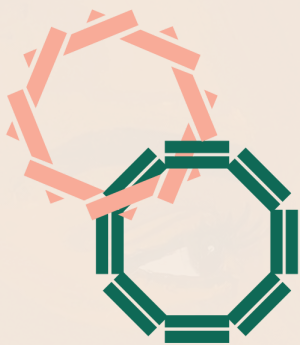




Working with
Women Alliance

POLICY BRIEF

TAKE A SEAT: LISTENING TO THE POLICY PRIORITIES OF AUSTRALIA'S YOUNG WOMEN

APRIL 2026

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future. We value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and knowledge. We extend our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who for thousands of years have preserved the culture and practices of their communities on country. This land was never surrendered, and we acknowledge that it always was and always will be Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. We acknowledge that Australian governments have been complicit in the entrenched disadvantage, intergenerational trauma and ongoing institutional racism faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must lead the design and delivery of services that affect them for better life outcomes to be achieved.

About Us

The Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) represents two key portfolios: National Women's Safety (NWS) and National Women's Equality (NWE). The WwWA connects the critical areas of gender-based violence prevention and the advancement of women's economic equality and leadership, bridging these important policy fields for greater impact. We work with members and stakeholders, including the Australian Government, to provide expertise and advice on gender equality and women's safety.

This policy brief was prepared in collaboration with WwWA's Young Women's Working Group, chaired by Jane Chen. The recommendations in this policy brief are evidence-based and informed by the expertise and lived experience of working group members. Language note about using 'young women' where we recognise these issues are also exacerbated for trans and gender diverse people.



About the Artist

Sheri Skele, also known as Bigi Nagala, a proud Bidjara woman and contemporary Aboriginal artist, explores and shares her rich cultural tapestry, personal experiences, and healing aspirations.

Hailing from South West Queensland's vast Bidjara land, rich Indigenous cultural heritage, healing sites, pristine bushlands, lagoons, wildlife, and ancient waterways, Sheri's art captures this sacred landscape.

About Young Women's Working Group

The Young Women's Working Group is a collective of emerging advocates convened by the Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) to shape evidence-based, solutions-driven policy. Over six months, members collaborated to identify the most pressing policy issues impacting young women safety and economic equality in Australia. Guided by members' own experiences and reflection, the group's work aims to amplify young women's voices in policy development.

Members:

Jane Chen - Chair
Sarah Williams
Aoibhinn Crimmins
Laura Crozier

Fatima Dean
Ashleigh Keating
Nandini Gera

Hannah Robertson
J Min Kok
Angelique Wan

Foreword on the Political Environment

Young people are particularly exposed to, engaged with, and affected by global politics and associated social narratives spread online.

The rights of women, girls, and gender-diverse people are facing unprecedented and growing threats both globally and within Australia. As the world navigates democratic backsliding and economic crises, there is an increasingly organised pushback on gender equality. The dominant narrative is one of misogyny and regressing women's rights. These narratives harm everyone –regardless of gender - by driving social fragmentation and 'othering.'

In Australia, violence against women is still escalating, and views about gender equality are shifting. More than 17% of all Australians agree feminism should be resisted with violence – support is highest among adolescent boys.¹ Most concerning is that roughly 40% of boys aged 13 to 17 agree that women lie about domestic and sexual violence.² The Working for Women Strategy³ frames harmful gender stereotypes as the foundation of gender inequality and commits to shifting these attitudes. Despite this, rigid gender stereotypes persist, and are even worsening among young people, contributing and perpetuating Australia's gender-based violence crisis.

Worldwide, women have 64% of the legal rights of men,⁴ and over half of countries lack consent-backed legal definitions of rape.⁵ As major conflicts and widespread political unrest continue to unfold across multiple regions, the urgency for action grows. These global realities are not only devastating communities but also threatening global progress toward gender equality. In 2024, 676 million women and girls lived within 50km of a deadly conflict, and there has been an 87% increase in conflict-related sexual violence.⁶ At this moment, there is an opportunity for the Australian Government to show greater global leadership on gender equality and safety by setting a standard that begins with its own domestic commitments.

Executive Summary

Young women and gender-diverse people in Australia are overrepresented in experiences of financial stress, gender-based violence, medical misogyny, and climate anxiety, and at the same time they are underrepresented and often excluded from decision-making and leadership roles. Without their voices represented, there is an absence of critical knowledge to inform forward-thinking, sustainable policymaking and to address emerging issues. Young people's experiences and perspectives are highly relevant to Australia's policy landscape – something that has already been acknowledged by the Albanese Government through *Engage! A strategy to include young people in the decisions we make.*⁷

With the rise of mental ill-health, social media and AI, the climate emergency, gender-based violence, the cost-of-living crisis, and navigating healthcare systems, young women and gender diverse people offer expertise and lived experience that are crucial for Australia's response to the most acute social and economic issues. This brief will provide a summary of the most pressing issues facing young women and gender-diverse people and present recommendations under five priority areas: economic security, gender-based violence, medical misogyny, climate change and the national policy agenda.

Young people carry the greatest burden of prospective social, economic and environmental issues and their voices must be resourced to strengthen Australia's response to emerging policy issues and to ensure policy solutions are sustainable.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Economic Security for Young People

1.1 Fund the expansion of Good Shepherd's financial counselling to additional locations across the country to develop financial literacy resources and outreach programs.

1.2 Develop and maintain a national pool of 15,000 dedicated youth tenancies for 16-24-year-olds.

1.3 Provide targeted subsidies for social housing providers to offset the lower rental contributions of young tenants who rely on social security payments.

1.4 Introduce consistent indexation across all incoming support payments, including Youth Allowance and Austudy payments to ensure payments keep pace with the cost of living.

1.5 Implement HECS-HELP forgiveness schemes for critical yet undervalued education, healthcare and community service jobs such as teaching and nursing.

1.6 Review and reform superannuation settings for young people, including extending guaranteed superannuation payments to workers under 18 and reviewing the 30-hour-per-week eligibility threshold.

2. Young People's Experiences of Gender-Based Violence

2.1 Acknowledge and embed the distinct experiences of young women and gender-diverse people who experience gender-based violence, and the environments this occurs in within the Second Action 2027-32 of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2023-32.

2.2 Remove partner-income means testing from social security payments as part of the Second Action Plan's commitment to women's economic independence and safety.

2.3 Fund youth specific gender-based violence response programs to address service gaps for young people. This should include the expansion of programs such as Amplify to become a national program.

2.4 Strengthen the implementation of the National Respectful Relationships Education Framework with states and territories to deliver comprehensive, evidence based online safety and digital literacy education, in partnership with Trusted eSafety Providers.

2.5 Adopt a public health approach to addressing pornography-related harm on young people by establishing a nationally coordinated approach for action that recognises the role of online pornography in shaping sexual norms, normalising sexual violence, and contributing to harm experienced by young people.

2.6 Clarify the operation of the positive duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 to explicitly recognise that in customer-facing industries, failing to address sexual harassment by patrons should be understood as permitting the continuation of a workplace environment that is hostile on the grounds of sex.

2.7 Empower the Australian Human Rights Commission to play an active oversight and compliance role in enforcing the positive duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 in nightlife and festival settings, recognising these environments as high-risk sites for sexual harassment and assault against women and gender-diverse people.

3. Young People's Experiences of Medical Misogyny and Healthcare

3.1 Lower the Medicare Safety Net threshold for people on low-incomes, beyond Concession cardholders and families eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part A.

3.2 Expand the number of subsidised sessions for chronic health management plans.

3.3 Increase funding for the provision and enhancement of healthcare services for transgender and gender-diverse people.

3.4 Pursue the continuation of specialist education for medical professionals to improve patient safety and outcomes. Scaling proven Government-funded initiatives such as Women's Health NSW's Pathways Project and SRHA's AUSLARC will deliver sustained system-wide benefits in clinical capability and patient satisfaction.

3.5 Mirror the National Respectful Relationships Education Framework to deliver a national curriculum on comprehensive sexual health education.

3.6 Provide long-term, sustainable funding for peer-based, community-led women's health services to scale up comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in schools, including partnerships with specialist providers such as PPEP Talk to deliver curriculum on menstruation, contraception, endometriosis, menopause, and pelvic pain.

4. Young People's Experiences of the Climate Emergency

4.1 Launch a Joint Standing Committee into the impacts of the climate emergency on young people and children.

4.2 Collect data on Australians' experiences of the climate emergency, disaggregated by gender, age and other demographics.

4.3 Provide national guidelines on minimum rental standards such as insulation and efficient heating and cooling, to be implemented by state and territory governments.

4.4 Develop economic modelling on the insurance industry and future housing market based on the risk scenarios outlined in the National Climate Risk Assessment. Include a gender-impact analysis.

4.5 Invest in education pipelines and support infrastructure for women to join the green workforce and ensure Future Made in Australia is successful.

5. Game Changing Recommendations

5.1 Establish an independent statutory Commissioner for Future Generations.

5.2 Introduce a Wellbeing of Future Generations Act for Australia.

5.3 Lower the voting age to 16.

1. Economic Security for Young People

“Young people’s financial security is no longer about whether they can buy a home in the future; it is about being able to afford groceries and healthcare right now”

- Working with Women Alliance Young Women’s Working Group

Financial stress is a gendered issue, disproportionately impacting young women. While becoming independent has always involved financial adjustments – such as moving out of home, covering rent and utilities, managing car and healthcare costs, and balancing work and study – broader macroeconomic shifts in recent decades have made these transitions far more challenging. Stagnant wages and social security supports have not kept pace with the persistent rise in living and housing costs, deepening intergenerational inequality. With rising costs limiting social participation and community connection, young women’s sense of belonging and mental resilience also suffers. Over 60% of young women feel overwhelmed by money matters, compared to only 48% of young men,⁸ and young women are 15% less confident than young men when it comes to comparing financial products.⁹

For young women and gender-diverse people, a lack of economic security is exacerbated by gendered patterns of pay inequity, underemployment, and care responsibilities, as well as the greater financial risks linked to relationship breakdown and violence. As a result, financial stress among young women is not merely part of early adulthood but a reflection of structural inequalities. These economic pressures are not experienced evenly. Young women and gender-diverse people who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, have disability, LGBTQIA+, migrants or on temporary visas, or primary carers face compounded financial insecurity, driven by structural exclusion from secure work, affordable housing, and adequate income support.

Recommendation 1.1: Fund the expansion of Good Shepherd’s financial counselling to additional locations across the country to develop financial literacy resources and outreach programs.¹⁰

The cost-of-living, housing, and rental crisis is worsening homelessness amongst young women and gender-diverse people

During 2025, Australian rental rates rose 5.2% to a median of \$681 per week, while the national vacancy rate fell 1.7%.¹¹ Rental rates are expected to reach record highs in every city this year,¹² with tenants already resorting to forgoing utilities to keep a roof over their heads. Cost barriers result in renters living in substandard housing with issues like mould, structural damage, and inadequate temperature control, posing serious health and safety risks.¹³

With the housing market becoming increasingly competitive, Australians are becoming more reliant on rental housing, with the proportion of employed renters steadily increasing over recent decades, for all age cohorts.¹⁴ This not only exposes renters to financial stress, but health risks associated with psychological stress and unsafe living conditions.

Young age is the most significant predictor of housing stress,¹⁵ and for the first time in 50 years, most people between 30-34 do not own their own home.¹⁶ In 2001 the average house price was four times the average salary.¹⁷ Since then, the average house price has quintupled, with wages only doubling.¹⁸ At the same time, wealth growth has been especially slow for young people. The overall share of wealth held by young people is miniscule (7%) and has not improved over the last two decades. While the bottom two thirds of Australian workers saw an average wealth increase of 55% over the last 20 years, young workers (under 35) only saw an increase of 39%.¹⁹ The average over-65 household is four times as wealthy as the average under-35 household.²⁰

Consequently, the rate of homelessness for young people has surged – up to 40,000 young people are experiencing homelessness on any given night in Australia.²¹ Women under 34 make up more than a third (36%) of all specialist homelessness service clients, and almost two thirds (59%) of female clients.²² LGBTIQ+ young people are also overrepresented in Australia's homelessness population.²³ Over the past decade, 520 children in contact with homelessness services have died with suicide the leading cause.²⁴

Despite these figures, social housing providers often turn young people away due to the 'youth housing penalty.' Social housing rents are calculated as a proportion of income, usually at about 25-30%. This means that those on Youth Allowance would pay a rental fee of \$86.52 compared to someone on the Age Pension paying \$186.33.²⁵ This is a significant financial disincentive for social housing providers.

Recommendation 1.2: Develop and maintain a national pool of 15,000 dedicated youth tenancies for 16–24-year-olds.

Recommendation 1.3: Provide targeted subsidies to social housing providers to offset the lower contributions of young tenants who rely on social security payments.

Young women's incomes are not meeting rising costs of living

Financial stress was the leading cause of distress for Australians in 2024, with women overrepresented in this group.²⁶ Young women are more impacted by the cost-of-living crisis, and experience more severe food insecurity, unaffordable housing, student debt, insecure employment, barriers to healthcare, and poor mental health.²⁷ Compared to their male counterparts, Gen Z women are more likely to be severely stressed about the cost of living, more likely to have no personal savings, and more likely to use buy-now-pay-later schemes.²⁸ Australia has one of the largest male-female financial literacy gaps in the world, with women less confident about their understanding of financial matters than their male peers.²⁹

Income Support

Women are more likely to receive income support,³⁰ with different payments helping them meet daily living costs at various life stages. For example, Parenting Payment Single (PPS) is an essential payment for young mothers, providing support for around 150,000 women under the age of 34.³¹ For many, PPS is the only source of income while caring for children. However, payment rates remain low relative to the cost of living, and limited access to affordable childcare and suitable employment can make it difficult for single parents to transition from income support to sustainable work.

Other key payments for young women include Youth Allowance (around 136,000 recipients across study and other categories), Austudy (about 8,255), the Disability Support Pension (66,000), and the Carers Payment (27,000). While smaller in recipient numbers, Youth Allowance and Austudy are critical for young women engaged in study or training, groups at high risk of financial insecurity. These payments are often insufficient to cover essential expenses and can be subject to parental means testing even when parents provide little financial support. Recipients of Youth Allowance have average weekly incomes about \$390 below the poverty line,³² and the most recent indexation increase of just \$6.95 per week lifted the payment to only \$338.60 - just 36% of the minimum wage. Such low rates leave many struggling to meet basic needs: 62% of recipients report eating less or skipping meals, and 70% report difficulty affording transport to work or medical appointments.³³

Recommendation 1.4: Introduce consistent indexation across all incoming support payments, including Youth Allowance and Austudy payments to ensure payments keep pace with the cost of living.

Student Debt

Women hold the majority of Australia's HECS-HELP debt,³⁴ with teachers and nurses – both female-dominated professions – carrying the biggest repayment burdens.³⁵ This is largely a consequence of structural changes to tertiary education that professionalised traditionally female-dominated occupations by absorbing them into the university system and making them more expensive. Male-dominated jobs such as trades have remained in vocational education systems that are typically cheaper and attract government subsidies. Students are often told not to worry about their student debts because they don't attract substantial indexation. However, women, especially young women, who are overrepresented in low-paying jobs, are likely to take longer than men to pay off their debts,³⁶ and will accrue greater indexation.

Recommendation 1.5: Implement HECS-HELP forgiveness schemes for low-paid, female-dominated jobs such as teaching, social work and nursing.

Junior Wages

Junior pay rates apply to employees under 21 in sectors that rely heavily on young, workers - retail, fast food and pharmacy. These industries are comprised of more than 50% women.³⁷ While the Fair Work Commission's decision to abolish junior pay rates for workers aged 18-20 in retail, fast food and pharmacy is a welcome change, existing junior rates of 50-70% for 15–17-year-olds remain. Yet many of these young workers have significant financial responsibilities and are 'paying adult prices on children's wages.'³⁸

Young workers are especially vulnerable to workplace exploitation due to being overrepresented in casual and part-time jobs. Exploitation risks are heightened for young migrant workers, students on temporary visas, workers with disability, and care experienced young people, who are more likely to accept insecure conditions due to limited alternatives or fear of retaliation.

Limited job security and uncertain hours reduce the ability to negotiate fair conditions or speak up about inequities. One in four young workers don't receive compulsory superannuation, and one in three have not been paid the overtime they are entitled to.³⁹ Without job security, and with limited education on workplace rights, many young people are unequipped to recognise or challenge exploitative practices – alarmingly, 35% have had their timesheet hours reduced by employers, and over 40% have been required to perform unpaid extra work.⁴⁰

Superannuation

Young Australians are disengaged from superannuation - more than one-third check their accounts only once a year, and more than one-quarter are unable to name their fund.⁴¹ Research consistently shows that young people who understand their super are six times more likely to take steps that improve their retirement outcomes.⁴² For young women, the stakes are even higher. By retirement, women have 25% less super than men.⁴³

Young people under 18 are also denied superannuation unless they work more than 30 hours per week for one employer. This compounds on gender inequality and the superannuation gap from the very start of young women's working life. Modelling estimates this exclusion can cost women up to \$11,000 by retirement.⁴⁴

Recommendation 1.6: Review and reform superannuation settings for young people, including extending guaranteed superannuation payments to workers under 18 and reviewing the 30-hour-per-week eligibility threshold.

2. Young People and Gender-Based Violence

The National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032⁴⁵ provides an important national framework for action, but young women's experiences are not always visible in the systems designed to prevent and respond to violence.

Young people experience gender-based violence in distinct ways that need to be recognised

Young people are not simply younger versions of adult victim-survivors. They experience gender-based violence in distinct settings, relationships and systems that require tailored policy responses. This is shaped by the specific social contexts they occupy, including transitions from secondary to tertiary education, casualised and customer facing employment, the formation of early and often foundational intimate relationships, and increasing independence without access to stable income or secure housing. As a result, gender-based violence occurs across a range of settings and forms that create unique and heightened risk factors for young people that are not always captured by existing policy and legislation. Without explicit recognition of these age-specific dynamics within national policy frameworks, responses risk leaving young women and gender-diverse people navigating systems not designed for their circumstances which increases vulnerability to ongoing harm.

Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, young women with disability, migrant and refugee young women (including those on temporary visas), LGBTQIA+ young people, and young people in out-of-home care or living in regional and remote areas face heightened risks of gender-based violence while simultaneously encountering greater barriers to help-seeking, including discrimination, service ineligibility, surveillance by systems, and fear of repercussions. Without explicit recognition of these compounded vulnerabilities, national responses risk entrenching harm for those young people most likely to be left out of protection frameworks.

Intimate Partner Violence

Youth intimate partner violence remains largely unrecognised as a distinct issue in Australia, instead being subsumed within adult or child-focused frameworks. Nationally, there is no uniform definition of intimate partner violence in youth and adolescent relationships, and legislative approaches vary across states and territories. For example, Tasmania's Family Violence Act 2004 excludes relationships that are not considered 'significant', while broader eligibility for legal protections and support payments is often tied to de facto status, such as cohabitation or financial interdependence. These frameworks fail to reflect the realities of young people entering early-stage or casual relationships. This contributes to a lack of youth-informed strategies and specialised services, pushing many young people into more complex and less protective justice pathways or excluded from support altogether. Further, many young people are uncertain where to seek help and are often dismissed as 'dramatic' or immature rather than recognised as experiencing serious violence, leading to underreporting and inadequate policy responses.

Family Violence

Australia's justice and DFV violence support systems are primarily focused on adult victims. Young women and gender-diverse people are typically sidelined, meaning they are unable to get help when fleeing family violence. Family violence can affect young people in multiple ways - through direct abuse from a parent or other family member, witnessing violence within the household, or living in environments shaped by coercion, control and fear. The impacts can extend throughout their lives, influencing mental health, friendships, future relationships, and participation in education, work and civic life. Research shows that people who experience household dysfunction in childhood often face higher long-term use of primary, allied and specialist health services due to enduring health impacts of early exposure to violence and instability.⁴⁶ Young people experiencing family violence often fall between systems that are designed either for children (child protection) or adults (DFV services), resulting in a service gap where their abuse is not adequately recognised.

Family violence responses are particularly inadequate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women, who experience disproportionately high rates of violence from an early age. For First Nations communities, family violence encompasses harm occurring across extended family and kinship networks, yet legal and service frameworks remain narrowly focused on intimate partners.

For young First Nations women, experiences of violence often intersect with early system contact, housing insecurity and over surveillance by child protection and justice systems, further reducing pathways to safety.

Sexual Violence

Sexual violence is the most reported form of gender-based violence experienced by young women and gender-diverse people. An estimated 2.2 million adult women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15, according to the 2021–22 Personal Safety Survey (PSS).⁴⁷ Contrary to persistent narratives that sexual violence is primarily perpetrated by strangers, the PSS shows that women are more than three times as likely to experience sexual violence by a man they know than by a male stranger, highlighting a significant mismatch between common assumptions and young women's lived experiences. Sexual violence also occurs across a range of settings where young people seek connection and community, such as online spaces, education settings such as universities, and public social environments like nightclubs and festivals. In these contexts, sexual violence is often normalised or obscured by factors such as alcohol and other drug use, peer dynamics, or the integration of digital technologies in how young people communicate and form relationships. Sexual violence is disproportionately experienced by young women with disability. Perpetrators tend to be people they know, including intimate partners, family members and carers and is exacerbated by dependence on others for care, housing and transport. This can limit autonomy and reduce safe opportunities for disclosure.

Technology-Facilitated Abuse

Technology-facilitated abuse is an increasingly prevalent form of gender-based violence experienced by young women and gender-diverse people. The pervasive role of digital technologies in young people's lives means this abuse follows victim-survivors across multiple settings. It often co-occurs with other forms of gender-based violence and uses digital tools to intensify harm through behaviours such as persistent messaging, location tracking via apps like Find My, and image-based abuse. A study conducted by the eSafety Commission found that more than one in eight (13%) of respondents said it was reasonable for a partner to monitor them using a location-sharing app.⁴⁸ The normalisation of location-sharing and online visibility amongst young people often means that the line between ordinary relationship behaviour and surveillance and harassment is blurred and can escalate quickly.

LGBTQIA+ young people are more likely to rely on online spaces to explore identity and form relationships where offline environments may be unsafe. For these young people, the abuse is specific to their identities such as threats of outing, non-consensual sharing/manipulation of images, misgendering, deadnaming and other identity-based harassment. These forms of abuse leverage stigma and discrimination as tools of control, while fear of unsafe or dismissive responses often discourages reporting.

Recommendation 2.1: Acknowledge and embed the distinct experiences of young women and gender-diverse people who experience gender-based violence, and the environments this occurs in within the Second Action 2027-32 of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2023-32.

- This should include a review into domestic violence legislation to ensure they appropriately reflect the dynamics of young and non-de facto relationships.

Economic Independence and Partner-Means Testing

Partner income means testing disproportionately affects young women, who are more likely to rely on income support during early adulthood due to insecure work, study commitments and/or housing instability. Partner-income testing assumes that relationships are safe and financially equitable. In reality, they increase financial dependence on a partner and increase the risk of abuse. The risks of income-testing are especially high for young women with disabilities who depend on payments such as the Disability Support Pension. The National Plan emphasises women's economic independence is central to safety and ability to leave/avoid violence relationship. However, partner-income means testing undermines this objective by limiting young women's access to independent income support when they need it most. Reform of this policy would ensure women are not forced into violent situations by social security arrangements.

Recommendation 2.2: Remove partner-income means testing from social security payments as part of the Second Action Plan's commitment to women's economic independence and safety.

Youth-Specific Social Services

Responses to GBV are often centred on adult safety and child protection, leaving gaps in recognition, support pathways and tailored services for young people. Youth specific services are critical to bridging these gaps, particularly for complex system navigation. Programs like Melbourne City Mission's Amplify⁴⁹ is an example of a youth-specific family violence service that provides wrap-around support via case managers and peer workers to help victim-survivors aged 15 to 19 navigate housing, finances, and the legal, court and justice systems. While the Government has committed to stronger laws and better support through its Women's Safety package, there is still a need for dedicated separate funding that prioritises youth case management and expands programs like Amplify to more regions across the country.

Recommendation 2.3: Fund youth specific gender-based violence response programs to address service gaps for young people. This should include the national expansion of programs such as Amplify.

Gender-based violence is happening in spaces that are particular to young people's lives.

Online spaces can be unsafe for young women, largely due to the use of AI to generate deepfakes and algorithmic targeting of misogynistic content. The rise in popularity of 'manosphere' influencers like Andrew Tate and Sneako promote content that challenges gender equality gains and promotes men's superiority. These discourses can gain a massive reach through social media algorithms that filter content directly to boys and young men. In Australian schools, more perverse, more targeted, and more brazen behaviours have been observed amongst boys,⁵⁰ underpinned by a culture of toxicity facilitated by manosphere rhetoric. Research has found that young people are creating non-consensual sexualised deepfakes at higher rates than other age groups,⁵¹ most of which target women and girls. There have been multiple incidents of young students creating sexualised deepfakes of their peers and teachers, which are uploaded online and shared by others.

The measures taken in response to these harms are not working effectively. Outright bans unfairly punish young people for their use of technologies – ignoring that many, especially marginalised groups, find critical social support and community through social media. Though perhaps more significantly, these measures place the responsibility onto young people to avoid and report harm. Globally, more than half of young women see themselves as primarily responsible for staying safe online⁵² but feel they should not be solely accountable for their safety online. The National Respectful Relationships Education Framework does not yet fully reflect the scale or nature of contemporary digital harms and is leaving Australian teens unprepared to navigate complex relationship dynamics. Lessons also focus too heavily on legal definitions and risk avoidance rather than equipping them with real-life skills for communication and emotional connection.⁵³ Without comprehensive education that reflects the realities of young people's digital lives, young people are left to engage with harmful content without the critical tools needed to recognise abuse and challenge misinformation. Strengthening the implementation of the Framework, alongside comprehensive online safety education delivered in partnership with Trusted eSafety Providers, is therefore critical.

More than half of all dating platform users are under 35, and recent data shows that over 70% have experienced online sexual violence in the past five years.⁵⁴ Alarming, one in three users reported experiencing acts of violence in person, perpetrated by someone they had met through a dating app or website.⁵⁵ Among those who experienced online sexual violence, two in five were blocked or unmatched by the perpetrator afterward,⁵⁶ making it difficult for victim-survivors to collect evidence or report the abuse. The introduction of the Australian Online Dating Code of Conduct⁵⁷ was a welcome acknowledgement of the harm that can occur in these digital spaces, but the framework remains limited. The code is completely voluntary, with no government power to enforce compliance or penalise non-compliant companies.

Recommendation 2.4: Strengthen the implementation of the National Respectful Relationships Education Framework with states and territories to deliver comprehensive, evidence based online safety and digital literacy education, in partnership with Trusted eSafety Providers.

Pornography

The widespread accessibility of online pornography is also reshaping young people's understanding of sex and consent in harmful ways. Violent sexual practices, including strangulation, are becoming normalised via mainstream pornography. An Australian study found that over half (57%) of Australians aged 18–35 reported having been strangled by a partner during sex, while 51 per cent report having strangled a partner.⁵⁸ These figures indicate that practices that were once considered extreme or uncommon are now much more normalised within young people's intimate relationships.

Australia has recently introduced age-assurance requirements for online pornography under the Online Safety Act 2021. While these measures are an important step in restricting children's access to age restricted material, they do not address the broader harms associated with pornography consumption, including the normalisation of sexual violence or the need for young people and young adults to critically understand pornographic content. Respectful relationships education plays a preventive role, but the impacts of pornography extend beyond classrooms, and responsibility for managing harm cannot rest primarily on young people or educators.

Although pornography is considered a private issue, its harms are collectively produced and socially embedded, shaping peer norms, relationship expectations and behaviour even among those who do not engage with pornography directly. These harms extend into relationships, health outcomes, workplaces and experiences of gender-based violence, and are borne disproportionately by young women and gender-diverse people. Addressing pornography-related harm therefore requires a public health lens that recognises shared responsibility across platforms, regulators, education systems, health services and all levels of government, rather than treating pornography solely as a private, moral or individual issue.

Recommendation 2.5: Adopt a public health lens to addressing pornography-related harm by establishing a nationally coordinated approach for action that recognises the role of online pornography in shaping sexual norms, normalising sexual violence, and contributing to harm experienced by young people.

Customer-Facing/Service Workplaces

Young women and gender-diverse people are overrepresented in customer-facing service roles such as hospitality and retail, industries where sexual harassment by customers is common and frequently normalised. These risks are compounded by the precarious nature of this kind of work, which is often casualised and disproportionately undertaken by migrant workers and people on temporary or working visas. Insecure employment, limited workplace protections and power imbalances reduce workers' capacity to challenge unsafe workplace cultures or report harm, particularly where sexual harassment is perpetrated by customers. The introduction of a positive duty on employers through reforms to the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 now require employers to take reasonable and proportionate steps to eliminate sexual harassment.

However young women's experiences suggest that current interpretations and implementation of this duty do not consistently capture harassment perpetrated by customers or recognise that failing to intervene allows a hostile work environment to persist on the grounds of sex. In practice, young women and gender-diverse people are mainly reliant on individual complaints for remedy which are unsuitable for workers with insecure employment who may fear retaliation or job loss.

Nightlife and Festivals

Nightlife venues, including clubs, bars, and festivals, have been identified as environments where overt sexual behaviour is normalised and even encouraged. These are settings that young women and gender-diverse people are disproportionately employed and are highly visible as part of social life. This makes nightlife settings a critical area for focus for gender-based violence policy measures. Most young people have had experiences of sexual violence or have heard about similar experiences, including sexual comments, groping, staring, or leering.⁵⁹ These situations create unreasonable expectations on young people by putting the onus on them to prevent harm. Strategies like covering their drinks, changing how they dress, never going anywhere alone, and pretending to have a boyfriend when approached, are all considered necessary for staying safe in the absence of few other protections. Women are less likely to report physical sexual violence that happens in nightlife settings than men for reasons like being unsure whether venue staff would act and believing it is normal to experience sexual harassment in the club and bar scene.⁶⁰ Given the complex and unique nature of these environments, any response must be tailored to the specific context, as a one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to be effective.

Recommendation 2.6: Clarify the operation of the positive duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 to explicitly recognise that in customer-facing industries, failing to address sexual harassment by patrons should be understood as permitting the continuation of a workplace environment that is hostile on the grounds of sex.

Recommendation 2.7: Empower the Australian Human Rights Commission to play an active oversight and compliance role in enforcing the positive duty under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 in nightlife and festival settings, recognising these environments as high-risk sites for sexual harassment and assault against women and gender-diverse people.

3. Young People's Experiences of Medical Misogyny and Navigating Healthcare

Economic insecurity, and systems navigation barriers are limiting young women and gender-diverse people's access to healthcare

Young women and gender diverse people face significant barriers to accessing healthcare. Compared to older Australians, young women are 3.5 times more likely to not purchase prescribed medication, 3.8 times more likely to delay or forgo GP visits, and 4.8 times more likely to delay or forgo specialist appointments to cost.⁶¹ These barriers are further compounded for young women and gender-diverse people with disabilities, who are more likely to require frequent medical care, specialist appointments and long-term treatment while facing reduced income, higher out-of-pocket costs and barriers related to accessibility, transport and practitioner availability.

Additionally, young women and gender-diverse people may be subject to health-related discrimination based on gender and/or sex. Experiences of gender-based health discrimination are not just resultant from female sex organs and reproductive health issues, women and gender-diverse people experience gender-based discrimination when treated for non-reproductive health conditions too.

The National Women's Health Strategy 2020-2030⁶² recognises the importance of enabling women and girls to access healthcare. However, more needs to be done to prioritise the health of young women and gender-diverse people in Australia – starting with addressing the underlying gender bias embedded across the healthcare system.

Chronic Health Conditions and System Navigation

Young women and gender diverse people are more likely to face difficulties navigating the healthcare system due to a greater likelihood of complex and intersecting chronic and reproductive health conditions. Young people with chronic health conditions and other co-occurring health issues require a team of healthcare professionals. While cost is a significant barrier in accessing relevant practitioners, navigating where to start, sharing one's medical history, interpreting medical information, and advocating for oneself is highly burdensome, time-consuming, and often comes at the opportunity-cost of not working or using free time and energy that is scarce for chronically ill people. These challenges are intensified for young people with disability, who are more also likely to experience multiple chronic conditions, require coordinated care across disciplines, and face accessibility barriers in communication, appointment length, diagnostic processes and follow-up.

Fragmented care and short consultation times disproportionately disadvantage patients whose conditions are complex, fluctuating or poorly understood. System navigation is especially difficult when health practitioners operate in silo, fail to share relevant information when referring, and do not offer a 'holistic' approach to treatment. Reproductive health is often treated separately to other health conditions, despite characteristics of one's menstrual cycle being markers of health status and offering critical insights into broader physical and mental wellbeing.

Recommendation 3.1: Lower the Medicare Safety Net threshold for people on low-incomes, beyond Concession cardholders and families eligible for Family Tax Benefit Part A.

Recommendation 3.2: Expand the number of subsidised sessions for chronic health management plans.

The lack of gender diversity in medical research and education is leading to inadequate diagnosis and treatment

The exclusion of women and gender-diverse people from medical research and education contributes to women's (already) poorer health outcomes and likelihood of chronic illness. Across Australian universities, male biology remains the default in textbooks,⁶³ and only one in four medical students feels adequately trained regarding women's pain presentations.⁶⁴ The most serious adverse effects of approved commercial drugs have disproportionately impacted women. Commonly used drugs are known to be more effective for men, with women and gender-diverse people experiencing more side effects when using antidepressants and pain-relieving medications like analgesics.⁶⁵

Young people, especially patients with reproductive or sexual health concerns, are subject to practitioners' biases, lacking knowledge, and ultimately, their treatment decisions. Cost barriers exacerbate this effect, as young people cannot afford to seek second opinions, or 'shop around' to find the right doctor.

Australia's healthcare system has been designed and tested on male biology, with women and gender-diverse people still underrepresented in clinical trials.⁶⁶ As a result, women and gender-diverse people's access to equitable healthcare is not guaranteed, but contingent on factors outside of their control.

Inadequate Diagnosis and Treatment

Young women frequently feel their symptoms are dismissed by practitioners, as an exaggeration or attention-seeking, especially when presenting with complex and poorly understood conditions such as endometriosis. This is particularly troubling given that more than 90% of women and girls experience pain lasting longer than a year,⁶⁷ and 60% of women live with at least one long-term health condition.⁶⁸ Further, almost half of Australian teens are living with chronic diseases or developmental conditions⁶⁹ – significantly disrupting schooling and extracurricular activities. Despite this, there is no mention of women or girls in the National Strategic Action Plan for Pain Management⁷⁰ nor the National Strategic Framework for Chronic Conditions.⁷¹

Limited Trans-Inclusive Healthcare

Trans-inclusive healthcare remains difficult to access due to cost barriers and long waitlists. This is especially critical for gender-affirming medical interventions and referrals to specialist services that are time critical. Despite transgender and gender-diverse people being more likely to access mental health services,⁷² 60% feel isolated from medical and mental health services, while 42% have experienced practitioners who did not respect their gender identity.⁷³ Months-long waitlists and increasing costs⁷⁴ create additional barriers for gender-affirming healthcare, posing significant risks to patients' physical and mental health. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) have identified the disproportionate rates of mental health comorbidities among transgender and gender-diverse people, with a majority experiencing anxiety and depression because of systemic discrimination.⁷⁵ Gender-affirming hormone therapies have immense benefits for reducing suicide risk and improving mental health.⁷⁶ Such challenges are identified in Australia's Primary Health Care 10 Year Plan 2022-2032 yet the plan includes no recommendations for reform, nor action plans.

Recommendation 3.3: Increase funding for the provision and enhancement of healthcare services for transgender and gender-diverse people.

Recommendation 3.4: Pursue the continuation of specialist education for medical professionals to improve patient safety and outcomes. Scaling proven Government-funded initiatives such as Women's Health NSW's Pathways Project and SRHA's AUSLARC will deliver sustained system-wide benefits in clinical capability and patient satisfaction.

Young women and gender-diverse people often receive little to no education about their own health

A 2025 survey identified gaps in young people's sex education:

- Only 62% of participants understood that the contraceptive pill does not decrease long-term fertility.
- Only 56% of participants knew that chlamydia can make women infertile.
- Only 34% of participants consider the topic of menstruation to be "covered well."
- Only 39% of participants consider the topic of contraception to be "covered well."⁷⁷

The survey also revealed that students want more education on sex and sexual health.⁷⁸

On average, young women and girls experience menstrual onset at an earlier age and with more irregularity.⁷⁹ A significant proportion of students are getting their first period as early as year 3, without receiving puberty education until year 5.⁸⁰ Early menstruation and irregular periods are risk factors for a number of health conditions.⁸¹

More than one third of young Australian women miss at least one class in three months due to menstrual symptoms including pain and fatigue.⁸² Students cite symptoms such as fainting, vomiting, extreme pain, depression, anxiety, and exhaustion as reasons for missing out on usual activities.⁸³ Only a third of women able to identify their fertility window, and 51% presenting with a reproductive health condition that they “assumed was normal.”⁸⁴

Menstruation education improves young women’s confidence in asking for pain relief for painful periods and improves their knowledge, attitudes, and management of menstruation.⁸⁵ It also correlates with stronger school attendance rates.⁸⁶ With a diagnosis of endometriosis taking 6.5 years on average,⁸⁷ and other diagnoses such as Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome (PCOS) and Pre-Menstrual Dysphoric Disorder (PMDD) also likely to be delayed, menstruation education is necessary so that girls know when to seek support.⁸⁸ Many young women remain unaware of appropriate support services - nearly half of multicultural women report not knowing where to access suitable healthcare.⁸⁹

A review of menstruation education initiatives has demonstrated that peer education and group counselling is as effective for delivering menstrual education as medical professionals.⁹⁰ While delivery in schools is effective, teachers are ill-equipped to deliver education without sufficient training.⁹¹

The Pelvic Pain Foundation of Australia (PPFA) runs a program on endometriosis (PPEP Talk), that has been funded by federal and state governments. The post-program data audit found that 94% of students assigned female at birth found it informative, and 85% found it empowering.⁹² The program is free for non-Government schools nationwide, and secondary schools in Western Australia, South Australia, and Queensland.⁹³ PPFA also delivers menstrual education that addresses critical gaps in current school-based education, at the cost of \$500 per session.⁹⁴ Sexual and Reproductive Health Australia have primary members in each state and territory that support the delivery of comprehensive relationship and sexual health education. Their South Australian member, SHINE delivers sexual health education through professional training programs for educators, and through school-based programs.⁹⁵ The Queensland Government has also partnered with Share the Dignity to deliver free period products and better menstrual education to students.⁹⁶ Share the Dignity has developed a resource package for teachers called PeriodTalk which includes an education program for students in years five to eight, with teacher notes and lesson plans, video explainers, letters for parents, and activities to engage students.

While these programs are effective, access is limited and inconsistent - dependent on factors such as postcode, funding and teacher capacity to engage in professional training. A nationally coordinated approach is necessary to ensure girls can recognise health abnormalities, and know when and where to seek help, regardless of postcode.

Healthcare Misinformation

A lack of affordable, equitable and youth-centred healthcare services means that young people are more likely to ignore health concerns or “self-diagnose” through the internet, social media, or advice from friends. Young women are also more likely to use AI tools such as ChatGPT to ask health-related questions.⁹⁷ False and misleading narratives – particularly about reproductive health – are widespread across social media platforms where content moderation is inconsistently enforced. Research has identified more than a hundred recurring deceptive claims about reproductive health that are commonly found online.⁹⁸

Online misinformation is not only a threat to physical health, but psychological health. Watching less than ten minutes of beauty-related content on social media can trigger significant shame and anxiety about appearance,⁹⁹ and platform algorithms have been linked to rising eating disorder risks.¹⁰⁰

With increasing access to information (and misinformation), and persistent access barriers to adequate healthcare, teaching young women and gender-diverse people about their health through reliable school-based programs will act as a protective factor from online mis- and dis-information.

Recommendation 3.5: Mirror the National Respectful Relationships Education Framework to deliver a national curriculum on comprehensive sexual health education.

Recommendation 3.6: Provide long-term, sustainable funding for peer-based, community-led women’s health services to scale up comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education in schools, including partnerships with specialist providers such as the PPEP Talk to deliver curriculum on menstruation, contraception, endometriosis, menopause, and pelvic pain.

4. Young People’s Experiences of the Climate Emergency

The climate emergency is an economic and social issue that threatens human rights and the livelihoods of everyone. It exacerbates and perpetuates pre-existing inequality and creates new forms of inequality, particularly for distinct communities who face sexism, racism, ableism, ageism and geographical discrimination.

Young people, children and future generations have the most to lose due to the climate emergency, with young women and girls facing specific challenges due to social norms. Evidence from neighbouring countries in Asia and the Pacific demonstrate that girls are impacted “first and the worst.”¹⁰¹ An estimated 1.4 million (or one in six) Australian children and young people experience an environmental disaster or extreme weather event at least once a year.¹⁰² The average annual cost of the impacts of the climate emergency on children and young people is estimated at \$6.3 billion.¹⁰³ These figures are projected to get worse.

The climate crisis is impacting young women's ability to plan for the future

One in four young people in Australia are very or extremely concerned about climate change.¹⁰⁴ Young women and LGBTIQ+ people experience more severe rates of climate anxiety, and are more likely to have a negative outlook on the future.¹⁰⁵ Indigenous people and people from regional and remote areas are also more likely to have negative outlooks on the future.¹⁰⁶ Numerous factors contribute this:

- Girls are worried about their futures, including finding employment opportunities,¹⁰⁷ making reproductive choices, and finding secure housing.
- Girls and young people feel that the school curriculum does not prepare them for working in 'green jobs'¹⁰⁸ which are mostly male-dominated; energy, manufacturing, construction, transport, and agriculture.
- Girls and young women are frustrated with politicians and overwhelmed by the burden of advocating for change and advocating just to be heard.¹⁰⁹

The Impact of Climate Change on Reproductive Justice

Young women and gender-diverse people are significantly impacted by policies, discourse and social norms around reproductive choices, and pressures resulting from conversations around fertility, and 'body clocks.' Climate-based arguments for population reduction in developed countries compete with economic arguments for sustaining the birth rate. Climate change is exacerbating threats to young women's ability to plan for the future, and their reproductive autonomy.

Already, access to abortion care in Australia is inconsistent: The cost of a surgical abortion in NSW can vary between \$805 to \$3,850.¹¹⁰ Women describe being judged or dismissed by doctors, and told they would "regret" an abortion or congratulated on an unintended pregnancy.¹¹¹ For women and gender-diverse people with disabilities, medical ableism can restrict their reproductive choices. For migrants and refugee communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and LGBTIQ+ people, mainstream services can be inaccessible due to cultural inappropriateness and systems that are difficult to navigate. During climate disasters, access to reproductive healthcare can be interrupted, further exacerbating these issues.

At the same time, women are fearful of introducing children into an unstable world. Two in five (40%) Australian women without children are hesitant to have children because of climate change.¹¹² For men, this figure was less than 17%.¹¹³ In Australia, the median age of mothers is increasing, with younger women less likely to have children.¹¹⁴ Australia's fertility rate* is the lowest ever recorded and is well below the replacement rate.¹¹⁵ Research has demonstrated that anxiety about childbearing increases with perceptions about how much the climate is likely to change.¹¹⁶ In general, women express higher levels of anxiety around quality of life for the young people and children in their lives, and prospective children.¹¹⁷

Recommendation 4.1: Launch a Joint Standing Committee into the impacts of the climate emergency on young people and children.

Recommendation 4.2: Collect data on Australians' experiences of the climate emergency, disaggregated by gender, age and other demographics.

The climate crisis is increasing young people's experience of housing insecurity and inadequate living standards

The climate crisis compounds on young women's experiences of insecure, unsafe housing and homelessness. It is further exacerbating economic disparities made worse by the housing and cost of living crisis, with women already less likely to own a home,¹¹⁸ and more likely to experience homelessness. Extreme weather events will impact renters and landlords, requiring more stringent rental standards to weather-proof homes and ensure they can withstand extreme conditions.

As Australia transitions to green energy, it is imperative that social and affordable rentals are sufficiently weather-resistant and safe to live in. Tenants are increasingly at risk of inadequate weather-proofing and outdated energy systems that are inefficient and expensive to run. Low and middle-income earners, young people, and women mostly reside in private rentals and social housing. These demographics are at risk of exposure to extreme temperatures and mould growth, subsequent health complications, and extraordinary energy bills.

The Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative (SHEPI), along with state and territory agreements, provides funding to install shading and insulation, energy-efficient electric appliances, and solar systems in social housing.¹¹⁹ However, rental standards have not improved despite National Cabinet's *A Better Deal for Renters*.¹²⁰ Without minimum standards for insulation, energy and water efficiency, and instalment of new energy systems such as solar power, states and territories cannot harmonise their rental standards and will not be accountable for improving them.¹²¹ More than 30% of Australia's households have rooftop solar, however that figure is just 4% for rental properties.¹²²

Recommendation 4.3: Provide national guidelines on minimum rental standards such as insulation and efficient heating and cooling, to be implemented by state and territory governments.

Home Ownership and Insurance

As the prevalence and severity of environmental disasters increases, so too, are home-insurance premiums. This will have enormous impacts on the housing market, banking sector and economy more broadly. If homeowners cannot afford their home insurance, they will breach their mortgage contracts. It will also affect the ability for first-home buys to qualify for a loan. The Climate Council estimates that by 2030, one in every 25 Australian properties will be 'high risk' and uninsurable.¹²³ The 2025 Climate Risk Assessment has indicated that flooding and environmental disaster damage will be increasingly likely for entire regions.¹²⁴ Over one year, the number of homes experiencing extreme home insurance affordability pressure increased 30%, with 1.6 million homes now experiencing insurance costs that place households at risk of underinsurance or being uninsured in 2024.¹²⁵

The Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's (ACC) Northern Australian Insurance Inquiry 2020, reported that cyclone risk premiums were likely to increase in particular areas as a result of climate change.¹²⁶ One case study saw an insurance premium in Cairns, Queensland, more than triple over three years – from \$25,000 to \$97,000.¹²⁷ We are concerned that given housing is a larger proportion of women's income and women are more likely to be in housing stress than men, rising insurance costs will have a more significant impact. This is especially stressful for young women, given insurance costs are only projected to increase over time.

The Government is currently addressing persistently high and increasing insurance premiums by effectively subsidising private insurers to help them cover damage that is well beyond the insured's excess. This helps cap premiums by outsourcing the additional costs associated with increased risk and likelihood of environmental disaster-related damage. The Cyclone Reinsurance Pool is injected with at least \$10 billion annually, and further funding subject to severity and occurrence of environmental disasters.¹²⁸ This approach has been cautioned against, with the Productivity Commission warning that subsidies erode incentives to address risk, and are a short term, costly solution.¹²⁹ The Government needs to implement forward-thinking policy that safeguards young Australians' futures and acknowledges the widespread and increasing impacts of the climate emergency.

Recommendation 4.4: Develop economic modelling on the insurance industry and future housing market based on the risk scenarios outlined in the National Climate Risk Assessment. Include a gender-impact analysis.

Young women and gender-diverse people are under-represented in industries focused on climate solutions

Australia's transition to green energy often comes with the promise of a surge in job opportunities. However, these opportunities will be in sectors that are male-dominated and already undersupplied. Sectors such as energy, engineering, manufacturing, construction, transport, agriculture, and new jobs created from renewables are already facing shortages, with enormous projected shortfalls as soon as 2030.¹³⁰ Uptake in training for electrical work has fallen by 40% over the last decade.¹³¹ Meanwhile, a shortfall of 32,000 electricians is also expected by 2030.¹³² In construction, 450,000 more jobs are required to build green energy infrastructure by 2030.¹³³

Young women and gender-diverse people are overrepresented in climate activism and underrepresented in formal leadership and sectors focused on climate solutions. Major industries related to climate change and critical to the renewable energy transition remain male dominated. Engineering, construction and trades, IT, mining, and clean energy are almost completely male-dominated.¹³⁴

Drivers of occupational segregation include caring responsibilities, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and 'leaky pipelines' where women and girls are excluded or discouraged from traditionally male education pathways. Exclusion from STEM educational pathways limits the potential workforce for emerging opportunities and high-demand jobs in the energy transition.

The Government must attract more people to these sectors and training pipelines and must do so quickly. Young women and gender-diverse people should play a significant role and have opportunities to drive energy transition Australia must also invest in more efficient skills recognition for migrants to realise its full potential in green energy jobs. More than 50% of Australia's engineers are born overseas, indicating a strong reliance on skilled migration.¹³⁵

Recommendation 4.5: Invest in education pipelines and support infrastructure for women to join the green workforce and ensure Future Made in Australia is successful.

- Develop and fund early-stage education pathways into the green workforce through school-based programs, paid pre-apprenticeships and bridging pathways
- Attach gender-responsive workforce conditions to Commonwealth-funded projects under the Future Made in Australia, such as participation/retention benchmarks for women and gender-diverse people, safety and care supports, flexible rostering and more.

5. A Youth-Focused National Policy Agenda

Young people carry the greatest burden of prospective social, economic and environmental issues, yet they consistently report that they do not feel listened to by members of parliament. Confidence in government action is critically low, only 1% believe the federal Government is adequately addressing their top policy concerns.¹³⁶ In the absence of any dedicated national agenda addressing the realities facing young people, this disconnect is deepening into distrust – 60% of Australians disagree that politicians act in the best interest of girls.¹³⁷

Despite seeing gender parity in the federal government and cabinet for the first time, the broader culture of Australian politics is still reminiscent of a 'boys club' that young women and gender-diverse people are excluded from. While three quarters of young women channel their political engagement into day-to-day activism, only 28% see politics itself as a viable career,¹³⁸ largely due to concerns about the safety of political workplaces and a persistent lack of diversity.¹³⁹ As a result, despite their strong civic engagement, just 1% of young people have run for office and only 8% say they would consider doing so in the future.¹⁴⁰

Integrating young voices into decision-making processes incentivises sustainable policy design. Wales' *Wellbeing of Future Generations Act 2015* requires the Welsh Government to "act in a manner which seeks to ensure that the needs of the present are met, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."¹⁴¹ The Welsh Government uses an Integrated Impact Assessment tool to support policymaking that plans for the long-term social, economic, environmental and cultural wellbeing of the country.¹⁴² Wales has also appointed a Future Generations Commissioner who oversees compliance with the Act.

By contrast, Australia's mechanisms for integrating young voices into decision-making processes are largely ineffective and often symbolic. Australia lacks the necessary oversight to embed the interests of young people and future generations across all Government portfolios. In addition, Australia's short electoral cycles, and exclusion of under-18-year-olds from voting, act as a disincentive for policymaking that is sustainable and grounded in intergenerational equality.

This Government must embed young voices into policymaking to ensure Australia's responses to acute policy issues are future-proof and forward-thinking. This starts with moving beyond rhetoric to game-changing reform.

Recommendation 5.1: Establish an independent statutory Commissioner for Future Generations.

Recommendation 5.2: Introduce a Wellbeing of Future Generations Act for Australia.

Recommendation 5.3: Lower the voting age to 16.

Universal Principles

These universal principles reflect how young women and gender-diverse people in Australia understand and respond to the most pressing issues shaping their lives.

Intersectionality

- Young people have the right to be recognised as having diverse needs, experiences and challenges. Many young women and gender-diverse people experience multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination or inequality - including but not limited to race, culture, ethnicity, indigeneity, disability, gender expression, sexual orientation, and/or geography face compounded challenges have specific, non-homogenous needs.
- Young people deserve to make their own choices without judgement – to pursue safety, dignity, opportunity, and autonomy in every path they take.
- Young people have the right to lives that are not limited, nor defined by, socio-economic status.

Economic Security

- Young people have the right not to compromise on basic needs – healthcare, food, safe housing, stable income support.

Safety by Design

- Young people have the right to feel safe in all environments, including physical spaces, online, and within relationships.
- Safety must be actively embedded into the design of policy, systems and environments that young people interact with.

Visibility & Inclusivity

- Young people deserve to have their voices heard and listened to, opinions represented and use to inform and be meaningfully involved and influential.
- Young people have the right to be meaningfully included and feel accurately represented in data and research.

Access

- Young people have a right to tailored support services, particularly for those who face barriers in accessing and navigating public services, or who may face discrimination when seeking support.

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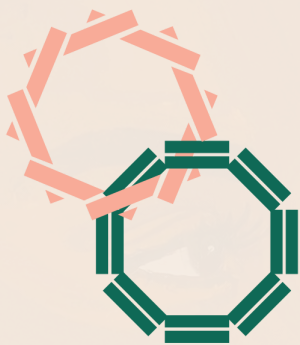
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Working with
Women Alliance

POLICY BRIEF

TAKE A SEAT: LISTENING TO THE POLICY PRIORITIES OF AUSTRALIA'S YOUNG WOMEN

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