

# Gender Equality

## Background

Australia has legislation that protects women from unfair treatment on the basis of their sex, marital or relationship status, pregnancy, family responsibilities and breastfeeding. It also makes sexual harassment against the law. Despite the legal framework, significant issues still exist around workplace equality, family and caring responsibilities, and violence.

## Key Issue – Domestic and family violence

Violence against women remains a critical and endemic issue in Australia. [Australian research](#) estimates that violence against women costs the Australian economy AUD\$22 billion a year.<sup>1</sup> The [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#) and [ANROWS](#) report that:

- 1 woman is killed every 9 days by a current or former intimate partner
- 1 in 6 women have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner
- 1 in 5 women have experienced emotional abuse by a current or former partner
- 42% of specialist homelessness services clients have experienced family and domestic violence
- Intimate partner violence is a leading contributor to illness, disability and premature death for women aged 18-44

On 5 March 2019, [the Australian Government announced](#) a \$328 million package for prevention and frontline services through the [Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022](#). This included \$35 million in support and prevention measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities and \$78 million to provide safe places for people impacted by domestic and family violence.

Despite this, under-resourcing of crisis and support services continues. The Commission is particularly concerned with the inadequate levels of support available for women in rural and remote areas, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, and lesbian, trans and intersex women.



Positive steps taken by the Australian Government include introducing a minimum standard for domestic violence leave, extending early release of superannuation on compassionate grounds to victims of family and domestic violence and prioritising women and children who are escaping family violence in the Federal Housing and Homelessness Agreement.

The Commission welcomes the recent [announcement](#) that the Women's Safety Council will work towards the development of the next National Plan, following the expiry of the current plan in 2022. The Commission urges the Council to consider the Commission's recommendations in the building of this plan.

## Recommendation

**Government increase prevention and early intervention initiatives on DFV; tailored measures to address the needs of women experiencing intersectional discrimination; and commit to a further National Plan from 2022**

### **Key Issue – Gender pay gap and women in leadership**

Positive actions regarding women in the workplace include the enactment of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth). The Act requires the provision of benchmark data on workplace equality using a reporting framework. In the [2018-2019 Workplace Gender Equality Agency \(WGEA\) dataset](#), 17.1% of CEOs were women. Despite constituting 50% of all private sector employees, women hold just over 30% of key management positions.

[WGEA has assessed](#) that the national gender pay gap stands at 14% with men earning on average \$254 more than women per week. Between 2016 and 2018, the average growth rate across all industries in women taking leadership roles including CEOs, key management personnel and other executive and general-manager roles stood at 2.8%.<sup>2</sup>

Efforts to achieve gender equity are apparent. Since 2013, around 300 companies have implemented stand-alone gender-equity strategies, however there is a wide variability in outcomes of gender-focused programs.<sup>3</sup>

## Recommendation

**Government  
implement targeted  
strategies to close  
the gender pay gap  
and ensure women's  
economic security  
later in life**

Often due to family and caring responsibilities, Australian women have more limited opportunities for paid work. As a result, the average Australian woman retires with approximately \$114,000 less superannuation than the average Australian man. The [Commission's background paper on Older Women's Risk of Homelessness](#) shows that this disparity leads to a greater reliance on the Age Pension for Australian women and is a contributing factor to increasing levels of homelessness amongst older women. 55.1 percent of people receiving the aged pension are women.<sup>4</sup> [The Commission has called on government](#) to redesign Australia's childcare system to breakdown barriers for women returning to work and provide better support to the predominantly female childcare workforce.



### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> KPMG and the Department of Social Services, [The Cost of Violence Against Women and their Children in Australia Report](#) (May 2016).

<sup>2</sup> McKinsey and Company, [Women in Leadership: Lessons from Australian Companies Leading the Way Report](#) (January 2018) 3.

<sup>3</sup> McKinsey and Company, [Women in Leadership: Lessons from Australian Companies Leading the Way Report](#) (January 2018) 5.

<sup>4</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, [Gender Workplace Statistics at a Glance Factsheet](#) (February 2020).