



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

A conversation in gender equality

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A conversation in gender equality

Australian Human Rights Commission
March 2017



Reflections from Kate...

We are at a critical time for gender equality in Australia. We are seeing shifts we never would have seen a decade ago, such as an increasing focus on the achievements of women in sport and the recognition of domestic violence as a workplace issue. In the World Economic Forum's 2016 Gender Gap Report, Australia ranked number one for educational attainment. Yet that same report ranked Australia 46th for overall gender equality due to low levels of economic participation and political empowerment.¹

Incorrect assumptions are being made about the progress of gender equality both in Australia and internationally. A 2017 global survey found that 62% of Australian men agreed with the statement 'Women have equal opportunities to men in the country where I live', compared to 48% of women.² These misconceptions signal the need for an increase in our efforts and priorities.

Since commencing my role as Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner in May last year, I have personally met with more than 1,000 people across the country. I asked them to comment on my initial priorities for gender equality – women's economic security, violence against women and women in leadership. They did. And they also shared many more insights that will make a difference to how I approach gender equality over the next five years.

It was particularly striking to hear women's stories – always moving and often outrageous. Women are not one homogenous group. Each story was different, each experience unique. Discrimination is not always experienced because of one attribute such as age, disability, gender, sexual orientation or race. Sometimes it is the intersection of attributes that leads to the experience of discrimination. We create women's programs or a program for people with a disability, as though you have to choose one identity. In reality, we heard these programs often do not meet the complex needs of individuals.

I identified common themes through my conversations. Some of the issues raised we were already well aware of: gender inequality in economic security and leadership and violence against women. Other issues raised were equally concerning, yet have received less attention. In this document, I have chosen to focus on these unheard stories and experiences. I wanted to reflect the voices, the concerns and the solutions I

heard. This does not mean I did not hear and note the many other stories or that I will not continue to strive for equality for all women. In fact, it is because I am committed to all women that I share my insights in this way. Too often 'women's issues' are cited as though we all share the same experience.

Individuals, communities and organisations are innovating and creating solutions at a grassroots level. In my role, I want to amplify their voices and ideas, advocate for the policy changes needed, raise awareness of the barriers to gender equality and explore ways we can overcome them together. I will focus on prevention and response to gender inequality in Australia, across multiple settings. In collaboration with Government and workplaces we can achieve policy, practice and cultural change. In collaboration with communities we can shift general attitudes and with individuals I remain committed to empowering women to understand and exercise their rights. Capturing women's voices will underpin my ongoing work with university students, work on improving data on domestic violence homicides and inquiries into sexual harassment and discrimination.

I am optimistic about gender equality in Australia. The insights in this document are not all 'doom and gloom'. In each consultation I have heard about the ingenious ways individuals are working to overcome structural biases and unhelpful stereotypes in order to improve opportunities for women and girls. Again and again I witnessed tremendous resilience from women overcoming the entrenched obstacles to their progress and men stepping up beside women to advance gender equality.

I want to thank the many people I consulted. It was an absolute privilege to hear and learn from you. I acknowledge the significant and inspiring work of the organisations and individuals who are working to achieve a more gender equal Australia. I look forward to working in collaboration with you in the future.

Kate Jenkins

8 March 2017

A CONVERSATION IN GENDER EQUALITY

The "Conversations in Gender Equality" started in May 2016 and as the new federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins visited every state and territory and spoke to over 1,000 men and women. The consultations confirmed 3 priorities and revealed 8 themes within these priorities.



LIVING IN RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE AREAS

Some women told us that negative and discriminatory attitudes about gender were amplified in these communities.



AT HOME, AT WORK, IN PUBLIC SPACES AND ONLINE

We heard that urgent action is needed in response to women experiencing violence in their workplaces and in public spaces.

PRIORITY ONE

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN



NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND EVERYDAY SEXISM

We heard that the Australian community continues to hold onto gender stereotypes. Speaking out can mean facing abuse and backlash.



GENDER EQUALITY IN ALL EMPLOYMENT

We heard about investment in programs, a recognition that workplaces want to do better and that men want to work with us, although gaps and barriers still exist.

PRIORITY TWO

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY



WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY

Women's experience of economic disadvantage at different points over a lifetime accumulates to poverty in retirement. Causes include violence, discrimination in the workplace and unpaid caring work.



WOMEN AT WORK

Casual, insecure and seasonal work available in many female dominated industries leaves women at risk, while male dominated industries are still often unwelcoming to women.

PRIORITY THREE

WOMEN'S VOICE & DIVERSITY IN DECISION-MAKING



WOMEN'S VOICE; WOMEN'S NEEDS; WOMEN'S SERVICES

Women-specific services, led by women, are helping to solve some of the most systemic problems faced by women in Australia. However, these services are losing vital funding.



COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN SOLUTIONS

People told us that they want to be empowered to make decisions for their community and address the often intersecting challenges they face.

Executive Summary



In the second half of 2016, federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins travelled to every state and territory to learn about Australia's progress towards gender equality.

Kate met with more than 1,000 people about her priorities: ending violence against women, improving women's economic security and increasing diversity in decision-making. Recognising that discrimination on the basis of a combination of attributes – such as gender and age or gender and disability – can be hard to identify, her conversations focused on engaging with people from a diverse range of communities and with a variety of life experiences.

Kate met with individuals and organisations working to advance equality across many sectors, including CEOs, directors, employer and professional bodies, unions, advocates, domestic violence sector, women's legal services, health services, government, regulators, businesses and not-for-profit community organisations.

Eight themes emerged from these conversations, outlined in this report.



Living in rural, regional and remote areas

- Women living in rural, regional and remote areas highlighted that some negative and discriminatory attitudes are amplified in these communities, where isolation gives women less support and fewer options to escape violence and discrimination.
- Women contribute to family businesses in an unpaid capacity leaving their economic security at greater risk than in other areas of the country.
- Women are developing innovative community responses and creative solutions to problems others have long discarded as too hard, and are keen to work with men and contribute to decision-making in their communities.



Violence against women

- Many state governments are taking responsibility for systemic change off the back of community advocacy, and workplaces are introducing domestic violence leave and other practices to support women experiencing violence.
- But, we need urgent action in response to women experiencing other forms of violence, experienced in workplaces, in residential settings, in public spaces and online.
- Women who experience intersectional inequality often experience higher rates of violence and face additional barriers to seeking help and support.



Community engagement in solutions

- People told us that they want to be empowered to make decisions for their community.
- Some communities face challenges when accessing services – there is limited access to services and they are often not culturally sensitive.
- Women often had no voice as an individual but collectively they could amplify their power and build confidence to develop innovative solutions to problems.



Women's voice; women's needs; women's services

- Despite their success in helping to solve some of the most complex problems faced by women in Australia, women-specific services are losing vital funding.
- As a result, there is less capacity to train and develop women and advocate on behalf of women. Where women are able to speak out, they are often not taken seriously.
- There is still significant under-reporting of family violence, sexual assault, sex discrimination and sexual harassment due to backlash and victimisation.



Women's economic security

- Women's financial insecurity in retirement accumulates over a lifetime. Problems persist despite clear evidence that women's economic participation results in substantial benefits to the economy.
- Solutions like paid parental leave and flexible work have not been accessed by all women – and are perceived as attainable for families where both parents were working in full-time, well-paid positions.
- The gender gaps are even more entrenched for women experiencing intersectional discrimination and disadvantage.




Women at work

- Casual, insecure and seasonal work available in many female dominated industries leaves women at risk of unreliable employment and poor working conditions, while male dominated industries are still often unwelcoming to women.
- However, the 'changing world of work' does offer opportunities to strengthen gender equality in the future.
- Women entrepreneurs are emerging across all industries and are turning to entrepreneurship to access flexibility and avoid sex discrimination in the workplace.



Gender equality in all employment

- While there is strong interest in gender equality in the corporate world, there is a gap between what leaders say and middle managers implement, as well as structural and cultural barriers to implementing flexible work policies.
- It is clear workplaces want to do better, particularly small and medium enterprises.
- Women want to hold positions of influence not just leadership, they want to be able to make change as opposed to just being present at the table.



Negative attitudes and everyday sexism

- Australian community continues to hold onto gender stereotypes and accepts the impact of inappropriate behaviour as a norm. Speaking out can mean facing abuse and backlash.
- We need to talk about the deeply embedded systemic and attitudinal barriers that too often enable sexism and consequent discrimination to go unremarked.
- Recent research highlights some areas of concern in young people's attitudes towards women. This data tells us that gender equality will not be achieved simply by generational change.

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

It is clear that we still have a way to go before we achieve gender equality in Australia. We remain optimistic about our ability to achieve positive change inspired by the creativity and resilience of women in Australia.

This is a community wide issue and everyone has a role to play in developing strategies at different levels, government, business, community; and in different settings, that are practical and inclusive of everyone.

Kate is committed to the following strategies:

- **Give women a voice** – promote and facilitate opportunities for women to have their voices heard at a regional, national and international level in collaboration with Alliances, government, businesses and communities.
- **Advocate for change** – argue the case for reducing gender segregation in our economy and advocate to address the causes of violence against women, particularly those who experience intersectional disadvantage.
- **Encourage the community to call to account** – challenge misconceptions that gender equality has been achieved and spotlight data and stories that highlight the benefits of gender equality for every Australian.
- **Policy change with government** – work with governments and other policy makers on the need for gender and intersectional lenses in funding allocation, policy, decision making and data collection.
- **Collaborate with workplaces** – work with employers to identify all the levers that impact the economic gender gap and find ways to share and amplify good workplace practices across sectors, different sized organisations and in metropolitan as well as regional, rural and remote communities.
- **Engage men in solutions** – engage with men to step up beside women and encourage their success.

A conversation in gender equality – what it was

The more people that are out there telling stories, the more inspiring it is for other people to know that this time, now, people will listen to you. It's not like the 60s, 70s and 80s, when they thought you were talking out of your arse, you know? You start at the tree roots. Then you slowly climb the tree. As you're climbing up the tree, you're getting to see more of the outside. Higher and higher. You're starting to feel that if you can see more and more on the outside, then there's a lot more possible than down in the roots.

Jane Rosengrave

Winner of the Tony Fitzgerald Memorial Community Individual Award at the 2016 Human Rights Awards

Before the Conversations in Gender Equality started in May 2016, the Commissioner identified three critical areas for achieving gender equality:

- Economic security for women
- Violence against women
- Women in leadership

Following the recommendations from Our Watch's 'Change the Story' framework³, the Commissioner focussed on settings where Australians live, learn, work and play – workplaces, universities and sport.

The idea was not to start from scratch, but build on the work achieved under the previous Sex Discrimination Commissioners. To focus on groups that had not previously come together to discuss gender equality. The three priorities resonated strongly with participants. While there have been substantial gains in equality under the law, one of the key findings of the conversations was the gap in equality in results. The experiences of participants gave voice to the impacts of gender inequality and why this has to change.

In recognition of the fact that intersectional discrimination – discrimination on the basis of a combination of attributes, such as gender and age or gender and disability – can be hard to identify, the conversations focussed on engaging with people from a diverse range of communities and with a variety of life experiences. This included speaking with: women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women¹, culturally and linguistically diverse women, rural, remote and

regional women, women with diverse sexual orientations, trans and gender diverse women, intersex women, older women, younger women and workers from gender-segregated industries. The conversations also ensured that men were able to participate and contribute.

We acknowledge that we could never hear every perspective during this engagement, but we do believe the stories and themes raised throughout this summary are an important reflection of the lived experience of people in Australia. The themes discussed overlap, just as the experiences of individuals do – each of us has a lived experience of any number of the issues raised. Some issues are deliberately reinforced in different themes to build this understanding of intersecting challenges faced. We also acknowledge the many voices that were not heard during these consultations and are committed to ongoing engagement throughout the Commissioner's term.

The Commissioner met with individuals and organisations working to advance equality across many sectors including; CEOs, Directors, Employer and professional bodies, unions, advocates, domestic violence sector, women's legal services, health services, legal services, government, regulators, businesses employees, students and not-for-profit community organisations.

This document sets out the key themes identified and provides an outlook on where the Commissioner intends to focus. Some of the planned work builds on existing projects and inquiries, others will be conducted in collaboration with other Commissioners and some will be explored for the first time. A full blueprint will be shared mid year.

¹ The Commissioner met with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. We use this term to describe them in this report.

In support of the key themes the focus of the three priorities have been developed further:

Violence against women manifests itself in a range of ways and in different settings

We heard violence against women includes a wide range of behaviours, including online abuse and harassment, violence in institutional settings, domestic and family violence, sexual violence, financial abuse and workplace sexual harassment.

Women's experience of economic disadvantage at different points over a lifetime accumulates to poverty in retirement.

Women's experiences of economic inequality are the result of interconnected burdens: including discrimination in the workplace, experiencing financial hardship because of domestic violence, sexual harassment and divorce, gender-segregated industries and insecure work, lack of affordable, accessible childcare, low superannuation and savings balances, gender pay gap and the expectation that women shoulder the majority of unpaid domestic and caring work.

Women's voice and diversity in decision-making

Women are not one group and inequality affects different women in different ways. We need diverse groups of women in leadership to influence decision making. And we need women to have more of a say in our government, communities and organisations, at all levels.



Living in rural, regional and remote areas



Many Australians enjoy the great benefits of living in our rural, regional and remote areas and recognise the importance to Australia's prosperity of a vibrant community outside our metropolitan hubs. Yet the experiences of women living in rural, regional and remote Australia highlight that some negative and discriminatory gender-based stereotypes and attitudes are amplified for women living in these communities. Characteristics other than gender, such as cultural background, sexual orientation or age can also contribute to discrimination in rural communities. As a result, we heard that there was an obvious gender gap in leadership, economic security and education; and that violence and sexism towards women was high.

We heard that isolation can make women more susceptible to violence and harassment and less able to speak up or escape when experiencing sexual harassment, discrimination and violence. People told us that in a small town it can be difficult to make a complaint due to a reluctance to undermine close community ties and the risk of exclusion from services where they are limited. Some examples included;

- A young female vet was discriminated against when she became pregnant. She was reluctant to complain because she loves the people she works with and in a small community her future employment would be affected by making a complaint.
- A woman on a working visa did not report sexual harassment because her employer threatened to report breaches of her visa restrictions to the authorities.
- A woman with children had few options for transport

and support services which limited her ability to escape domestic violence.

- An Aboriginal woman was too scared to make a complaint about being overcharged her taxi fare. In addition to a lack of services, she is faced with the power imbalance the driver holds to refuse her services in the future.

Women's economic security in rural, remote and regional areas can be at greater risk than in other areas of the country. We heard women contribute to family businesses in an unpaid capacity leaving them without entitlements or superannuation. We heard some rural families look to their sons to finish their education and inherit the farm. In extreme cases we heard young girls are being taken out of school to assist with caring and other unpaid work due to intense financial pressures being experienced by families.

We heard that there is a high tolerance of sexism and discrimination against women working in traditionally male-dominated industries like agriculture and mining.

Families in rural, remote and regional Australia are experiencing tough times which tend to contribute to greater discrimination and impact on women. We heard that this is just as likely to be due to economic pressures from increased competition in supermarket supply chains and lost jobs in regional areas that are transitioning to new economies as it is natural disasters such as flood and drought. In consultations, we heard that the focus during these difficult times turns to the men, their wellbeing and economic survival and lesser emphasis is placed on the role women play in finding creative solutions to support families, businesses and communities. Yet we also heard of examples of innovative community responses to local needs, men working with women to face challenges like the closure of local manufacturing and mining plants.

We heard pregnant girls and young teenage mothers experience discrimination and disadvantage when accessing opportunities for education and employment. Their stories included:

- A young woman living in a rural community who didn't get an education and felt like she didn't have a voice, resigned herself to staying home and becoming pregnant.
- In an Aboriginal community, the intergenerational impact of child protection practices has been to break down the sense of identity and family structures rather than strengthening family and community. An Aboriginal woman told us that her daughter had been removed by child services and subsequently became pregnant, only to have that child also 'taken away'.
- A young mother waiting to catch the bus to school was denied entry because she had a child with her.

In remote Australia, service providers are expected to cover large geographical areas which can lead to a lack of women-specific and culturally sensitive services being available. Living remotely or in male-dominated environments can lead to women being isolated from other women and the networks that can support them to thrive in these environments. Living in remote dispersed communities also impedes the influence they have over decisions that affect them in Canberra and across state, territory and local government.

We heard many stories that captured the resilience and imagination of women living in remote, regional and rural Australia. In every setting whether it be local sport, local councils, businesses and schools, women are striving to claim a rightful place at the decision-making table. They are finding creative solutions to problems others have long discarded as too hard. When one young woman asked why young people were leaving her community she was told there was no child care. In response, she opened up a day care service and is now opening a second one. As well as providing a much-needed service in her community, this has also helped the women she employs to re-engage in work after years spent caring for children.

Women commented on the difference it makes when men engage and support their progress. And when they have the opportunity to connect and build networks.

Women in rural and regional Australia are often the back bone of many community groups, we have to have a can do attitude to achieve what is needed. We support one another through regular contact, whether that be over the phone or over a coffee. It is during the most challenging times, such as the current dairy industry crisis, you realise the strength of your networks and your community. I do not know where I would be without those who have supported me in my journey including my husband, friends and family and the male chairperson who gave me my first chance in leadership!

Sarah Parker

Secretary of Rural Women's Coalition

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Promote and facilitate opportunities for women to have their voices heard at a regional, national and international level in collaboration with Alliances, government, businesses and communities.
- Engage with men living in rural, regional and remote areas on understanding the benefits of equality and the important role they play in achieving it.



Violence against women



We heard that the Australian community welcomes the recent focus on family violence although there could be better understanding of the diverse forms of family violence beyond physical and sexual (including financial and emotional) and the impact of family violence on children. We also heard the urgent need to broaden this focus. In addition to violence in the home and residential settings, women are experiencing violence in their workplaces and in public spaces including sexual assault, sexual harassment, everyday sexism, online violence; and unacceptable violence against intersectional communities of women.

Women who experience intersectional inequality due to race, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, intersex status or socio-economic status often experience higher rates of violence and face additional barriers to seeking help and support. We heard from one young woman that *'being Asian, there is a fear of losing your job if you complain or report - fear of not being able to support families. Whatever happens, you end up just keeping things to yourself'*.

We are aware of some of the existing intersectional issues faced by women in Australia:

- Research shows that women with disability are 40% more likely than women without disabilities to be the victims of domestic violence⁴. More than 70% of women with disabilities have been victims of violent sexual encounters at some time in their lives and are subjected to such violence by a greater number of perpetrators. Their experiences of violence continue over a longer period of time, and more severe injuries result from the violence⁵.

- Older women are significantly more likely than older men to be victims of abuse⁶. The sexual assault of women over 65 occurs in a wide range of contexts and they can face violence from partners, family members and service providers on whom they may rely on for general care, health care and intimate care⁷.
- Experiences of violence against women with diverse sexual orientations, trans and gender diverse women and intersex women, can be compounded by the lack of inclusive services⁸.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of violence-related assault than non-Indigenous women in Australia⁹.

We heard that the impact of cultural values and immigration status on women from migrant and refugee backgrounds can enhance the complexities of family and domestic violence. They are generally less likely than other groups of women to report family and domestic violence, and may face additional barriers to safety due to limited support networks in Australia or lack of knowledge of Australian law.

We heard women with disability experience violence in group homes, where they are unable to choose whom they live with. The isolation and discrimination that women with disability experience increases their risk of being subject to violence and creates barriers to leaving violence. Stories of violence against women with disability went beyond physical, sexual and economic abuse. We heard from women humiliated by family members, having their privacy invaded and sharing concerns over forced sterilisation and lack of decision-making regarding their reproductive rights.

We heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women that they fear reporting violence may lead to the involvement of child protection or impact retention of their public housing. Women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities feared reporting would impact their visas and family's future work opportunities.

We heard that women, especially young women, experience violence and harassment online. One woman observed, *'pornography, computer games, and apps expose kids to violent images from a very early age, encouraging deep cultural stereotypes against women'*. This can include the dissemination of private images or materials without consent, and violent, sexualised abuse and harassment. We heard of instances of sexting where young women have sent images that boys have asked for which were then distributed without their consent. This indicates a lack of understanding by young Australians about how healthy relationships work and what is appropriate. This is supported by research which looks at young people's attitudes towards relationships and has found more than a third of girls and young women want more informative and practical safe-sex and healthy relationships education at school.¹⁰

Women, who advocate on women's rights issues, including family and domestic violence, appear to be at particular risk of online harassment, as are women with diverse sexual orientations, trans and gender diverse women and intersex women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities. We heard stories of women who have received threats on social media because of their advocacy for women exposed to harassment. It appears that the most horrifying digital abuse is reserved for women with high visibility, who speak out or those deemed to be feminist. The remedies have lagged behind the abuse and action by law enforcement is often ineffective. It is also invisible to people in power who are not using social media.



We frequently heard that women internalise an expectation of mistreatment from a very young age and then take actions to stop other's mistreatment; for example 'don't wear that', 'don't go there' or victim blame those experiencing violence. We heard that the consequences of violence are far-reaching and ongoing. This includes the financial burdens, losing work or leaving work, mental health and the general deterioration of their health and wellbeing.

Case study

Sonia² grew up in a family free of violence, with a father who actively challenged gender stereotypes. While studying science at university, Sonia entered a violent relationship, which fundamentally shifted her perceptions of gender equality. Sonia dropped out of university. After she fell pregnant, her partner regularly raped her and employed emotional manipulation to convince her that his behaviour was acceptable. Sonia revealed the sexual violence she had experienced to her family, who recommended that she contact a domestic violence service. As a result of the support she received, she has realised that her partner's behaviour is not acceptable. She has returned to university to study law. Sonia stresses the importance of telling her story and is committed to improving the world for her daughter.

We did hear some progress is being made. We heard women taking inspiration from the courage of survivors of violence to speak out themselves and advocate for change. We heard that the recent momentum for change in systems and communities has been prompted by long term advocacy, wider awareness of tragic deaths and prevalence data, high profile individuals, clever campaigns and better media reporting.

We are seeing many state governments taking responsibility for system change off the back of community advocacy and workplaces introduce domestic violence leave and other supportive practices to support women experiencing violence.

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Advocate to address the causes of violence and response as it affects women who experience intersectional disadvantage.
- Continue to spotlight data and stories of the full breadth of gendered base violence experienced by women and advocate for action.

² Name change



Community engagement in solutions



During our conversations in gender equality, people spoke about individual experiences and the need for a whole of community response. Individuals want to be empowered to make decisions for their community that are relevant to them and address the often intersecting challenges they face.

Women with diverse sexual orientations, trans and gender diverse women and intersex women, culturally and linguistically diverse women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women noted many intersecting and complex problems that are exacerbating gender inequality. The conversations highlighted that their experiences cannot be understood in terms of being a woman without also understanding their experience of race, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, intersex status and culture. Solutions need to address many problems at once to be successful, including access to basic needs such as medical assistance, housing, employment and justice. We heard stories of overcrowded housing and shortage of food when families help provide for extended family and communities.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, we heard specifically about the impacts of colonisation and the experience of racism that have resulted in services and responses that violate cultural beliefs and community expectations. We often heard from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who said that they do not just want solutions for women but solutions for their whole community that involve men just as much as women. And they want their solutions taken seriously by policy makers.

We need to get our control back and our mob needs to be front and centre.

Participant, WA

The influence of family and relationship is high in multicultural, culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and women are expected to carry the larger burden of family and care. This impacts their capacity to find and sustain employment. We heard:

- A migrant woman was influenced by her family not to report sex discrimination *'I'm just lucky to have a job, I know it (the discrimination) is wrong but I need the job'*.
- An Aboriginal woman did not have the opportunity for higher education, as she was unable to travel interstate due to caring responsibilities for her family and community.

Some of the stories we heard uncovered the challenges some communities face when accessing services. People told us service responses were not culturally sensitive, there is limited access to services (especially in remote areas), and that there is a lack of trust in the system. We heard:

- A trans woman noted the *'need for the Violence against Women sector to realize that LGBTI deals with diverse women, not just gay men'*, and that diverse women *'need their services too'*.

- An Aboriginal woman reported that, instead of listening and taking the time to resolve her query, the service provider escalated their discussion to involve a compliance response from law enforcers.
- No privacy or respect for a woman experiencing violence who was trying to seek support from services and was asked to tell her story in front of a queue of people.
- A trans man was given a 'female' wristband in medical centres despite living in his affirmed gender for over 10 years.
- Australia's long history of removing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their parents has left young women scared to take their babies to hospitals when they are unwell because they fear having their children removed from their custody.

We also heard stories of over-servicing. For example Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are the most significantly over-represented population in Australian prisons and their rate of incarceration is increasing more rapidly than any other group.¹¹ Their incarceration has ramifications for their entire community and negatively impacts their health. In Queensland alone, 86% of Indigenous women who were incarcerated were suffering from mental disorders.¹²

We heard from women with disabilities that although they often had no voice as an individual, collectively they could amplify their power and build confidence to develop innovative solutions to problems they have a lived experience of. Two examples we heard were:

- Women with autism collectively voicing the discrimination they experience as adult women with autism. Their disability is not visible and is assumed to be a condition experienced by young boys, not girls and women.
- A group of Western Australian activist women who call themselves the "Bolshy Divas" have creative and fun ways to challenge discriminatory attitudes through advocacy and organised campaigning. Together they could share experiences, highlight challenges and see the fun side of advocating for change. As a group they had many of the solutions to the problems that neither the women's sector nor the disability sector alone seemed to grasp.

Women want to have significant leadership roles and play a vital role in their communities. It was obvious we need to support efforts to increase representation of women in politics, on public and private sector boards and in community organisations so they can have full and effective participation in policies and programmes that affect them and their communities.

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Empower greater voice for women and promote community-based local capacity building and solutions to the complex challenges that exacerbate gender inequality in communities experiencing intersectional discrimination.



Women's voice; women's needs; women's services



Having their voices ignored and services defunded is disadvantaging women all over Australia.

It is convenient for our community to infer that the experiences of all people are the same and therefore that a solution for one is the solution for all. This ignores and devalues the impact of services designed to support women like safe housing and working women's centres. Women-specific services, led by women, are helping to solve some of the most systemic problems faced by women in Australia. However, despite the evidence that services addressing the unique needs of women are working, these services are losing vital funding. Women's refuges are being closed and women informed that homeless services will assist them. Funding for women's legal services is declining and women are being referred to community legal services. It is more challenging for women to access whole of community services, opposed to women's only services. We heard that inevitably a service available to everyone is more likely to be accessed by men and has less experience assisting women.

Defunding these services also results in less capacity to train and develop women and advocate on behalf of women. Women are left with no support and become invisible in the debate. When vulnerable groups of women are unable to access justice, refuges and employment, they are being denied basic human rights.

Case study

Kim³ immigrated to Australia with her husband. After her arrival, she began experiencing severe domestic violence, resulting in a disability. After five years of abuse, she escaped from her husband and was homeless. Through her local domestic violence service, she was able to meet other survivors who had similar experiences. This network provided significant support to Kim.



Jane Rosengrave

Winner of the Tony Fitzgerald Memorial Community Individual Award at the 2016 Human Rights Awards

³ Name change

Where women are able to speak out, they are often not taken seriously. Many women told us that their voices are ignored when they have constructive solutions and that they were ignored when things go terribly wrong and they need support. For example, we heard:

- A female employee was labelled 'hysterical' for calling out sexism.
- A woman didn't disclose to their small business employer that they were experiencing domestic violence for fear of backlash.
- A woman was asked directions by three men. One man then attacked her and the other two watched. Instead of condemning the attacks, the media said she shouldn't have been out by herself at night.
- An older woman experienced discrimination because of caring responsibilities. Her attempts to speak up and find support failed and as a last resort she was helped by a working women's centre¹³.
- A woman with disabilities experiencing domestic violence was passed between domestic violence services and disability services without receiving the specific support required for her circumstances.

Women spoke about their inability to access justice or action through the current complaint systems. A number of recent studies have shown that women who report experiences of sexual harassment or assault can face significant consequences due to reporting. Findings from the Australian Human Rights Commission's 2012 National Sexual Harassment Telephone Survey showed that nearly one-third (29%) of respondents who reported experiencing sexual harassment indicated that their complaint had a negative impact on them.¹⁴ Some examples of reported impacts include experiences of victimisation, ostracism or social exclusion, and physical and emotional abuse¹⁵.

We heard the language of harassment and bullying being used to describe sexual harassment and sex discrimination which can diminish the fact that women are more likely to experience this than men.

We were constantly reminded of the under-reporting of family violence, sexual assault, sex discrimination and sexual harassment due to backlash and victimisation. Research shows that women are often reluctant to report incidents of sexual harassment or assault for fear of negative consequences for their career or reputation, convoluted reporting processes, a perceived lack of confidentiality in reporting processes, or a lack of confidence in reporting outcomes.¹⁶

It is unhelpful to frame the challenges faced by women in Australia as 'women's problems'. Yet it is important to recognise the gendered nature of disadvantages faced by women. Gender equality is not a 'man versus women' issue - we all have a role in achieving gender equality, just as both have something to gain from it.

So often when talking about gender inequality it is looked at in isolation - what men have that women don't - without considering the intersecting social structures. This creates an overly simple and reductive understanding of what inequality looks like, and ignores the reality of men, who due to race, ethnicity, education, sexuality, ability or class may suffer discrimination in ways some women do not. Looking at gender inequality as simply men/women inevitably prioritises a very particular sort of woman - she's white, straight, middle-class, able-bodied and cis-gender. Feminism and other discussions about gender inequality need to make sure they are addressing more than just one type of privilege and power structure to truly tackle the issue of inequality.

Arabella Close and Courtney Thompson
FEMPOWER

We remain optimistic about change when we hear from groups of young people like R4Respect and fEMPOWER committed to advancing respect and responsibility and violence prevention in their communities. They are often volunteering for unfunded organisations and continue, as they see the impact they are having with other young people across cultural groups and within education. Where women-specific services are available we heard stories of the remarkable innovation of women working to solve challenges together.

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Work with government and other policy makers on the need for gender and intersectional lenses in funding allocation, policy, decision making and data collection.



Women's economic security



Women's experience of economic disadvantage at different points over a lifetime accumulates to poverty or disadvantage in retirement. Women's experiences of economic inequality are the result of interconnected burdens: including violence, discrimination in the workplace and the expectation that women shoulder the majority of unpaid caring work.

We heard mainstream dialogue is about women's choice: their choice of profession, choice to have children, choice about whether and how to be in the paid workforce, the choice to be an unpaid carer. The stories we heard suggest that the system is choosing or directing what roles individuals play, rather than the individual. Over a lifetime the economic disadvantage compounds, which is a significant reason why in 2016 Australia ranks at 42 of 144 countries in a widening economic gender gap, down from 12th in 2006¹⁷.

We heard that inequality begins with entrenched gender norms in the home. Girls are given toys such as dolls and cooking sets to play with and are expected to help with household chores. They receive praise for their looks¹⁸ rather than for brains and ability. This entrenches gender stereotypes. A young woman living in rural Australia told us, *'At the end of year 10 I had to choose between agriculture/cattle and teaching/child care. I was told the cattle industry is not an industry for women. I asked why – and was told because you can't lift things'*.

In adolescence, despite doing well in school¹⁹, we heard that girls are discouraged from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects and choosing male-dominated careers like mining, construction, resources, armed services, trades, often out of fear for their safety and unwelcome sexual

attention. These are highly paid and secure industries. Instead, young women are encouraged to choose female-dominated, often lower paid industries (education, health, social services, hospitality) or gender-segregated occupations in male-dominated industries. The gender pay gap means that women on average earn 16.2% less than men²⁰. A young student and single mother shared; *'I fear that when I go into a job I'm not going to be paid as much as my male compatriots and that I'll be watched over because of my family responsibilities. I'm looking for a career that I can enjoy and be financially responsible'*.

Once in the workforce, women have a one in four chance of having experienced sexual harassment in the last five years.²¹ Sexual discrimination and sexual harassment impacts women's ability to engage in paid work while also costing them to fight their discrimination and harassment cases. Women's workplace participation is impacted by their experiences of sexual harassment and violence outside the workplace and they may be denied leave or flexible work arrangements to attend violence-related matters, such as moving into a shelter. We heard some have their employment terminated or they may be transferred or demoted. We heard that this treatment can exacerbate the costs and consequences of family and domestic violence. Economic abuse can continue after separation when a partner makes things financially difficult for them.

The financial consequences of having children reverberate for the rest of a woman's life. Wages and superannuation are on hold for many women who take parental leave after the birth of a child. A young woman noted;

'I'm going to start thinking about having children and have concerns about expectations of family and from people at work – ideally I would like an arrangement where we both work part-time, three days a week, and have access to child care. But I have no job security, I am only working as a casual and I am economically not secure enough to have a family now. I still want to be engaged in my work after having a baby.'

The 'choice' to take on unpaid caring responsibilities is influenced by family economic decisions such as the cost of childcare and comparative wages of women and men after parental leave. So women return to work flexibly or move into casual, insecure employment.

One in two mothers experience pregnancy discrimination²², missing out on opportunities and sometimes losing their jobs altogether. Progression stalls and workforce participation drops especially after children. Women are more likely to take the primary caring role and unpaid domestic tasks. Negative

attitudes towards working mothers, and fathers who take on primary caregiving roles impacts decision to return to work or study. As one woman noted: *'My own career basically got frozen in time'*.

We heard that financial literacy and risk appetite can be lower for women meaning their savings are not working as hard for them as their male counterparts. Young women told us that they needed better financial literacy, in particular to understand the financial implications of their decisions. While information may be available, some women told us that it was not presented in a form they intuitively engaged with.

Across Australia, there is a high cost to caring responsibilities and women continue to undertake more unpaid work (even when they are in paid employment)²³ than men. As women age they carry the primary burden for elder care.

When we listened to culturally and linguistically diverse women we heard their options for work can be influenced by expectations of caring for family and community and in some cases the control of their partner. When they do work, they get very little payment and recognition.

One woman observed; *'What is going to be the security for them when they get older if they don't have the opportunity to work. Women of colour, even when educated, find it even more difficult to navigate and to reach leadership levels'*.

One participant observed that women's financial inequality was compounded by commercial factors: *'Women pay more for things than men pay for i.e. haircuts, toiletries etc. despite being paid less'*.

This accumulation of disadvantages has led to women in 55-65 age group being seriously disadvantaged. Between 2000 and 2005, single elderly female households experienced the highest incidents of poverty compared to other household types.²⁴ Women retire with half the savings of men and are two and a half times as likely to live in poverty in their old age compared to men.²⁵ We heard:

- *'Older women are not just at the vulnerable end, but those who were actively not able to participate in workforce in the sixties due to laws are now coming up in our homelessness data. They were not able to put the lump sums down for mortgages'*.

- *'I'm still working now because when I got to the age I thought I would retire I discovered I didn't have enough money and it was too late for me to fix it. So I've just had to keep working'*.

We heard that sharing unpaid work was often seen as only attainable for families where both parents were working full-time in well paid positions and could afford childcare.

Although some building blocks are already in place to promote women's economic empowerment, including excellent levels of educational attainment, access to childcare and paid parental leave, and a strong legal and industrial system that supports worker protections and workplace flexibility, we heard implementing these for all women has not been achieved. This is despite clear evidence that women's economic participation results in substantial benefits to the economy.²⁶

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Work with employers to identify all the economic levers (eg. Paid parental leave, superannuation, childcare, flexible work, pay gap) that impact the economic gender gap and consider innovative approaches to reverse the widening gap.



Women at work



While some progress is being made in gender equality for women in larger workplaces, full time employment and regulated employment, many women are constrained by the lack of choice when it comes to work and care, casual work and new ways of work. There are structural barriers and social norms preventing us from realising the full potential of gender equality in workplaces.

Although the flexibility that comes with casual work could work well for women, we heard women often have no certainty over income and shifts which impacts their ability to access childcare. We heard that the trade-off for having caring responsibilities can be poor quality jobs and the threat of losing employment. We heard:

- A young woman had to be available 24/7 by her phone just in case she was called for a shift and the shifts were only 4 hours at a time.
- A mother with caring responsibilities lost shifts in her casual employment because she was unable to find care for her children at short notice for a shift.
- A woman working in a male-dominated industry who had questions about pay and conditions felt she would be seen as 'too assertive/threatening' to ask about her rights.

We heard that women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may have little knowledge or understanding of their rights and are unable to access advice in translated or culturally appropriate ways. When they do gain an understanding of their rights, they can be influenced by family

and community to 'put up with' poor conditions or insecure work in order to maintain some form of employment.

Like Lyn's⁴ story:

Case study

After immigrating to Australia from South East Asia, Lyn worked as a cleaner in a hospital. She regularly experienced sexual harassment from doctors and patients at the hospital. On one occasion, a patient called her into his room, where he sat naked with an erection. Her colleagues, including her manager, assumed that she was sexually involved with the patient. On another occasion, a co-worker's husband attempted to sexually assault her. Lyn tried to report an unrelated instance of sexual harassment by a colleague's husband, but her manager did not take her seriously. After eight years of employment, Lyn thinks that she will have to resign from her job. She says that some of her colleagues and other acquaintances assume she is a sex worker because of her cultural background and the fact that she has savings. She has changed her habits and lifestyle to avoid being in situations where people might make comments about her personal life.

⁴ Name change

We heard that very few women report or seek remedy for loss of pay, poor working conditions, loss of employment or sexual harassment and assault. We heard:

- An international student studying English was exploited by her employer by underpaying her with cash. She thought this ‘was how it is done here’.
- A young migrant woman on a bonded visa forced to work outside her visa conditions for fear of losing employment.
- A woman with intellectual disability was underpaid by her supported employment.

Women with disabilities are less likely to be in the workforce than men with disabilities.²⁷ Women with disabilities who are employed are overrepresented in poorly paid jobs; are steered towards traditional areas of female employment (such as clerical and keyboarding positions); are given marginal jobs far below their capacity; and are denied opportunities for further training and job advancement.²⁸

Women’s disadvantage goes beyond conditions of work and can include the effect of violence against female workers in the workplace. Women are less likely to speak up or seek help when faced with sexual harassment and discrimination. We heard:

- A young woman asked to wear a bikini while fruit picking in order to get paid a bonus.
- A woman living in a rural community experiencing sexual harassment from her small business employer felt unable to report as his wife was the only other worker and she feared backlash from the small community.
- A young student subject to verbal abuse and intimidation in her workplace.

We heard there are fewer opportunities for career development, progression and leadership in casual employment. For example: a female academic noted that although promotions are supposed to be considered in light of achievement relative to opportunity, in reality promotions are based on how many papers you have produced which disadvantages women on parental leave or with caring responsibilities.

The solutions to workers’ problems are often based on secure work, for example, Enterprise Bargaining Agreements entrench conditions that favour traditional full time work models. This further marginalises women in insecure work. Many of these workers are completely unprotected as they are employed for cash-in-hand as cleaners or carers. These invisible workplaces are not regulated and workers experience pressure to do their work in a shorter amount of time than it actually takes with no legal entitlement to award rates.

I have worked in insecure work for a labour hire contractor in the horticulture industry. We were paid below the minimum wage, we worked long hours in unsafe workplaces. For women the situation was very bad, I know women who were sexually harassed and assaulted. When I joined the union I experienced what collective action can do. Now I help other workers organise. I think more needs to be done to ensure women have safe workplaces.

Kaylha Ho

NUW activist and organiser

Women's challenges in workforce participation, such as pay inequity, gender-segregated industries and rigid social norms, are exacerbated by policies that cause some sectors to expand and contract, effectively clustering women in vulnerable sectors. We heard:

- Women hold the majority of administrative roles and men the operational roles in the mining sector. During the mining downturn this meant women were more susceptible to losing their jobs.
- Women employed in the care sector (aged care, NDIS providers, child care) are being impacted by the casualisation of the industry, low pay and poor conditions. We heard this is particularly prevalent for young women and culturally and linguistically diverse workers.
- In remote Western Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women dominate health and hairdressing industry and men participate in agriculture and mining.

Research by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) shows women hold over 80% of jobs in the Health Care and Social Assistance sector, and these are generally lower paid and have higher levels of casual work (23% compared to 2% in mining).²⁹ Whereas men dominate jobs in higher paid industries such as mining and technology. This imbalance not only disadvantages women economically but also means diversity of decision-making is missing in both industries. We need to hear men's voices and see men's participation in female-dominated industries as much as we need women's in male-dominated industries.

Despite passionately pursuing careers in male-dominated industries that they love, women can also experience isolation and discrimination. We heard:

- A female plumber started her own business after failing to receive a single callback for job applications despite being overqualified.
- *'One of the main issues for women in engineering is that there simply aren't enough female employees in the workplace, and that can be unpleasant'.*

Surprisingly one of the barriers (or excuses) given to women working in male-dominated industries was the lack of toilets. We heard:

- A woman was not allowed on site because 'there was no suitable toilet'.
- A woman was told 'you can't go fishing' because the boat did not have a toilet onboard.
- A woman was deterred from becoming a long haul truck driver on the basis that there were no toilets on the remote long haul routes.

This perpetuates the cycle of family and teachers discouraging young girls from pursuing work in these industries out of concern for their welfare. We heard:

- A young woman living in the city told by her teacher you 'can't do a mechanical apprenticeship, that's for boys'.
- A young woman in a suburban area was encouraged to pursue childcare or be a barista rather than apply for a trades apprenticeship.

We know that 44% (5.1 million) of current Australian jobs are at high risk of being affected by computerisation and technology over the next 20 years³⁰. Currently STEM careers are dominated by men and are paid well. There was a strong desire from women working in male-dominated industries to raise awareness of the pathways available through STEM.

Technology and people working in robotics are predominantly male and with the shift towards automated work, the benefits of diverse thought are not present. These industries are at the forefront of discussions on what work looks like in the future and yet women's voices are not equally represented.

Employers are responsible for creating jobs, advertising jobs, setting rosters, hours of work and conditions. Women told us that they advocated for change to structural barriers such as the delegation of particular tasks according to gender. For example women are allocated administrative tasks, and those tasks are casual, while men can mine underground and those are permanent roles. The 'changing world of work' does

offer opportunities to strengthen gender equality in the future. Diverse, flexible and enabling workplace cultures for everyone will support women's greater participation in education and employment. Gender-segregated occupations and industries are not good for anyone and new ways of work also provide opportunities for more men to enter female-dominated industries.

We acknowledge the creativity of women working in male-dominated industries. They are creating networks across the country to advocate and work to change the structural barriers to employing women in these sectors – like placing toilets on long haul routes or raising awareness of pathways with girls in schools. Networks such as Women in Mining, Women in Trades, Women in Construction and Women in Power are sharing solutions that work. There are some exciting new programs specifically aimed at increasing women in STEM (Code like a girl, Robogals, Male Champions of Change for STEM). Women's networks in male-dominated industries need support so that they can continue to coordinate efforts and strategies.

Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities there are opportunities to reintroduce cultural development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who traditionally work in agriculture instead of continuing to see men dominate remote farming industries.

We heard from men committed to gender equality that they see one role they can play is to 'recruit, educate and mobilise' other men to make change and demonstrate the benefits of gender equality for everyone.

Women entrepreneurs are emerging across all industries and are turning to entrepreneurship because they are unable to access flexibility to balance work and family life or have experienced sex discrimination in the workplace. The challenge for these women, like many entrepreneurs, is that often building their businesses comes at the cost of their economic security, for example not paying themselves superannuation. They can be the only female entrepreneur in the room and would like to see greater focus on capacity building and networks for their sector like Rarebirds for women entrepreneurs.

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Collaborate with small, medium enterprises with particular focus on vulnerable workers and women in rural, remote and regional areas.
- Advocate to reduce gender segregation in industries, occupations and roles



Gender equality in all employment



There is a strong interest in gender equality from the corporate world. We heard about investment in programs and a recognition that workplaces want to do better. Many CEOs and Boards understand their role in leading change and as a result, there has been some progress with initiatives by the Male Champions of Change (MCC) and Chief Executive Women. However, this does not mean gender equality has been achieved.

Questions are being raised about the results to date. Some reported a sense of fatigue and suggestion that gender equality is achieved and the focus should move to other areas of diversity. Challenges still include equal participation of genders in flexible work, reducing the pay gap and increasing the influence and diversity of women in leadership.

We are still frequently hearing stories of pregnancy and caring related discrimination experienced by women. We also heard that in practice there remains structural and cultural barriers to the implementation of flexible work policies and grievance and complaint policies. There remains entrenched norms in workplaces that prevent policies being adopted equally by women and men. A gap also exists between what leaders are saying and what middle management implements, for example:

- An older woman was caring for her elderly father who passed away. She requested leave at half pay and bereavement leave which was granted. Then her sister-in-law took her own life and so she was supporting her nephew and was denied extra leave as her manager didn't consider her sister-in-law as family.

- A woman was made redundant on parental leave as she no longer 'fit' the look for her service industry employer.

The experiences of women with diverse sexual orientations in the workplace demonstrates the need for more supportive and inclusive workplaces. They still remain fearful of 'coming out' at work which results in them being unable to be themselves at work. When they do, they can experience discrimination related to their sexual orientation, in addition to their gender.

Engagement of men has been instrumental towards change. There appears to be increased awareness and interest from men, in particular young men and men with young families, to be engaged in efforts to advance gender equality. Men also told us they appreciate opportunities to share gender equality strategies that are working with each other. We heard they want to understand how to engage in these efforts in a meaningful way. In many cases it seems like their motivation has been about reducing harm to protect women. For future progress we will need to see leaders have the same passion for women succeeding.



Men have a vital role to play in building a world of gender justice. We must put our own houses in order, speak out against the sexism around us, and support feminist campaigns for change. That's the right thing to do. And men ourselves will benefit from progress towards equality.

Dr Michael Flood

Associate Professor, Queensland University of Technology

Regardless of all the conversations, there has not been a shift of responsibility in caring. Unless we redistribute care in the same way as formal work women will continue to experience economic and health disadvantages and men will be dissatisfied with lower involvement with their children.

Small and medium enterprises (SME) often do not have the same compliance practices or staff with expertise in management or human resources. We heard from small business owners that they want to do the right thing and want support to know how to do it. There are some good examples of small businesses providing flexible work and job-sharing. Yet there were also examples of women being in precarious work or vulnerable situations. We heard from some groups that there is a sense that the focus on ASX200 companies has been to the detriment of change in SME. We need to support the cultural and structural changes needed in SMEs through practical help.

We listened to stories of women in or seeking leadership. There are both perceived barriers and actual structural barriers to their participation. We heard that women face backlash in leadership roles or are shut out of them completely. For example, there are still perceptions that there is 'no pipeline' of women with the 'right skills'. However often the structural and cultural barriers to appointing women stand in the way, such as selection processes, gender-segregated experience or risk adverse nature of Boards. The system has delivered the same sorts of leaders – leaders who don't reflect the full diversity of our community, including from multicultural backgrounds. Women also want to hold positions of influence not just leadership, they want to be able to make change as opposed to just being present at the table. Overwhelmingly they want to see greater diversity in the women being appointed to these roles. We heard about:

- The lack of representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on boards of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island and other community organisations.
- Women sole proprietors being invisible to rural and regional communities.
- Culturally and linguistically diverse women and women with diverse sexual orientations, trans and gender diverse women, intersex women not being seen on Boards or in leadership.
- A woman with disability fighting for a place at the decision making table who then witnessed the surprise of colleagues that she had valuable contributions to make.
- Few women in coaching and leadership roles in traditionally male-dominated sports.

We heard that strategies like the MCC initiative which promote gender equality have had a positive impact on organisations. As leaders of workplaces, men are showing that to make change they need to be the ones to lead change from their positions of power. And then ensure their replacements are people that reflect the diversity of our community.

The contemporary lens of gender equality in the military can often bely the journey we are on, and overshadow the distance we have travelled so far. When I joined the Army in 1984, training was gender segregated. On graduation the scope of jobs available to us was limited. Women were not able to serve in combat specialities such as infantry, armour and artillery. Battalion command, deployment on military operations, and promotion were constrained by established organisational policy and practice. Gender equality is a capability enhancer and combat multiplier, and is a key element of organisational diversity and inclusion. Today, training and education provided in the Australian military is nationally recognised and gender inclusive. Women and men serve in multiple specialities in the Australian Army, including combat specialities such as armour and infantry. In the Airforce we have female pilots and, in Navy, women are ships captains. Promotion is merit-based, and we have female one and two star generals or Service equivalents. Women regularly deploy on military combat operations with their male counterparts. In my experience the gender equality journey can sometimes seem like an uphill struggle. However, the view from the top is infinitely worth the journey.



Colonel Helen MacPherson (Retired)

There is a move towards gender targets as a positive path to change and we heard people previously opposed are now moving towards supporting targets. In some settings, there is a better understanding of the myths around targets and merit.

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Develop collaborations to find ways to share and amplify good workplace practices across sectors, different sized organisations and in metropolitan as well as regional, rural and remote communities.
- Engage with men to step up beside women and encourage their success.



Negative attitudes and everyday sexism



Gender inequality is alive and well. Credible data from the World Economic Forum³¹, Australian Bureau of Statistics³² and other research organisations shows that Australia performs poorly in violence against women, women in leadership and women's economic security and yet, the Australian community continues to hold onto gender stereotypes and accepts the impact of inappropriate behaviour as a norm. Speaking out can mean facing abuse and backlash.

We heard the frustration from every group we spoke with that negative and discriminatory gender stereotypes are reinforcing the structural and systemic barriers to gender equality.

We heard that one of the key barriers to gender equality is the way we accept a degree of 'everyday sexism' as harmless. As a community we don't speak up about this because we feel it's not malicious and the incidents are too small to make a fuss. All of us need to acknowledge and discuss the high rates of low level sexism in our workplaces. If we want to improve gender equality, we need to talk about the deeply embedded systemic and attitudinal barriers that too often enable sexism and consequent discrimination to go unremarked. We also heard from men that for progress to be made they needed to highlight and action gender equality on a daily basis and then share their stories with others.

Our Watch's 'Change the Story' framework³³ points to substantial evidence that higher levels of violence against women are consistently associated with lower levels of gender equality in both public life and personal relationships. The framework makes it clear we can't just focus on the violence itself; we must change the bigger story behind it. We must

challenge the social, political and economic structures, practices and systems that created gender inequality, and the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that continue to support and normalise it³⁴.

Our community is attached to gender stereotypes around work and leadership which limit opportunities for both women and men to share roles outside of work. Understanding these stereotypes starts in very young children. We heard examples of schools sending home literacy books that reinforce gendered norms and inappropriate behaviour or humour being accepted as part of our culture. We see it manifest in the unequal coverage of women's sport in the media. The unequal representation and influence of women in decision making positions in their communities, places of work and study and in their homes. We hear it spoken when making a complaint is described as 'whinging' from a woman and 'feedback' from a man.

Of particular concern are the confusing and unhelpful messages in the commercial world that create mixed messages for young people, such as toys targeted at boys and girls separately, pop culture, accessible pornography and games reinforcing discriminatory attitudes and social media backlash against those speaking out against the norm.

Women also experience backlash for asking about employment conditions. When they have questions about pay and conditions they are often perceived as 'too assertive/threatening', especially in a male-dominated workplace. We heard that some women are bullied or have their employment terminated when they make complaints.

As one woman observed: *'Men are seen as decisive while women are seen as being cooperative – these attributes are not gendered nor are they mutually exclusive'*.

There is strong opposition to initiatives aiming to advance gender equality. Sections of our community, particularly a larger proportion of men, don't think discrimination or inequality is an issue anymore. A comprehensive survey of Victoria Police last year asked the question: 'Do you think discrimination still exists for women?', 73% of the women said yes, and 46% of the men said no³⁵. This is manifest in women's experiences at work and in the community, overt and covert opposition to targets or special measures which aim to achieve substantive equality for women:

- *'Men feel that they are losing and perpetrators feel a sense of injustice. Some male students feel they are being blamed.'*
- *'I was named as a target by a group of men online. I reported it to authorities and when I gave evidence, the men right's activist sat behind me.'*

While we look to the next generation for change, recent research findings highlight some areas of concern with regard to the attitudes of young people towards women.³⁶ The results of a recent survey conducted by VicHealth showed that young people aged 16-24 years presented higher levels of attitudinal support for violence against women than those aged 35-64 years, with young men showing lower levels of support for gender equality and higher levels of attitudinal support for violence compared to the young women surveyed.³⁷ These findings are supported by the results of a 2015 study commissioned by OurWatch, which indicated that one in six 12-24 year olds believed 'women should know their place', and more than a quarter believed that 'male verbal harassment' and 'pressure for sex towards females' were 'normal' practices. This data tells us that gender equality will not be achieved simply by generational change.

Nevertheless, there is some promising progress and a template for more. One example is visualising what gender equality looks like for sportswomen, their coaches, administrators, fans and the media.

Pathways for women in sport are now opening up in ways we have never seen...and it's important to invite men to walk with us to help us open the doors that are still closed to us... Sport is a powerful medium to enable young women to grow as leaders in their communities. It is often the only place where traditional barriers can be set aside, because the fathers, grandfathers, uncles and brothers suddenly find new respect for these girls when they see how much effort they put in and the skills they display. We are creating community change... young women know it's possible to play, coach, umpire, administer and commentate at an elite (AFL) level. But those of us charged with guiding them, we must always share the stories of what has gone before and where brick walls still appear, teach them, if we cannot knock them down, then we must find a way to climb over them.

Karina Grey

Founder and Director of Starwin Social Enterprise,
Manager of the Tiwi Bombers Girls AFL team,
Darwin NT

We heard about the experiences of trans and gender diverse women in encountering and combatting negative and discriminatory attitudes and behaviours. We heard about the positive consequences of initiatives in schools that have been designed to respect and protect the human rights of trans and gender diverse young people and the resilience of young trans and gender diverse young people in the face of bullying and harassment.

Everyone has a role to play to help build greater equality in Australia. Talking about low level sexism in the workplace is not a conversation about villains and victims; it is a conversation we need to have about cultural and attitudinal change.

What can we do to achieve gender equality?

- Challenge misconceptions in the workplace and the community that gender equality has been achieved through data and education of the benefits of gender equality for every Australian.

Where to from here...



Although there has been some progress in some areas, overwhelmingly I heard gender equality has not been achieved.

I am acutely aware of the systemic barriers and gendered norms that need to be overcome to achieve gender equality and remain committed to ensuring Australia reaches this goal. This is a community wide issue and everyone has a role to play in developing strategies at different levels, government, business, community; and in different settings, that are practical and inclusive of everyone.

I am committed to recognising a diversity of experiences. This means being inclusive of women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, rural, remote and regional women, women with diverse sexual orientations, trans and gender diverse women, intersex women, older women, younger women and workers from gender-segregated industries. I will continue to collaborate with government, business, community groups, unions, researchers and individuals and be a public voice on gender equality issues for Australia.

Kate Jenkins

Sex Discrimination Commissioner

8 March 2017

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Where can I learn about my rights and responsibilities and get more information?

The Australian Human Rights Commission can provide you support.

Call the Complaint Information line on: 1300 656 419 (local call) or TTY: 1800 620 241 (toll free) or Fax: (02) 9284 9611

Visit the website at:
www.humanrights.gov.au

Make a complaint online by going to
www.humanrights.gov.au/complaints/make-complaint

Access Resources at:
www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/sex-discrimination?source=our-work

Post

Australian Human Rights Commission
GPO Box 5218
Sydney NSW 2001

If you are deaf or hearing impaired you can contact us by TTY on 1800 620 241. If you need an Auslan interpreter, the Commission can arrange this for you.

If you are blind or have a vision impairment, the Commission can provide information in alternative formats on request.

If you are thinking about making a complaint, you might also want to consider obtaining legal advice or contacting your trade union. There are community legal services that can provide free advice about discrimination and harassment. Contact details for your closest community legal centre can be found at www.naclc.org.au/directory.

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