

MAINTAINING OUR COMMITMENT TO WOMEN

STATEMENT BY
THE HONOURABLE JUDI MOYLAN MP
MINISTER FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN
12 MAY 1998

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OVERVIEW

The Government is committed to building a society which allows all Australians to look to the future with confidence. Central to this commitment is the goal of allowing women and men to share both the rewards and responsibilities of work and family life.

Women are a diverse group. Their needs and aspirations vary from individual to individual. There is no simple formula for 'meeting the needs of women'. However, there is a need for all government agencies to take the concerns of all Australians, including women, into account in all aspects of decision making. This Budget Statement demonstrates how this aim has been, and is being, achieved.

The 1998 Budget has strengthened the Government's commitment to women by focusing on greater flexibility in the workplace, new initiatives to provide increased security and certainty for older Australians, improved services for rural and remote families, improved employment services and increased apprenticeship opportunities, reforms to the treatment of superannuation in the event of marriage breakdown and measures to significantly improve the safety of women.

A number of significant initiatives have been undertaken by the Government in its first term of office to assist women and their families including:

- the introduction of the family tax initiative which is providing \$1 billion a year to those who need it most - lower and middle income Australian families;
- enshrining female pension entitlements at 25 per cent of male total average weekly earnings;
- improving support services and funding for carers;
- industrial relations laws which offer genuine choice in the workplace including the provision of permanent part-time work and greater scope for balancing work and family commitments;
- introduction of stringent gun laws leading to the surrender of some 643,000 guns making Australia a safer place for all;
- leadership in the prevention of domestic violence; and
- fairer child care assistance which targets services and subsidies to where they are needed most – low and middle income earners, parents of children with disabilities, families in crisis and those from the country.

More remains to be done and the 1998-99 Budget builds on the strong foundations already laid.

In this Budget, women will benefit from initiatives across a range of portfolios including:

- new and fairer income tests for the Commonwealth Seniors' Health Card at a cost of \$191 million over four years, including simplification of the eligibility test. This will result in the income limits being raised to \$40,000 for a single person (up from \$21,320) and around \$67,000 for a couple (up from \$35,620);
- a \$24.3 million Rural Multipurpose Health and Family Services Network to help rural and remote families receive the same access to services as other Australian women, men and children;
- the provision of operational funding for national women's non-government organisations (NGOs) of up to \$50,000 per NGO from a pool of \$500,000;
- a \$13 million initiative over four years to build partnerships between business and communities to improve the quality of life for all Australians; and
- a job network which provides new and better ways to get Australians into work.

This Statement outlines the initiatives taken by the Government over the past twelve months and in the current budget to improve the lives of Australian women. Through its ongoing commitment to women, the Government is implementing practical strategies designed to make a real difference. The work is not limited to one Minister or agency but, as is evident, is reflected across all spheres of Government activity.

WORK AND FAMILY

The Government acknowledges the increasing number of women undertaking paid work while still carrying the major responsibility for family and community care. The Government recognises the need for flexible workplace policies which will benefit those women (and increasingly men) who wish to blend family and work responsibilities. Only a flexible and responsive workplace relations system can cater to differing individual circumstances. The *Workplace Relations Act 1996* has laid down the framework to achieve this.

However a desirable balance of work and family also entails recognition and support for the many unpaid roles performed by women within the family and the importance of child care in supporting women in employment.

Income security is a vital part of a reliable safety net and support system for Australians in need. The Government provides income support for people who cannot provide adequately for themselves for reasons such as age, disability, unemployment or caring responsibilities. Special emphasis has been given to the position of women and children in some programmes. The Government has also begun the process of addressing inadequacies in the distribution of superannuation on marriage breakdown which has particularly affected the income security of women for many years.

FAMILY SERVICES

The Government will provide \$8.6 million over four years to bring together information on services and benefits available to families across the spectrum of government departments and community services, for example through the Internet. The development of a coordinated and easy to use system will improve access for women to information about family and community services available to them.

This Budget also provides over \$13 million over four years for the development of business and community sector partnerships towards improving our communities. This initiative will increase levels of investment in shared community objectives, create higher levels of civic engagement and philanthropy, and develop stronger, more robust community networks.

CHILD CARE

In 1998, the Government has implemented a range of reforms to improve the availability of child care and to address a number of inequities that existed in the Commonwealth Child Care Programme.

The National Planning System, which came into effect in April 1998, will ensure that new child care places are located in the areas of greatest need. As a result, more families will be able to access child care places. It will also mean that services' viability is not threatened by new services opening in areas where there is little or no demand for new Commonwealth subsidised places.

The new Outside School Hours Care Childcare Assistance initiative introduced at the end of the first school term this year will significantly improve affordability for many thousands of families. Low income families will be entitled to the maximum rate of

\$1.61 per hour for one child, a significant increase on the previous rate of \$0.73. Changes also mean the provision of a more equitable system of Childcare Assistance for school age children using long day care centres, Family Day Care and Outside School Hours Care services.

In 1997-98, the new Commonwealth Child Care Advisory Council commenced major reviews of funding and charging practices in long day care centres and of the Quality Improvement Accreditation System.

1998-99 will be primarily a period of refinement, consolidation and improved communication for families, children and service providers.

SUPERANNUATION AND DIVORCE

The Government will release in the coming months for public comment, proposals to reform the treatment of superannuation in the event of marriage breakdown.

There are currently limited options for people dealing with superannuation on dissolution of marriage. The significance of superannuation as an asset of the marriage and its value as a source of income in retirement, need to be properly recognised and dealt with so that divorce settlements are fair to both parties. This is particularly important for women as their caring responsibilities mean there are often reduced opportunities to build separate retirement income.

The proposed reforms aim to provide certainty in valuing and apportioning superannuation assets built up during a marriage and greater choices to achieve settlements that better meet people's circumstances and needs.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYMENT PROGRAMME

From 20 March 1999, the social security arrangements for participants in the Community Development Employment Programme (CDEP) - the equivalent of the work for the dole scheme for indigenous people - will be amended to apply uniform conditions to CDEP participants. This measure removes inequities between unemployed and pensioner CDEP participants. In the long run, all income support recipients taking up CDEP work will be better off than non-working income support recipients.

Specific components of the package are:

- payment of a CDEP participant supplement of \$20 per fortnight to eligible low income CDEP workers;
- enabling eligible CDEP workers to access social security add-ons such as Rent Assistance, bereavement payments, Telephone Allowance, Pharmaceutical Allowance, Pensioner Concession Cards and automatic access to Health Care Cards; and
- treating CDEP wages as directly deductible income which reduces the income support payment dollar for dollar under the social security income test up to the maximum basic rate of payment.

CHANGES TO AUSTUDY PENSIONER EDUCATION SUPPLEMENT

From 1 March 2000, recipients of the Austudy Pensioner Education Supplement (PES) who are undertaking a study load of between 25 and 50 per cent will receive \$30 per fortnight instead of \$60 per fortnight. Those studying more than a 50 per cent load will continue to receive the full rate of PES.

This addresses concerns that pensioners may be eligible for an education supplement even if their study load is relatively light. This measure ensures Government funding is targeted at those pensioners with more substantial study loads and encourages those who are able to expedite completion of their study. Disability support pensioners are exempted from this change.

IMPROVE ASSISTANCE TO FOSTER CARERS

From 1 September 1999, the 12 month waiting period for Parenting Payment will be removed for single foster carers. In addition, from 1 July 1999, under certain conditions, foster carers will be able to receive a Health Care Card for foster children in their care.

These measures recognise the valuable role that foster carers (many of whom are women) play in our community. Around 900 single foster carers will be eligible for Parenting Payment without waiting 12 months. Carers of around 4,000 foster children will benefit from access to a Health Care Card.

ABOLISH SPECIAL MAINTENANCE

From 1 January 1999, non-cash or special maintenance will be treated the same as other forms of child maintenance income under the Family Allowance income test.

The current special maintenance income test is anomalous, applying only to family payments. It is the last vestige of income testing arrangements which, prior to 1993, applied also to pensions.

INTRODUCE A SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT ADVANCE

From 20 March 1999, the special employment advance will be introduced for social security customers who are or would be in financial hardship because they have earned income but not yet received it or because of the costs of taking up employment.

The measure improves incentives for women and men to take up work (especially casual work) and will alleviate hardship. Approximately 4,500 customers who are in hardship because they have earned but not received payment and 30,000 customers who take up employment where essential costs would otherwise be a barrier will be assisted by this measure.

OTHER INITIATIVES TO ASSIST FAMILIES

Marriage and Relationship Education

In recognition of the pressures placed on family life today, the Government allocated an extra \$6.1 million over three years in 1996-97 to foster positive, stable relationships. In

April 1997, 34 new and extended marriage and relationship education services were launched throughout Australia in 10 metropolitan, 12 regional and 12 rural high need areas. The additional funding targeted to this element of the Family Relationships Services Programme will bring total Commonwealth government expenditure up to \$11.85 million over three years.

Marrying And Migrating: You Have To Work At It

In April 1997, the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs released a video and accompanying booklet entitled *Marrying And Migrating: You Have To Work At It*. This product provides information on issues to consider before migration, some aspects of life in Australia, settlement issues, and family relationship issues and services. It is available in a variety of community languages. It is aimed at ensuring more informed decision-making by spouse and fiancé migration applicants and its success in this regard is indicated by on-going demand for the product.

Ensure the Child Disability Allowance, Carer Pension and Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit can be claimed when the child or care recipient is in hospital

Currently, parents and carers can be prevented from receiving Child Disability Allowance, Carer Pension or Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit solely because the child or care recipient is in hospital at the time of claim. This measure, announced in this year's Budget, will address this situation and will benefit the many women who are carers of children and adults with a disability.

CHILD SUPPORT

On 30 September 1997, the Government announced reforms to the child support scheme which will improve the scheme's flexibility, provide greater equity and more regular support for children. Legislation to give effect to these reforms was introduced into Parliament on 12 March 1998.

The reforms underscore the principle that parents have a primary duty to maintain their children.

Since 1 January 1998, all people who have an exemption from obtaining child support because of fear of family violence have been reviewed by Centrelink Social Work staff to assess if they are still at risk of violence and, if they are no longer at risk, give them the opportunity to obtain child support.

To protect certain parents and their children from violence amendments to the Child Support legislation will enable, from 1 July 1998, the Child Support Registrar to end a current assessment and collection of child support while the family is considered at risk.

From 1 July 1998, the minimum child support liability for all payers (including those receiving income support) will be \$5 a week (\$260 a year). For those who are Social Security pension or benefit recipients, Centrelink may arrange collection of this amount and transfer it to the Child Support Agency. Other payers will make payments either through the Child Support Agency or privately.

Child support assessments will more accurately reflect the payer's capacity to pay as there will be less opportunity to minimise taxable income for the purposes of child support. From 1 July 1999, calculation of child support assessment will be amended to include net rental property losses and exempt foreign income into taxable income for child support purposes.

More flexible arrangements for non-agency payments as part of child support liabilities

In 1994, the Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues recommended that more be done in the area of non-agency payments. In response the Government will introduce, through the Child Support Agency, more flexible arrangements for non-agency payments including:

- ensuring that payers and payees are aware of the availability of non-agency payments;
- accepting certain payments as credit towards the payer's child support liability (up to a limit of 25 per cent of monthly liability), provided that 100 per cent of the monthly liability is met. Examples of approved items are bona fide school fees, essential medical items, rent, rates, mortgages, utilities, child care costs;
- if the non-agency payment meets the requirements, it will be automatically credited against the payer's liability; and
- the Child Support Registrar can disallow a non-agency payment in cases where he or she considers that the payee has been coerced, harassed or is at risk of domestic violence.

This measure will ensure that child support payers and payees are both involved in their child's upbringing and allows payers more choice in the form in which child support is paid.

OLDER WOMEN

In addition to the income security needs of women throughout their lives, the Government recognises the needs of older women as a special group. The greater longevity of women compared with men, in combination with the compounding effects of women's broken work patterns and reduced working hours, can impact on the capacity of women to provide for their own retirements. The Government realises such concerns need to be addressed in a cohesive way and is playing a key role in ensuring older women's needs are addressed.

SIMPLIFICATION OF THE COMMONWEALTH SENIORS' HEALTH CARD INCOME TEST

From 1 January 1999, the income test for the Commonwealth Seniors' Health Card will be based on taxable income (similar to the Family Allowance income test). In addition, the thresholds will be raised to \$40,000 for a single person (up from \$21,320) and around \$67,000 for a couple, combined (up from \$35,620).

The Commonwealth Senior's Health Card enables older Australians, mainly self-funded retirees, who are not eligible for the Age Pension to access pharmaceuticals at a concessional rate. These changes will greatly simplify the claim process and allow approximately 220,000 more older women and men to receive the card.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR AN AGEING AUSTRALIA

The Government recognises the enormous contribution that older women have made and continue to make to our society. In November 1997, the Government announced its intention to develop a National Strategy for an Ageing Australia.

Partnerships will be built between government, communities, individuals and families to meet the needs and aspirations of Australians as they age. The Strategy will explore a range of public policy areas important to older Australians, including health, retirement incomes, housing, employment, social security, taxation and aged care. The Strategy will address the needs of the current generation of older Australians while looking to the future of the needs of the next generation.

INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF OLDER PERSONS

1999 is the International Year of Older Persons. The Government's contribution to the Year will focus on implementing practical national initiatives to improve the health and well-being of older Australians and recognise their contribution to communities and the nation. The Year will involve a range of cross-government projects complementing community-based activities and projects by the non-government sector. Partnerships between government, business and the community will be an important focus for the Year.

RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE

The Government is committed to bringing about the desperately needed improvements in Australia's residential aged care sector. At the same time the Government recognises that the community expects that a balance be struck between the user and taxpayer contributions to the cost of care in order to sustain the provision of services over the coming decades.

Almost three in four older Australians living in nursing homes or hostels are women. The Government is concerned to provide older Australians with a better quality of life in their later, most vulnerable years.

Wide-ranging improvements to residential aged care commenced from 1 October 1997. The changes were necessary to build a sustainable aged care system which could deliver quality care and services for now and into the future. The reforms included:

- integrating nursing homes and hostels into a single aged care system to minimise the need for relocation as people become more frail;
- establishing a new accreditation system to ensure the quality of care and accommodation;

- delivering the necessary funds to allow the poor quality of many buildings to be improved and to provide an ongoing source of capital funds. At present, there are problems with many nursing home buildings, with nearly 40 per cent of residents living in wards of four or more beds and others in homes which are outdated and unsuitable; and
- income-testing subsidies for residents who enter care from 1 March 1998 onwards to make the system sustainable and financially secure as the population ages.

Access to places will continue to depend on the need for care, not capacity to pay. If residents cannot afford to make a contribution to the cost of their accommodation, they will be assessed as concessional residents. All providers are required to set aside a certain number of places for concessional residents, based on local conditions and will receive additional subsidies from taxpayers for them.

COMMUNITY CARE AND CARERS

A significant number of older Australians and their carers are women. Women are major beneficiaries of the Government's *Staying at Home - Care and Support for Older Australians* package of measures announced by the Prime Minister on 2 April 1998. The package provides around \$280 million over four years designed to enhance the care of older people in the community and to provide greater recognition and support for carers. These measures will assist elderly Australians to remain in their homes for as long as possible and provide better support for carers.

The package includes:

- 3,900 additional Community Aged Care Packages at a cost of \$95.5 million over the next four years. Together with growth under existing programmes, this will more than double the number of people assisted to 22,000. The packages will also be able to cater for people with more complex care needs, including nursing care;
- an increase in continence assistance at a cost of \$15.4 million over four years to make it easier for older people to manage at home and avoid unwanted admission to residential care;
- the expansion of the successful Carer Respite Centres initiative announced in the 1996-97 Budget from 58 to 73 centres at a cost of \$30.9 million over four years;
- an extra \$10.3 million over four years will also be available for additional respite care places for people with dementia;
- ageing carers looking after adult children with disabilities will be assisted by increased accommodation assistance through the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement at a cost of \$15.4 million over four years;
- reforms to income support for carers with eligibility for the Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit will be widened at a cost of \$96.4 million over four years. This builds on an already announced 29 per cent increase in the rate of benefit from \$58.30 to \$75.10 per fortnight to take effect from 1 July 1998;

- aged care assessment teams' funding will be increased and indexed to growth in the older population to enable people to access care appropriate to their needs at a cost of \$14.1 million over four years; and
- a communication strategy at a cost of \$2 million in 1998-99 to promote positive images of older people and ageing in the community.

WAR WIDOWS' AND WIDOWERS' PENSION

On 26 March 1998, the Prime Minister announced that adjustments to War Widows' and Widowers' Pensions would be linked to the Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) benchmark, resulting in an immediate increase in \$6.80 per fortnight. This measure applies if indexation by the Consumer Price Index does not result in the relevant component of War Widows' and Widowers' Pensions being at least equal to 25 per cent of MTAWE.

Prior to amending legislation being passed to give effect to the changes, ex-gratia payments are being made to all affected war widows and widowers.

In the Budget, the Government has provided around \$164 million over four years for this measure which provides for War Widows' and Widowers' Pensions to be adjusted in line with increases in Age and Service Pensions and will ensure that, as with other pensioners, war widows and widowers share in increases in community living standards. This measure reinforces the Government's commitment to care for those who deserve special recognition for their personal sacrifices and to protect the living standards and financial security of older Australians.

EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Employment and earnings opportunities remain areas of persistent difficulty for some women. Improving the access of women to education and training across a wide range of fields is an important means of addressing this endemic problem and remains high on the Government's agenda. The Government supports women's choice to engage in education, training and paid work and has implemented strategies to assist this process.

THE JOB NETWORK

On 1 May 1998, the Government introduced Job Network, a new and better way of helping unemployed Australians into jobs. Under Job Network, employment services will be directed to those people most disadvantaged in the labour market. Many job seekers will benefit from new job matching arrangements, while others may need job search training or intensive assistance before they can find and retain a job successfully. Job search training will provide assistance with preparing resumes, interview techniques and presentation to eligible unemployed women to apply successfully for jobs. Job search training will generally be provided to job seekers who have been unemployed for six to 12 months and who have current work skills. Intensive assistance will provide individually tailored help to job seekers, including women, who are long term unemployed or are disadvantaged in the labour market and will address job seekers' employment barriers and place them in jobs.

Centrelink will also provide a range of improved job seeker services that can be used free of charge by all women looking for a job, including those not registered with Centrelink. They will have improved access to computers, facsimiles, photocopiers and telephones in Centrelink offices to help them identify suitable employment opportunities, prepare resumes and apply for jobs.

NEW APPRENTICESHIPS

In August 1997, a national marketing campaign for New Apprenticeships was launched. New Apprenticeships seeks to take the best aspects of traditional apprenticeships and make them available across a wider range of occupations including women's traditional occupations. It will also provide for school based apprenticeships and traineeships and access to part-time employment based training arrangements in some industries. These training arrangements can provide worthwhile outcomes for those who may otherwise be disadvantaged in their access to vocational education and training, such as women.

The Government has taken several steps to improve access and equity in employment based training. These include:

- providing assistance for some people who need preliminary training before they can successfully undertake an apprenticeship or traineeship;
- incentives for employers taking on women as apprentices or trainees in non-traditional areas;
- provision of subsidies and incentives to both full-time and part-time apprentices and trainees; and
- funding to identify and pilot strategies to help equity groups achieve successful outcomes in New Apprenticeships.

ENTERPRISE BARGAINING

The Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business has engaged the National Institute of Labour Studies to prepare the 1997 report on enterprise bargaining in the federal industrial relations system, as required by section 358A of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*. Early analysis of the Department's major data source, the Workplace Agreements Database, indicates that more than 77 per cent of current workplace agreements include one or more flexibilities such as part-time work, flexible working hours arrangements, more flexible annual leave arrangements, job sharing, working from home, career break schemes, paid parental leave and family/carers' leave. Such measures are of significant benefit to women as they assist in achieving a better balance between work and family responsibilities. The report will cover developments in Australia during 1997 in bargaining for the making of certified agreements and Australian Workplace Agreements. In particular, the report will cover the effects that such bargaining has had in Australia on the employment (including wages and conditions of employment) of women, part-time employees, persons from a non-English speaking background and young persons.

OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYMENT ADVOCATE

The Government has established the Office of the Employment Advocate (OEA) to provide assistance and advice to employers (especially in small business) and employees on the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*. The OEA role includes the provision of advice in connection with Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs).

OEA services to employers will be of assistance to women who play an increasingly important role in small business. Regarding services to employees, the Employment Advocate is required to have particular regard to:

- the needs of workers in a disadvantaged bargaining position (for example women, people from a non-English speaking background, young people, apprentices, trainees and outworkers);
- assisting workers to balance work and family responsibilities; and
- promoting better work and management practices through AWAs.

Some of the initiatives the Employment Advocate has developed to assist employees understand their rights and obligations under the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* include:

- producing an information kit for employers and employees interested in negotiating AWAs;
- holding a series of workshops on making AWAs in all States from March 1998;
- undertaking an advertising campaign to promote the availability of AWAs as a new option under the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*;

- establishing a National Telephone Enquiries Service enabling employers and employees to receive advice and assistance on a range of matters in accordance with the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*; and
- contracting community sector organisations to provide assistance and advisory services to workers in a disadvantaged bargaining position, including women;
 - this includes Working Women's Centres in five States, community legal centres and community organisations with an employment focus.

EQUAL PAY

The Government is firmly committed to ensuring that men and women receive equal remuneration for work of equal value without discrimination based on sex.

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Equal Pay Handbook was launched on 16 February 1998. The Handbook is designed to assist employers in understanding the factors which lead to disparity in pay levels between men and women and to meet their obligations under federal industrial and anti-discrimination legislation. The Handbook provides strategies to address issues of pay disparity, including an equal remuneration audit methodology.

'WOMEN AND WORKPLACE AGREEMENTS' INFORMATION LEAFLETS

The Government has published a series of four leaflets, called *Women and Workplace Agreements*. These leaflets explain how the new flexible arrangements and the consultation processes work. They provide ideas which can be adapted to suit individual needs of the employee and the employer, because not all ideas will be appropriate for all businesses or industries. Topics covered include working hours, mode of work, pay, leave, work organisation and production, and work environment. They also deal with women's rights in relation to discrimination in the workplace. The series of leaflets may be obtained from the Commonwealth Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business or via the Internet at <http://www.dir.gov.au>.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION FOR WOMEN

The Affirmative Action Agency continues to assist employers to achieve equity in their workplaces for working women. Affirmative action is now regarded as a component of professional business practice. In 1997, the Minister for Workplace Relations and Small Business publicly recognised the high level of achievement of a number of businesses in this area through the Affirmative Action Awards.

The *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986* is currently being reviewed as part of the Government's decision to review all legislation that may affect Australian business. The review will investigate the best way to deliver the objectives of the current Act. The Government will announce any action to be taken within six months of completion of the review.

OUTWORKER COMPLIANCE AND INFORMATION CAMPAIGN

The Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business, in conjunction with the Office of the Employment Advocate and the Department of Industry, Science and Tourism, will commence this three month campaign in May 1998. This campaign will assist manufacturers and outworkers (predominantly women from non-English speaking backgrounds) understand their rights, responsibilities and opportunities under the Textile, Clothing and Footwear industry awards and the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*. The campaign will involve awareness raising, education and compliance strategies, including seminars, the development of plain English publications and some translated materials, letters and visits to employers and a telephone hot-line.

LAW AND JUSTICE

Australians all wish to live free from fear of violence and have fair access to Australia's justice system. The Government is committed to measures which redress the particular difficulties women face in accessing the justice system and to ensuring women have affordable and accessible information, assistance and support in relation to their legal rights and responsibilities. The nature and extent of all forms of violence are issues of major concern. In recognition of this, the Government has implemented a number of major initiatives to work towards creating an environment safe and free from violence. These initiatives have a particular focus on identifying new preventative approaches to responding to domestic violence that go beyond the current (and very essential) crisis response.

GUN CONTROL LEGISLATION

Following the Port Arthur tragedy, the Prime Minister played a key role, and the Government acted swiftly to implement wide-ranging gun control legislation including an unprecedented buy-back scheme. The national firearms amnesty resulted in 643,000 firearms being surrendered for compensation of \$316 million.

The Government continues its commitment to achieving tough, uniform and effective gun control laws for Australia. The Prime Minister recently announced changes to the Customs (Prohibited Import) Regulations, in line with the National Firearms Controls agreement made in 1996. Under the changes, a stricter import ban on Category C semi-automatic firearms (subject to minor exceptions) has been imposed in addition to the existing ban on automatic weapons.

It is proposed that the issue of the effectiveness of Australian gun control laws be reviewed and assessed at the Australasian Police Ministers' Council meeting in June this year.

NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SUMMIT

As part of the Government's commitment to reducing the incidence of domestic violence in Australian families, the Prime Minister brought the Heads of Government together in the National Domestic Violence Summit on 7 November 1997. The leadership of the Prime Minister in making domestic violence a national issue is a first for Australia and discussion at Heads of Government level is an important step in signalling to the community a shared commitment to addressing this most serious issue.

The major outcome of the Summit was that the Commonwealth, States and Territories have agreed to work together in *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*, a new initiative for testing innovative approaches to domestic violence prevention.

Partnerships Against Domestic Violence is underpinned by \$25.3 million from the Commonwealth (from June 1997-June 2001). The first part of the package - worth \$12 million - is for co-operative work between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories. The second part of the package, \$13.3 million, is for new Commonwealth projects which will be developed in consultation with the States and Territories.

The funds will be directed towards projects aimed at:

- helping children and young people to make happy and healthy relationships, and not grow up to use violence - especially young people who are already at risk;
- protecting women and children at risk;
- helping adults to break free of violent behaviour;
- working with the community, educating against violence;
- providing assistance to women from culturally diverse backgrounds;
- finding out what works in responding to and preventing domestic violence; and
- helping women and children in regional Australia and indigenous communities.

Continued support for domestic violence in rural and remote communities

The Government recognises that women in rural and isolated settings who are subjected to domestic violence face additional problems in terms of isolation and lack of support networks and services. In its commitment to provide support services for all communities, the Government has provided \$3.2 million over three years to ensure the continuation of the Domestic Violence Rural and Remote Initiative. The previous pilot programme which funded 10 projects demonstrated that although services required more lead time to establish community networks, very successful services of immense value to local communities can be established in rural remote areas.

The Government has also taken action to help women in rural areas, or their friends and families, who are affected by domestic violence by providing them with easily accessible information about domestic violence, the range of services available, and the law. *The National Rural Domestic Violence Information Kit*, produced in response to one of the recommendations of the National Domestic Violence Forum in 1996, was launched on 15 October 1997 - to date over 50,000 kits have been distributed.

BUSINESS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Business Against Domestic Violence was launched by the Prime Minister on 12 November 1997. The Prime Minister is the Patron of this initiative and the co-chairs are Robert Champion de Crespigny of Normandy Mining and Paula Gerber of Maddock,

Lonie and Chisholm, lawyers. A trust account has been established and tax deductibility granted for donations to the trust.

The aim of the initiative is to encourage business, as part of the community, to play a role in preventing and responding to domestic violence. Businesses can work as partners in new initiatives to support communities, employees and families, lead the change in attitudes which will help to prevent domestic violence, develop policies linking the workplace to domestic violence services, and/or donate money to public benevolence projects. A number of businesses including Medibank Private, Woolworths and Western Mining are working with the Government on this initiative.

NATIONAL CAMPAIGN AGAINST VIOLENCE AND CRIME

Through its \$13 million National Campaign Against Violence and Crime (1996-97 to 1998-99), the Government is addressing a number of the concerns women have about crime and violence in Australian society. In 1997-98 and 1998-99, work will be undertaken in a number of areas, including:

- a pilot project to prevent recurrent burglaries sited in South Australia and Queensland;
- pilot projects testing strategies to reduce fear of crime;
- a project targeted at adolescents and aimed at preventing violence/victimisation in their current and future relationships - a pilot will be undertaken in rural Western Australia;
- an early intervention project with children under 10 years of age, with the ultimate aim of preventing future delinquency;
- in response to recommendations from the 1996 National Domestic Violence Forum, completion of an audit and review of domestic violence perpetrator programmes;
- a project to set priorities to reduce violence in indigenous communities; and
- other general community awareness programmes aimed at addressing fear of crime and reducing the culture and incidence of violence in Australia.

MODEL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAWS

The Government responded promptly to one of the major recommendations of the National Domestic Violence Forum which called for nationally consistent domestic violence laws. At the request of the Commonwealth, in early 1997 the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General (SCAG) established a working group of Commonwealth, State and Territory officials to review the existing laws relating to domestic violence and prepare a revised model which achieves greater consistency between jurisdictions and reflects current thinking on domestic violence issues. The working group prepared model domestic violence laws.

At the National Domestic Violence Summit in November 1997, Heads of Government released a discussion paper, *Model Domestic Violence Laws*. The Working Group sought

submissions on the discussion paper from interested groups and members of the public by 31 March 1998, and will report to SCAG later this year. To facilitate this process, the Office of the Status of Women has recently completed a series of public consultation meetings to seek community input on the discussion paper. The Minister for Justice and the Attorney-General have also been actively promoting discussion concerning the issues raised in the discussion paper.

FURTHER WORK ARISING FROM THE 'WOMEN'S SAFETY SURVEY'

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' Women's Safety Survey published in December 1996 provided the first comprehensive national data on the extent of all forms of violence against women. The Office of the Status of Women (OSW) has purchased ten copies of the detailed data files of the survey and has made these available to selected organisations or individuals to facilitate further analysis of the data which may assist in improving governments' policy and programme response to domestic violence. In light of the survey's findings that only a small proportion of women subjected to physical violence or sexual assault use crisis services or contact the police, OSW commissioned social research consultants, Keys Young, to undertake a study on the needs of these women. The study will be concluded later this year.

POLICING

The Australian Institute of Criminology held the first Australasian Women Police Conference in July 1996. The Attorney-General delivered the opening address at this Conference which was attended by over 300 mostly women police officers. Data released at the Conference showed that women were under-represented in senior ranks. Following the Conference, senior women in Police met and developed senior management training and mentoring strategies for women. The idea of a Women in Policing Advisory Committee was also conceived at that Conference.

The Australasian Women in Policing Advisory Committee (AWIPAC) was established by the Australasian Police Ministers' Council (APMC) in November 1996 to provide advice on a range of issues of concern to women in police services. The APMC continues to seek advice from the AWIPAC. AWIPAC is the peak women's advisory committee enhancing police professionalism by providing advice and strategies to Commissioners to maximise the contribution of women in policing. The AWIPAC met regularly during 1997, considering matters such as policies affecting the employment of women in policing, the involvement of women in management training and professional development and problems facing women in policing. Women in policing is also a standing item at the Police Commissioners' Conference.

INTRODUCE A CRISIS PAYMENT FOR PEOPLE IN EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

From 1 July 1999, the Government will introduce a one-off payment through the social security system to assist people who are in financial hardship and a crisis situation. This payment will particularly assist women who have been forced to leave their place of residence and establish a new home due to domestic violence. Some 11,000 victims of domestic violence will receive an average payment of \$150.

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION AND PARENT SUPPORT

The Budget provides for an increase in funding for child abuse prevention and parent support initiatives to support parents in their parenting role, thus providing benefits to the community. Total funding for these initiatives will be around \$12 million over four years.

LEGAL AID

New legal aid agreements have been negotiated with the aim of ensuring that Commonwealth resources are expended on Commonwealth matters, such as family law, and to improve the accountability of the legal aid system.

Traditionally, the majority of legal aid funds are devoted to State and Territory criminal matters. This form of legal aid is more likely to be needed by men than women. The result of this has been that in 1990-91 men received 64 per cent of legal aid; in 1991-92 they received 63 per cent; and in 1992-93 they received 69 per cent. A successful redistribution of Commonwealth legal aid funding will increase the resources available for Federal and Family Court matters, to which women are frequently parties, thereby ensuring that women have greater access to Commonwealth legal aid funding.

WOMEN'S LEGAL SERVICES

The Commonwealth Community Legal Services Programme, which is administered by the Attorney-General's Department, allocates funding to women's legal services which provide legal advice and referral services for women, including toll-free telephone advice. They also undertake community legal education on the issues that are of particular concern to women, including family law matters, violence against women, discrimination, employment and many other areas of law. In addition, they also play an advocacy role and have increased the availability of lawyers for women needing legal representation in courts and tribunals.

The annual recurrent funding for women's legal services operating under the Commonwealth Community Legal Services Programme, including rural outreach positions and indigenous women's initiatives, is \$3.896 million.

The Commonwealth has recently endorsed reforms of the Aboriginal Legal Services being conducted by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and agreed to retain these services within ATSIC. These reforms include considering the extension of a competitive tendering process to ensure that providers of Aboriginal Legal Services are the best available and implementing quality service standards to ensure best practice across all services. The Government recognises that maintaining separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ALS) is necessary to ensure that services are sensitive to the special needs of indigenous people. Demand for these services has grown by around 25 per cent over the last five years, with two-thirds of indigenous people requiring legal aid choosing to use an ALS. However, only 28 per cent of the clients of the ALS are women. The Government is committed to initiatives which will improve the access of women to Aboriginal legal services, including targeting funding to provide additional services for women.

MODEL CRIMINAL CODE OFFICERS' COMMITTEE - SEXUAL OFFENCES AGAINST THE PERSON

The Government has placed the reform of sexual assault laws as a priority in the development of a Model Criminal Code. The Government wants to see better protection under the law for all Australian women. It is concerned that the community has as much opportunity as possible to participate in the law reform process.

Following concern that defence counsel were beginning to adopt a practice of calling for rape counselling notes, the Attorney-General obtained the agreement of state and territory Attorneys-General to have the Model Criminal Code Officers' Committee (MCCOC) examine this problem and develop an appropriate solution. Women are concerned that the practice will cause rape victims to not seek counselling when they need it and that the defence counsel will take advantage of victims at a time when they are very vulnerable. The Government understood these concerns and acted quickly to ensure that they were addressed. The Committee issued a preliminary discussion paper seeking submissions and the matter is being considered in conjunction with the discussion paper *Sexual Offences Against the Person*.

The Office of the Status of Women in association with MCCOC, organised and conducted a series of nationwide consultations in 1997 on *Sexual Offences Against the Person*. The purpose of the consultations was to ensure that community input on the discussion paper was as extensive as possible. The contribution of women's groups and individual women is particularly crucial in this area of the law.

The final report on *Sexual Offences Against the Person* is due to be released by MCCOC later this year.

RESTRUCTURE OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY COMMISSION

On 8 April 1998, the Attorney-General introduced a Bill into the House of Representatives to reorganise the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and rename it the Human Rights and Responsibilities Commission.

The Human Rights Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) underlines the Government's commitment to the effective and equitable protection and promotion of human rights for all Australians.

The new Commission will have a streamlined structure and more focused principal functions, while fully maintaining the protection afforded to all Australians under federal anti-discrimination laws. Under the new structure, a Deputy President will have responsibility for sex discrimination and equal opportunity matters.

The Government sees the new Commission's primary functions as focusing on education and dissemination of information on human rights, and assisting business and the general community to comply with their obligations under federal anti-discrimination laws.

ASSISTANCE FOR WOMEN SEEKING HUMANITARIAN ENTRY AND REFUGEE STATUS IN AUSTRALIA: GUIDELINES ON GENDER ISSUES FOR DECISION MAKERS

In July 1996, the Government released *Guidelines on Gender Issues for Decision Makers*, to provide guidance on the sensitive handling of onshore and offshore applications by women for humanitarian entry and refugee status in Australia. They cover:

- procedural issues, such as sensitive consideration of women applicants, particularly those who have been victims of sexual violence; and
- guidance on understanding gender-based persecution, which provides clarification of how 'persecution' and 'particular social group' under the Refugees' Convention can encompass gender-related attributes.

As the guidelines were developed in consultation with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and non-government organisations, they are consistent with the United Nations criteria that Australia uses for recognition of a refugee.

CONSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

Ensuring the contribution of Australian women to national debate about Australia's constitutional arrangements is vital in a modern democracy. The Government believes that constitutional issues are a matter for all Australians, and all Australians should be able to participate in a mature discussion on the range of issues surrounding our system of government and proposals for an Australian republic.

CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

From 2-13 February 1998, a Constitutional Convention was held to discuss the question of whether or not Australia should become a republic. The Government believes that all sides of the argument should be heard and was determined to ensure that women were given an opportunity to participate fully in this important event. To this end, the Government ensured that of the 36 non-parliamentary appointed delegates, half were women. Approximately 36 per cent of elected delegates to the Constitutional Convention were also women.

The focus on the Australian Constitution resulting from the Convention went a long way to informing all Australians about the constitutional and practical issues involved in any move to a republic. At the Constitutional Convention, the Prime Minister confirmed that, if re-elected, the Government would conduct a referendum in 1999 on whether Australia should become a republic.

WOMEN'S CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION

Immediately prior to the Constitutional Convention, the Women's Constitutional Convention 1998 - organised by Australian Women Lawyers, the Constitutional Centenary Federation (ACT Chapter), the National Women's Justice Coalition, the Women's Electoral Lobby, Women into Politics and the Young Women's Christian Association of Australia - was held in Parliament House, Canberra. This event was

opened by the Minister for the Status of Women and was attended by approximately 300 women from around Australia. The Women's Constitutional Convention helped to ensure that the Constitutional Convention engaged the whole community and ensured that women played a crucial role in the debate.

YWCA INFORMATION KIT

In June 1997, the Office of the Status of Women made a grant to the Young Women's Christian Association of Australia to develop and run an education campaign on constitutional issues targeting women. The project was timed to coincide with the election of delegates to the Constitutional Convention and involved the development and distribution of an information kit, postcards and posters.

HEALTH

A range of physical, psychological and social factors unique to women requires that the health and well-being of women are given a special government focus. The Government is committed to implementing health policies which place an emphasis on the provision of affordable health services, preventative care and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.

RURAL MULTIPURPOSE HEALTH AND FAMILY SERVICES NETWORK

The Government will provide \$24.3 million over four years to improve the health and well-being of rural and remote families by establishing a Rural Multipurpose Health and Family Services Network. Each Multipurpose Service will be set up by a Community Planning Manager. Families, businesses and community groups will have opportunities to contribute to the structure of the services so that the services are flexible, integrated and user-friendly. It will be a responsibility of the Community Planning Managers to ensure that Multipurpose Services are available on the ground as soon as possible.

The Network will ensure that Australian families living in rural and regional Australia will receive the same access to services as other Australians. Multipurpose services will provide the mix of services best suited to the needs of each community such as nursing home and hostel care, radiology, palliative care and community nursing, home care and meals on wheels, women's health, podiatry, mental health and integrated services for young children including infant welfare, immunisation and parenting information.

MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH

Smoking during pregnancy is a significant threat to the health of both mother and child. In order to reduce the number of pregnant women who smoke and to maximise the number of women who remain smoke-free after they have given birth, the Commonwealth has provided funds to the Australian Medical Association to organise a conference to develop a national consensus statement on smoking and pregnancy.

CANCER PREVENTION AND TREATMENT

Included in the increased public health funding previously mentioned, in recognition of the impact that cancer has on women and the population in general, the Government will provide funding to establish a National Cancer Control Initiative to address priority issues in cancer. As part of this initiative, the Commonwealth, through the National Breast Cancer Centre, will undertake a trial of multidisciplinary care for women. Multidisciplinary care, involving a team of clinicians working closely with a patient, has been shown to improve outcomes, especially in the management of breast cancer.

The Government is maintaining its commitment to women's health through promoting cervical screening with a major media campaign starting later in the year. Cervical cancer is the most preventable of cancers affecting women and the National Cervical Screening Programme is targeting unscreened and underscreened women in an effort to raise participation in regular biennial screening.

INDIGENOUS HEALTH

In the Budget, the Government has provided additional funding to improve the health of indigenous Australians. The particular initiatives include those aimed at improving sexual health and improving the management of common respiratory illnesses affecting indigenous people. Respiratory illnesses, such as pneumococcal and influenza disease, have a particular impact on the health status of women in their role as carers.

Sexual Health

The Government is committed to improving the sexual health of indigenous Australians through ensuring that Aboriginal people have access to effective clinical and population sexual health programmes for the early detection, diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs).

In responding to recommendations of the *National Indigenous Australians' Sexual Health Strategy 1996-1997 to 1998-1999* the Government has implemented a comprehensive range of measures to reduce the incidence and transmission of STDs amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Early detection of STDs will help decrease the incidence of secondary infertility, help reduce the transmission of HIV in women and reduce the morbidity associated with these conditions.

RURAL WOMEN

The Government acknowledges that many farm businesses, community services and town-based enterprises depend upon the hard work and dedication of women in rural and regional Australia. It has committed itself to a range of policies and programmes which support rural women.

The Government also plays a leadership role in recognising, promoting and supporting the key role women play in rural industries and rural communities. It has also provided a number of opportunities for women to speak directly to Ministers and senior policy makers on a range of issues affecting rural and remote communities in recognition of the leadership role women can and wish to play in rural affairs.

In addition the Government has funded a number of initiatives that will enhance the skills of rural women and have ensured that programmes are accessible to them. Special programmes have been developed which deal with critical social issues in rural areas, such as domestic violence and youth suicide.

NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE AND RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

In March 1997, the Government initiated and co-sponsored with State and Territory governments a major National Forum on Women in Agriculture and Resource Management. A major outcome of the Forum has been the development of the National Action Plan for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management. The Plan is being developed in consultation with rural industry organisations, agricultural government agencies and rural women's organisations. The Plan will describe best practice examples of how organisations can support the work of rural women with compelling arguments as to why rural industries should be proactive in seeking the views and perspectives of rural women.

RURAL WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN DECISION MAKING

Rural women involved in rural industries have participated in significant government policy development forums, such as the meeting with Ministers as part of the World Rural Women's Day, a round table on the Action Plan for Australian Agriculture and input to the development of the new rural package, *Agriculture-Advancing Australia*.

LEADERSHIP AND RECOGNITION

In September 1997, the Government announced a major integrated rural policy package, *Agriculture-Advancing Australia*, which aims to help the farm sector and rural and regional communities to successfully adapt to change. Rural women will benefit from these initiatives, particularly funding made available for leadership development and ongoing operational support for a limited number of national rural women's non-government organisations. Both these initiatives will enhance women's leadership and advocacy skills. In addition, the Government funds an annual scholarship for a mature age rural woman to participate in the Australian Rural Leadership Programme.

The Government has supported rural women to attend the Second International Women in Agriculture Conference in Washington in June 1998. Funding has also been approved

to develop a slide video showcasing the contribution rural women make to Australian agriculture as well as promoting Australian food and Australia as a tourist destination.

RESEARCH ABOUT RURAL WOMEN'S ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTION

The Government commissioned ground breaking research that investigates rural women's economic contribution to rural industries, and impediments to rural women's access to decision making in the sector. Entitled *Missed Opportunities - harnessing the potential of women in agriculture* the national research project, for the first time, quantified the dollar contributions rural women make to their farm businesses and their communities.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

The alarming statistics regarding the incidence of domestic violence has led to a whole-of-government strategy to deal with the causes of domestic violence, and develop preventative programmes to break the cycle of domestic violence. The Department of Primary Industries and Energy is undertaking a three year research project, under *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* (see page 15), that looks at the specific issues of domestic violence in mining and remote rural communities. The research will also fund pilot projects in these case study communities to demonstrate the most effective ways of dealing with domestic violence.

RURAL WOMEN'S UNIT

The Rural Women's Unit within the Department of Primary Industries and Energy provides an important link between the Government and women in rural Australia. It does this by a range of strategies which aim to improve the recognition and participation of women in decision-making within agriculture, fisheries, forestry and resource management.

INTERNATIONAL ISSUES

The Government is proud of its record in implementing its international commitments to increase the gains for women in all spheres of society. Australia has contributed to a number of international fora where its sound record of progressing and achieving women's equality have been acknowledged.

THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Australia remains committed to consolidating and increasing the gains made towards full equality for women with men and the full implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Australia appeared before the CEDAW Committee in July 1997 to report on its third periodic report which was well received.

FOURTH UN WORLD CONFERENCE ON WOMEN

Australia has made significant progress in implementing its commitments under the Platform for Action which was adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995. Australia has been commended on its comprehensive national action plan to implement the Beijing Platform for Action by UN bodies including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

THE 42ND SESSION OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN

In addition to its ongoing work concerning women's rights, the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) had two major tasks:

- continuing to monitor the implementation of the Platform for Action adopted at the Fourth UN World Conference on Women. This year the particular areas for consideration were violence against women, women in armed conflict, human rights of women, and the girl child; and
- continuing the process of developing an Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Government supports the process of the development of the Optional Protocol and the Australian delegation received favourable comment for its constructive contribution in the working group. Once the text is finalised there would need to be consultations with the States and Territories and interested parties before the Government determined whether or not to become a party to the Optional Protocol.

AUSAID

Australia is committed to assisting developing countries to reduce poverty and achieve sustainable development. The Government recognises that a full and equitable partnership between men and women is required to achieve this aim, and a gender perspective is incorporated in all aid activities. The aid programme is working to increase women's access to education, health care and economic resources, while supporting our partners to promote the human rights of women and eliminate discrimination against them.

In Australia's bilateral, non-government organisation and multilateral programmes, assistance is provided to meet basic needs as well as supporting initiatives to advance women's status in the longer term.

In Vietnam, the Primary Health Care for Women and Children Project will provide \$15 million over the next four years in support of basic health care in five provinces. Men will also benefit from this project as their local health facilities are upgraded and the health of their families improves. In Fiji, the Pacific Technical Assistance Facility Project will assist in strengthening the capacity of the Department for Women and Culture to formulate policies and programmes and facilitate and monitor their implementation. An adviser funded by Australia will assist the Director of the Department for two years.

Support is also provided to women in projects with a broader focus. In Papua New Guinea, the Elementary Teacher Education Project will result in the opportunity for all children to undertake elementary education in a local language at the village level. Outcomes for girls will be enhanced by the proximity of elementary education to their homes, the high percentage of women teachers to be trained, and the requirement that curricula and teaching materials take account of gender concerns. In Pakistan, Australia will provide assistance to farmers so they can utilise saline and waterlogged land productively and reclaim and rehabilitate farmland. The gender strategy for the project will ensure that women share in the benefits of the project.

As well as bilateral aid, Australia supports regional and international organisations and multilateral banks, which fund substantial gender related programmes. Funding to these agencies will continue in 1998-99. For example, contributions to the United Nations (UN) agencies in 1997-98 included \$2 million to the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), and \$300,000 to the UN Fund for Women (UNIFEM).

The Pacific Women's Resource Bureau of the Pacific Community (previously the South Pacific Commission) received approximately \$260,000 in 1997-98 for programme support, and strengthening the management capacity of national women's focal points in the areas of planning, advocacy and management. This funding will continue in 1998-99.

Support for the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre continues, with \$1.2 million being spent over four years from 1995-1999. The Centre is addressing violence against women, including by community education on gender violence and the development and expansion of Pacific regional activities such as training.

During 1997-98, AusAID developed the Guide to *Gender and Development* to assist aid activity managers and contractors to make gender analysis an integral part of their work. The Guide provides gender analysis questions applicable to all stages of the aid activity cycle, as well as questions that assist gender analysis in a range of sectors, such as health, infrastructure and the environment.

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL AGRICULTURAL RESEARCH

The Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR) manages and funds a range of bilateral and multilateral agricultural research projects. The promotion of gender equity is an important aim of the ACIAR's bilateral project programmes. Project development guidelines issued to research providers seeking ACIAR funding require a gender impact statement. As the Centre deals with research providers, overseas as well as within Australia, gender initiatives are often subject to policies of ACIAR's partner country governments.

In recent years a concerted effort has been made to expand the participation of female scientists and professionals working in the agricultural research centres supported by the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR). Over the period 1995-96 to 1997-98, the Government will contribute \$106,000 to the CGIAR Gender Programme, including to a specific initiative to develop innovations for gender sensitive participatory research.

DEFENCE ISSUES

It is a crucial responsibility for any Australian Government to ensure the effective defence of people and the national interest. The Government acknowledges the contribution of women to the defence force, in either a direct or supportive way, supports their leadership aspirations and the need for Australia's defences to be in the hands of people of the highest calibre.

PART-TIME SERVICE FOR DEFENCE FORCE MEMBERS

The Australian Defence Force is developing the flexibility to allow members of the permanent forces to be employed on a part-time basis. Members undertaking part-time work will take leave without pay for a number of agreed days in any fortnightly period.

Under the concept, known as Part-Time Leave Without Pay (PTLWOP), members will remain part of the permanent force and will be able to apply to reduce their working fortnight from the normal 10 days to between one and nine days. The minimum period of PTLWOP will normally be three months and the maximum period two years, with salary and allowances paid on a pro-rata basis. PTLWOP will not be a right and each application for employment under the scheme will be considered in regard to the requirements and recommendations of local Unit management, especially with respect to the impact on the Unit's operational effectiveness.

FAMILY SUPPORT

The Defence Community Organisation provides a comprehensive range of social work, family liaison, educational liaison support services and related programmes that enhance the well-being of Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel, their families and communities. These programmes include a Child Care Programme, which currently has 15 employer-sponsored child care centres. Capital costs for the construction of a new child care centre in Darwin, which will open shortly, is \$1.5 million. The budgeted cost for a new child care centre, currently under construction at the RAAF Base Tindal, is \$1.5 million. The funding allocation for the Family Support Funding Programme is \$1.3 million per annum. This programme provides grants to groups of defence families, community groups, or self-help projects initiated by defence families to assist in the delivery of services which are beneficial to service families in the area.

A range of ADF Spouse Employment Initiatives have also been developed to assist ADF spouses when seeking work. These include an Internet home page and bulletin board service which will allow ADF spouses to search on-line for job vacancies Australia-wide. On-line access is available to the Centrelink vacancy database and a myriad of additional employment resources. The Defence Community Organisation home page allows employers to advertise positions specifically directed to defence spouses and enables ADF spouses to register their availability for employment. Employment information seminars are being held on a regular basis. An employment assistance handbook *Jobs on the Move* has been compiled, in consultation with ADF spouses, to provide information, ideas and practical advice. Access to the Defence Job Clubs is available to ADF spouses who request this service. An employment assistance resource kit is also being developed by the Defence Community Organisation. These initiatives were developed in consultation with defence spouses, including the National Consultative Group for Service Families, and are broadly based on the outcomes of a

number of reviews and reports relating to ADF families. They are quite versatile and will assist ADF spouses significantly when seeking employment.

REVIEW OF WOMEN IN COMBAT POSITIONS

As part of the regular review of policies, a review is currently being undertaken into the employment of women in combat and combat-related positions. The review is to be completed by 30 June 1998.

CONTINUED INTEGRATION OF WOMEN INTO THE AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE

In January 1997, the Government released a report prepared by Dr Clare Burton entitled *Women in the Australian Defence Force*. The report indicated that women in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) are more readily accepted than previously and made a number of recommendations which would further enhance the careers of women in the ADF.

Recommendations addressed equity policy, equity training, job competencies, human resource management practices (including recruitment, career management and performance appraisal), employment practice, and organisational performance monitoring. Wherever possible, recommendations from the report will be implemented.

FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

A recent review of the problems faced by Australian Defence Force (ADF) members with families with special needs when required to relocate to satisfy organisational needs revealed they suffered disadvantage. Four provisions have been instituted which will assist those members. The assistance offered will not replace Commonwealth or State government programmes and schemes, but will cover any shortfall or gaps in the services already available. Easing this burden will allow members to meet their Service obligations, rather than restricting their availability for posting or forcing them to leave the ADF.

The provisions now offered to families with special needs are:

- pre-posting visits to enable the member concerned to seek assistance from the Service Housing Authority to allocate a suitable Married Quarter, or arrange for modification to a Married Quarter. The member may also visit local authorities to determine what services are available in the new locality relevant to their needs and enrol in the services before arriving on posting;
- accommodation assistance to meet the members' specific accommodation requirements - this may include: additional bedrooms; internal mobility and access facilities; environmental controls including insect screening; special bathing facilities; unusual vehicular access; special safety features; and the particular location of the dwelling;
- provision of special equipment - where there are no local resources to draw on for supply of special equipment, the member may be assisted with the costs of hire of such equipment; and

- therapy and respite care - access to therapy and respite care when relocating is difficult and there is usually a waiting period to requalify for the entitlement in the new locality. Access is further complicated as the need for the provision, and the length of the waiting period is determined by State or private agencies. Self-help is not viable as specialist therapy and carer attendance is required. Defence can provide assistance to the member until the relevant State systems can assume this responsibility.

WOMEN IN SUBMARINES

A booklet entitled *Women in Submarines* has been produced to assist in addressing issues raised in the Submarine Integration Study in relation to women serving in Collins Class submarines. The booklet was aimed at participants in focus groups and the Royal Australian Navy in general.

WOMEN AND SPORT

The cultural significance of sport and its contribution to Australians' physical well-being cannot be under-rated. The Government recognises the need to provide more accessible opportunities for women to be involved in all aspects of sport and physical activity, including at leadership and administrative levels.

The Government also plays a leadership role in providing public recognition for women's sporting achievements. Significant projects aimed at increasing the involvement and recognition of women in sport have been initiated at the Federal Government level.

Active Australia is a national participation programme aimed at involving all Australians in sport and physical activity. *Active Australia* provides the framework through which women from diverse cultural backgrounds, socio-economic status, and level of physical ability can be involved in sport as athletes, coaches and managers.

NATIONAL PLAN FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

The national plan aims to change the current culture of Australian sport and physical activity towards one that enables the full participation and involvement of women. Targeted at agencies and organisations which determine and deliver sport and physical activity opportunities, the national plan will consist of a policy outlining guiding principles and a range of strategies, providing best practice examples for the inclusion of women in the sport and physical activity environment. This is being developed in collaboration with the Office of the Status of Women, the Department of Health and Family Services, the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs, and Womensport Australia.

HARASSMENT-FREE SPORT

The strategy aims to assist sporting organisations create and maintain an environment where participants are free from harassment. Consisting of policy, procedures, awareness seminars and training opportunities, the strategy will facilitate sporting organisations to

develop a system to prevent the occurrence of harassment and, where needed, to sensitively and effectively manage instances of harassment.

MANAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

The programme is aimed at increasing the number of women in decision-making roles within the sport industry. Aspects of the programme will include the identification of training framework, the implementation of a mentor programme and the development of a productive diversity resource. This programme has been developed in collaboration with Womensport Australia, State Departments of Sport and Recreation and Industry Training Boards.

LITERATURE REVIEW ON WOMEN AND SPORT RESEARCH

The review will provide a comprehensive insight into the quantity and nature of research on women and sport issues. Copies will be sent to research institutions with suggestions for directing research in identified areas of need.

NATIONAL FORUM ON WOMEN AND MANAGEMENT IN SPORT

The forum will provide an opportunity for women representatives from all areas of sport to gain knowledge from leaders in other industries and to share experiences and information. This forum is to be conducted in the latter part of 1998.

WOMEN IN DECISION MAKING

The Government is committed to increasing the number of women appointed on merit to decision-making positions. Women in decision making are those women in all areas of government and business in the public and private sectors. This includes women in politics, management, and on boards and committees. In meeting this commitment, the Government has implemented a number of initiatives to provide an integrated way to achieving measurable improvement in the number of women on Commonwealth boards and bodies.

EXECUTIVE SEARCH PILOT PROGRAMME IN GOVERNMENT

In March 1998, the Prime Minister announced the commencement of a new major government initiative called the Executive Search Pilot Programme which will be implemented by the Office of the Status of Women.

As part of this programme, executive search firm Profile Ray & Berndtson is conducting a nation-wide identification and selection process to provide the names of suitably qualified Australian women with high level skills in a variety of fields and specialist areas for possible nomination to Commonwealth board vacancies.

The four Commonwealth government agencies participating in the pilot programme are the Departments of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Primary Industries and Energy, Workplace Relations and Small Business, and Finance and Administration. Upcoming board vacancies with Commonwealth discretion will be targeted in the pilot programme.

EARLY WARNING SYSTEM

The Office of the Status of Women (OSW) is implementing an Early Warning System for all other Commonwealth portfolios where, approximately six months before a Commonwealth board vacancy arises, OSW will put forward details of suitably qualified women for those vacancies. The aim of this early intervention is to ensure that suitably qualified women are considered by relevant portfolios and their Ministers early in the nomination or selection process.

APPOINTMENTS

The Commonwealth maintains information on the level of participation of women on Commonwealth boards and bodies through the *Appoint* database. This is managed by the Office of the Status of Women and it enables portfolio agencies to monitor their performance with data collected every six months and disseminated to Commonwealth agencies. *Appoint* data for the second half of 1997 shows that in the public sector, women held 30.6 per cent of Commonwealth board positions. This represents an increase in the total number of women appointed to positions on Commonwealth boards with total Commonwealth discretion. Through the Executive Search Pilot Programme and the early warning system mentioned above, Government Ministers will be asked to play a greater role in encouraging their portfolios to nominate women for consideration for appointments to Commonwealth boards and bodies.

PRIVATE SECTOR BOARDS

The Office of the Status of Women (OSW) will continue to liaise with key industry groups on ways and means to improve the participation of women on private sector boards and in senior management and hopes to undertake some more collaborative initiatives in the near future. OSW has also provided some private sector companies with names of suitable women who could be considered for private sector board vacancies.

RESEARCH ON WOMEN IN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR SENIOR MANAGEMENT AND ON COMMONWEALTH AND PRIVATE SECTOR BOARDS

The Government commissioned two research papers from Dr Clare Burton: *Women's Representation on Commonwealth and Private Sector Boards*; and *Women in Public and Private Sector Senior Management*.

The research examines the current participation of women on boards and in senior management in both the public and private sectors. It examines why there are so few women and suggests possible strategies for encouraging a more rapid advancement of women into leadership and decision making positions. Of particular significance is the examination of the differences in the participation rates of women in senior management and decision-making positions between the public and private sectors.

The research highlights the impediments to getting women into senior management and onto boards. The Office of the Status of Women is examining those barriers and identifying strategies to overcome them. This research is available on the Internet at <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/osw>.

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION

The last Federal election brought a significant increase in the number of women in the Commonwealth Parliament. There are currently 47 women in the Commonwealth Parliament in Australia.

This brings women's participation in Commonwealth Parliament to a record 21 per cent from only 14 per cent for the previous Parliament. This rate is now nearly double the international average of 11 per cent.

WOMEN HEADS OF MISSIONS

Women have made a significant contribution to Australia's foreign service both at home and overseas. The Government is committed to increasing further the role women play in the development and implementation of Australia's foreign and trade policies. There are currently 12 out of 78 women Heads of Mission or Heads of Post at Australian missions. Since March 1996, the Government has appointed 9 women Heads of Missions.

RECOGNITION OF WOMEN

The Government acknowledges the significant involvement and contribution of women to society. Despite the increasing success of women in all facets of life, they are not receiving appropriate recognition for their contribution. The Government is examining ways of providing such recognition.

HONOURS AND AWARDS FOR WOMEN

The Government is examining ways of encouraging an increase in the number of nominations for women and other under-represented groups in the Australian honours system. The Office of the Status of Women was on the (interdepartmental) Working Group on Women which discussed strategies to improve information targeted to women about Honours and Awards under the Order of Australia. This Working Group recently reported to the Australian Honours Publicity Committee which is examining the issues raised in the 1995 Report of the Review of Australian Honours and Awards, *A Matter of Honour*.

One of the main issues for the Publicity Committee is examining ways of improving the dissemination of information in an effort to increase awareness of and nominations for women and other under-represented groups.

The Government will continue its involvement on a national level and States and Territories are encouraged to think about strategies for increasing female nominations and promoting successful award recipients in their jurisdictions.

MEMORIAL FOR AUSTRALIA'S SERVICE NURSES

The Government has committed \$100,000 towards a memorial to mark 100 years of military service by Australia's Service Nurses. The memorial is to be built on Anzac Parade in Canberra at an estimated cost of \$2 million, with the balance of the funds being raised by the Australian Service Nurses National Memorial Fund committee. It is anticipated that the memorial will be dedicated in October 1999.

WOMEN AND SMALL BUSINESS

Small business continues to be a major generator of new job opportunities in Australia. In 1995-96 small business accounted for 65 per cent of net new job creation. Small businesses account for about 97 per cent of all private sector business in Australia and 46 per cent of the business workforce.

Women play an increasingly important role in small business. Small businesses operating in Australia have increased by 6.5 per cent since 1995. 10 per cent are operated by an individual woman or predominantly by women. 58 per cent are two operator businesses (a 20 per cent increase since 1995) and over 87 per cent of these were men and women combinations (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1998). Thus women are integral to over 60 per cent of small businesses. The Government wishes to encourage women through the support of successful role models and encourage their integration into the small business sector through adequate access to government information and support services.

BUSINESS ENTRY POINT

The launch, in July 1998, of the Business Entry Point (BEP) - the Government's one-stop-shop for business operators - will assist in this regard. The BEP is based on the principle of equity of access, so while being Internet based, business will also be able to access the BEP through existing telephone call-centres, shop fronts or intermediaries such as accountants. When fully developed, the BEP will provide a service to Australian businesses to make it easier to fulfil compliance requirements of Commonwealth, State and Territory and local government agencies. The first phase of the development of BEP services will offer access to enhanced government information through a National Business Information Service, being developed in the Office of AusIndustry. This will be closely integrated with the single process for initial registration requirements of four Treasury agencies (Australian Taxation Office, Australian Securities Commission, Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Insurance and Superannuation Commission).

FAIR TRADING

The Ministerial Statement *New Deal: Fair Deal - Giving Small Business a Fair Go* was released on 30 September 1997. This was the Government's response to the Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology entitled *Finding a Balance - Towards Fair Trading in Australia* which found that small businesses were often disadvantaged in their dealings with big business.

The Government accepted the need for change. The reforms introduced in the *New Deal: Fair Deal* package are based around stronger legislation protecting small business through the *Trade Practices Act 1974* and State and Territory retail tenancy laws as well as recognised codes of conduct, more powerful enforcement of legal rights, better targeted information and alternative dispute resolution. Amendments to the *Trade Practices Act 1974* and a mandatory Franchising Code of Conduct are expected to take effect from 1 July 1998.

MICRO-BUSINESSES

On 6 February 1998, the Government welcomed the report of the Micro-business Consultative Group entitled *Under the Microscope*.

There are an estimated 670,000 micro-businesses (one that employs fewer than five people) in Australia making up 85 per cent of all private non-agricultural small businesses. They are becoming the main source of employment for women, young Australians and employees affected by downsizing.

The Group's Terms of Reference included advising on policy options for the development of the micro-business sector in Australia. The Group was to identify the major barriers that impact on the establishment and growth of micro-businesses and to prepare strategies to tackle these barriers.

The Group gave its support to many of the Government's small business initiatives including the *New Deal: Fair Deal* fair trading reforms, the *More Time for Business* programme of regulation reform and red tape reduction and the reforms in workplace relations. The Government is already acting on many of the issues raised by the Group, and its new recommendations and issues will be assessed.

The Commonwealth has sent the report to State and Territory Governments and representatives of local government with a view to discussing the recommendations of the Micro-Business Consultative Group at the National Small Business Summit in July 1998.

BUSINESSWOMEN'S AWARDS

The Office of AusIndustry provided \$60,000 sponsorship of the Telstra Women's Small Business Awards in 1997 and \$70,000 in 1998. The Award seeks to recognise the qualities of a successful woman in business and to encourage other women to succeed by demonstrating the techniques employed by successful women in business.

PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN

The manner in which women are portrayed in the media is of concern to a great many people. The Government believes that women should be portrayed in the media in a realistic and respectful way.

COMMERCIAL TELEVISION

In May 1997, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) submitted a revised code of practice to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) for registration.

The code relates to a variety of issues, including preventing the broadcasting of programmes that, in accordance with community standards, are not suitable to be broadcast by that section of the industry, methods of protecting children from exposure to programme material which may be harmful to them, methods of classifying programmes that reflect community standards, promoting accuracy and fairness in news

and current affairs programmes, and the procedures to be followed by the broadcasters in handling complaints from the public.

The revised code will give effect to the recommendation of the 1996 Ministerial Committee that material classified 'MA' due to its violent content should not commence until after 9.30pm.

OTHER SERVICES

In September 1997 the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA) registered codes of practice for narrowcasting services (subscription television, subscription radio, open television and open radio). As with all the industry codes, these contain provisions prohibiting the broadcast of discriminatory material.

The ABA is currently consulting with the subscription television broadcasting sector in relation to its codes of practice.

The Federation of Australian Radio Broadcasters has indicated that it will review the commercial radio codes of practice this year. The current Commercial Radio Codes of Practice include Guidelines on the Portrayal of Women and on the Portrayal of Indigenous Australians.

WOMEN AND NEW TECHNOLOGY

As information services become a fundamental part of social and economic infrastructure, it is vitally important that the Government ensures all Australians can access and make productive use of information and communication services. The failure of women to adequately develop appropriate skills and use these services could result in future gender-based disadvantage in employment, as well as social isolation.

RESEARCH ON THE INTERNET

The Commonwealth/State Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women commissioned research in 1997 on women and information technology. The purpose of this activity is to establish, through access to a national syndicated survey, baseline data on women and information technology, specifically women's access to the Internet.

Women are the key users of government services and, as such, the effectiveness of government policy in service provision, through the Internet, will be determined by the appropriate consideration of key gender differentials affecting access.

The research, which will be finalised in early 1999, will measure the success of government policies on improving women's participation in all aspects of information and communications technology.

ONLINE SERVICES - REGIONAL AND RURAL AUSTRALIA

Policy options to promote the development of online infrastructure and services in regional and rural Australia are being investigated and encouraged.

Research has shown that telecommunications has a particular significance for rural women in a range of areas:

- maintaining family and social cohesion through regular contact with family and friends;
- accessing important information about, for example, health and education issues; and
- accessing business information to assist in areas such as farm management.

The Government believes that online services development in regional and rural Australia can provide very significant benefits to rural women, in further breaking down the barriers of isolation, boosting the level of community and business services available to them, and providing greatly enhanced opportunities for communication with family, friends, social and business contacts.

OSW'S INTERNET HOME PAGE

Located at <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/osw>, the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) Internet home page provides general information on OSW's work and the Minister for the Status of Women. OSW's email address is women@dpmc.gov.au.

REGIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS INFRASTRUCTURE FUND

The Government established the \$250 million, five year Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) to ensure that rural and regional Australia has the opportunity to participate and share in the benefits available from access to telecommunications services. Launched as *Networking the Nation* in June 1997, the programme aims to assist the economic and social development of regional, rural and remote Australia by funding projects which:

- enhance telecommunications infrastructure and services;
- increase access to, and promote use of, services available through telecommunications networks; or
- reduce disparities in access to such services and facilities between Australians in regional, rural or remote areas and those in urban areas.

It is expected that rural women will benefit from all projects funded through *Networking the Nation* through enhanced access to advanced telecommunications services. Several projects approved by the RTIF Board in the first funding round in November 1997 will have specific impact on women. The Queensland Rural Women's Network received funding to develop a proposal to enhance the ability of Queensland rural women to access computers and the Internet.

ONLINE PUBLIC ACCESS INITIATIVE

The Online Public Access Initiative funded innovative projects which enhance community access to online and communications services and technologies. Successful

projects included those which aim to provide public access to women and parents supervising children's Internet access.

Young Media Australia received funding to develop the 'Parents' Internet Resource Centre'. The focus of this project is to provide support for parents and care-givers in relation to children's use of the Internet, through training sessions and establishment of an online support centre for parents and children.

WISNet Online, a project of the Women's Information Service of South Australia, aims to redress the gender imbalance in use of new technologies by targeting women who are currently denied access to online services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and disadvantaged/isolated women. The project will provide five access points in key centres throughout rural South Australia, and three 'roving' access points in appropriate community centres throughout remote regions of South Australia.

FILM AND TELEVISION

The Australian Film Commission provides a Women's Programme intended to enhance the level and nature of women's participation in the Australian Film industry. In 1997-98 the Women's Programme developed and supported a number of initiatives. These included: Women in Television Networking Forums; Women in Television Small Group Forums; a Film Technician's Scheme for women; a support scheme designed to assist women working in the new imaging technologies area; a series of workshops to help women working in television called *Taking the Next Step*; and sponsorship of the 1997 Women in Film and Television Australia's national conference.

In 1998-99 the Women's Programme will continue to support initiatives for women in the film industry.

IMPROVING COMMUNITY ACCESS AND COMMUNICATION.

The Government is continuing to provide greater opportunities for women's organisations to communicate effectively with government and to access mainstream government agencies. This is in recognition of the broad impact of women-specific factors on public policy.

The Commonwealth Government recognises that mutual benefits can be derived from an effective communication and information dissemination system between the Government and non-government organisations (NGOs) and strongly appreciates the productive role NGOs play in promoting interest and debate on important issues and in helping governments to develop policy.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S NON-GOVERNMENT ORGANISATION FUNDING PROGRAMME

This programme, administered by the Office of the Status of Women (OSW) for the Commonwealth Government, provides operational funding to national women's non-government organisations (NGOs). In the last year, 15 women's NGOs received funding from a pool of \$500,000. In addition, more than \$305,000 was allocated to women's NGOs through mainstream funding from various portfolios.

The funding programme has been refined to allow more efficient administration and to ensure it is consistent with the broader policy objectives of the Government in the areas of women in the paid and unpaid workforce, particularly child care, industrial relations and superannuation, women and public life - involving women in management and decision making, violence against women, legal issues affecting women, and women in business.

Australian national women's NGOs have been invited to apply for operational funding in 1998-99. Financial assistance of up to \$50,000 from a pool of \$500,000 will go to a core group of national organisations capable of representing the broad issues of concern to Australian women at Commonwealth, State, Territory and community levels.

Organisations with a specific focus will be encouraged to apply to the department or agency which best reflects its needs and Commonwealth Government ministers will ensure that women's organisations can compete for funding from the relevant portfolio.

COMMONWEALTH/STATE MINISTERS' CONFERENCE AND ADVISERS' MEETINGS

The Commonwealth/State Ministers' Conference and Advisers' Meetings offers the opportunity for the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to share information on current activities, areas of work and issues of interest.

Themes of the most recent Ministers' Conference, held in Brisbane in March 1998, included Women in Leadership, Violence Against Women, Economic Opportunities for Women, Information Technology and Women as Consumers.

AUSTRALIAN WOMEN'S ROUND TABLE

The Australian Women's Round Table, hosted by the Minister for the Status of Women, offers the opportunity for national women's non-government organisations (NGOs) to be informed first hand of government policies and programmes and to speak directly to Government about issues of concern to women in the community. Membership of the Round Table is decided annually and is based on an application process.

The Government recognises the important role of NGOs in the policy process and is keen to work cooperatively with women's NGOs and relevant line departments and agencies on progressing recommendations from the Round Table.

It is anticipated that the 1998 Australian Women's Round Table will occur in August.

REGIONAL ROUND TABLES

As well as the annual Australian Women's Round Table, the Minister for the Status of Women is continuing to meet with smaller groups of women's organisations in different states. These meetings will allow the Minister to meet with a wider cross-section of women's organisations and a larger number of individual women. They will provide an opportunity for the Minister to gain a deeper understanding of the range of issues encompassed by organisations across Australia.

NETWORK EXCHANGE OF WOMEN'S SERVICES

The Government recognises that information sharing is vital to ensuring the ongoing effectiveness of both Government and non-government organisations (NGOs) and has funded a national women's communication network - *Network Exchange of Women's Services (NEWS)*.

The Government believes that the exchange and dissemination of information about women's policy should be as wide as possible. With this in mind, *NEWS* provides current information to NGOs and other organisations with an interest in women's issues through a variety of mechanisms to ensure that the information is readily accessible.

The fully interactive Internet web site (located at <http://www.tnews.net.au>) is updated on an ongoing basis and allows direct input from women's NGOs. There is also a fortnightly bulletin, which can be faxed or posted, for those organisations which do not have access to the Internet.

PARLIAMENTARY ADVISORY GROUP

This group comprises a parliamentary representative from the Government in each State and Territory. It provides feedback to the Minister for the Status of Women on national issues affecting women in their respective States and Territories with the aim of facilitating the flow of ideas and concerns of women throughout Australia back to Canberra. The panel is:

| | | | |
|------|------------------------|-----|--------------|
| NSW | Senator Helen Coonan | ph: | 02 9251 2631 |
| Vic. | Senator Kay Patterson | | 03 9544 7411 |
| Qld | Mrs Kathy Sullivan, MP | | 07 5591 1011 |
| WA | Senator Sue Knowles | | 08 9481 0349 |
| SA | Senator Jeannie Ferris | | 08 8237 6840 |
| Tas. | Senator Jocelyn Newman | | 03 6334 1755 |
| ACT | Senator Margaret Reid | | 02 6247 6444 |
| NT | Senator Grant Tambling | | 08 8981 3567 |