

Australian
Gender
Equality
Council



**A COLLECTIVE
VOICE**



2025

PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION

AUSTRALIAN COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT

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CONTENTS

ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN GENDER EQUALITY COUNCIL.....	3
SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	3
1. Strengthening the ‘Working for Women’ Strategy	3
2. Economic Security & Workforce Participation	3
3. Safety & Respect	3
4. Education & Cultural Change	4
5. Government & Leadership	4
6. Gender-Responsive Budgeting	4
INTRODUCTION	5
AGEC’S 2025 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION - SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....	7
AGEC’S 2025 PRE- BUDGET SUBMISSION - DETAIL	16
1. CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY	16
2. ECONOMIC SECURITY.....	20
3. WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION	22
4. SAFETY & RESPECT IN FAMILY & COMMUNITY	24
5. SAFETY & RESPECT AT WORK.....	25
6. EDUCATION	28
7. GOVERNMENT & DEMOCRACY	30
8. WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY	32
9. HEALTH & WELLBEING	34
10. FAMILY & CARING REPOSIBILITIES.....	36
11. INFRASTRUCTURE	37
12. SPORTS.....	37
13. MEDIA.....	39
APPENDIX ONE – AGECE Manifesto	40
APPENDIX TWO - Gender Inequality as a Wicked Problem – Fitzsimmons et al. (2025)	41
APPENDIX THREE– MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE AUSTRALIAN GENDER EQUALITY COUNCIL	42



ABOUT THE AUSTRALIAN GENDER EQUALITY COUNCIL

The Australian Gender Equality Council (AGEC) brings together front-line organisations working towards gender equality. Backed by rigorous research, we advocate for women in all their diversity across the country, to achieve progress in key areas of policy and government action, most recently we actively advocated for a National Gender Equality Strategy. Our voice is independent, collective and strong, raised together for a future that's fair for all.

AGEC currently represents 26 organisations whose members combine to more than 500,000 women across a wide range of industry and community sectors.

SUMMARY OF PRIORITIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Strengthening the 'Working for Women' Strategy

- Transform the existing 'Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality' into a **nationally coordinated strategy** involving all levels of government, businesses, and civil society.
- Define **clear targets** for gender equality and ensure funding aligns with strategic objectives.
- Establish a **National Gender Equality Act** to consolidate and strengthen legislative protections.

2. Economic Security & Workforce Participation

- **Address the gender pay gap** by ensuring equitable remuneration in female-dominated industries.
- **Expand superannuation payments** to include all earned income, particularly for carers and those in insecure work.
- Expand mandatory pay gap reporting to include organisations with more than 50 employees
- Increase women's workforce participation by supporting **universal free childcare**, extending **paid parental leave to 26 weeks**, and setting **workforce gender targets**.

3. Safety & Respect

- Expand legal protections against gender-based violence, including nationwide coercive control laws and stronger workplace protections.
- Fund safe housing, financial support, and frontline services for women and children escaping violence.



- Introduce **workplace regulations** to prevent gender-based violence, bullying, and harassment.

4. Education & Cultural Change

- Revise the national curriculum to eliminate gender bias and mandate education on respectful relationships, consent, and workplace equality.
- Ensure gender balance in STEM education and vocational training through funding and national targets.
- **Regulate media and advertising** to eliminate gender bias and ensure equal representation of women in leadership, sport, and entertainment.
- Funding for a public education campaign to positively shift the perception of women with particular reference to those standing for public office.

5. Government & Leadership

- **Mandate gender balance** in all government Cabinets and leadership roles.
- Tie political **party funding** to gender-balanced candidate pipelines.
- Collect **national data** on gender representation in all sectors.
- Funding for education programs in schools and universities that encourage and empower girls and young women to consider public and community service leadership positions.

6. Gender-Responsive Budgeting

- Ensure all federal, state, and local budgets apply a gender lens to funding decisions.
- Establish **transparent reporting** on gender-related expenditure and progress against equality targets.

AGEC urges the Federal Government to adopt a holistic, action-driven National Gender Equality Strategy that not only addresses gender inequality's symptoms but its root causes. This requires bold investment, structural reforms, and a whole-of-society approach to create a gender-equal Australia.



INTRODUCTION

The release of 'Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality', in March 2024 was a significant step in Australia's journey towards gender equality. As AGEC noted in its 2024 Pre-Budget submission, Australia will only be capable of achieving gender equality when a well-defined, comprehensive and legislated National Strategy, funded and led by the Federal Government, and in active collaboration with every State, the business community, non-government organisations and the broader community, is manifest. Such a strategy should identify and seek to address all aspects of gender inequality as set out in AGEC's Gender Equality Manifesto (See Appendix One).

While we were pleased with the Albanese Government's 'Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality' we note that a 'National Strategy' should be a holistic and integrated suite of laws, interventions, and guiding principles that, when communicated and adopted throughout the country, generates a desired pattern of decision making.

The 'Working for Women' plan takes significant strides towards some of these elements of strategy; however, a strategy should be about how all Australians should make decisions and allocate resources in order accomplish gender equality, not just Federal Government institutions.

A good strategy provides a clear roadmap, consisting of a fully integrated set of guiding principles and rules, that defines the actions that all organisations should take (and not take) and the things they should prioritise (and not prioritise) to achieve gender equality. Therefore, any undertaking that does not encompass the active inclusion of all States, the business and NGO community and every citizen of this country is simply not a strategy, but rather a series of policies and interventions that may be more or less connected but will ultimately fail to generate whole of country change. Simply put, gender inequality is a 'wicked problem' and, from a policy perspective, must be addressed from this standpoint (See Appendix Two).

As an independent Gender Equality peak body and think tank, we would be pleased to offer any assistance in expanding upon the 'Working for Women' plan.

This submission is based on our members' feed-back obtained through the AGEC members Annual National Forum where the 'Working for Women' plan was workshopped over two days. In sum, the AGEC National Forum believe that the following issues still need to be addressed:

- Make the 'Working for Women' plan a strategy rather than an aspirational vision
- Define what is meant by Gender Equality and set Targets
- Focus upon addressing the Causes of Gender Inequality
- Allocate appropriate funding to all elements the Strategy



- Consolidating all gender related legislation into an overarching National Gender Equality Act – Incorporating the States and Territories
- Integration of all Government Gender Programs under one Responsible Department/Minister
- Public Promotion of the National Gender Equality Strategy, including a Dialogue with all Civil Society Organisations and the Private Sector
- Ensuring the Strategy has bi-partisan support so that initiatives are not defunded or deprioritised by successive Governments
- Develop strategies to tackle head-on and overcome conservative pushback and perceptions of social engineering, rather than averring to sub-sections of society

Given the marginal decline in the gender pay gap over the past 20 years, ongoing gender segregation of industry sectors, unchanging gender role stereotypes, persistent inequality in the sharing of domestic workload, low levels of representation of women in leadership and politics, poor retirement outcomes for women relative to men, stagnant numbers of women CEO's in our ASX200 firms and ongoing violence against women, AGECE believes that the 'Working for Women' plan is imbalanced in its focus. AGECE believes that an effective National Gender Equality Strategy must equally address the causes and the symptoms of gender inequality.

This should be a key pillar of the 2025-2026 Federal Budget, supported by a Women's Budget, gender budget and gender mainstreaming analysis, a public education campaign and a material increase in investment in all aspects of tackling gender inequality. However, fundamentally it must be a Strategy in truth and not just in name. And the Strategy must position that gender equality is for everyone.

We were likewise pleased at the Albanese Government's commitment that from 2023-24 gender responsive budgeting will be embedded across the budget process and we continue to look forward to understanding how this will be implemented.





AGEC'S 2025 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION - SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

	ELEMENT	RECOMMENDATIONS
1	CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Measure and set targets around gender attitudes, gender stereotype and gender role beliefs across Australian society. • Fund a national community education program to positively address gender role stereotypes and promote the objectives of the 'Working for Women' plan. • Continue gender-responsive budgeting, applying a gender lens to all policies and decisions, relative to their ability to drive targets, with year on year, transparent reporting to the public. • Measure and report progress upon past initiatives in women's budgets, reconciling expenditure relative to targets. • Ensure there is a gender balance in all budget expenditures including health, sport and education using progress towards meaningful targets as a benchmark for funding considerations. • Ensure Australia's national gender equality strategy addresses gender disparity in workforce participation rates.
2	ECONOMIC SECURITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliminate the underpayment of female-dominated industries through award changes to childcare workers, education support workers, veterinary nurses, and personal care and disability support workers. • Rebalance remuneration and benefits across all industries to gain traction in closing the gender pay gap. • Legislate superannuation payments on all earned income and supplement the superannuation contributions of caregivers, sole traders, long-term casual employees, and those who take time out for family or caring responsibilities. • Expand mandatory pay gap reporting to include organisations with 50-99 employees, including State and Local Governments. • Unpaid work, such as caring, must be assigned financial 'value' through direct financial or tax subsidies. • Legislate for financial institutions and retirement funds to have systems in place to prevent economic coercion and control.



3	WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The removal of structural barriers to people’s equal participation and representation in all industries. • The gender imbalance in male and female-dominated industries is addressed. • Fund and support programs that have proven to increase representation in one-gender dominated industries to address gender segregation within industries and occupations. • Address pay inequality between male and female dominated industries. • The productivity commission research the optimal implement of setting of targets or quotas for companies to ensure suitable gender representation throughout the employee lifecycle and at all levels of workforce participation. Research to include how the private sector can be incentivised by government to correct gender imbalances across sectors and industries. • Increase women’s leadership representation through mandated strategies and action plans for organisations and governments to address gender balance at all levels of leadership including boards. • Gender equality is considered when awarding all government contracts
4	SAFETY & RESPECT IN FAMILY & COMMUNITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for frontline services, a predominantly female workforce of professionals who are supporting victims in a national crisis of gendered violence. • Funding for an additional \$5m for five pilot sexual assault legal services sites. • Coercive control legislation to be adopted in every State and ensure consistent definitions of consent and assault and consistent outcomes. • Free access to resources to flee violent relationships. • Safe respite housing and accommodations are available for those who need them when fleeing dangerous or violent situations for both short and medium term and financial advice and support. • Victims of family and domestic violence are given every opportunity to remain in their homes – alleged perpetrators are removed from the family home until a resolution is achieved. • Perpetrator programs are to be well researched and measured for their effectiveness – having to report upon their results to obtain continued funding.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publicly funded education and awareness campaigns that are culturally inclusive and communicate shared Australian societal expectations regarding safety and Respect in the home, family, and community environment. • Government agency employees and contractors must be trained in person-centred, trauma-informed, culturally sensitive customer service behaviour. • Medical and emergency response personnel must be trained in person-centred, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive customer service. • Post reforms analysis/review of family courts, highlighting best practices, lessons learned and recommendations for further restructuring. • Violence, harassment, and abuse are punished more severely and uniformly nationwide. • Provision of education in schools and community organisations to empower people to identify and call out disrespectful behaviours before they become abused. • Primary, secondary, and tertiary education programs include respectful relationships and behaviour units—long-term programs to eliminate gender stereotypes and promote Respect for women and girls.
5	SAFETY & RESPECT AT WORK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Federal Government conduct an inquiry into the development of specific model safety regulations to address occupational violence, bullying, and sexual and gender-based harassment, which disproportionately impact women.
6	EDUCATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guaranteed, universal, equal access for all students to all schools and appropriate equitable funding for all schools based upon their needs. • School Funding must be directly linked to adherence to the principles of gender equality outlined in the 'Working for Women' plan. • A full review of the National Curriculum must be undertaken to identify and eliminate Gender bias. A review of curriculum in each State to identify opportunities for gender mainstreaming and elimination of bias and to ensure education around gender role formation, human rights, consent, sexual harassment, sexuality, reproductive rights, sexual health, period education and products is being delivered effectively.



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary and secondary curriculums have mandatory diversity and inclusion education for students and parents, the content and delivery of which to be based upon a Federal Government mandate with no exclusions or exemptions. • STEM and STEAM opportunities must be promoted in primary school and early childhood learning in order to shift entrenched gender biases in career preferences of boys and girls. This will require significant funding to enable reach to all schools and done in collaboration with Australian Industry and Tertiary Institutions. • All subjects offered by primary and secondary schools up to Year 10 must be undertaken equally, regardless of gender. • 40/40/20 Targets for disciplines and subjects dominated by one gender in Years 11 and 12 must be adopted in all primary and secondary schools to achieve gender balance. • Curricula must represent the achievements of all genders. Women's leadership and empowerment accomplishments must be included in all curricula. • Students have equal access to all extra-curricular activities regardless of gender and other intersectionality's. • Dedicated early career interest counselling and mapping be available in every school, to promote non-gender stereotypical job roles. • All schools must offer non gendered uniform options. • Funding must also be made available to educate Teachers and early childhood educators regarding the causes and symptoms of gender inequality, particularly regarding the connection between gender role stereotypes and subject interest, selection, engagement and career preferences. • As part of a broader National media campaign around gender equality, an advertising campaign be funded and aimed at parents around careers and gender stereotyping. • Audit and enforcement of existing gender equality initiatives in the current National Curriculum in all schools by the Federal Government and penalties introduced for failure to adhere to either the National Curriculum or existing discrimination laws.
7	GOVERNMENT & DEMOCRACY	Federal Government collect Data on:



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender and diversity of local government, State and Federal candidates and those elected. • Gender and diversity of staff at first, second and third tier of local, state and federal employees. • Gender and diversity CEOs, Chairs and Boards in non-government sectors. • Data should be mandated by the Federal Government and not left to voluntary organisations to collect such as the Australian Local Government Women’s Association or Chief Executive Women. • Funding for education programs in schools and universities that encourage and empower girls and young women to consider public and community service leadership positions. • Include gender, civics, democracy, and governance in the national primary and secondary school curriculum. • Funding for a public education campaign to positively shift the perception of women with particular reference to those standing for public office. • Continued funding of the WIPO leadership grant to train and equip women candidates to all levels of government, such as the one awarded to the consortium led by Women for Election Australia. • Funding for Mentoring women, such as the Australian Local Government Women’s Association national mentoring program for elected local government women councillors to increase retention and the capacity of councillors. • The Federal Government mandates that all Cabinets contain a gender balance and diversity in line with the composition of the society they represent. • The Federal Government requires all political parties set targets and quotas for candidate recruitment and pre-selection. • Legislation that political parties will only receive election funding from the AEC or equivalent authority if they meet the candidate target or quota (similar to Eire) • Require all political parties to develop gender-balanced candidate pipelines and that all candidates are given equal campaign funding support by their parties. • Require Parliaments to enforce respectful standards of behaviour.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for a pilot program to establish a Women in Local Government network in South East Asia and the Pacific. This would empower women in the region. We note that the Australian Local Government Women’s Association is the largest organisation of its kind in the Commonwealth, and would be an ideal organisation to work with the Australian Government to establish a ‘Global Women in Local Government’ network.
8	WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research is undertaken by the productivity commission to direct Government on how best to incentivise private sector employers to increase the availability and access to flexible work. Once determined, all levels of government implement recommendations. • Introduce legislation, regulations and adopt policies that normalise flexible working. • Provide a government funded “carer credit” which sees carers allocated credits in the form of superannuation payments, pension top ups and other government services as a payment for the savings to the budget these unpaid carers provide. • Task the Fair Work Commission with ensuring that workplace flexibility is built into enterprise agreements and awards to enable split shifts, job share, and flexible rostering in 24/7 environments. • Extend current government programs such as the \$20,000 Instant Asset Write-Off scheme to larger employers where the asset is related to the establishment and/or provision of flexible work for employees.
9	HEALTH & WELLBEING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A response to the Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention approaches, Unlocking the Prevention Potential, Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence undertaken by the Women and Women’s Safety Ministerial Council be consistent with the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 and prioritise action on those items consistent with the primary prevention framework outlined by Our Watch in their Change the Story Framework. • Provide funding towards free abortions nation-wide. • Ensure access to free sanitary products for everyone who menstruates. • Ensure provision of maternity services at rural and regional hospitals.



10	FAMILY & CARING RESPONSIBILITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government funding and policy changes to provide universal free quality childcare through subsidies, tax breaks, or the extension of primary school education to 0-5-year-olds. • Employers and Government provide equal access to leave for parenting and other caring responsibilities. • Immediate introduction of 26 weeks of paid parental leaves unrelated to a parent's gender or carer status (a reference to primary or secondary carer status removed). • Prohibit requirements for a 12-month waiting period for access to employer parental leave.
11	INFRASTRUCTURE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work and community facilities must reflect the needs of all genders for equal participation and safe access. • Gender diverse consultation is required for all infrastructure decisions at Federal, State, Local and organisational (where privately approved or contracted by Government to provide services) levels. • Balanced gender representation in the assessment of tenders for the development of public infrastructure. • Ensure that a gender lens is applied to all infrastructure spend at Federal, State and Local Government levels. • Government procurement contracts stipulate the need for gender equality. • Change planning laws so that they must consider the needs of both men and women and how decisions about infrastructure affect both men and women, including how safe they are.
12	SPORTS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grants to sporting clubs to undertake training in making their club a place where everyone feels welcomed and respected. • Set gender-neutral standards for pay and conditions in all professional sporting codes. • Funded sporting infrastructure meet and reports annually on 'accessibility' KPI's. • A gender lens is applied at all sporting infrastructure spend by all three levels of government. • Tie Australia's sports-related funding to the relevant sporting codes achieving agreed gender targets. • Review Federal and State sports funding from a gender perspective. • High-Performing Board Training for Committees and Boards



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding for programs that support training and development for board and committee members, both men and women, to enhance their governance capabilities. • Leadership Development Programs for Women and Girls in Sport • Initiatives that equip women and girls with essential skills such as leadership, resilience, and confidence, both on and off the field. These programs foster a pipeline of future leaders and role models in sport and beyond. • Funding for research into the specific barriers women face in sport, particularly those that impact their career progression. This should include exploring how sport can serve as a platform to develop transferable skills that benefit women in leadership and workplace settings. • Funding of high-performance athletes must be from a gender equality perspective. • Mandate to ensure gender-proportional media coverage of sports. • Sports policy and program decisions to explicitly consider the impacts on women.
13	MEDIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating a program similar to the UK's well-established program for the elimination of gender bias in advertising. • Fund media watchdogs to develop and enforce a policy toolkit for fair gender representation in the media. • Directing media outlets to set editorial targets for coverage of women sports people, commentators and entertainers. • Actively increase and set targets for the number of women commenting as experts and providing their perspectives, contributions, and responses. • Remove gender-biased advertising and programming and sexist media. • Promote exemplary organisations that demonstrate gender balance. • Advocate for vocational training for journalists including gender studies, unconscious bias, language use, and awareness training. • Undertake legislative reform to advertising standards to eliminate gender-biased advertising and programming. • Industries and organisations should evaluate and assess their level of female representation, engage in training and



	<p>development for spokeswomen, and commit to tracking improvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The media must pledge to enhance the proportion of female bylines to match the population's gender ratio (50/50).• Media should address the gender disparity in the most widely discussed topics covered in the media, such as sports, health, and politics.• The media should prioritise gender parity in the news and reporting via inclusion and diversity in content creation by ensuring workplaces promote and provide exposure for women and avenues to leadership.• Setting quotas for the number of women to anchor prime time shows.
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AGEC'S 2025 PRE- BUDGET SUBMISSION - DETAIL

1. CAUSES OF GENDER INEQUALITY

Gender inequality is a socially constructed problem. For Australia to be a global leader in gender equality, Australia must address the systemic causes of gender inequality, while continuing to acknowledge and address the severe impacts of its symptoms, including its most severe manifestations in violence against women.

In addressing gender inequality, no societal systems, structures, communities, or institutions (secular or religious) can be permitted or enabled to differently value or deny opportunities based on gender. While such overt discrimination, which is currently enabled through many long-standing laws, remains unaddressed, gender equality will never be realised in this country.

Gender inequality in Australia manifests in many ways, including:

- Stereotyping of gender roles
- Lack of value attributed to caring roles
- Gender segregated economy and a large gender pay gap
- Disproportionate gender representation in political parties and parliaments
- Gendered education system
- Inequitable burden of caring responsibilities
- Reinforcing of stereotypes across all forms of publicly consumed media
- An epidemic of gender-based violence

The root cause of gender inequality in Australia, and globally, is the assignment of gender roles and stereotypes about these roles, which are instilled in early childhood and the primary school years. As such, this problem can only be addressed at the household level and in early and primary school education as well as addressing the media our children are absorbing in these years. In a study undertaken by Fitzsimmons, Yates and Callan (2018) it was identified that many schools still offer different course streams based upon student gender, with girls being channelled into courses such as home economics and boys towards courses preparatory to trades. Likewise, many religious schools still teach gender fundamentalism and assign gender roles such as parenting and domestic duties, to women. Given that approximately 30% of all schools in Australia are affiliated with a religion, or 94% of private schools, gender role stereotyping, a fundamental cause of gender inequality is being perpetuated by the current funding and governance of our education system.

As a country, we need to unravel these gender role assignments and stereotypes at the source. Extensive research has established that gender stereotypes and traditional



societal norms regarding the roles of men and women underpin the many and varied symptoms of gender inequality¹.

Gender norms are deeply entrenched in Australian culture and have a very powerful influence on gendered outcomes such as disparate violence against women. Gender norms are instilled in us from the day we are born and influence everything we do^{2,3}.

Gender role stereotypes are ultimately the cause of our gender segregated economy, division of domestic labour, domestic and family violence and workforce participation rates, and must be addressed in any Gender Strategy as a priority.

The economic cost of not addressing these problems is well understood and retards the Australian Economy by as much as 10–15% of its GDP annually^{4 5}.

Initiatives that target the elimination of gender stereotypes, which would address the root cause of inequality, currently only receive 1% of government funding⁶ allocated towards addressing gender inequality. This disparity must be addressed in future budgets. Without addressing the causes of gender inequality, as a country, we will need to assign significant funding to addressing its symptoms ad infinitum. This is both short-sighted and an unfair and an entirely unnecessary burden on future generations of Australians.

Addressing the origins of gender stereotypes requires a nationally integrated, multi-faceted strategy underpinned by societally focused education on the need for change and the origins of gender stereotypes/gender norms. It must be recognised that Gender inequality is a Wicked Problem which occurs at multiple levels including Government/Society, Organisations, Families, and Individuals.

The issue of gender role stereotype formation occurs in early childhood and primary years; hence this issue is best tackled by understanding and addressing its primary drivers⁷ during these years. While much research has been undertaken in jurisdictions

¹ Eagly and Carli (2007) <https://archive.org/details/throughlabyrinth0000eagl/page/n7/mode/2up>

² Bourdieu (1990) <https://epdf.tips/the-logic-of-practice.html>

³ Perez, C. (2019). *Invisible Women: Exposing Data in a World Designed for Men*. London: Vintage Press

⁴ World Economic Forum. (2024). *Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Gap: This is the state of work for women in 2024*. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/06/women-work-gender-gap-2024/>

⁵ Goldman Sachs (2023). *Cutting the gender employment gap in half could boost global GDP by 6%*. <https://www.goldmansachs.com/insights/articles/cutting-the-gender-employment-gap-could-boost-global-gdp-by-6-percent>

⁶ Deloitte (2024). *Remaking the Norm*. Sydney: Deloitte Access Economics.

⁷ Fitzsimmons, T.W., Yates, M. S., & Callan, V. (2018). *Hands Up for Gender Equality: A Major Study into Confidence and Career Intentions of Adolescent Girls and Boys*. Brisbane, Qld: AIBE Centre for Gender Equality in the Workplace – The University of Queensland.



outside of Australia, much more needs to be done to understand the specific contribution and age at which the following factors apply to Australian Children^{8 9 10}

1. The parental division of labour in the home (observed behaviour)
2. Espoused parental (friends and other familial) attitudes towards gender roles and careers.
3. The assignment of household duties to children.
4. Gender roles portrayed in media and viewed by children, including advertising.
5. Role modelling of gender role stereotypes by early educators and primary/secondary school teachers, including the proportion and type of senior roles held by women.
6. The lack of visible (gender disconfirming) roles undertaken by both men and women (For example, male nurses and female tradies)

Significant expansion in funding is therefore required across the education of parents, revision media standards and the visibility of roles in early childhood and primary/secondary education as set out further throughout our submission.

The role of intersectionality in the differential experience of gender must also be understood. Most policies treat gender inequality in aggregate, as though women were a homogenous group. Far deeper understanding of the demographic composition of Australian women and the impact of disability, CALD, sexuality, age, indigeneity, among other forms of intersectionality is required for any National Strategy to be effective.

For a National Gender Equality Strategy to succeed, not only does it require action by the Federal Government, but also leadership to integrate and align effort across all States and Territories, the Corporate and NGO sectors. Additionally, there is a need to rationalise and modernise all anti-discrimination frameworks as well as all legislation affecting women. Simply put, our legislative framework around gender equality is a patchwork of Acts and Regulations (State and Federal) developed piecemeal over the past 50 years and needs full review, modernisation, and integration. Likewise, legislation that actively protects gender discriminatory behaviour, such as by religious institutions, represents ancient and medieval views which are no longer held by the vast majority of the Australian public, and these must be repealed.

⁸ Bandura, A. (1995). *Self-efficacy in changing societies*. New York: Cambridge Press.

⁹ Bandura, A. (1997). *Self-efficacy: The exercise of control*. New York: W.H. Freeman.

¹⁰ Fitzsimmons, T.W., Yates, M. S., & Callan, V. (2018). *Hands Up for Gender Equality: A Major Study into Confidence and Career Intentions of Adolescent Girls and Boys*. Brisbane, Qld: AIBE Centre for Gender Equality in the Workplace – The University of Queensland.



AGEC recommends:

- Measure and set targets around gender attitudes, gender stereotype and gender role beliefs across Australian society.
- Fund a national community education program to positively address gender role stereotypes and promote the objectives of the 'Working for Women' plan.
- Continue gender-responsive budgeting, applying a gender lens to all policies and decisions, relative to their ability to drive targets, with year on year, transparent reporting to the public.
- Measure and report progress upon past initiatives in women's budgets, reconciling expenditure relative to targets.
- Ensure there is a gender balance in all budget expenditures including health, sport and education using progress towards meaningful targets as a benchmark for funding considerations.
- Implement mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting for all organisations employing 50 or more people, including State and Local Governments.
- Address pay inequality between men and women across all industries
- Ensure Australia's national gender equality strategy addresses gender disparity in workforce participation rates.





2. ECONOMIC SECURITY

Gender Pay Gap

While the gender pay gap continued to narrow in 2024, it remains at 21.8%¹¹, with every industry seeing a pay gap in favour of men. This gap, which costs Australia \$966 million a week or \$51.8 billion a year, has roots in gendered industry segmentation, leadership hierarchy disparities, positioning within salary bands, and discriminatory practices, all contributing to the enduring injustice¹¹.

AGEC recommends:

- Eliminate the underpayment of female-dominated industries through award changes to childcare workers, education support workers, veterinary nurses, and personal care and disability support workers.
- Rebalance remuneration and benefits across all industries to gain traction in closing the gender pay gap.

Gender Superannuation Gap

AGEC welcomed the introduction of legislation to include Superannuation Guarantee payments on the Commonwealth Parental Leave Scheme, following years of advocacy from AGEC and other gender equality advocates. This will add \$14,500¹² to the average mother of two's balance at retirement – a significant proportion of the \$53,000¹³ gender super gap.

While paying superannuation on the Commonwealth Paid Parental Leave scheme is a step to acknowledging the value of unpaid care that is predominantly done by women, these 22 weeks is only a small part of the unpaid and unrecognised care. Providing unpaid care can impact an individual's employment outcomes, and over time affect the superannuation and retirement savings¹⁴.

Data analysis shows a primary carer loses an average of \$175,000 in superannuation and \$392,500 in lifetime earnings, to the age of 67¹⁵. Some who are carers for extended periods of time will lose substantially more, with the most affected 10% losing at least \$940,000 in lifetime income, and \$444,500 in retirement savings.

¹¹ Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2024

¹² Super Members Council, 2024

¹³ ASFA, 2023

¹⁴ Carer's Australia, 2024

¹⁵ Furnival and Cullen, 2022



AGEC recommends:

- Legislate superannuation payments on all earned income and supplement the superannuation contributions of caregivers, sole traders, long-term casual employees, and those who take time out for family or caring responsibilities.

Expand Mandatory Gender Pay Gap Reporting

AGEC welcomed the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's commitment to publishing employer gender pay gaps for organisations with over 100 employees from 27 February 2024 and for Commonwealth public sector employers with over 100 employees from early 2025.

AGEC recommends:

- Expanding mandatory pay gap reporting to include organisations with 50-99 employees, including State and Local Governments.

Value Unpaid Care Work

Unpaid care work includes all forms of domestic work, such as cooking, cleaning, washing, gardening and home maintenance. It also includes taking care of children, the elderly or a family member with a long term health condition or disability as well as voluntary community work¹⁶.

The monetary value of unpaid care work in Australia has been estimated to be \$650.1 billion, the equivalent to 50.6% of GDP¹⁷.

AGEC recommends:

- Unpaid work, such as caring, must be assigned financial 'value' through direct financial or tax subsidies.

Economic Security and Safety

Sixteen percent of women in Australia have experienced what is known as partner economic abuse. Economic abuse is a form of domestic and family violence that involves the control of a partner or ex-partner's money and finances (as well as the things that money can buy), in a way that threatens their economic security and potential for self-sufficiency. It can include controlling a victim's access to cash and bank accounts, hiding financial information and assets, sabotaging study and/or employment opportunities, not contributing to household bills, taking on debt in a

¹⁶ England, P. (2005). Emerging theories of care work. *Annual Review of sociology*, 381-399

¹⁷ Counting on Care Work, 2022.



partner's name without their knowledge and manipulating finances to avoid or reduce child support payments¹⁸.

AGEC recommends:

- Legislate for financial institutions and retirement funds to have systems in place to prevent economic coercion and control.

3. WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION

The workforce participation rate for Australian women continues to increase at a glacial pace with female participation at 62.9% in 2024 up from 62.3% in 2023¹⁹. Australia's female workforce participation rate remains low to population ratio and compared to other comparative economies.

Increasing Australia's female workforce participation rate persists as a fundamental element to resolving gender inequality.

Women face additional barriers to employment. In November 2024, among the 1.2 million people seeking paid work, women cited reasons such as childcare (44%), short-term illness or injury (9.4%), and long-term health conditions or disability (10%) for their unavailability to be employed²⁰.

The main incentives for increasing workforce participation among women is ability to work part-time hours (34.4%), finding a job that matches skills and experience (33.4%) followed by working a set number of hours on set days (29%)²⁰.

Research indicates that when applying for work, women receive fewer interview invitations compared to equally qualified men. Research has also found that, women face more stringent evaluations of their credentials during the initial recruitment stage²¹.

The Albanese Government's national gender equality strategy focuses on one of the most significant drivers to workplace gender inequality, the traditional, gendered divisions of paid and unpaid work. It speaks to the gendered division of Australia's care and community sector but silent on others such as high paid sectors that crucially need

¹⁸ Centre for Women's Economic Security

¹⁹ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), Gender indicators, Australia.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/gender-indicators>

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), Barriers and incentives to labour force participation, Australia.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/latest-release>

²¹ Griffiths, M., & Tress, D. (2016). Gender equitable recruitment and promotion. University of Sydney. <https://ses.library.usyd.edu.au/handle/2123/21261>



focus. The overall industry gender segregation contributes to 20% of the national total remuneration gender pay gap.

Australia's approach to resolving workforce participation inequality must be a key component of a significant and systemic national gender equality strategy beyond primary care and community sector.

The inequality of opportunity, including recruitment and remuneration, at all levels of the workforce between male and female dominated industries plays a key role in Australia's persistent gender pay gap and requires greater prioritisation by all levels of government.

AGEC recommends:

- The removal of structural barriers to people's equal participation and representation in all industries.
- Address the gender imbalance in male and female-dominated industries.
- Fund and support programs that have proven to increase representation in dominated industries to address gender segregation within industries and occupations.
- Address pay inequality between male and female dominated industries.
- The productivity commission research the optimal implement of setting of targets or quotas for companies to ensure suitable gender representation throughout the employee lifecycle and at all levels of workforce participation. Research to include how the private sector can be incentivised by government to correct gender imbalances across sectors and industries.
- Increase women's leadership representation through mandated strategies and action plans for organisations and governments to address gender balance at all levels of leadership including boards.

Gender equality is considered when awarding all government contracts and procurement.



4. SAFETY & RESPECT IN FAMILY & COMMUNITY

All people must be respected and be safe from any threat or action of family and domestic violence, sexual assault, coercive control, and sexual harassment in the household, family, and community environment

We are pleased at the Government's emphasis on women's domestic and family violence and the recent investment in Women's Legal Services.

AGEC recommends:

- Funding for frontline services, a predominantly female workforce of professionals who are supporting victims in a national crisis of gendered violence.
- Funding for an additional \$5m for five pilot sexual assault legal services sites.
- Coercive control legislation to be adopted in every State and ensure consistent definitions of consent and assault and consistent outcomes
- Free access to resources to flee violent relationships.
- Safe respite housing and accommodations are available for those who need them when fleeing dangerous or violent situations for both short and medium term and financial advice and support.
- Victims of family and domestic violence are given every opportunity to remain in their homes – alleged perpetrators are removed from the family home until a resolution is achieved.
- Perpetrator programs are to be well researched and measured for their effectiveness – having to report upon their results to obtain continued funding.
- Publicly funded education and awareness campaigns that are culturally inclusive and communicate shared Australian societal expectations regarding safety and Respect in the home, family, and community environment.
- Government agency employees and contractors must be trained in person-centred, trauma-informed, culturally sensitive customer service behaviour.
- Medical and emergency response personnel must be trained in person-centred, trauma-informed, and culturally sensitive customer service.
- Post reforms analysis/review of family courts, highlighting best practices, lessons learned and recommendations for further restructuring.
- Violence, harassment, and abuse are punished more severely and uniformly nationwide.
- Provision of education in schools and community organisations to empower people to identify and call out disrespectful behaviours before they become abused.
- Primary, secondary, and tertiary education programs include respectful relationships and behaviour units—long-term programs to eliminate gender stereotypes and promote Respect for women and girls.



5. SAFETY & RESPECT AT WORK

We acknowledge the importance of the Prime Minister of Australia’s declaration that we are facing a “national crisis” of violence against women, with one woman being killed every four days²². This declaration placed a national spotlight on the importance of women’s safety, at home, at work, and in public. In this vein, we also commend the review undertaken by the Federal Government’s Expert Panel into the Rapid Review of Prevention Approaches to End Gender-Based Violence.

This said, there is still urgent work needed to be undertaken to reform workplace safety regulations in preventing and responding to work-related gendered violence. When the risk is serious harm or death, as it is with gendered violence, regulatory intervention is imperative. Our current safety laws and regulations remain silent on this issue.

The current gap in our workplace safety regulations leaves women, especially those from high-risk groups, vulnerable to violence both at work and at home. We consider that the workplace is a critical location for long-term structural reform, women’s economic empowerment, and fostering a culture of respect and equality²³.

Work-related gendered violence can range in severity from comments and gestures through to sexual harassment and rape. It can also include stalking, intimidation, threats, verbal abuse, ostracism, exclusion, sexually explicit gestures, offensive language and imagery, put downs, innuendo, insinuations, undermining a person in their role or position, sexual harassment, sexual assault, and rape²⁴. Work-related gendered violence sometimes overlaps with work-related bullying²⁵.

Safe Work Australia’s February 2024 Report²⁶ identified that in 2021 – 2022, women accounted for the majority (59%) of accepted workers’ compensation claims for occupational violence. The most significant disparity in workplace experiences for men and women was in exposure to work-related bullying, harassment and occupational violence where 31.1% of women with a mental stress claim had experienced this conduct.

²² Albanese, A. (2024). No more: National rally against gender based violence march, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/no-more-national-rally-against-gender-based-violence-march>.

²³ Parsons, S. (2024). Safety Regulation for Primary Prevention of Gendered Violence. Australian Women Lawyers, <https://australianwomenlawyers.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/1-Australian-Women-Lawyers-Submission-31.7.24.pdf>.

²⁴ WorkSafe Victoria. (2022). Work-related gendered violence including sexual harassment. <https://content-v2.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/ISBN-Work-related-gendered-violence-including-sexual-harassment-2022-11.pdf>.

²⁵ WorkSafe Victoria. (2022). Work-related gendered violence including sexual harassment. <https://content-v2.api.worksafe.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-11/ISBN-Work-related-gendered-violence-including-sexual-harassment-2022-11.pdf>.

²⁶ Safe Work Australia. (2024). Psychological health and safety in the workplace, February 2024, Our Data, Your Stories, https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Psychological-health-in-the-workplace_Report_February2024.pdf.



The Report also found that women are more likely than men to experience poor work-related psychological health outcomes because they are exposed to more psychosocial hazards, including work pressure, work-related bullying and harassment, occupational violence and workplace sexual harassment than men. Over half of serious claims for mental health conditions were among women (58%) who also had higher than average rates of high or very high psychological distress²⁷.

The Report considered that the estimated number of women who have experienced work-related sexual harassment is over 2.5 times the estimated number of men who have experienced this conduct (332,400 women compared to 127,600 men)²⁸.

The Report found that the healthcare and social assistance industry was comprised of 78% female workers, and that 71% of community and personal services workers are female. It also considered that given the exposure to psychosocial hazards and the high number of claims for mental health conditions for female-dominated industries and occupations, it is unsurprising that we observe poor outcomes resulting from exposure to psychosocial hazards in females, including a higher number of serious claims for mental health conditions²⁹.

Women are more likely than men to be bullied and experience unwanted sexual advances, unfair treatment because of their gender and experience physical assaults or threats by clients or patients³⁰.

Action 6 of the Federal Government's First Action Plan, 2023 – 2027, Under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, 2022–2032³¹ acknowledges that targeted work is needed to address sexual violence in all settings, including in the workplace, and that an outcome relevant to this includes that women are safe and

²⁷ Safe Work Australia. (2024). Psychological health and safety in the workplace, February 2024, Our Data, Your Stories, https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Psychological-health-in-the-workplace_Report_February2024.pdf.

²⁸ Safe Work Australia. (2024). Psychological health and safety in the workplace, February 2024, Our Data, Your Stories, https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Psychological-health-in-the-workplace_Report_February2024.pdf.

²⁹ Safe Work Australia. (2024). Psychological health and safety in the workplace, February 2024, Our Data, Your Stories, https://data.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/Psychological-health-in-the-workplace_Report_February2024.pdf.

³⁰ Potter, R., Dollard, M., Tuckey, M. (2016). Bullying and harassment in Australian workplaces: Results from the Australian Workplace Barometer Project 2014 - 2015, <Bullying & Harassment in Australian Workplaces: Results from the Australian Workplace Barometer Project 2014/15>.

³¹ Commonwealth of Australia. (2023). First Action Plan, 2023 - 2027, Under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, 2022-2032, <https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/d23-1021308-first-action-plan-accessible-pdf.pdf>.



supported in all settings and that systems and institutions should support and protect persons impacted by gender-based violence³².

The Australian Human Rights Commission's 2020 Report, *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*³³, identified that while Australia's model workplace health and safety framework has the potential to adequately address sexual harassment, this framework is currently underutilised, and there is an urgent need to raise awareness that sexual harassment is a workplace health and safety issue.

On 23 August 2024, recommendation 7(f) in the Federal Government's Rapid Review Expert Panel Report recommended strengthening workplace health and safety laws to complement the positive duty on employers to prevent workplace sexual harassment, sex discrimination and harassment under the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)³⁴.

Recommendation 7(f) from the Expert Panel's report is consistent with the findings of the Boland Review. The Boland Review noted that women and migrant workers are especially vulnerable to psychosocial risks and recommended that Safe Work Australia develop criteria for the ongoing assessment of new and emerging hazards, ensuring that legislative updates and new Model Work Health and Safety Regulations are timely and effective³⁵.

Whilst Safe Work Australia has issued a Model Code of Practice for Sexual and Gender-Based Harassment, Australia's model safety regulations remain silent on the safety controls required for occupational violence, bullying, and sexual and gender-based harassment, which disproportionately impact women.

AGEC recommends:

- The Federal Government conduct an inquiry into the development of specific model safety regulations to address occupational violence, bullying, and sexual and gender-based harassment, which disproportionately impact women.

³² Commonwealth of Australia. (2023). First Action Plan, 2023 - 2027, Under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, 2022-2032, <https://www.dss.gov.au/system/files/resources/d23-1021308-first-action-plan-accessible-pdf.pdf>.

³³ Jenkins, K. (2020). *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*. Australian Human Rights Commission, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020>.

³⁴ Campbell, E., Fernando, T., Gassner, L., Hill, Jess., Seidler, Z., Summers, A. (2024). Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention approaches, *Unlocking the Prevention Potential, Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence*, <https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/unlocking-the-prevention-potential-4.pdf>.

³⁵ Boland, M. (2018). Review of the model Work Health and Safety Laws, Final Report. Safe Work Australia, https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1902/review_of_the_model_whs_laws_final_report_0.pdf.



6. EDUCATION

Currently in Australia there is unequal access and inequitable outcomes for girls and women at all levels of education.

The current education system plants the seeds of gender inequality in each new generation, representing a fundamental cause of gender inequality and represents a significant cost to all Australians. In answer to this, the Federal Government must link all school funding to upholding the principles outlined in the 'Working for Women' plan. Funding to schools should not be an exception in this critical area, but rather it must be the baseline, if gender equality is to be seen by the next generation.

In a study undertaken by Fitzsimmons, Yates and Callan (2018) it was identified that many schools still offer different course streams based upon student gender, with girls being channelled into courses such as home economics and boys towards courses such as industrial arts. Likewise, many religious schools still teach gender fundamentalism and assign gender roles such as parenting and domestic duties, to women. Given that approximately 30% of all schools in Australia are affiliated with a religion, or 94% of private schools, gender role stereotyping, a fundamental cause of gender inequality is being perpetuated by the current funding and governance of our education system.

Equitable access to education for all women regardless of their geographical location, religion, disability, sexuality, cultural and linguistic diversity or wealth must be guaranteed by the Federal Government. Systemic barriers to education for women such as lack of transport, childcare and digital connectivity options, disability access/support and ongoing and entrenched gender role stereotyping act to impede women's access to education and direct women away from what are traditionally male areas of industry.

Equal gender representation in primary, secondary, tertiary and vocational education classes and courses, and in all fields of study must become a benchmark for success in this area.

AGEC recommends:

- Guaranteed, universal, equal access for all students to all schools and appropriate equitable funding for all schools based upon their needs.
- School Funding must be directly linked to adherence to the principles of gender equality outlined in the 'Working for Women' plan.
- A full review of the National Curriculum must be undertaken to identify and eliminate Gender bias. A review of the enactment of curriculum in each State be undertaken to identify opportunities for gender mainstreaming and elimination of bias and to ensure that education around gender role formation, human rights, consent, sexual harassment, sexuality, reproductive rights, sexual health, period education and products is being delivered effectively.



- Primary and secondary curriculums have mandatory diversity and inclusion education for students and parents, the content and delivery of which to be based upon a Federal Government mandate with no exclusions or exemptions.
- STEM and STEAM opportunities must be promoted in primary school and early childhood learning in order to shift entrenched gender biases in career preferences of boys and girls. This will require significant funding to enable reach to all schools and done in collaboration with Australian Industry and Tertiary Institutions.
- All subjects offered by primary and secondary schools up to Year 10 must be undertaken equally, regardless of gender.
- 40/40/20 Targets for disciplines and subjects dominated by one gender in Years 11 and 12 must be adopted in all primary and secondary schools to achieve gender balance.
- Curricula must represent the achievements of all genders. Women's leadership and empowerment accomplishments must be included in all curricula.
- Students have equal access to all extra-curricular activities regardless of gender and other intersectionality's.
- Dedicated early career interest counselling and mapping be available in every school, to promote non-gender stereotypical job roles.
- All schools must offer non gendered uniform options.
- Funding must also be made available to educate Teachers and early childhood educators regarding the causes and symptoms of gender inequality, particularly regarding the connection between gender role stereotypes and subject interest, selection, engagement and career preferences.
- As part of a broader National media campaign around gender equality, an advertising campaign be funded and aimed at parents around careers and gender stereotyping.
- Audit and enforcement of existing gender equality initiatives in the current National Curriculum in all schools by the Federal Government and penalties introduced for failure to adhere to either the National Curriculum or existing discrimination laws.





7. GOVERNMENT & DEMOCRACY

To achieve gender equality all levels of Government must reflect the gender mix and overall diversity of the communities they represent.

This is a key area highlighted in *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality. Priority area 5. Leadership, representation and decision-making*. The desired outcomes of Priority area 5 includes more women at all levels of political, judicial and public service leadership and decision-making.

Data

It is imperative to understand the current leadership situation and monitor improvement. Data should include the gender and diversity of candidates and those elected. There should also be data on the gender and diversity of government staff, CEOs, Chairs and Boards in non-government sectors. Data should be mandated by the Federal Government and not left to voluntary organisations to collect.

AGEC recommends:

Federal Government collect Data on:

- Gender and diversity of local government, State and Federal candidates and those elected.
- Gender and diversity of staff at first, second and third tier of local, state and federal employees.
- Gender and diversity CEOs, Chairs and Boards in non-government sectors.
- Data should be mandated by the Federal Government and not left to voluntary organisations to collect such as the Australian Local Government Women's Association or Chief Executive Women.

Empower young women and educate

There is a low perception of women standing for public office. This needs to be reversed to encourage more women to stand and increase community knowledge

AGEC recommends:

- Funding for education programs in schools and universities that encourage and empower girls and young women to consider public and community service leadership positions.
- Include gender, civics, democracy, and governance in the national primary and secondary school curriculum.
- Funding for a public education campaign to positively shift the perception of women with particular reference to those standing for public office.



Training and mentoring

Training and mentoring are proven methods to elect and retain women in public office.

AGEC recommends:

- Continued funding of the WIPO leadership grant to train and equip women candidates to all levels of government, such as the one awarded to the consortium led by Women for Election Australia.
- Funding for Mentoring women, such as the Australian Local Government Women's Association national mentoring program for elected local government women councillors to increase retention and the capacity of councillors.

Parliament

Parliament will only reflect the diversity of the community if the political parties are set targets or quotas for candidates. This has been legislated in many countries.

AGEC recommends:

- The Federal Government mandates that all Cabinets contain a gender balance and diversity in line with the composition of the society they represent.
- The Federal Government requires all political parties set targets and quotas for candidate recruitment and pre-selection.
- Legislation that political parties will only receive election funding from the AEC or equivalent authority if they meet the candidate target or quota (similar to Eire)
- Require all political parties to develop gender-balanced candidate pipelines and that all candidates are given equal campaign funding support by their parties.
- Require Parliaments to enforce respectful standards of behaviour.

Gender Equality Global Leadership

The Government has committed to Australia re-emerging as a global leader in gender equality. Given Australia's leadership role in the Pacific, it would be opportune to establish a program for women in the region.

AGEC recommends:

- Funding for a pilot program to establish a Women in Local Government network in South East Asia and the Pacific. This would empower women in the region. We note that the Australian Local Government Women's Association is the largest organisation of its kind in the Commonwealth, and would be an ideal organisation to work with the Australian Government to establish a 'Global Women in Local Government' network.



8. WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY

Paid employment is one of the benchmarks for financial security. In order to maintain this employment and ultimately grow and flourish within it, flexibility is essential. Particularly to meet the growing demands of family and caring responsibilities.

Flexible working arrangements are a means of increasing workforce participation for women and encouraging more men to assume caring responsibilities.

Due to the traditional, gendered divisions of paid and unpaid work caring, women are still more likely to seek flexible working arrangements than men. In November 2024, among the 1.2 million people seeking paid work, women cited the most significant barrier to their ability to be employed was childcare³⁶.

Women, on average, undertake paid work for 31.8 hours per week compared to male average of 38.5 hours per week³⁷. Further, women contribute, on average, 3 hours and 34 minutes per week to childcare activities compared to male average of 2 hours and 19 minutes³⁸. As such, workplaces must be encouraged to allow flexibility for both men and women in order for caring and family responsibilities to be genuinely shared.

AGEC acknowledges the legislative changes the Albanese Government has introduced on workplace flexibility. AGEC specifically notes the increase to parental leave from 1 July 2024 from 22 weeks to 24 weeks and 25 weeks on 1 July 2025, the payment of superannuation on parental leave pay from 1 July 2025 and the Fair Work Act changes on an individual's right to request and negotiate flexible working arrangements that suit both employee and employer.

The availability and access to flexible work requires greater focus and action.

AGEC recommends:

- Research is undertaken by the productivity commission to direct Government on how best to incentivise private sector employers to increase the availability and access to flexible work. Once determined, all levels of government implement recommendations.
- Introduce legislation, regulations and adopt policies that normalise flexible working.

³⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), Gender indicators, Australia.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/gender-indicators>

³⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2024), Barriers and incentives to labour force participation, Australia.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/latest-release>

³⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2020-21), How Australians Use Their Time, Australia.

<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/how-australians-use-their-time/2020-21>



- Provide a government funded “carer credit” which sees carers allocated credits in the form of superannuation payments, pension top ups and other government services as a payment for the savings to the budget these unpaid carers provide.
- Task the Fair Work Commission with ensuring that workplace flexibility is built into enterprise agreements and awards to enable split shifts, job share, and flexible rostering in 24/7 environments.
- Extend current government programs such as the \$20,000 Instant Asset Write-Off scheme to larger employers where the asset is related to the establishment and/or provision of flexible work for employees.





9. HEALTH & WELLBEING

Addressing violence against women

Australia continues to face a “national crisis” of violence against women, with one woman being killed every four days. On 23 August 2024 the Federal Government released its Expert Panel Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention approaches, Unlocking the Prevention Potential, Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence.

It was agreed that the Women and Women’s Safety Ministerial Council would oversee the collective response to the Report, and that Council would report back to National Cabinet on the progress of the response by the end of 2025.

Equitable access to abortion

While abortion is legal across Australia, there are continued barriers to access, particularly for diverse and minority communities. Issues around access to interpreters and a lack of health insurance make accessing abortion very difficult for multicultural communities or those on temporary visas³⁹. Accessing abortion in Australia is expensive.

Equitable access and improved women’s health care and pain management

The Victorian Labor Government’s landmark Inquiry⁴⁰ into Women’s Pain has revealed the significant impact pain conditions like endometriosis, pelvic pain and migraines are having on the lives of Victorian women and girls. This is a picture highly likely to be replicated across the country.

AGEC welcomes the Federal Government’s decision to list Visanne on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS), making it the first endometriosis treatment to receive subsidisation in over 30 years and call for a clear plan for educating consumers and communities about this new PBS listing.

This is just the beginning of what must be a comprehensive approach to addressing women’s health challenges. Conditions like polycystic ovary syndrome (PCOS), fibroids, and pelvic pain syndromes often go undiagnosed for years, with devastating impacts on women’s physical and mental health.

The Victorian inquiry also revealed women and girls experiences of sexism and misogyny, feeling ignored or dismissed by clinicians who attributed their pain to psychological and personality factors, as well as culturally unsafe care. The inquiry found that delayed diagnosis, the high cost of care and the impact of pain on the quality of life, relationships with family and friends, and careers of women is significant. Importantly, about 40 per cent of women who participated in the survey were from regional and rural Victoria –

³⁹ Multicultural Women’s Health

⁴⁰ <https://www.premier.vic.gov.au/lasting-impact-womens-pain-revealed>



their insights highlighted the importance of being able to access the right care closer to home.

The stories and experiences generously shared by Victorian women and girls in the survey, via written submissions and forums over last few months will now form the development of recommendations to improve the way women's healthcare is delivered in Victoria. AGECE suggests Victoria's findings will be applicable to all States and Territories and should be reflected in Federal Policy and Regulation.

AGECE is also concerned at the reduction of maternity services in rural and regional hospitals.

AGECE recommends:

- A response to the Report of the Rapid Review of Prevention approaches, Unlocking the Prevention Potential, Accelerating action to end domestic, family and sexual violence undertaken by the Women and Women's Safety Ministerial Council be consistent with the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 and prioritise action on those items consistent with the primary prevention framework outlined by Our Watch in their Change the Story Framework.
- Ensure equitable access by providing funding towards abortions nation-wide.
- Ensure public access to free sanitary products for everyone who menstruates.
- Implement a clear plan for educating communities about the listing of Vioxx on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)
- Incorporate the findings of the Victorian Inquiry into Women's Pain into federal legislation and regulation to enhance women's health services nationwide, ensuring equitable access and improved care for women in both metropolitan and regional areas across all states and territories.
- Ensure provision of maternity services at rural and regional hospitals.



10. FAMILY & CARING REPOSIBILITIES

Childcare in Australia costs significantly more as a percentage of household income as in other OECD countries. In Australia, full-time net child-care expenses consume about a quarter of the household income for an average-earning couple with two young children—more than double the OECD average of 11%. The steep cost of child care doesn't just strain household budgets; it also significantly affects workforce participation, particularly for women.

As women often take on the role of a family's "second earner," they tend to reduce their paid working hours to manage caregiving responsibilities. For many, the high cost of child care, combined with Australia's tax and benefit system, means that taking on additional paid work can feel financially unrewarding.

Funding universal childcare would add an additional \$140 billion⁴¹ to the Australian economy with an estimated cost to government of just \$13 billion⁴².

AGEC recommends:

- Government funding and policy changes to provide universal free quality childcare through subsidies, tax breaks, or the extension of primary school education to 0–5-year-olds.

Equal access to leave

While there has been some increase in workplaces offering gender-neutral or 'universal' paid parental leave, WGEA and ABS data shows that even when offered, men are not accessing parental leave at a rate that encourages sharing the burden of care.

To encourage men to take paid parental leave, there needs to be a shift in culture in many organisations. Men are also hindered by their often higher paid and senior leadership roles. Men must be supported by their organisations and by policy changes to take parental leave.

AGEC recommends:

- Employers and Government provide equal access to leave for parenting and other caring responsibilities.

AGEC welcomed the expansion of paid parental leave from 18 weeks to 26 weeks by 1 July 2026. AGEC was disappointed that this change was delayed to 2026.

AGEC recommends:

⁴¹ Georgie Dent in Women's Agenda, 2020

⁴² Education Department estimates, 2020



- Immediate introduction of 26 weeks of paid parental leaves unrelated to a parent's gender or carer status (a reference to primary or secondary carer status removed).
- Prohibit requirements for a 12-month waiting period for access to employer parental leave.

11. INFRASTRUCTURE

Infrastructure for work and community facilities must reflect the needs of all genders for equal participation and safe access.

AGEC recommends:

- Work and community facilities must reflect the needs of all genders for equal participation and safe access.
- Gender diverse consultation is required for all infrastructure decisions at Federal, State, Local and organisational (where privately approved or contracted by Government to provide services) levels.
- Balanced gender representation in the assessment of tenders for the development of public infrastructure.
- Ensure that a gender lens is applied to all infrastructure spend at Federal, State and Local Government levels.
- Government procurement contracts stipulate the need for gender equality.
- Change planning laws so that they must consider the needs of both men and women and how decisions about infrastructure affect both men and women, including how safe they are.

12. SPORTS

AGEC believes there must be equal access, participation and remuneration in all levels of sport for all genders.

Taking part in sport provides health and social benefits. There is a significant gender gap in sport participation. Only 33.6 per cent of women aged 15 years and over participate in sport related activity once per week. This compares to 49.8 per cent of men.⁴³

Barriers

Women and girls still face significant challenges in playing and volunteering in sport. These include harassment and the lack of role models.

⁴³ Women's Budget statement 2024-25



AGEC recommends:

- Grants to sporting clubs to undertake training in making their club a place where everyone feels welcomed and respected.
- **High-Performing Board Training for Committees and Boards**
Funding for programs that support training and development for board and committee members, both men and women, to enhance their governance capabilities. This should include a focus on how to retain and support women in leadership positions on boards, addressing the barriers they often face and creating an environment where they can thrive.
- **Leadership Development Programs for Women and Girls in Sport**
Initiatives that equip women and girls with essential skills such as leadership, resilience, and confidence, both on and off the field. These programs foster a pipeline of future leaders and role models in sport and beyond.
- **Increased Investment in Australian Research**
Funding for research into the specific barriers women face in sport, particularly those that impact their career progression. This should include exploring how sport can serve as a platform to develop transferable skills that benefit women in leadership and workplace settings.

Equality

There is a lack of equality both in funding and infrastructure for women.

AGEC recommends:

- Setting gender-neutral standards for pay and conditions in all professional sporting codes.
- Funded sporting infrastructure meets and reports annually on 'accessibility' KPI's.
- A gender lens is applied at all sporting infrastructure spend by all three levels of government.
- Tie Australia's sports-related funding to the relevant sporting codes achieving agreed gender targets.
- Funding of high-performance athletes must be from a gender equality perspective
- There must be gender-proportional media coverage of sports.
- Sports policy and program decisions explicitly consider the impacts on women.
- Review Federal and State sports funding from a gender perspective



13. MEDIA













The media, including sport, news and journalism, the arts, entertainment, screen media and advertising must reflect the gender composition of society. This includes those who work in the media and arts industry as well as the characters and/or content that is available to view. The UK has a well-established program for the elimination of gender bias in advertising which goes well beyond traditional standards to eliminate sexualised advertising and while Australia has a process of complaint via Ad Standards, there are still many complaints that are dismissed but which could contribute to pushing gender stereotypes into society.

AGEC recommends:

- Initiating a program similar to the UK's well-established program for the elimination of gender bias in advertising.
- Review Federal sports funding from a gender perspective
- Fund media watchdogs to develop and enforce a policy toolkit for fair gender representation in the media.
- Directing media outlets to set editorial targets for coverage of women sports people, commentators and entertainers.
- Actively increase and set targets for the number of women commenting as experts and providing their perspectives, contributions, and responses.
- Remove gender-biased advertising and programming and sexist media.
- Promote exemplary organisations that demonstrate gender balance.
- Advocate for vocational training for journalists including gender studies, unconscious bias, language use, and awareness training.
- Undertake legislative reform to advertising standards to eliminate gender-biased advertising and programming.
- Industries and organisations should evaluate and assess their level of female representation, engage in training and development for spokeswomen, and commit to tracking improvement.
- The media must pledge to enhance the proportion of female bylines to match the population's gender ratio (50/50).
- Media should address the gender disparity in the most widely discussed topics covered in the media, such as sports, health, and politics.
- The media should prioritise gender parity in the news and reporting via inclusion and diversity in content creation by ensuring workplaces promote and provide exposure for women and avenues to leadership.
- Setting quotas for the number of women to anchor prime time shows.

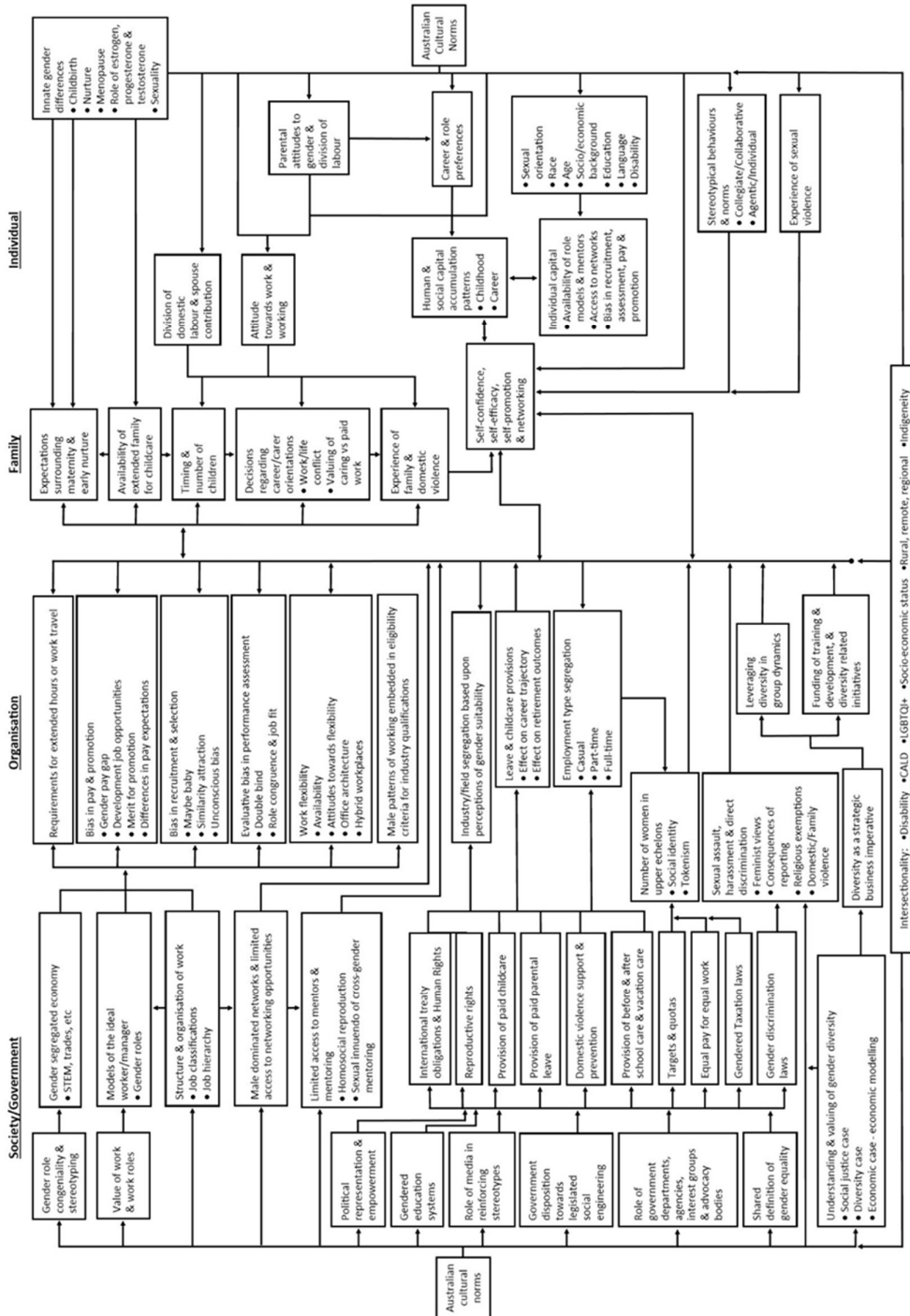


APPENDIX ONE - AGECE Manifesto

<p> ECONOMIC SECURITY</p> <p>Gender must not be a factor in levels of economic security during working life or in retirement.</p>	<p> WORKPLACE FLEXIBILITY</p> <p>All workplaces must provide and support flexible work arrangements accessed equally, regardless of gender.</p>
<p> WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION</p> <p>Participation, representation, and leadership in the Australian economy must reflect the equitable gender composition and overall diversity profile of society.</p>	<p> HEALTH & WELLBEING</p> <p>Women and girls must have equitable and unimpeded access and agency concerning their health and well-being, including proportionate funding distribution, research, and services.</p>
<p> SAFETY & RESPECT IN FAMILY & COMMUNITY</p> <p>All people must be respected and be safe from any threat or action of family and domestic violence, sexual assault, coercive control, and sexual harassment in the household, family, and community environment.</p>	<p> FAMILY & CARING RESPONSIBILITIES</p> <p>Family and caring responsibilities are recognised as a social responsibility and a priority for everyone, regardless of gender and diversity. National systems and processes exist to support shared care.</p>
<p> SAFETY & RESPECT AT WORK</p> <p>All people must be respected and be safe from any threat or action of gender-based violence, bias, bullying, sexual assault, and sexual harassment in the workplace.</p>	<p> INFRASTRUCTURE</p> <p>Infrastructure for work and community facilities must reflect the needs of all genders for equal participation and safe access.</p>
<p> EDUCATION</p> <p>All genders must have equal access to all levels of education to ensure equitable outcomes.</p>	<p> SPORTS</p> <p>All levels of sport must allow for equitable access and participation and have a zero-gender-based pay gap.</p>
<p> GOVERNMENT & DEMOCRACY</p> <p>All levels of Government must reflect the gender mix and overall diversity of the communities they represent.</p>	<p> MEDIA</p> <p>Media voice and content, including sports, news media, the arts, entertainment, and community, must reflect the gender composition of society</p>



APPENDIX TWO - Gender Inequality as a Wicked Problem - Fitzsimmons et al. (2025)





APPENDIX THREE- MEMBER ORGANISATIONS OF THE AUSTRALIAN GENDER EQUALITY COUNCIL

AGEC members come from 19 different industry and community groups and include:

- Australasian Women in Emergencies Network (AWEN)
- Australian Federation of Business & Professional Women (AFBPW)
- Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA)
- Australian Women Lawyers (AWL)
- Australian Women in Resources Alliance (AWRA)
- Economic Security for Women (eS4W)
- Elevate Her (Lean in)
- Engineers Australia
- Financial Services Institute of Australasia (FINSIA)
- Indigenous Women in Mining and Resources Australia (IWMRA)
- National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC)
- National Association of Women in Operations (NAWO)
- National Rural Women's Coalition (NRWC)
- Older Women's Network (OWN)
- Professional Migrant Women (PMW)
- Tradeswomen Australia (TWA)
- Transport Women Australia (TWA)
- Women and Leadership Australia (WLA)
- Women for Election Australia (WFEA)
- Women in Automotive (WinA)
- Women in Aviation Australian Chapter (WAI)
- Women in Banking and Finance (WIBF)
- Women in Digital (WID)
- Women in Super (WIS)
- Women in Technology (WIT)

Australian
Gender
Equality
Council



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