disproportionate or specific impacts on women and other parts of the population. This includes climate change, conflict and disaster.

Women face greater impacts from **climate change**. In Australia women are more likely to live in housing unable to cope with extreme temperature and experience higher rates of ill health and death as a result, especially older women.<sup>131</sup>

In times of **natural disaster**, natural hazards, mitigation and recovery, women face **increased unpaid care and domestic work** due to existing roles, responsibilities and cultural norms. **Violence against women increases** during and after natural disasters.<sup>132</sup> The onset of the **COVID-19 pandemic** also coincided with the onset or **escalation of violence and abuse**.<sup>133</sup>

## The Australian Government as a model employer

Throughout each priority area in this Strategy, employers are identified as key actors to support gender equality. The Australian Government, as a major employer, has an important role to play in modelling how employers can best support gender equality.

The Australian Public Service (APS) is leading the way through:

- achieving gender balance in the APS through target setting and data collection
- improving rates of staff working flexibility across departments
- improving APS First Nations recruitment to Senior Executive Service levels
- increasing the APS parental leave to 18 weeks for both parents from 2027
- evaluating the *Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2021–26* to ensure ongoing work is aligned with Working for Women and to accelerate the pace of change
- seeking opportunities for overarching structural improvements that support gender equality.

The APS recognises that work to address gender equality cannot be siloed. The APS will ensure alignment between its work on gender equality with other diversity and inclusion strategies and policies to address the experiences of all APS employees who have faced discrimination and disadvantage in the workplace.

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency will continue to capture and use private and public sector employers' gender equality performance data to provide best practice examples and support organisations. The Government is committed to using this and other data from the APS to learn what drives gender inequality and what does or doesn't work, so it can improve – drawing on the experience of the APS to not just improve how the public service drives change, but what can be done more broadly to support women in workplaces across Australia.

## How ***Working for Women*** will be delivered

To meet the vision and ambitions set out in this Strategy, the Government is committed to continuing to consult closely and deepen its engagement with women and gender equality experts in Australia. Using decision-making processes, Government will drive action and make sure policies support efforts to achieve gender equality. Tracking progress and regular reporting will provide accountability for action, ensuring progress remains on track.

Government also needs to demonstrate best practice gender equality – not only in the policies, programs and services it provides, but also by showing leadership as an employer.

It is critical for Government to **hear the views** of **experts** and **the lived experience** of women to **deliver practical changes** to improve gender equality.

## Governance and engagement

In the Australian Government, the **Minister for Women** will oversee whole-of-government implementation of the Strategy, although all Ministers are responsible for delivering on the Government's commitment to gender equality. The **Office for Women** reports to the Minister for Women and is the central gender equality institution within the Australian Public Service (APS). The Government has strengthened the Office for Women to put women and gender equality at the centre of policy and decision-making, and to lead implementation of the Strategy in the APS.

Other key parts of the Australian Government's architecture to achieve gender equality include: the **Workplace Gender Equality Agency** which reports directly to the Minister for Women; the **Sex Discrimination Commissioner** in the Australian Human Rights Commission, as well as the other commissioners who focus on human rights and discrimination; the **Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner**; and the **eSafety Commissioner**. These institutions are key to the success of the Strategy through their roles in driving efforts to end gender discrimination across the country, improving equality in Australian workplaces and improving women's safety.

It is critical for government to hear the **views of experts and the lived experience of women** to deliver practical changes to improve gender equality. The Government will continue to invest in women's advocacy to elevate issues affecting women's safety and economic equality in Australia and to deliver expert and strategic advice to Government on the solutions required to meet the Strategy's vision. The voices of First Nations women; migrant and refugee women; women with disability; and those living in regional, rural and remote areas will be central to guide progress under this Strategy, ensuring Government takes a genuinely intersectional approach to women's policy.

The Government will also establish a regular **survey** to hear directly from women about their lives, concerns and priorities. A **new research partnership** will help build the evidence base on what works to achieve gender equality, especially in relation to driving economic equality. This will help drive progress in Government and support public-private collaboration on gender equality.

## Implementation

Gender equality is affected by the work of every Government portfolio. The Government will take a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to achieve long-term progress, guided by the Strategy's vision, ambitions and priority areas.

### **Putting gender analysis at the centre of decision-making and investment**

The Government has put gender equality at the centre of public policy and the Budget through the reintroduction of gender responsive budgeting. Gender responsive budgeting embeds consideration of gender impacts through Budget processes, so the Government can make informed and practical decisions that close gender gaps and improve the lives of women and men.

The Government will continue to improve the practices, processes and tools for gender responsive budgeting, which is a key mechanism for ensuring that Government policies and investments support this Strategy. This includes enhancing intersectional analysis as part of gender responsive budgeting processes. The system is still in the initial stages of implementation – when it is more bedded down and tested, Government can consider options to ensure that the system is robust and sustainable.

Gender analysis and consideration need to be embedded in key Government functions beyond the Budget process. This includes new strategies, agreements with states and territories, Government reviews, consultations and research, evaluation processes, and internal consultancy. The Government will explore options to build on current approaches to using its purchasing power to encourage action on gender equality outcomes through procurement, while maintaining consistency with Australia's international government procurement trade commitments.

The Office for Women is responsible for supporting the capability of the APS to embed gender analysis in its work through its advice and the guidance it produces, and will focus its efforts on the Strategy's priority areas. All APS departments are responsible for leadership on gender equality within their policy areas and ensuring staff have the skills, information and resources to deliver high quality gender analysis, and departments must invest in the uplift required.



## **What structural change looks like: using Government procurement to drive gender equality**

Government awards an estimated \$70 billion annually on goods and services, and this is a prime opportunity to boost women's economic equality.

Through the Workplace Gender Equality Procurement Principles, relevant businesses that employ 100 or more people must be compliant with the *Workplace Gender Equality Agency Act 2012* in order to be eligible to win some Government work. Compliance requires employers to meet gender equality standards, report to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency on their performance against Gender Equality Indicators, and communicate their performance to employees, shareholders and governing bodies. From 1 April 2023, employers with 500 or more employees were required to have policies or strategies in place to support the 6 gender equality indicators in the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*. The indicators cover the gender composition of governing bodies and of the workforce, equal remuneration, flexibility and care friendly work arrangements, workplace consultation on gender equality, and efforts to prevent and address sexual harassment.

Government will also introduce a requirement for businesses with 500 or more employees to commit to – and achieve – workplace targets against at least three of the Gender Equality Indicators, in order to win government work.

To support women owned and led businesses, the Government will introduce a public, searchable supplier register to identify women owned and led business. The register will also track and monitor Government contracts being awarded to women-owned and led businesses, and allow for these businesses to register their willingness to supply to government. The register will help identify relevant suppliers for Government, and will support development of future actions by building the evidence base on the experiences of women owned and led businesses navigating Government procurement processes.

## Reporting framework: tracking progress

The Government will track, measure and report on progress under the Strategy through a reporting framework that provides specificity about what success looks like, what steps the Australian Government needs to take to get there and how the Government will know if it is reaching its goals. **The reporting framework will guide this work over the 10-year life of the Strategy.**

The **foundation** and **priority areas** in the reporting framework illuminate the areas where change is needed. The **ambitions** describe what must be met to achieve the vision of the Strategy. The **outcomes** describe what success will look like and are supported by **indicators** that describe what information and data will be used to monitor progress. **Actions that drive change** in the reporting framework outline where Government and others can focus effort and attention in order to achieve progress on the outcomes. Data measures will be disaggregated by sex or gender and, where possible, further disaggregated by specific priority cohorts. Data measures will also continue to evolve and be refined over the life of the Strategy, as new data becomes available. The Government will release a **baseline data report** within the Strategy's first year of publication. This report will link ambitions, outcomes and indicators in the reporting framework with the current state and nature of gender inequality in Australia, and will be used as a baseline for measuring progress.

### Monitoring and public reporting tools and reviews

The Government will use a number of tools to report on the impact of the Strategy and broader progress towards achieving gender equality. These include:

- the **Status of Women Report Card**, which will be updated annually to report on the status of key outcomes and indicators under the Strategy
- the **Women's Budget Statement**, which will outline the actions and investments being made by Government in annual budgets to reach ambitions under the Strategy
- **Departmental Annual Reports**, where Australian Government agencies will report on their efforts to achieve gender equality and build gender analysis capability.

There will be **two reviews** of the Strategy, which will be published at the mid-point and at the end of the Strategy in 2034.

## Focusing on the evidence

The reporting framework will draw on data and information sources available across government.

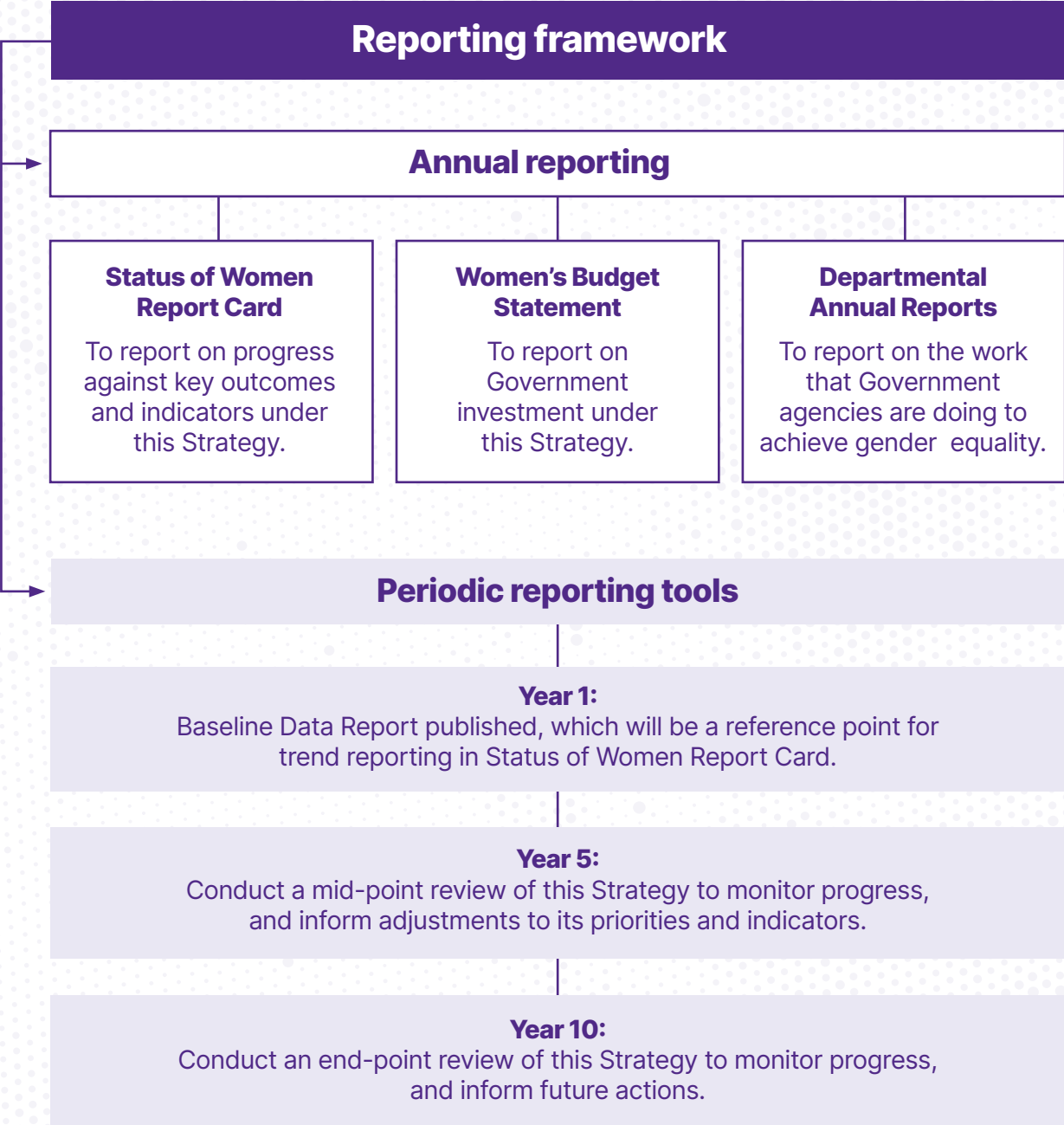
A robust evidence base will be required to identify the most effective ways to achieve gender equality. The Government will improve the use of the data that is available, collect new data where needed and develop tools to present an accurate and nuanced understanding of gender equality in Australia. A gender data action plan, complementing the Government's *Data and Digital Government Strategy*, will further support these efforts by building data and data analytics capabilities. The Government is also implementing reforms outlined in the 2021 review of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* that will build on the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's role in collecting and reporting on employer data on workplace gender equality.

The Government is committed to continually improving intersectionality of data and recognises that limitations in current data impacts on the ability to measure all people's experiences of inequality. Where possible, and increasingly over time, information will be disaggregated to measure progress towards gender equality for First Nations people; culturally and linguistically diverse people; migrant and refugee people; people with disability; LGBTIQ+ people; people in rural, regional and remote communities; children and young people; and older people. Where new data relevant to the Strategy's outcomes are available, these will be incorporated into regular reporting.

The Government is also committed to ensuring First Nations communities retain ownership of their cultural knowledge and intellectual property, and is promoting the Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles in its collection of data under the reporting framework.

**With sustained ambition and effective investment and effort against the Strategy's priority areas, this reporting and data should start to show a genuine move towards an Australia that works for women, where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender.**

# Reporting framework at a glance



## Vision

An Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender.

## Foundation and priority areas

- a** aligns with targets under the outcomes framework of the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*
- b** aligns with commitments and priority areas under the *National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2032* and *National Men's Health Strategy 2020–2030*
- c** aligns with targets and outcomes under Closing the Gap
- d** aligns with the Australian Government's targets for gender balance on Australian Government boards



## Foundation. Gender attitudes and stereotypes

Outcomes	Indicators	Actions that drive change
Community attitudes and beliefs in Australia reject gender inequality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased community attitudes that reject gender inequality<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• young people rejecting gender inequality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reinforcing positive behaviours and attitudes across the life course and in all settings, including at home, at school, in our communities and online<sup>134</sup></li> <li>• challenging the harmful stereotypes that limit women and men<sup>135</sup></li> <li>• changing the way many people think about who is responsible for care, work and decision-making<sup>136</sup></li> <li>• ensuring that no one voice dominates political and social debates, which can pose risks to certain groups including women<sup>137</sup></li> <li>• increasing media literacy so that people can critically engage with and interpret media content<sup>138</sup></li> </ul>
People are not limited by gender roles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• proportion of families with a female as the primary or sole income earner in the household</li> <li>• proportion of girls studying STEM in year 12</li> <li>• proportion of boys studying health and arts in year 12</li> <li>• men's and women's enrolments at university</li> <li>• agreement with statements supportive of shared care and paid work</li> <li>• agreement with statements enforcing traditional gender roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ensuring early childhood, school and tertiary education reinforces that anyone can be interested in and study anything<sup>139</sup></li> <li>• ensuring workplaces are free of discrimination, harassment and stereotyping<sup>140</sup></li> <li>• ensuring facilities are appropriate for all people and enable them to study or work where they choose, regardless of gender<sup>141</sup></li> </ul>



## Priority area 1. Gender-based violence

### Ambition - End violence against women

Outcomes	Indicators	Actions that drive change
<p>1.1 All people live free from violence and are safe at home, at school, at work, in the community and online</p> <p><i>Note:</i> Indicators relating to the outcome 'employers support and end to gender discrimination, and sexual harassment and violence in the workplace' are detailed under Outcome 3.3</p>	<p>1.1.1 A reduction in female victims of intimate partner homicide<sup>a</sup></p> <p>1.1.2 An increase in community attitudes that reject violence against women<sup>a</sup></p> <p>1.1.3 A reduction in the rate of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children<sup>*</sup></p> <p>1.1.4 Percentage of people who have experienced sexual violence</p> <p>1.1.5 Percentage of people who have experienced sexual harassment</p> <p>1.1.6 Percentage of people who have experienced physical violence</p> <p>1.1.7 Percentage of people who have experienced stalking</p> <p>1.1.8 Percentage of people who have experienced technology-facilitated abuse</p> <p>1.1.9 Percentage of people who are safe in their homes (physical and/or sexual partner violence)</p> <p>1.1.10 Percentage of people who are safe in their homes (partner emotional abuse)</p> <p>1.1.11 Percentage of people who are safe in their homes (partner economic abuse)</p> <p>1.1.12 Percentage of people who are safe at work (physical violence)</p> <p>1.1.13 Percentage of people who are safe at work (sexual harassment)</p> <p>1.1.14 Percentage of workplaces with policies, strategies and actions in place to support employees experiencing family and domestic violence</p> <p>1.1.15 Percentage of people who are safe at school (sexual and physical abuse)</p> <p>1.1.16 Percentage of people who are safe in the community (sexual harassment)</p> <p>1.1.17 Percentage of people who are safe in the community (physical violence)</p> <p>1.1.18 Percentage of people who are safe online</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addressing gender inequality and other forms of discrimination, which create the social context for violence against women<sup>142</sup></li> <li>investing in and coordinating efforts across the spectrum of violence, including primary prevention and early intervention, response, recovery and healing<sup>143</sup></li> <li>implementing effective perpetrator interventions, including services for men using violence, and holding these men to account; and, where possible, supporting them to change their harmful behaviour<sup>144</sup></li> </ul>



## Priority area 2. Unpaid and paid care

**Ambition** - Balance unpaid work; Close the gender pay gap

Outcomes	Indicators	Actions that drive change
2.1 The unpaid work and care gap between women and men narrows	<p>2.1.1 Average number of hours of unpaid work done each week for women and men</p> <p>2.1.2 Average number of hours of unpaid child care done each week for women and men</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>changing gender attitudes and stereotypes around caring<sup>145</sup></li> <li>ensuring workplace relations settings enable flexible work for all employees, regardless of gender<sup>146</sup></li> <li>employers supporting flexible working hours<sup>147</sup></li> <li>changing societal expectations around 'normal' working arrangements<sup>148</sup></li> <li>ensuring reforms to the tax and transfer system take gendered impacts into consideration<sup>149</sup></li> </ul>
2.2 Parents and carers have access to affordable and high quality early childhood education and care services	<p>2.2.1 Parent and carer access to early childhood education and care</p> <p>2.2.2 Early childhood education and care is affordable and high quality</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increasing availability and affordability of early childhood education and care<sup>150</sup></li> <li>attracting and retaining early childhood educators and teachers<sup>151</sup></li> </ul>
2.3 The gap between women and men working part-time or flexibly narrows	<p>2.3.1 Women and men working part-time</p> <p>2.3.2 Women and men accessing flexible work arrangements</p> <p>2.3.3 Organisations supporting flexible work arrangements</p> <p>2.3.4 Organisations encouraging men's use of flexible working arrangements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing parental leave settings that incentivise men and partners to take paid parental leave<sup>152</sup></li> <li>implementing workplace entitlements, such as flexible workplace policies, part-time work and job-sharing arrangements<sup>153</sup></li> <li>ensuring workplaces support people to balance work and care<sup>154</sup></li> </ul>
2.4 The gender gap in use of and access to paid parental leave narrows	<p>2.4.1 Women and men accessing the Australian Government's Paid Parental Leave Scheme</p> <p>2.4.2 Organisations providing employer funded paid parental leave</p> <p>2.4.3 Weeks of employer funded paid parental leave provided</p> <p>2.4.4 Organisations that report offering gender neutral parental leave policies (without using primary or secondary carer definitions)</p> <p>2.4.5 People accessing employer paid parental leave</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>establishing parental leave settings that incentivise men and partners to take paid parental leave<sup>155</sup></li> <li>implementing workplace entitlements such as flexible workplace policies, part-time work and job-sharing arrangements<sup>156</sup></li> <li>ensuring workplaces support people to balance work and care<sup>157</sup></li> </ul>
2.5 Men's representation in the care and support workforce increases	<p>2.5.1 Average earnings of men and women in the care and support workforce</p> <p>2.5.2 Men represented in the care and support workforce</p> <p>2.5.3 Men represented in health and education fields of study in tertiary education</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improving status, pay and conditions in care and support jobs to value current workers and attract new ones<sup>158</sup></li> <li>changing gender attitudes and stereotypes around caring<sup>159</sup></li> </ul>



## Priority area 3. Economic equality and security

**Ambitions** - Close the gender pay gap; Close the retirement income gender gap.

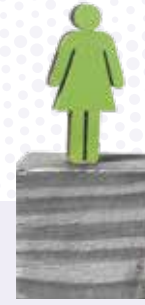
Outcomes	Indicators	Actions that drive change
3.1 The gender pay gap closes	3.1.1 Gender pay gap 3.1.2 Share of top quartile earners who are women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improving gender balance across industries and occupations<sup>160</sup></li> <li>more equally shared caring responsibilities<sup>161</sup></li> <li>reducing gender discrimination<sup>162</sup></li> <li>creating greater workforce opportunities for women<sup>163</sup></li> </ul>
3.2 Industries and occupations are less gender segregated	3.2.1 Industry gender-segregation in current male-dominated and female-dominated industries 3.2.2 Gender balance in emerging industries and occupations 3.2.3 Gender segregation by occupation 3.2.4 Women represented in STEM-related industries and occupations 3.2.5 Working conditions in feminised and male-dominated industries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>changing gender attitudes and stereotypes about 'men's and women's work'<sup>164</sup></li> <li>implementing flexible work and education and training systems<sup>165</sup></li> <li>higher valuing of feminised work<sup>166</sup></li> <li>using safe and inclusive recruitment processes and workplaces<sup>167</sup></li> <li>focusing on how emerging industries can be built as gender equal from the ground up<sup>168</sup></li> </ul>
3.3 Employers support an end to gender discrimination, and sexual harassment and violence in the workplace <i>Note: outcomes relating to gender-based violence at work are detailed under Indicator 1.1</i>	3.3.1 Percentage of organisations with policies, training and processes in place on discrimination and sexual harassment 3.3.2 Percentage of organisations with policies to support gender equality in employment processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creating more secure work<sup>169</sup></li> <li>reducing industry and occupational gender segregation<sup>170</sup></li> <li>ensuring workplaces have clear expectations for behaviour, including policies and codes of conduct<sup>171</sup></li> <li>creating greater accountability for perpetrators and improved reporting mechanisms<sup>172</sup></li> </ul>
3.4 The retirement income gap closes	3.4.1 Women's workforce participation 3.4.2 Median superannuation account balances 3.4.3 Women's personal income at retirement 3.4.4 Women's reliance on their partner's income at retirement 3.4.5 Personal superannuation income 3.4.6 Personal investment income 3.4.7 Recipients of the age pension 3.4.8 Age at retirement 3.4.9 Employers paying superannuation on parental leave	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reducing the gender pay gap</li> <li>developing superannuation-system supports for people to catch up after time out of the workforce<sup>173</sup></li> <li>implementing a strong safety net provided by the social security system<sup>174</sup></li> </ul>
3.5 Women have access to homelessness services and secure long-term housing	3.5.1 Women and men's access to homelessness services 3.5.2 Access to social housing 3.5.3 Proportion of women and men living in housing owned outright, owned with a mortgage, rented, or under other tenure arrangements 3.5.4 Affordability of housing for women and men 3.5.5 Women's and men's satisfaction with social housing services 3.5.6 Women's and men's experiences of homelessness and other marginal housing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increasing housing supply<sup>175</sup></li> <li>improving housing affordability<sup>176</sup></li> <li>supporting access to safe and appropriate housing and housing services<sup>177</sup></li> </ul>
3.6 The proportion of women-owned businesses increases	3.6.1 Proportion of women owners of small businesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>investing in women-led and owned businesses<sup>178</sup></li> <li>increasing availability of relevant banking products<sup>179</sup></li> </ul>



## Priority area 4. Health

### Ambitions - Gender equity in healthcare access and outcomes

Outcomes	Indicators	Actions that drive change
4.1 The health care system recognises and is responsive to gendered health issues, and provides women and men with increased access to information, diagnosis, treatment and services	<p>4.1.1 Empower and support all men and boys to optimise their own and each other's health and wellbeing across all stages of their lives<sup>b</sup></p> <p>4.1.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives<sup>c</sup></p> <p>4.1.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong<sup>c</sup></p> <p>4.1.4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing<sup>c</sup></p> <p>4.1.5 Women and men who delayed or did not use health services when needed due to cost</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reducing gender bias in health practices<sup>180</sup></li> <li>ensuring gender equitable clinical care and diagnosis<sup>181</sup></li> <li>developing tailored health services for women and girls<sup>182</sup></li> <li>managing the varied needs of people as they age<sup>183</sup></li> <li>addressing the health and related impacts of violence against women and girls<sup>184</sup></li> <li>providing safe and accessible services<sup>185</sup></li> <li>strengthening research and policy responses on health issues that disproportionately impact women<sup>186</sup></li> <li>ensuring appropriate, culturally responsive health services and wrap-around maternity supports exist for First Nations women<sup>187</sup></li> <li>specialised support for culturally and linguistically diverse women, including culturally responsive health services<sup>188</sup></li> </ul>
4.2 Women have choice and access to safe and affordable maternal, sexual and reproductive health care	<p>4.2.1 Increase access to sexual and reproductive health care information, diagnosis, treatment and services<sup>b</sup></p> <p>4.2.2 Women's access to contraception</p> <p>4.2.3 Women's access to abortion</p> <p>4.2.4 Women's access to fertility support</p> <p>4.2.5 Women's access to antenatal care</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improving access for all women to information, diagnosis, treatment and services for sexual, reproductive and maternal health<sup>189</sup></li> <li>improving health promotion and service delivery for preconception, perinatal and maternal health<sup>190</sup></li> <li>strengthening research and policy responses on the impact of sexual and reproductive health<sup>191</sup></li> </ul>
4.3 The mental health of women, men and gender diverse people improves	<p>4.3.1 People's own assessment of their mental wellbeing</p> <p>4.3.2 Access to consultations with health professionals for mental health</p> <p>4.3.3 Rates of self-harm</p> <p>4.3.4 Rates of suicidal thoughts or behaviours</p> <p>4.3.5 Women's mental health after sexual assault</p> <p>4.3.6 Women's and children's mental health impacts from family and domestic violence</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>improving access to mental health awareness, education, and prevention<sup>192</sup></li> <li>improving access to intervention and care<sup>193</sup></li> </ul>



## Priority area 5. Leadership, representation and decision-making

### Ambitions - Close leadership and representation gender gaps

Outcomes	Indicators	Actions that drive change
5.1 There are more women across all levels of political, judicial and public service leadership and decision-making	5.1.1 Women continue to hold 50% of Australian Government board positions <sup>d</sup> 5.1.2 Women represented in the Federal Parliament 5.1.3 Women represented in state and local governments 5.1.4 Women represented across Australian Public Service and Senior Executive Service roles 5.1.5 Women are represented in the judiciary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>reducing all forms of discrimination for women in leadership<sup>194</sup></li> <li>addressing barriers to work such as unequal balance of unpaid work and lack of workplace flexibility (as outlined in priority areas 2 and 3)<sup>195</sup></li> <li>changing norms and stereotypes around what makes a good leader<sup>196</sup></li> <li>increasing visibility of diverse leaders<sup>197</sup></li> <li>target-setting, including for First Nations women, women with disability, and culturally and racially diverse women<sup>198</sup></li> <li>creating culturally safe workplaces<sup>199</sup></li> <li>reducing online abuse directed towards women in leadership positions<sup>200</sup></li> </ul>
5.2 There are more women across all levels of non-government leadership and decision-making	5.2.1 Women represented in CEO positions 5.2.2 Women represented in executive leadership team roles (pipeline roles to CEO positions) 5.2.3 Women represented on boards 5.2.4 Women represented in chair positions 5.2.5 Rates of gender balance in management roles 5.2.6 Part-time in management roles	In addition to the above actions under outcome 5.1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>implementing Safety by Design principles to ensure inclusive design in consultations, data and design<sup>201</sup></li> </ul>
5.3 Women's participation in sport increases across all levels, including in positions of leadership	5.3.1 Women and girls participating in sport 5.3.2 Gender pay gap in sports 5.3.3 Women in paid non-player roles in sport, including as administrators, coaches and in leadership positions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ensuring sport clubs are supportive and safe<sup>202</sup></li> <li>delivering pay equity in professional sports<sup>203</sup></li> <li>shifting stereotypes about what it means to be a sportsperson<sup>204</sup></li> <li>increasing representation of women's sports in the media<sup>205</sup></li> <li>investing in women-specific sports research<sup>206</sup></li> </ul>
5.4 Women are recognised equally through the Australian honours system	5.4.1 Women recipients of the Order of Australia (General Division)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increasing awareness of the honours nomination process<sup>207</sup></li> <li>challenging stereotypes about who and what deserves recognition<sup>208</sup></li> <li>aiming for gender balance in nominations across all categories<sup>209</sup></li> </ul>
5.5 More women influence and are represented in media	5.5.1 Quoted women experts and sources in media 5.5.2 Women's by-lines in media 5.5.3 Women represented on boards for publicly owned broadcasters 5.5.4 Public interest in male and female representation in sports coverage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>increasing by-lines for women in under-represented areas such as sports<sup>210</sup></li> <li>increasing representation of women in news media<sup>211</sup></li> <li>increasing gender diversity in media leadership<sup>212</sup></li> </ul>

# More information and accessing support

The Government acknowledges that discussions about gender inequality, discrimination, and gender-based violence can be distressing for many people. If you would like to speak to someone for support, national counselling and referral services are available.

- **1800RESPECT** – Confidential information, counselling and support service for people impacted by domestic, family and sexual violence. 1800 737 732 or [www.1800respect.org.au](http://www.1800respect.org.au)
- **Lifeline** – Counselling services for anyone at any time. 13 11 14 or [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)
- **Beyond Blue** – Information and referral for depression and anxiety. 1300 224 636 or [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)
- **MensLine Australia** – Telephone and online support, information and referral service to help men with relationship and other problems. 1300 789 978 or [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)
- **QLife** – A free phone and web chat service that provides anonymous LGBTIQ+ support services on a range of issues including sexuality, gender, identity, bodies, feelings, and relationships. 1800 184 527 or [www.qlife.org.au](http://www qlife.org.au)
- **13YARN** – National support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in crisis. 13 92 76 or [www.13yarn.org.au](http://www.13yarn.org.au)
- **Arafmi** – Support for family, friends and carers of people with mental illness. 1300 554 660 or [www.arafmi.com.au](http://www.arafmi.com.au)
- **My Blue Sky** – Free legal and migration support to people experiencing forced marriage and other forms of modern slavery in Australia. 02 9514 8115 or [www.mybluesky.org.au](http://www.mybluesky.org.au)
- **Carer Gateway** – Free services and support for carers, including counselling, peer support, coaching, help around the home and respite. 1800 422 737 or [www.carergateway.gov.au](http://www.carergateway.gov.au)
- **eSafety Commissioner** – Complaints-based reporting scheme for cyberbullying of children, serious adult cyber abuse, image-based abuse and illegal and restricted content. [www.esafety.gov.au/report](http://www.esafety.gov.au/report)

# Appendix 1: Australia's international human rights obligations and development commitments

Achieving gender equality is critical to realising the human rights of all people and sustainable development. Australia is committed to working with the international community to advance gender equality and ensure women's and girls' empowerment is at the centre of our international efforts.

Australia is a party to the 7 core international human rights treaties, including the:

- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)
- International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)
- Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
- Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).

The ICCPR obligates Australia to protect and preserve basic human rights. This includes the right to life and human dignity; equality before the law; freedom of speech, assembly and association; religious freedom and privacy; freedom from torture, ill-treatment and arbitrary detention; gender equality; the right to a fair trial; right to family life and family unity; and minority rights. The ICESCR aims to ensure the protection of economic, social and cultural rights needed to live a life of dignity and freedom, including freedom from discrimination, and the right to equality between men and women. The ICERD was one of the first human rights treaties to be adopted by the United Nations. It commits all member states, including Australia, to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination and to promote understanding amongst all races.

The CRPD sets out Australia's obligations to promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms

by all persons with disabilities and to promote respect for their inherent dignity. As part of these obligations Australia has committed to address the disproportionate impacts of discrimination and all forms of gender-based violence experienced by women with disabilities. Article 6 expressly recognises that women and girls with disabilities face multiples forms of discrimination, and requires States Parties to ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights of women and girls with disabilities.

Under CEDAW, Australia has committed to promoting policies, laws, organisations, structures and attitudes that ensure women have the same rights as men. CEDAW facilitates this by promoting non-discriminatory practices across a number of areas including employment; education and training; health; economic life, sport and culture; law and policy; politics and public life; family relations; and violence against women.

The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* is the key legal mechanism Australia uses to implement the rights enshrined within CEDAW. The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their sex, gender identity, intersex status, sexual orientation, marital or relationship status, family responsibilities, because they are pregnant (or might become pregnant), or because they are breastfeeding. The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)* imposes a positive duty on employers and persons conducting a business or undertaking to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate as far as possible, the following unlawful behaviour from occurring:

- discrimination on the grounds of sex in a work context
- sexual harassment in connection with work
- sex-based harassment in connection with work
- conduct creating a workplace environment that is hostile on the grounds of sex
- related acts of victimisation.

Another important legal mechanism for implementing the rights enshrined in CEDAW in Australian workplaces is the *Fair Work Act 2009*. The general protections provisions in the Fair Work Act prohibit discriminatory adverse action being taken by an employer against an employee on the basis of a number of protected attributes, including sex, gender identity, breastfeeding, pregnancy, and subjection to family and domestic violence. The Fair Work Act also includes an express prohibition on sexual harassment in the workplace (Part 3–5A). Workers who experience sexual harassment at work can apply to the Fair Work Commission for assistance to resolve the matter, including seeking a ‘stop sexual harassment order’.

Australia also endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2009, which provides a comprehensive framework for the recognition and protection of Indigenous rights. UNDRIP includes 4 key principles: self-determination, participation in decision-

making, respect for and protection of culture, and equality and non-discrimination. The UNDRIP is a comprehensive statement of Australia's existing human rights obligations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This commits Australia to take action and ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls have the right to shape their own lives and participate in decision making processes affecting their rights. It also promotes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's and girls' right to maintain, protect, and practice cultural traditions, and their right to enjoy all human rights free from discrimination.

While UNDRIP does not establish new human rights for Indigenous peoples, it does explain how the rights within these treaties apply to the specific circumstances of Indigenous peoples globally.

Australia also fully supports the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), agreed by UN member states in 2015 as a road map for global development efforts to 2030 and beyond. The SDGs seek to realise the human rights of all, and cover economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development. The SDGs comprise 17 goals across 169 targets. SDG 5 is 'Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls'. Gender equality is also mainstreamed across the 16 other goals and the SDGs reporting framework.

## Abbreviations

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CRC	Convention on the Rights of the Child
CRPD	Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities
ECEC	Early childhood education and care
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
ICERD	Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
ICESCR	International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural and Social Rights
LGBTIQA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer/questioning, Asexual
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency

## Endnotes

- 1 Flood M, *Masculinities and health: Attitudes towards men and masculinities in Australia*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), Melbourne, 2020; The Men's Project and Flood M, *The Man Box 2024: Re-examining what it means to be a man in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne, 2024.
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- 8 Gracia E and Merlo J, 'Intimate partner violence against women and the Nordic paradox', *Social Science and Medicine*, 157: 27-30, 2016, doi: 10.1016/j.socscimed.2016.03.040.
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