



Budget

2024–25

WOMEN'S BUDGET STATEMENT

Statement by

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Minister for Finance, Minister for Women,
Minister for the Public Service of the Commonwealth of Australia

and

The Honourable Jim Chalmers MP

Treasurer of the Commonwealth of Australia

For the information of honourable members
on the occasion of the Budget 2024–25

14 May 2024

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ISBN 978-1-925832-96-9

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Support and note on data

Support

This Statement includes information that may be distressing for some readers. It outlines the impacts of violence against women, including sexual assault, as well as issues such as suicide, self-harm, stillbirth, and miscarriage. The Government respectfully acknowledges and regrets the loss of those who have died and the harm and distress caused to those who are affected by violence, suicide, self-harm, stillbirth or miscarriage.

Help is available. Lifeline provides 24-hour support in Australia for those experiencing a personal crisis and can be contacted by calling 13 11 14 or visiting lifeline.org.au. If you, or someone you know, is experiencing family, domestic or sexual violence, you can contact 1800RESPECT (1800 737 732) or visit 1800respect.org.au for support.

Note about data

This Statement endeavours to include data and analysis to demonstrate the outcomes experienced by different groups of women, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, women with disability, women of different ages, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual or other sexually or gender diverse (LGBTIQ+) populations. There are, however, limitations to data in some cases, particularly small population or sample sizes. The Government is committed to ensuring data are available to help inform better outcomes for all Australians, noting that this needs to be culturally appropriate and protect the right to privacy.

This Statement uses unit record data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey. The HILDA Project was initiated and is funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) and is managed by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Melbourne Institute). The findings and views reported in this Statement, however, are those of the Government and should not be attributed to either DSS or the Melbourne Institute.

The majority of the data collected and reported in this Statement relate to sex, not gender. *Sex* is based upon the person's sex characteristics, such as their chromosomes, hormones and reproductive organs. *Gender* is a social and cultural concept. It is about social and cultural differences in identity, expression and experience as a man, woman or non-binary person. This Statement uses the terms *women* and *men* in reference to both sex and gender, but the terms *female* and *male* are used when presenting data collected on the basis of sex.

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Foreword

To achieve an Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and have access to resources and equal outcomes no matter their gender, women and gender equality must be at the centre of Australia's economic plan.

Equality for women in every part of our economy and society is central to our Government's plans for the future – because it is essential for Australia's success in the future. The Women's Budget Statement speaks for the progress we have made so far and the determination we hold to go further.

This Budget Statement reflects the values and priorities of our Government. It is about education and employment, fair pay and respectful workplaces, the chance to be your best and the right to be safe wherever you are – at home, at work or in the community.

It is about drawing on the talents of our whole population. Fundamentally, it is about who we are as Australians.

This year, the Albanese Government launched our country's first national strategy with an explicit focus on achieving gender equality. *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (Working for Women)* is this Government's ten-year commitment to shift the dial on gender equality for everyone, and to get things working for women in Australia.

Since day one, women's safety and women's equality have been at the centre of this Government's thinking and decision-making. The links between gender inequality, financial insecurity and women's safety are clear, and we cannot have an equal society until women and children are safe. *Working for Women* sets out our ambitious agenda to drive lasting change over the next ten years, with a commitment to support people from all backgrounds and life experiences. It has five priority areas: gender-based violence; unpaid and paid care; economic equality and security; health; and leadership, representation and decision-making.

Our nation has been rightly horrified by the shocking acts of gender-based violence committed by men against women and children this year. The devastating truth is that these abuses are not new but a continuation of the crisis of violence faced by women in this country, and around the world. We need change. The Government is taking urgent action through the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* to address the epidemic rates of violence in Australia.

This Budget, the Government is permanently establishing ongoing financial support through the Leaving Violence Program for victim-survivors leaving a violent intimate partner relationship. The Government is also responding to high rates of sexual violence on university campuses including through a National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence and by establishing an independent National Student Ombudsman.

Women shouldn't feel they have to stay in a violent relationship because there's nowhere to go. That's why this Budget includes funding for a new five-year, \$9.3 billion National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness with states and territories. This represents an increase of \$423 million, with the Commonwealth doubling its dedicated funding allocation for homelessness services to \$400 million a year – funding that states and territories must match. The Government is also targeting a \$1 billion increase to the National Housing Infrastructure Facility towards crisis and transitional accommodation for women and children fleeing domestic violence, and youth.

To help us better prevent violence, the Government is establishing an expert panel to undertake a rapid review of prevention approaches and to provide advice on how we can improve outcomes and build on existing efforts.

Ensuring women's economic security is critical for reducing risk and giving women more choices. Women remain over-represented in lower income brackets, as lower paid workers, and as recipients of government payments. This Budget continues the Government's commitment to relieving cost-of-living pressures, including for women. The Government's tax cuts, informed by gender analysis, will provide cost-of-living relief to all women taxpayers and reduce disincentives to their workforce participation. 90 per cent of women taxpayers will receive a bigger tax cut than they would have under the previous government's plan.

The Government is also delivering additional energy bill relief to all households and further increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which will particularly help households in financial stress, many of which are single mother households.

This Budget's investments in women's health aim to address the higher health costs faced by women, while ensuring greater choice, access and support for sexual and reproductive health, including menopause, endometriosis and pelvic pain.

Reforms to Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) indexation will ensure that when women invest in their education, growth in their loans does not outpace growth in wages. Women will be big beneficiaries of our new Commonwealth Prac Payment, which will support students in female-dominated courses of nursing, teaching, midwifery and social work. These professions are in demand, and prac payments will help more women graduate and join the workforce.

The undervaluing of paid and unpaid care is a driver of women's lower incomes and lifetime earnings. This Budget continues our historic reform of Paid Parental Leave by introducing a superannuation guarantee equivalent payment on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave for parents of babies born or adopted on or after 1 July 2025. This is a strong signal that care is valued and will help close the superannuation gap which currently sees women retire with around 25 per cent less super than men. This Budget also prioritises the care economy, making a provision to deliver on our commitment to provide funding towards wage increases for aged care workers and early childhood educators, with details to be finalised following Fair Work Commission processes.

A future made in Australia relies on a strong, highly skilled workforce, but high rates of industry gender segregation mean we are not tapping into the full talent pool of our country. This Budget invests in making sure that all Australians have the opportunity to access the jobs and careers of the future – this includes the Building Women’s Careers program that will boost women’s participation in construction, clean energy and advanced manufacturing industries, and technology and digital sectors, ensuring women benefit from the opportunities of a future made in Australia.

We are making structural investments to help make Australia a country where a person’s gender imposes no limit on how their life unfolds – the rights they enjoy, the choices they make, or how safe they feel.

The Women’s Budget Statement is now a reporting mechanism for *Working for Women*. From this Budget onward, the Women’s Budget Statement will report on our investments to implement *Working for Women*.

Since our first Budget in 2022, we have reintroduced gender responsive budgeting – making gender analysis a core budget practice. The analysis includes consideration of women’s safety, including addressing risk, ensuring appropriate and trauma-informed support and interactions with victim-survivors and considering interactions with perpetrators. The five priorities of *Working for Women*, along with its foundational focus on positive gender attitudes and ending stereotypes, are a touchstone for gender responsive budgeting.

We know this is not the work of one budget or one term of government. We will continue to invest in women’s safety and economic equality, in valuing paid and unpaid care, in women’s health, and in leadership, representation and decision-making, and on shifting the gendered attitudes and stereotypes that limit and harm us. And we remain committed to working with women around Australia to drive change and make a difference where it matters to them.

The Honourable Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister

The Honourable Jim Chalmers MP
Treasurer

Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher
Minister for Finance
Minister for Women
Minister for the Public Service

Overview

The Government is committed to an Australia where people are safe, treated with respect, have choices and access to resources, and equal outcomes no matter their gender. The pathway to achieving this vision is set out in *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (Working for Women)*. *Working for Women* sets out five priority areas for Government action to drive change: gender-based violence; unpaid and paid care; economic equality and security; health; and leadership, representation and decision-making. *Working for Women* also names positive gender attitudes and an end to stereotypes as the foundations needed to achieve gender equality.

The Women's Budget Statement forms part of the reporting framework for *Working for Women*, providing a line of sight to the Government's activities across the five priority areas. This Women's Budget Statement outlines key actions and investments made by the Government in the 2024–25 Budget and the 2023–24 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO), and how they are driving progress towards the long-term ambitions necessary to achieve gender equality. Progress across all five priorities set out in *Working for Women* is required to drive meaningful change. This Women's Budget Statement is structured against the five priorities, highlighting efforts to shift stereotypes and attitudes throughout. In many instances, investments under one priority will help drive progress in another. For example, reforms to the Paid Parental Leave scheme encourage shared caring responsibilities, while also reducing the retirement savings gap to deliver more equitable economic outcomes for women.

The Government is putting gender equality at the heart of policy and decision-making through the rollout of gender responsive budgeting. All areas of government are responsible for ensuring government policy and decision-making considers gender impacts, such as in relation to women's safety and economic security. From the 2023–24 MYEFO, all Cabinet Submissions and New Policy Proposals required gender analysis. This Women's Budget Statement includes case studies of gender analysis in practice to show how it informed policy and investment to support *Working for Women*.

To ensure gender equality remains central to decision-making beyond the Budget, Government strategies will also consider gender impacts. Reporting on gender equality will be included in Australian Government Annual Reports to illustrate efforts and actions across Government to improve the lives of women and progress gender equality.

Gender-based violence

Violence against women and children is a national crisis. In 2022–23, an average of one woman was killed every 11 days by a current or former intimate partner.¹ The number of women dying as a result of men's violence so far this year has further highlighted the unacceptable prevalence of gender-based violence across Australia.

However, violence is not inevitable. High rates of gender-based violence can be addressed through shifting the social, cultural, political and economic factors that lead to violent behaviour. The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*

continues to guide the efforts of all Australian governments to end gender-based violence in one generation.

The Government is continuing to drive change to end violence by providing an additional \$1.1 billion in this Budget and 2023–24 MYEFO bringing the total investment in women's safety to \$3.4 billion since October 2022. The Government is also developing a standalone First Nations National Plan for family safety to address the disproportionately high rates of violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. It will be guided by the newly established First Nations National Plan Steering Committee to embed the voices and experiences of First Nations peoples in the First Nations National Plan.

This Budget invests \$925.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to permanently establish the Leaving Violence Program (LVP). This investment will help people experiencing intimate partner violence to leave those relationships, providing those eligible with access to up to \$5,000 in financial support along with referral services, risk assessments and safety planning. This funding is on top of other investments to strengthen the social safety net, such as through back-to-back boosts to Commonwealth Rent Assistance, and the 2023–24 Budget measure to expand eligibility for Parenting Payment (Single).

As a step towards strengthening prevention efforts, the Government is commissioning an expert-led rapid review of best practice approaches to prevention. The Government is also delivering a range of new measures to tackle factors that exacerbate violence against women, such as violent online pornography and misogynistic content targeting children and young people.

Unpaid and paid care

Women continue to spend more time caring for children, ageing parents or other family members, and people with disability, than men. One-third of the gender pay gap is attributable to women taking time out of the workforce to care for family and other interruptions in full-time employment, which results in women having less pay and fewer opportunities for promotions and management positions.² In addition, gendered norms and stereotypes that women are 'natural carers' further widens the gender pay gap by encouraging women to gravitate towards the paid care sector when seeking education and employment. Paid care roles are traditionally undervalued, underpaid and insecure.

The Government recognises that gender equality cannot be achieved without better valuing both paid and unpaid care. In this Budget, the Government is providing greater flexibility to recipients of the Carer Payment, who are overwhelmingly women, to undertake paid work, study or volunteering activities. To better value the paid care sector and address workforce shortages in highly feminised fields, the Government is committing to provide funding towards wage increases for workers in the early childhood education and care and aged care sectors, and investing to support students. And through reforms to the Paid Parental Leave scheme and further parenting support, the Government is encouraging fathers and partners to play a more active role in the unpaid care of children.

Economic equality and security

Significant progress has been made in recent decades towards economic equality and security for women. Labour force participation rates have increased, particularly for younger generations of women, and more women are attaining higher education qualifications. Women's workforce participation has increased from around one-third in the 1960s to nearly two-thirds today, and in 2023 the proportion of women aged 15 to 74 years old holding a non-school qualification was 64 per cent for women (compared with 56 per cent in 2014).³ Despite this, women are still paid less than men on average, are more likely to experience economic disadvantage, and have lower superannuation balances at retirement.

The Government recognises that households are under pressure from high but moderating inflation and higher interest rates. The Government's tax cuts provide cost-of-living relief for low- to middle-income families and reduce disincentives to take on more hours of work, particularly for women. The Government is also delivering additional energy bill relief to all households and further increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which will particularly help households in financial stress, many of which are single mother households.

The Government is committed to reducing workforce gender segregation as part of creating a future made in Australia. This Budget includes investments to support more women to pursue careers in key high-demand industries to deliver on the twin objectives of meeting our workforce needs and ensuring women share in the jobs of the future.

The Government recognises that progress has not been equal for all Australian women. This Budget includes investments to provide First Nations women in remote communities more opportunities for real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions as well as action to prevent and address migrant worker exploitation. The Government is also investing in women's economic security by paying superannuation on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave.

Health

Sex and gender are key determinants of health and wellbeing. Women face different barriers to accessing healthcare to men. Gender bias in the health system can impact the healthcare that women receive, which can prevent or delay the diagnosis or appropriate treatment of their health conditions. To achieve gender equality, health systems need to respond to the needs of women and girls.

The Government is increasing access to essential health services for women, including maternal, sexual and reproductive healthcare. In this Budget, the Government is continuing to strengthen Medicare to make it easier and more affordable to access healthcare. This includes longer Medicare Benefits Schedule consultations with gynaecologists, expanding the range of free mental health services and affordable treatment for breast cancer. This Budget also invests to improve research and data on women's health to help

address gender bias within the health system, and support general practitioner training in long-acting reversible contraceptives and menopause.

Leadership, representation and decision-making

While significant achievements have been made to improve women's participation in leadership, representation and decision-making across Australia's public and private sectors, there is still a long way to go. More women, including First Nations women, women with disability and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, need to be represented in decision-making roles to achieve gender equality.

The Government is leading by example through implementing new targets for women's representation on Australian Government boards to include portfolio-level targets of 50 per cent representation of women on boards and 50 per cent representation of women in Chair and Deputy Chair positions. Government policy levers are also being utilised to drive gender equality. The Government has announced it will introduce a new legislative requirement for businesses with 500 or more employees to commit to gender equality targets for their workplaces through the Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting.

Gender-based violence

All Australians have the right to be free from violence and live without fear. Gender equality cannot be achieved without ending gender-based violence. In early 2024, reporting on the number of women who have died as a result of men's violence has contributed to a national conversation about the unacceptable prevalence of gender-based violence across Australia and the need for urgent action. This situation is not new and reflects a global challenge that can only be addressed through concerted efforts – both short- and longer-term. Through the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan), all Governments, including the Australian Government, have set a goal to end gender-based violence in a generation.

Commitments in this Budget bring the Government's total investment to support women's safety and help deliver the National Plan to \$3.4 billion. *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* complements the National Plan by outlining the Australian Government's commitment that all people live free from violence and are safe at home, at school, at work, in the community and online.

This chapter provides an overview of the Government's commitment and ongoing action to ending gender-based violence. It highlights new actions in this Budget, including to accelerate efforts to prevent violence and intervene early, and to provide targeted support for victim-survivors in areas such as financial support, legal assistance and support for refugee and migrant women. These measures represent the next step in the Government's ongoing efforts to address violence against women.

The Government's efforts complement work across states and territories, who are generally responsible for frontline service provision and law and justice responses. On 1 May 2024, the Prime Minister convened an urgent National Cabinet meeting that focussed exclusively on stopping violence against women. All First Ministers want violence against women and children to stop.

Efforts to end violence will be strengthened through gathering data and monitoring progress against measurable targets that have been agreed by Australian and state and territory governments for the first time. While the scale of the issue is well understood, making progress to end violence against women will rely on data that highlights impacts across different cohorts and the core features of effective approaches to prevention and response.

Gender-based violence – key statistics

<p>On average, one woman was killed every 11 days by a current or former intimate partner in 2022–23</p>	<p>In 2022–23, the rate of intimate partner homicide for First Nations women was six times the rate for other women</p>
<p>Just over one in four women (27% or 2.7 million) have experienced violence or abuse by a cohabiting partner</p>	<p>Almost one in four women (23% or 2.3 million) have experienced emotional abuse by a cohabiting partner</p>
<p>Female university students (62.9%) were more likely to have experienced sexual harassment in their lifetime than male students (26%)</p>	<p>In 2022–23, 75% of specialist homelessness service clients who had experienced family and domestic violence were female</p>

The Australian Institute of Criminology has been reporting intimate partner homicide data in respect to women since 1989–90, when 60 women were murdered by an intimate partner. Since then, there has been an overall decline, however, it is not unusual to see fluctuations between years. The National Homicide Monitoring Program data shows during the COVID-19 lockdown years of 2020–2022, there was a significant decline in female intimate partner homicides. In 2019–20, 37 women were killed by an intimate partner compared to 27 in 2020–21 and 26 in 2021–22.⁴ An increase was seen in 2022–23, with 34 women killed by a current or former intimate partner.

There is no acceptable level of deaths from gender-based violence.

The Government has announced a new statistical dashboard to improve the reporting and measurement of intimate partner homicide. To be released in mid-2024, the intimate partner homicide dashboard developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology will provide accurate, verified and closer to real-time data, with cumulative, quarterly data on incidents of intimate partner homicide, by current or former partners. This data is different to other sources of data led by community organisations and based on media reports, such as Counting Dead Women Australia and the Red Heart Campaign, which counts women killed overwhelmingly by men as a result of all forms of violence. The dashboard will help to develop a better understanding of contributing factors and inform responses by law enforcement, the family, domestic and sexual violence sector and policy makers. It will also

support governments to track progress against the *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan) target to reduce female intimate partner homicides by 25 per cent each year.

It is also critical that victim-survivors are at the heart of solutions and policies. To support this, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission has established a National Lived Experience Advisory Council to embed the voices of people with lived experience of domestic, family and sexual violence in policy at the national level.

National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032

The National Plan sets out the vision to end gender-based violence in Australia in one generation. The Government has invested in a range of measures that support the outcomes of the National Plan and is working jointly with states and territories on its implementation.

The First Action Plan 2023–2027 (First Action Plan) is driving the first five-year effort of achieving the National Plan's vision by committing to actions to improve the safety of women and children, including across health, housing, education, justice and employment settings. Accompanying the First Action Plan, an Activities Addendum will be updated annually to include new activities and report on implementation of existing activities, with the first update expected before the end of 2024.

An Outcomes Framework will measure progress towards the long-term outcomes of the National Plan, with the performance measurement plan, released in May 2024 and on an annual basis hereafter, being the primary mechanism to monitor change and guide investment over the life of the ten-year National Plan.

The investments in the Budget and in MYEFO build on the 85 Commonwealth initiatives to support the National Plan that are underway. This wide range of initiatives is funded through the \$2.3 billion invested across the Government's first two Budgets to deliver the Government's commitments across the domains of the National Plan and support women's safety (see Box 1 below).

Box 1: National Plan Implementation – examples of existing initiatives

Prevention – investing in ANROWS to undertake priority research to build the evidence base of the National Plan; supporting Our Watch to deliver primary prevention initiatives; rolling out phases 5 and 6 of the Stop it at the Start campaign; establishing a national consent campaign; funding community led sexual violence prevention pilots; grants to prevent technology-facilitated abuse; rolling out consent and respectful relationships education; preventing and responding to the forced marriage of women and girls; developing and delivering a national consent survey; and increasing investment in prevention services, programs and campaigns for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Early intervention – extending DV-alert training for health, allied health and community frontline workers; creating a National Perpetrator Referral Database; developing a National Perpetrator Risk Assessment Framework; investing in MensLine Australia's 'Changing for Good' program; extending funding for No To Violence; establishing a Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program; supporting the Helping Children Heal initiative which helps break the cycle of intergenerational trauma; investing in early intervention for young men and adolescents who have experienced family, domestic or sexual violence; rolling out training packages to enhance law enforcement responses to domestic, family and sexual violence; and developing and delivering continuing professional development training for legal practitioners on coercive control.

Response – continuing the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation program; continuing the Keeping Women Safe in their Homes program and the Safe Connections (Safe Phones) program; continuing the Support for Trafficked People Program; providing funding to states and territories through the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses; funding innovative perpetrator responses in partnership with the states and territories; funding frontline service and community workers in the states and territories; funding accredited training on sexual violence responses for doctors, nurses and frontline workers; funding to increase the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander shelter and accommodation services; investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations to meet demand for services; supporting the eSafety Commission to deliver technical support for victim-survivors and frontline workers on technology-facilitated abuse; funding a scoping study on alternative reporting mechanisms for sexual assault; funding a national review of family and domestic violence order frameworks; and improving access to family violence provisions for visa applications.

continued on next page

Box 1: National Plan Implementation – examples of existing initiatives
(continued)

Recovery and healing – funding the Australian Law Reform Commission to enquire into justice responses to sexual violence; establishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men’s wellness centres; expanding the Lighthouse Project to improve safety in family law processes; rolling out the Priority Property Pools program to support streamlined court processes to resolve small property disputes; supporting protections against cross-examination by family violence perpetrators; rolling out pilots of specialist and trauma-informed legal services for victim-survivors of sexual assault; funding Primary Health Networks to provide trauma-informed recovery care for victim-survivors; implementing Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Primary Health Network pilots to support people who have experienced domestic, family and sexual violence or child abuse to navigate the health system; funding the Illawarra Women’s Health Centre to establish a Women’s Trauma Recovery Centre; improving the safety of women and children in child abduction cases; and delivering place-based, trauma-aware and culturally responsive healing programs for families impacted by violence.

The measures underway across all jurisdictions to implement the National Plan are outlined in the Activities Addendum to the First Action Plan and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025, which will be updated annually to include new activities and report on implementation of existing activities, with the first update expected before the end of 2024.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–2025 (Action Plan) supports the delivery of initiatives to address the immediate safety needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and families. The Action Plan also establishes a strong foundation for longer-term structural change that will be carried forward through the First Nations National Plan for Family Safety.

Box 2: First Nations National Plan

The First Nations National Plan will provide a whole of society approach to address the disproportionately high rates of family violence and abuse against First Nations women and children and provide further action to address Target 13 of Closing the Gap: by 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced by 50 per cent, as progress towards zero.

In January 2024, the Government appointed 24 members to form the First Nations National Plan Steering Committee (Steering Committee) to work in genuine partnership with government to provide advice and guidance on the development of the First Nations National Plan. Over its two-year term, the Steering Committee will oversee the development of the First Nations National Plan, inform and guide consultation, and identify and engage widely with stakeholders nationally.

The Government is partnering with SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children, to provide secretariat support to the Steering Committee, conduct community consultation and develop the First Nations National Plan under the Steering Committee's guidance. Nation-wide consultations for the First Nations National Plan will be undertaken to ensure it is informed by First Nations voices.

Preventing violence against women and children

It is everyone's role to seek to stop violence against women and children before it occurs, not just respond to it. Preventing violence must have a focus on the role that men and boys play across all parts of society, as people who will work to embed prevention approaches in all settings. This includes their roles as educators, employers and employees, frontline workers, journalists, legal professionals, sportspeople, parents and carers, and leaders. Addressing violence against women requires cultural and systemic responses across all levels of government and community.

Budget highlights: Accelerating efforts to prevent violence

The Government recognises the importance of focusing on prevention and is investing in swift and targeted expert advice to support evidence-based approaches. This will strengthen efforts to intervene earlier to prevent men perpetrating violence including where there is higher risk – for example due to financial stress, mental health, or alcohol and drug issues.

The Government is investing \$1.3 million over two years from 2023–24 to establish an independent expert panel to undertake a rapid review of the approach to violence prevention and advise Government on additional efforts to end the cycle of violence. This will focus on evidence-based approaches to preventing violence, new methods and whole of system opportunities, with a focus on high-risk perpetrators and prevention of homicide. The independent expert panel will be supported by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and will report back to Government in the third-quarter of 2024.

The expert panel and future work to end gender-based violence will be supported by \$4.3 million in 2024–25 for Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) to further build the evidence base on pathways into and out of perpetration.

Additional funding of \$3.9 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$1.0 million per year ongoing) is also being invested in additional resourcing for the Office for Women, in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, to support whole-of-government coordination efforts towards women's safety. This work will complement the work of the Department of Social Services as the policy steward of the National Plan. This funding supports the Government's commitment to strengthen gender equality and is additional to the Office for Women's existing staffing of 64 Average Staffing Level, which will be maintained going forward through reprioritisations within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Box 3: Working with states and territories to prevent violence and target high-risk perpetrators

At the Meeting of National Cabinet on gender-based violence on 1 May 2024, First Ministers agreed that system responses need to be strengthened, with a focus on high-risk perpetrators and serial offenders to prevent homicides. This involves work across all jurisdictions.

First Ministers agreed:

- To task Police Ministers Council and the Standing Council of Attorneys-General to develop options for improving police responses to high-risk and serial perpetrators, including considering use of focused deterrence and fixated threat strategies
- To improve information sharing about perpetrators across systems and jurisdictions, with work to be led by the Commonwealth Minister for Women who is also chair of the Data and Digital Ministers Meeting
- States and territories will explore opportunities to strengthen national consistency and drive best practice approaches across jurisdictions, including relating to risk assessment and responses to sexual assault.

National Cabinet will also be briefed on this work and the rapid review of prevention approaches later this year.

Supporting women and children experiencing violence

The Government is committed to strengthening services and systems to help victim-survivors to leave violence and support their long-term recovery. Targeted investments are being made to address violence in higher education settings, and provide a range of financial, legal, health and housing supports, and assistance for migrant women.

Support to leave family and domestic violence

Financial insecurity is a major contributing factor in a woman's decision to leave, stay in or return to a violent relationship. Women who leave violent relationships suffer a drop in income of as much as 45 per cent.⁵ According to the 2021–22 Personal Safety Survey, of the 1.4 million women who experienced violence by a previous partner whilst living together, 43 per cent (583,800) temporarily separated. Of these 583,800 women, 21.5 per cent returned to the partner due to lack of financial resources.⁶

The Escaping Violence Payment (EVP) trial and the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot (TVP) continue to provide financial support to victim-survivors to leave violent relationships. More than 45,000 Australians have accessed the EVP since its commencement in 2021. The TVP has also provided over \$14.0 million in financial

assistance to over 4,300 victim-survivors on temporary visas who have experienced family and domestic violence.

A 2023 independent evaluation of the EVP trial found that the majority of clients surveyed (92 per cent) agreed that the payment helped relieve financial stress and 51 per cent agreed that without the payment they could not have left a violent relationship.⁷ Demand for financial support has continued to grow, with a 60 per cent increase in applications received between July and December 2023.

Temporary visa holders experiencing family and domestic violence face additional barriers when leaving, or seeking to leave, a violent partner relationship. The TVP has highlighted the importance of access to legal assistance for victim-survivors on temporary visas.

Budget highlights: Leaving Violence Program

The Government is delivering a landmark investment of \$925.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to permanently establish the Leaving Violence Program (LVP). The LVP will support victim-survivors of intimate partner violence, including migrants regardless of their visa status, to make choices about leaving violent relationships through the provision of individualised financial support packages.

The program will provide eligible victim-survivors, who are predominantly women, with up to \$5,000 in financial support, including up to \$1,500 in cash and up to \$3,500 in goods and services. Support services will also be provided including safety planning, risk assessment, and referrals to other services for up to 12 weeks.

The new LVP builds on the successes and learnings of the Escaping Violence Payment (EVP) trial and the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot (TVP), to establish a new program that ensures eligible victim-survivors leaving violence are able to access support.

Unlike the EVP trial, the \$5,000 financial support component of LVP will be indexed annually to help ensure the payment keeps up with the cost of living. Combining the EVP trial and the TVP into a single program will ensure a 'no wrong door' approach for victim-survivors.

Establishing the LVP as a permanent program provides certainty for victim-survivors, service providers and the broader Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV) sector.

The LVP will commence in mid-2025, following the procurement of an appropriate service provider with FDSV experience, and the transition of the EVP trial and the TVP into the program.

The EVP trial and the TVP will be extended until 30 June 2025, and support services will continue to be provided for a further 12 weeks beyond the pilot end date for active cases.

Temporary visa holders will continue to be able to access legal support services for migration and family law issues with funding being extended for a further five years.

Box 4: Government funding to support women who may be experiencing violence

In addition to the National Plan, the Government has also invested in a range of services and initiatives that support women's financial security, including those at risk of or impacted by gender-based violence.

This funding includes:

- \$253.4 million over five years from 2023–24 for 1800RESPECT, the national counselling, information and referral service for people affected by domestic, family and sexual violence. 1800RESPECT provides frontline support, and includes options for phone, text, video call and online chat counselling support.
- \$35.4 billion over five years from 2023–24 to fund Parenting Payment (Single). In the 2023–24 Budget, the Government expanded eligibility for Parenting Payment (Single) to single principal carers with a youngest child under 14 years of age, up from eight years of age. This provides support to single parents, overwhelmingly women, including those who have experienced family and domestic violence.
- \$31.8 billion over five years from 2023–24 on Commonwealth Rent Assistance which includes a 10 per cent increase in this Budget, building on last year's Budget which delivered a 15 per cent increase, the largest increase in over 30 years. Just over half (51 per cent) of the people who benefit from the further increase to maximum rates are single women (compared to 27 per cent who are single men).
- The \$10.0 billion Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) will help support 20,000 new social homes, including for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence, and older women on low incomes who are at risk of homelessness.
- Targeting the \$1.0 billion increase to the National Housing Infrastructure Facility to better support housing for women and children experiencing domestic violence and youth.

Preventing extreme online misogyny and supporting online safety

A critical challenge for ending violence against women is the changing nature of technology, and the risks posed to women by online environments. Social media algorithms can push misogynistic content to young people, normalising sexist or even violent attitudes and undermining gender equality. There is also growing concern around the role of violent online pornography in normalising gender-based violence within the Australian community.

Preventing and addressing gender-based violence means adapting to new environments where sexism and misogyny can be perpetuated, and taking action to prevent these harms from reaching the community, especially young people.

The Government's Stop it at the Start campaign has been a key initiative to drive attitudinal change and prevent violence. A new phase of the Stop it at the Start campaign will launch in mid-June and run until May 2025. This new phase will specifically include a counter-influencing campaign in online spaces where violent and misogynistic content thrives, to directly challenge the material in the spaces it is being viewed.

The campaign is intended to counter the corrosive influence of online content targeted at young adults that condones violence against women. It will raise awareness about a proliferation of misogynistic influencers and content, and encourage conversations within families about the damaging impact of the material.

Budget highlights: Age assurance pilot

The Government will provide \$6.5 million in 2024–25 to develop a pilot of age assurance technologies to protect children from harmful online content, like pornography and other age-restricted online services.

This pilot is part of a suite of interventions aimed at curbing easy access to material known to cause harm to children and young people, and tackling extreme misogyny online. The pilot will help identify available age assurance products to protect children from online harm, and test their efficacy, including in relation to privacy and security.

The outcomes will inform the existing work of Australia's eSafety Commissioner under the Online Safety Act – including through the development of industry codes or standards – to reduce children's exposure to age-inappropriate material.

Box 5: Preventing online harm

The Government is also introducing a range of reforms that seek to address the changing ways gender-based violence is perpetuated online.

The Government will introduce legislation to ban the creation and non-consensual distribution of sexually explicit deepfake material. Digitally created and altered sexually explicit material is a damaging form of abuse against women and girls that can inflict deep harm on victims. The reforms will make clear that creating and sharing sexually explicit material without consent, using technology like artificial intelligence, will be subject to serious criminal penalties.

In response to concerns about the role of violent online pornography in perpetuating attitudes and behaviours that lead to gender-based violence, the Government is undertaking long overdue classification reforms with states and territories which will examine options to reduce exposure to violent pornography, informed by engagement with experts and best available evidence about harms.

The Government will also bring forward legislation in 2024 to outlaw the malicious release of private information online (known as doxxing) and overhaul the *Privacy Act 1988* to give all Australians, and particularly women who are experiencing domestic and family violence, greater control and transparency over their personal information.

Legal and dispute resolution support for women and children

The National Plan highlights the importance of enhancing access to equitable justice outcomes for all victim-survivors, identifying and removing barriers to engaging with the justice system, strengthening accountability and consequences for perpetrators, and ensuring the policing and justice workforce have the tools and training to respond effectively to the use of violence.

First Nations families can face barriers in accessing culturally appropriate support from mainstream support services for separated and separating families. The First Nations Family Dispute Resolution pilot supports selected Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to provide culturally appropriate alternative family dispute resolution to clients. Through this pilot, selected Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations can recruit and train staff to provide family dispute resolution, and to modify service delivery approaches to offer more culturally appropriate services.

The National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020–25 provides funding to legal services, including to women experiencing gender-based violence. With the current National Legal Assistance Partnership to expire in mid-2025, an independent review has been undertaken to evaluate the extent to which the objective, outcomes and outputs of the National Legal Assistance Partnership have been achieved and consider how future arrangements could

better provide access to justice. The findings of the review will be considered during the development of future legal assistance arrangements beyond June 2025.

The community legal sector is a female-dominated workforce.⁸ Salaries for the community legal sector are significantly less than those attainable in private practice or for equivalent positions within government. Investing in the community legal sector is not just good for the many women who seek support through legal services, it also supports closing the gender pay gap.

Budget highlights: Funding dispute resolution and legal assistance

- The Government will extend the First Nations Family Dispute Resolution pilot by two years from 2024–25, at a cost of approximately \$11.7 million, to allow a further period to establish new culturally safe and appropriate family dispute resolution service models. This will enable currently funded services to continue to pilot these services to separated and separating families in their communities.
- The Government will provide additional funding of \$44.1 million in 2024–25 to support the National Legal Assistance Partnership and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, including one-year indexation supplementation to the funding for Legal Aid Commissions, Community Legal Centres, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, and additional funding to reduce pay disparity in the legal assistance sector. Providers supported by this measure deliver critical advice and representation to women experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, family and domestic violence.

Box 6: Changes to the *Family Law Act 1975*

The Government has made changes to reform the *Family Law Act 1975* (Family Law Act) to make the family law system simpler and safer for parents and children. These changes, which commenced on 6 May 2024, repealed complex and confusing provisions around parenting orders, and replaced them with a simpler decision-making framework focused on what is in the child's best interests. The Government also introduced new powers for courts to address systems abuse and improved the use of Independent Children's Lawyers.

The amendments to the Family Law Act also establish an enhanced information sharing framework between the family law courts and state and territory child protection, policing and firearms agencies. The Framework will provide access to crucial family violence, child abuse and neglect risk information to inform decisions made in the best interests of children.

The Government is also considering feedback received on an exposure draft Bill, released for consultation in September 2023, which proposed amendments to the family law property division framework under the Family Law Act. Those proposed amendments sought to address the financial impacts of family violence.

Law enforcement systems information sharing to support the safety of women and children

The National Plan highlights the role of strong data-sharing mechanisms in holding perpetrators accountable and keeping women and children safe. Law enforcement systems that share data on perpetrators of gender-based violence across jurisdictions contribute to the vision of the National Plan to end gender-based violence in one generation.

Budget highlights: Law enforcement systems information sharing

The Government has committed \$109.9 million over two years to the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission to support enhanced collaboration and information sharing through the continued integration of state and territory law enforcement agencies into the National Criminal Intelligence System. The National Criminal Intelligence System provides law enforcement agencies with police intelligence and other criminal justice information in near real-time, such as domestic violence related protection orders.

In addition to providing legal assistance, the Government is also working to strengthen responses to violence in the justice system. In September 2023, the Government in partnership with the states and territories released the National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence (National Principles). The National

Principles will improve efforts to understand and identify coercive control to effectively respond to family and domestic violence.

Box 7: National Principles to Address Coercive Control in Family and Domestic Violence

On 22 September 2023, the Australian, state and territory governments released the National Principles which outline a shared understanding of coercive control and its impacts.

The National Principles will help raise awareness of coercive control, inform more effective responses to family and domestic violence, and promote more consistent support and safety outcomes for victim-survivors. The Government has released a range of supporting resources to support implementation of the National Principles, including videos, fact sheets, guides for healthcare professionals and tailored resources for First Nations communities.

Improving women's housing security

Family and domestic violence is the main reason women and children leave their homes in Australia. Many women and children leaving their homes may experience housing insecurity, and in some cases, homelessness. Of the 273,600 clients who accessed homelessness services in 2022–23, 38 per cent (or 104,000) were people experiencing family and domestic violence.⁹ Without adequate and appropriate housing, the essential rights of women and children to safety, security and privacy are compromised.

The Government is committed to investing in crisis accommodation as an immediate support to assist women and children to leave situations of family and domestic violence. Pathways to longer-term secure housing are also important for victim-survivors to re-establish their lives after leaving a violent relationship.

The Budget includes funding for a new five-year, \$9.3 billion National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness with states and territories. This represents an increase of \$423 million. Under the agreement, the Commonwealth will double its dedicated funding allocation for homelessness services to \$400 million a year – funding that states and territories must match.

The Government will also target the \$1 billion increase to the National Housing Infrastructure Facility to better support housing for women and children experiencing domestic violence and for youth. The funding is being rebalanced to provide more up-front grants to support states and territories and community housing providers to deliver more housing for these cohorts.

Crisis accommodation

Access to safe accommodation is fundamental to the immediate safety of women and children experiencing family and domestic violence. Crisis and transitional housing can provide immediate support to women and children experiencing family and domestic violence in the short-term.

The intersection of homelessness and family and domestic violence can also have a significant impact on the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and families. Experiencing violence and homelessness can lead to trauma, significant stress and other mental health issues, further compounding the difficulties faced when leaving violent relationships.

The Housing Australia Future Fund will provide \$100 million in disbursements over five years for crisis and transitional housing options for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence, and older women at risk of homelessness. In addition, in the 2022–23 October Budget, the Government committed an additional \$100 million over five years to continue the Safe Places Emergency Accommodation program via the Safe Places Inclusion Round.

Budget highlights: Healthcare in crisis accommodation and services

The Government will provide \$6.0 million over two years from 2024–25 for the provision of trauma-informed local outreach healthcare in crisis and temporary accommodation and services, to support women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. This support will be provided through Primary Health Networks on the Central Coast and targeted to population groups at disproportionately higher risk of violence. Funding includes an independent evaluation on the impact of this support service for women and children who have experienced family, domestic and sexual violence.

Safe housing in remote communities

Housing issues, including homelessness, inadequate housing and overcrowding, disproportionately affect First Nations people. The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Report found overcrowding heightens the risk of harms such as violence and abuse, thereby exacerbating trauma, stress and conflict.¹⁰ Addressing overcrowding in remote First Nations communities, and improving access to culturally appropriate living conditions, contributes to positive outcomes for First Nations women and girls.

Budget highlights: Northern Territory Homelands and Housing

With a landmark \$4.0 billion investment over ten years the Australian and Northern Territory (NT) Governments are working towards a commitment to halve overcrowding in the NT by 2034. This Budget provides \$698.4 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$2.0 billion over ten years from 2024–25) to build up to 270 homes each year, \$120.0 million over three years from 2024–25 to continue urgent repairs and maintenance of existing housing and essential infrastructure on homelands, and a further \$20.0 million in 2023–24 to deliver an additional 49 houses under the existing Remote Housing Northern Territory Federation Funding Agreement.

Targeted support to improve women's safety

Improving women's safety at university

The 2021 National Student Safety Survey found that nearly one in two university students (48 per cent) have experienced sexual harassment at least once in their lifetime and one in three university students (30.6 per cent) had experienced sexual assault at least once. Sexual harassment and sexual assault was disproportionately experienced by women, transgender students, LGBTIQ+ students, students who were gender-diverse, younger students, students with a disability and students who live in student accommodation.

Fewer than one in two (47.5 per cent) students who had experienced sexual assault in a university context, and formally reported it, said their university had explained the reporting or complaints process to them, while fewer than one in three (29.7 per cent) were satisfied with the process.¹¹

In February 2024, the Government, in conjunction with the states and territories, released the Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education.

Budget highlights: Addressing violence in higher education

- Under the Action Plan Addressing Gender-based Violence in Higher Education, the Government has committed to \$18.7 million over four years from 2024–25 to develop and introduce a National Higher Education Code to Prevent and Respond to Gender-based Violence. The National Code will set requirements for higher education providers to embed a whole-of-organisation approach and strengthen accountability for systemic issues relating to gender-based violence.
- Complementing this work, the Government has committed \$19.4 million over two years from 2024–25 to establish an independent National Student Ombudsman. The Ombudsman will investigate student complaints and resolve disputes with higher education providers. Students will be able to escalate complaints about the administrative actions of their higher education provider, including complaints relating to sexual harassment, assault and violence.

Support for migrant and refugee women experiencing violence

Migrant and refugee women can face specific forms of discrimination and disadvantage which intersect with their experiences of family and domestic violence. Women on temporary visas may fear that leaving a violent relationship will impact their visa status and can face barriers accessing support services. The Department of Home Affairs' specialised visa support service assists temporary visa holder experiencing family and domestic violence. It has managed over 1,700 client referrals since being piloted in July 2021.

Budget highlights: Support for temporary visa holders experiencing violence

The Government will provide \$6.1 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$1.6 million per year ongoing) to continue specialised support for visa holders experiencing domestic and family violence through the Domestic and Family Violence visa support service.

MYEFO highlights: Addressing forced marriage and violent relationships

The Government has committed \$18.6 million over five years from 2023–24 (and \$3.8 million per year ongoing) to support temporary visa holders leaving violent relationships and people who are at risk of, or who have experienced, forced marriage. Funding includes:

- \$12.1 million over five years from 2023–24 (and \$3.8 million per year ongoing) to establish the Forced Marriage Specialist Support Program. The program will provide caseworker support, counselling, temporary accommodation and financial support for those at risk of, or who have experienced, forced marriage
- \$4.4 million over two years from 2023–24 to increase financial support available under the Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot to \$5,000 (previously \$3,000) to align with the Escaping Violence Payment
- \$2.2 million over four years from 2024–25 to extend Speak Now, Australia's national forced marriage community education service, to prevent forced marriage and other forms of modern slavery through education, awareness-raising and collaboration with frontline workers and communities.

Unpaid and paid care

While women's labour force participation has increased, women still undertake the majority of unpaid care in Australia. Unpaid care refers to time spent looking after children, ageing parents, other family members and people with disability, chronic health conditions and mental illness.

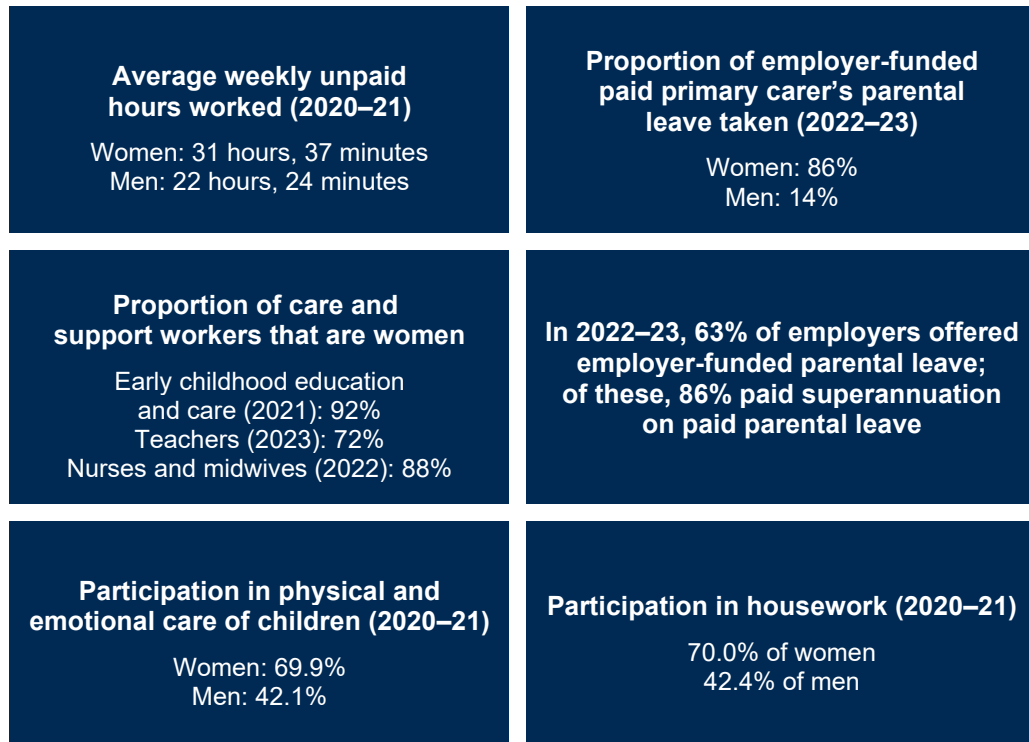
Spending more time on unpaid care than their male counterparts impacts women's lifelong economic security by limiting their labour force participation, career progression, and leadership opportunities. Additionally, gendered stereotypes and attitudes about women being 'natural carers' have meant paid care work is dominated by women and migrant workers, with these roles historically undervalued, often low paid and insecure.

The Government is committed to addressing this undervaluation and better recognising the substantial contribution of unpaid and paid care to Australia's society and economy. In *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (Working for Women)*, the Government committed to driving action to narrow the unpaid work and care gap between women and men, ensure parents and carers have access to affordable and high-quality early childhood and care services, and reduce the gender gap in use of, and access to, paid parental leave.

This Budget includes a range of investments and reforms to support parents and children and drive equality in care. The Government is investing in parenting supports for fathers to empower and build their parenting confidence and skills. Additionally, recent changes to the Government's Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme will improve accessibility and flexibility of parental leave.

The Government is also committing to provide funding towards wage increases for workers in the early childhood education and care and aged care sectors. This Budget includes Commonwealth Prac Payments to support eligible students in nursing and midwifery, teaching and social work courses while they attend mandatory placements.

Unpaid and paid care – key statistics



Unpaid care

Australian women continue to spend more time than men participating in unpaid work, despite an increase in their workforce participation. This unpaid work limits women's scope for greater participation in the paid labour force and in leadership roles, with cumulative impacts on their lifelong economic security.

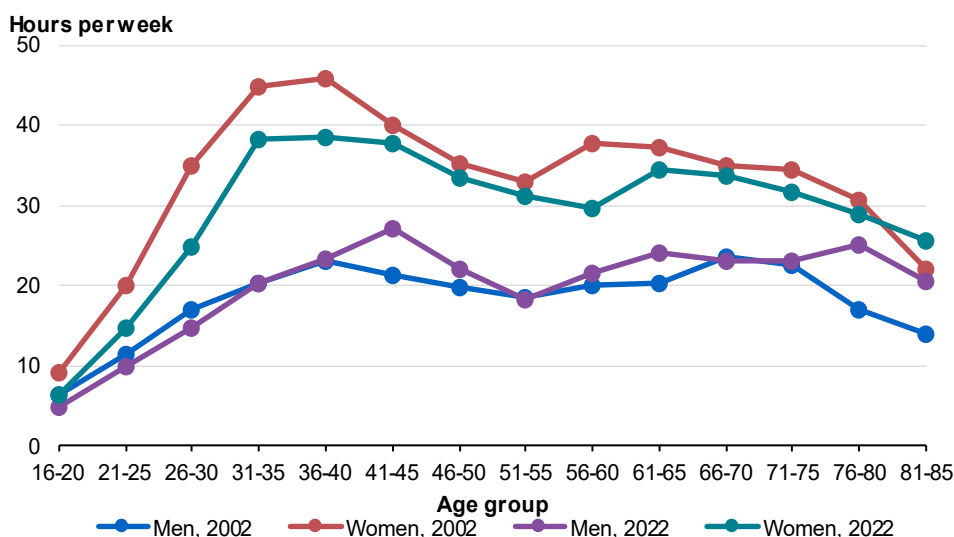
Data indicates that women of all ages continue to spend more time caring for children and taking on domestic household work than men (Chart 2.1). The gap in time spent on these activities between men and women grows rapidly into adulthood, reaching its peak during child-bearing years. This gap reduces somewhat for men and women over the age of 40 but remains persistent across all ages. Although women have slightly reduced their hours on domestic and caring responsibilities between 2002 and 2022, a large gender gap remains. The data suggests that hours of unpaid work and care performed by men aged under 40 has not materially changed since 2002.

Often unpaid care encompasses not only care for children, but also ageing parents and other relatives, including people with disability, chronic health conditions and mental illness. For some First Nations women, caring responsibilities extend to protecting and

caring for Country, which remains an important part of daily life and practice. A survey undertaken in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's Office shows that First Nations women perform greater amounts of unpaid care than any other group surveyed, with unpaid care activities accounting for 62 per cent of participants' time on a usual weekday.¹²

Unpaid care work is not only a persistent barrier to workforce participation for many women, but it may also deter them from participating in higher intensity and better paid occupations and industries. It may influence the form of employment women take and the locations in which they are able to work, as well as increase the likelihood of working in part-time, casual and contract work, which tends to be less secure.

Chart 2.1: Hours per week spent on unpaid work and caring, by age and sex, 2002 and 2022



Source: HILDA, Restricted Releases 2 and 22.

Note: Includes all surveyed men and women, regardless of couple status of household type. Time use includes time spent caring for a relative, caring for own and others' children, domestic household work and errands, and outdoor domestic tasks.

Budget highlights: Valuing care

As outlined in the Employment White Paper, *Working Future*, the Government is committed to overcoming barriers to employment and improving participation.

In the 2024–25 Budget, the Government is providing \$18.6 million over five years from 2023–24 and \$3.1 million per year ongoing to support Carer Payment recipients by changing the 25 hour per week participation limit rules from 20 March 2025.

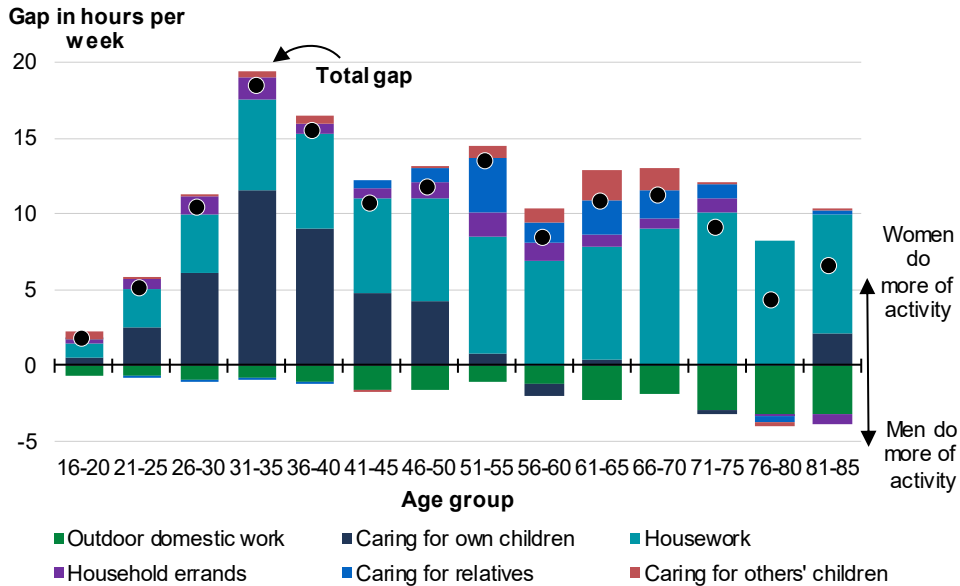
The changes will amend the current participation hours limit to allow up to 100 hours of work over a four-week settlement period. This will provide greater flexibility for Carer Payment recipients to structure their work commitments around the care needs of the person they care for, including for those with episodic or fluctuating conditions, while remaining eligible for the payment. Travel time, study and volunteering activities will also be excluded from the limit, and the use of single temporary cessation of care days will be allowed, rather than the current seven day minimum. Payments will also be suspended for up to six months, rather than cancelled, when a carer exceeds their participation limit or allowable temporary cessation of care days. This supports more responsive access to payments if circumstances change.

Around 31,000 Carer Payment recipients earn income, including over 25,000 women, and may benefit from greater flexibility to undertake paid work, study or volunteering.

The gender gap in unpaid care widens when families have children

The gap between the time women spend on unpaid work and care relative to men is largest between the ages of 31 and 35, a time when many families choose to have children. For this age group, women on average spend 18 more hours than men on unpaid labour per week. More than half of this gap – over 11 hours per week – is due to differences in the amount of time spent on caring for children (Chart 2.2).

Chart 2.2: Differences in time spent per week on caring and unpaid domestic work, by type of activity and sex, 2022



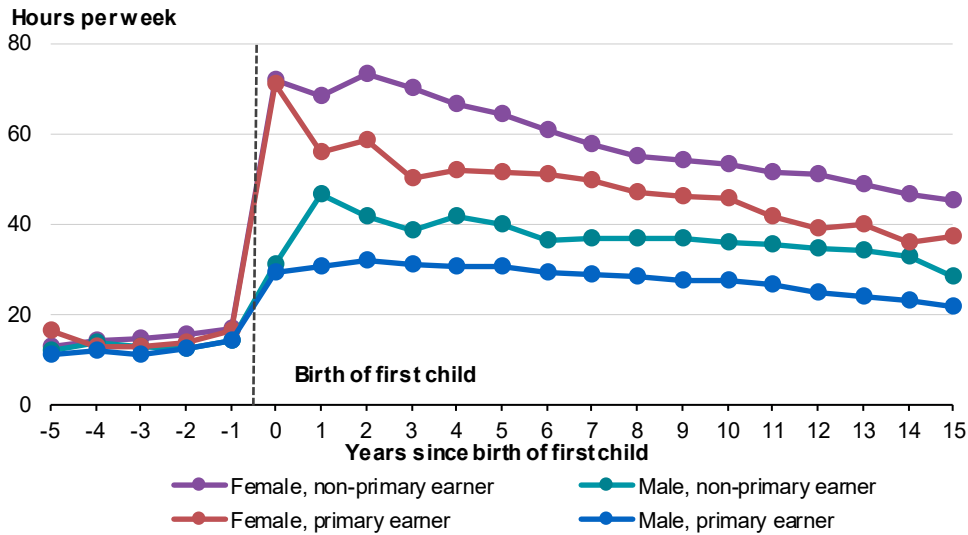
Source: HILDA Restricted Release 22

Note: Includes all surveyed men and women, regardless of couple status of household type.

Treasury analysis found that women’s earnings fall by an average of 55 per cent in the first five years of parenthood, and this remains significant a decade into parenthood. In contrast, fathers’ work patterns remain, on average, unchanged, and parenthood has no significant long-term impact on earnings.

Differences in caring and household responsibilities hold true regardless of earning potential. In heterosexual partnerships where the woman is the primary earner, household labour is still disproportionately performed by women after the arrival of children (Chart 2.3).

Chart 2.3: Total time per week spent on unpaid domestic and care work, by years since birth of first child



Source: HILDA, Restricted Release 22.

Note: Values from two years after birth onwards are calculated as a two-period rolling average to smooth volatility. Primary earning status is defined as earning at least 25 per cent more than the individual's partner and is calculated yearly. Individuals can change from primary to non-primary earner over time.

Sharing care

Sharing unpaid care benefits both men and women. International evidence suggests that nations with a more equal distribution of unpaid care between women and men report higher employment rates for women and lower gender gaps in earnings.¹³ Domestically, data suggests that more active engagement in unpaid work, including caring for children, heightens relationship satisfaction for fathers and improves their ability to balance work and family commitments.¹⁴

Access to well-functioning formal care and support systems can facilitate a more equal distribution of unpaid care. These systems provide women with greater autonomy to increase workforce participation to their preferred levels. Greater workforce participation can increase women's economic security and financial independence.

Use of formal child care is increasing. This indicates parents are utilising formal child care to help them balance paid work and caring responsibilities.

Reforms to Paid Parental Leave will lead to more equitable outcomes

Parental leave boosts women's economic security by maintaining important linkages between women and their employers, ensuring employers can retain valued staff. Paid parental leave increases the number of employees returning to work after parental leave, reduces recruitment costs and improves staff morale and productivity.

The availability and uptake of employer funded parental leave is also increasing. In 2022–23, the proportion of employers offering universally available employer-funded parental leave rose by nine percentage points from the previous year to 21 per cent, in acknowledgement of the important role both parents play in child care. Men are also increasingly viewing access to adequate care supports as an integral feature of a successful career. The proportion of employer-funded primary carer parental leave taken by men increased by 0.6 percentage points in 2022–23, with this shift being led by large employers in male-dominated industries.¹⁵

The Government's reforms to its Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme aim to support this shift in culture. The Government's policy to pay superannuation on Government-funded PPL will recognise the contribution parents make to society and reduce the negative impact of parental leave on retirement incomes. Further information on this commitment is included in Chapter 3: *Economic equality and security*.

Gender analysis in practice: Expansion to Paid Parental Leave

The Government's expansion to the PPL scheme was designed to improve support for families and to have a positive impact on gender equality by encouraging fathers and partners to play a more active role in the care of children.

In expanding the PPL scheme to 26 weeks by 1 July 2026, the Government also sought to support more equal sharing of parenting and household responsibilities. Compared to women, fewer men take up Government-funded PPL. In 2022–23, 171,280 parents received Parental Leave Pay (with 99 per cent being the biological mother), while 88,645 parents claimed Dad and Partner Pay (with 98 per cent being the biological father).

Gender analysis concluded that fathers and partners taking leave following the birth or adoption of a child has positive impacts for women and their families. Under the new scheme, parents can take a portion of PPL at the same time which will increase to four weeks from 1 July 2025 (up from two weeks currently). This supports parents to optimise their health, family and work obligations, with periods of concurrency allowing fathers and partners to undertake child caring duties and support the birth parent during recovery from childbirth. Research suggests this leads to more equitable division of care over a child's lifetime.¹⁶

To encourage more men to take up Government-funded PPL, the Government is increasing the reserved period of leave for each parent to four weeks by 1 July 2026. This means those weeks can only be accessed by that parent but with flexibility for parents to take up to four weeks concurrently (from 1 July 2025). These changes, together with the increase in the total amount of PPL available, are designed to encourage more equal sharing of parenting and household responsibilities. This contributes to gender equality and better supports parents to spend time with their children and participate in family life. Single parents will be able to access the full entitlement as it increases.

In addition to expanding the PPL scheme, the Government has also amended the *Fair Work Act 2009* to include greater flexibility for employees taking unpaid parental leave from 1 July 2023, allowing them to take up to 100 days of their 12-month leave entitlement flexibly during the 24-month period after the birth or placement of their child.

Further, the Government is providing expanded parental leave entitlements to employees of the Australian Public Service (APS), supporting parenting as an equal partnership and encouraging provision of best practice entitlements in the private sector. Parental leave for APS employees will increase to provide equal leave of 18 weeks for both caregivers by the end of February 2027. Primary caregivers will access 18 weeks from 2024, with the ability to take it at half pay. Secondary caregivers receive eight weeks in 2024, progressively increasing to 18 weeks by the end of February 2027.

Societal barriers deter men from increasing participation in unpaid care

Evidence suggests that when fathers take parental leave in the first year of their child's life, they are more likely to continue sharing in the care of their children. However, men who want to take on more care at home often face barriers to doing so. For example, many men who take parental leave report discrimination when they return to work and men who choose to access flexible work in the form of reduced hours as their children grow up experience higher levels of discrimination or harassment. This can discourage men from participating to the extent they want to in caring and household responsibilities. Male-dominated industries are less likely to offer universally available paid parental leave, presenting another barrier to access.¹⁷

Fathers experience emotional and social benefits from being supported to have an increased role in their children's lives. KPMG found that greater involvement in their children's lives increases ongoing participation of fathers in child care and other forms of unpaid work, heightens relationship satisfaction and contributes to a better balance of work and family commitments.¹⁸ This has positive implications for fathers' physical and mental health and, according to research, helps to rebalance the unpaid caring responsibilities in the home, giving women more flexibility to engage in the paid workforce to their preferred levels.¹⁹

For children, research has shown that having an engaged and involved father increases the likelihood that the child will thrive across all areas of their life including their physical and mental health, self-esteem, educational outcomes and career prospects.²⁰ This is all in addition to the economic benefit it provides for women.

The Government recognises how critical the early years are for children's development and continued success over their lifetime. The Early Years Strategy, released on 7 May 2024, sets out the Government's ten-year vision for children's wellbeing and outcomes, and to drive policy and investment. The Strategy seeks to empower all parents and caregivers with the skills, resources and capabilities they need in their roles. The Strategy was shaped through consultation with families, carers, early childhood experts, the early childhood sector and young children.

Budget highlights: Supporting parents and carers

The Government will extend existing community support for parents and caregivers to improve child outcomes in the early years, boost parents' confidence and encourage more shared care of children, in turn facilitating an increase in women's economic participation. This includes:

- providing \$4.8 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Fathering Project to continue to provide targeted parenting support for fathers, building their confidence to be primary or equal caregivers
- funding of \$4.6 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Raising Children Network. The Raising Children's Network provides web-based parenting information. Funding will further build parenting skills, knowledge and improve equitable access to information for all parents and caregivers
- providing \$4.3 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Supporting Expecting and Parenting Teens program administered by the Brave Foundation, to continue providing mentoring and case management support for young parents to strengthen their parenting skills, achieve their goals and break the cycle of disadvantage faced by young parents and their children.

These investments are aligned with the Early Years Strategy 2024–2034.

Valuing the paid care sector and other feminised industries

Women are overrepresented in caring, teaching and nursing roles partly due to attitudes about them being 'natural carers'. Workers in these industries have historically been lower paid compared with workers in other industries, including many where the work has lower educational attainment requirements.

Care and support jobs are historically undervalued

Caring roles were historically performed for free by family members, mainly women, disguising the level of skill and experience required to perform them and assuming a 'natural' inclination to care. These lingering assumptions devalue the additional qualifications and standards of care that are now mandatory for some paid care roles. Although greater overall workforce participation by women has led to many caring roles transitioning to the formal economy, most of those roles are still held by women and many attract below-average pay.

While pay for care and support jobs varies by role, median weekly earnings for many care and support roles remain below the economy-wide average.²¹ Low wages for care and support workers not only has the potential to undervalue their work but contributes to the gender pay gap and reinforces barriers to expanding the workforce. Ongoing government action continues to support strong wage growth for care and support economy workers.

Budget highlights: Valuing care workers

On 7 December 2022, promoting gender equality became an objective of the *Fair Work Act 2009*, and on 6 March 2023 expert panels were created at the Fair Work Commission to focus on pay equity and the care and community sector.

In addition to these changes, the Government recognises the significant contribution of care workers to Australia's society and economy. The Government is committed to better valuing care workers and attracting and retaining staff in these vital sectors.

The Government is committed to provide funding towards a wage increase for early childhood education and care workers to recognise the value of the workforce and support the Government's ambition of universal access to affordable, quality early childhood education and care. Details will be finalised following the Fair Work Commission processes currently underway.

The Government strongly supports the decision of the Fair Work Commission to further increase the award wages for aged care workers. The Government has committed to funding this increase to wages once the final decision is delivered, building on the \$11.3 billion already allocated to support the interim increase of 15 per cent for aged care workers. A primary consideration for the Fair Work Commission in this case was the historic undervaluation of these female-dominated occupations.

The Government is also investing \$87.2 million in workforce initiatives to support, attract and retain aged care staff. This will benefit women, who comprise over 85 per cent of the current aged care workforce.

Addressing workforce shortages in highly feminised industries

Completion rates for nursing and teacher education courses, which are highly feminised industries, have declined. This has contributed to acute labour supply shortages across care and teaching professions.²² The Employment White Paper and Australian Universities Accord Final Report found one of the barriers to completing these qualifications is that many care and feminised industries require students to undertake lengthy placements, putting students at a financial disadvantage by preventing students from engaging in paid work.²³

Budget highlights: Supporting nursing, teaching and social work students

The Government will provide \$1.6 billion over 11 years to support nursing and midwifery, teaching and social work students in higher education and VET while they undertake mandatory placements required by their course. From 1 July 2025, the Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) will provide \$319.50 per week to eligible students for the duration of their placement. The CPP is expected to support more than 73,000 students per year.

Gender analysis in practice: Mandatory placements support for highly feminised industries

The Government's support payment for higher education and VET students undertaking unpaid mandatory placements in nursing and midwifery, teaching and social work courses will advance gender equality by reducing barriers to the completion of qualifications and assisting in meeting skills shortages in highly feminised fields.

Women make up around 87 per cent of nursing, 75 per cent of initial teacher education and 85 per cent of social work enrolments in higher education.²⁴ Many students in these cohorts also juggle full-time or part-time study with paid work as well as caring and parental responsibilities.

Completion rates for teachers, nurses and social workers have declined over the decade. Four-year completion rates show that for teaching students commencing in 2005, the completion rate was 55.4 per cent, and 40.9 per cent for social workers. For students commencing in 2019, the four-year completion rate for teachers had fallen to 30.1 per cent, and 26.3 per cent for social work.²⁵ Similarly, the four-year completion rate for nursing fell from 64.3 per cent to 54.1 per cent over the same period. These degrees require lengthy, mandatory placements, which are an essential part of study and preparedness for the workplace, but often act as a disincentive to completing the qualification.

The Government is providing a Commonwealth Prac Payment for eligible students to mitigate financial hardship faced while completing mandatory placements in nursing and midwifery, teaching and social work courses leading to these important professions. The payments have been designed to target those who need the financial assistance the most, noting these education pathways also have high representation of First Nations, regional and remote, and mature aged students.

Economic equality and security

There have been significant improvements in women's economic equality and security in recent decades. More women are attaining higher educational qualifications and participating in the workforce, increasing financial independence. However, gaps persist between women's and men's economic outcomes. The gender pay gap remains significant and women are retiring with lower superannuation balances.

In *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (Working for Women)*, the Government has committed to a number of objectives to reach its ambition to achieve economic equality. This includes closing the gender pay gap; reducing gender segregation within industries and occupations; ending gender discrimination, sexual harassment and violence in the workplace; and closing the retirement income gap.

This Budget includes actions which will drive change and make further progress towards achieving economic equality and security for all women in Australia, whilst also delivering cost-of-living relief. All 6.5 million women taxpayers will receive a tax cut from 1 July 2024, which will provide cost-of-living support for low- to middle-income families and reduce disincentives for women to take on more hours of work. The Government is also addressing cost-of-living pressures through further increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and delivering additional energy bill relief to all households.

The Government is committed to reducing workforce gender segregation as part of creating a future made in Australia. These investments include \$55.6 million to launch the Building Women's Careers program to create structural and cultural change in male-dominated workplaces so more women pursue careers in key high demand industries. The Government is also investing \$38.2 million over eight years to support a thriving, skilled and diverse STEM workforce. These investments are in addition to the Commonwealth Prac Payments, highlighted in Chapter 2: *Unpaid and paid care*, which provide support for eligible students in nursing and midwifery, teaching and social work courses while they attend mandatory placements. Additionally, the Government is capping indexation of Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt to the lower of the Consumer Price Index or Wage Price Index, which will benefit more women who hold the majority of HELP debts.

The Government is investing in women's economic security by paying superannuation on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave for births or adoptions on or after 1 July 2025. This is a key step towards reducing the retirement savings gap and improving the fairness of Australia's retirement income system.

Women's economic equality – key statistics

<p>Labour force participation rate (March 2024)</p> <p>Women: 62.6% Men: 70.6%</p>	<p>Full-time average weekly ordinary earnings gender pay gap (November 2023)</p> <p>12.0% or \$238.00 per week on average</p>
<p>Weekly paid hours usually worked (March 2024)</p> <p>Women: 31.9 Men: 38.7</p>	<p>Total remuneration gender pay gap (2022–2023)</p> <p>21.7% or \$26,393 per year on average</p>
<p>Make-up of the clean energy industry (2023)</p> <p>Women: 35% Men: 65%</p>	<p>Median super balance approaching retirement, 60–64 years old (2020–2021)</p> <p>Women: \$158,800 Men: \$212,000 \$53,200 gap</p>

Providing cost-of-living relief to women and families

High cost-of-living pressures are being felt broadly across the community. The Government recognises that households differ in their capacity to cope with cost-of-living pressures. For this reason, it is continuing its cost-of-living support to help relieve pressure on households. This support is particularly important for single women, who are almost twice as likely to face indicators of financial stress compared with coupled households.

The Government's cost-of-living tax cuts will deliver tax relief to all Australian taxpayers from 1 July 2024. All 6.5 million women taxpayers will receive a tax cut in 2024–25, benefitting by an average amount of around \$1,650 relative to 2023–24 settings. Compared with previously legislated settings, 5.8 million women taxpayers (90 per cent of women taxpayers) will receive a larger tax cut under the Government's tax plan, with an average additional tax cut of \$707.

People in female-dominated occupations, such as teaching, nursing and aged care, are also among the most likely to benefit from the tax changes, with over 95 per cent of these taxpayers receiving more tax relief compared to the previously legislated settings.

The Government's tax cuts are expected to raise labour supply, particularly for women. Within households, a combination of factors can influence individual decisions to participate in the labour market, and the extent to which people work. Women are more likely to be lower income earners and the interactions between the tax and transfer system can create additional disincentives for women to participate as fully as they wish to. As such, the same change to tax rates can produce different labour supply responses between men and women.

Women, particularly women with children, are more likely to adjust their work hours in response to changed tax rates than men. People with less formal education and those with reduced potential to earn higher incomes are also more responsive to changes in after-tax incomes than other cohorts.

By directing more tax relief to people on low-and middle-incomes, the Government's tax changes are expected to raise women's labour supply by around 630,000 hours per week. This is more than double that expected under the previously legislated settings (around 230,000 hours). This increase is being driven by increases in hours worked and greater participation of women with taxable incomes between \$20,000 and \$75,000.

The Government's tax cuts build on other government initiatives that support women's workforce participation, including the Cheaper Child Care reforms that came into effect in July 2023.

Box 8: Cameos – Cost-of-living tax cuts and Cheaper Child Care reforms¹

The new cost-of-living tax cuts from 1 July 2024, and the Government's Cheaper Child Care reforms, which came into effect in July 2023, will offer cost-of-living support by allowing low- to middle- income families to keep more of what they earn.

Example 1: Rebecca is working full-time on the national minimum wage (\$45,906) and is a sole parent of a three-year-old child who attends long day care five days per week. She is a recipient of the Parenting Payment Single. Under the Government's changes, Rebecca will receive a tax cut of \$1,077 and an additional \$1,625 in Child Care Subsidy. In total, Rebecca's benefit is \$2,702, equivalent to a 5.0 per cent increase in her disposable income.

Example 2: Yumna works part-time three days a week earning \$35,925 and her partner works full-time earning \$67,646. Together, Yumna and her partner have a combined household annual income of \$103,571. The couple have a three-year-old who attends centre-based long day care three days a week and a nine-year-old who attends outside school hours care for three days a week. With the Government's changes, the couple will receive a tax cut of \$1,902 and an additional \$2,043 in Child Care Subsidy. The couple's net benefit from the tax cuts and increased Child Care Subsidy is \$3,945, equivalent to a 4.7 per cent increase in their disposable income.

1 Examples are based on estimated tax and transfer policy settings for the 2024–25 income year. Households are assumed: not to be renting; not to have a HECS-HELP debt; to only receive private income from employment; to hold suitable private health cover and not to be paying the Medicare levy surcharge. In both examples, the three-year-old child is in long day care for ten hours per day on the same days worked by the sole parent or the part-time worker, for 50 weeks per year, at a cost of \$12.85 per hour. In example 2, the nine-year-old child attends outside school hours care for five hours per day on the same days worked by the part-time worker, for 40 weeks per year, at a cost of \$8.80 per hour. In example 2, the part-time worker is earning the female median taxable income in 2021–22 while her partner earns the median taxable income in 2021–22. Income tax includes the impact of personal tax rates and thresholds, the Medicare levy, as well as relevant tax offsets including the low income tax offset and beneficiary tax offset. Disposable income is the income available to a person or household inclusive of their private income and transfer payments, after income tax and net of child care costs.

The Government is also addressing cost-of-living pressures through further increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 10 per cent and delivering \$300 in additional energy bill relief to more than 10.0 million households.

Increases in the cost of housing put more women, particularly single women, at risk of experiencing rental stress. The increase to maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance responds to recommendations from the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee. The 2024–25 Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee report notes that renters are at a greater risk of financial stress and poverty and many Australians on income support find their incomes heavily absorbed by rent. As at March 2024, Commonwealth Rent Assistance reduces the incidence of rental stress amongst recipients by around 31 percentage points.

Budget highlights: Cost of living relief to households

Cost-of-living Tax Cuts

From 1 July 2024, the Government is delivering tax cuts to all 13.6 million Australian taxpayers, including all 6.5 million women who pay income tax. Compared to previously legislated settings, 11.5 million taxpayers will receive a bigger tax cut, including 5.8 million women taxpayers. The Government's tax changes are designed to provide cost-of-living relief to middle Australia without adding to the inflation outlook, return bracket creep, and boost labour supply, particularly for women.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance

The Government is increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 10 per cent. This builds on the Government's increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance in the last Budget and will help address rental affordability challenges for recipients. Stable and affordable housing is a key enabler of meaningful economic and social participation. The Government provides Commonwealth Rent Assistance to income support recipients and those on Family Tax Benefit Part A renting privately or in community housing to assist with the cost of housing.

This will support a significant number of women experiencing rental stress. The change benefits a number of vulnerable groups, including single women households who are 51 per cent of households eligible for the maximum Commonwealth Rent Assistance rate. Single women households are more vulnerable to rental stress due to the gender pay gap, responsibilities as single parents and disproportionately facing family and domestic violence. Around 200,000 households who stand to benefit from the increase are couple households, with the benefit flowing to women in these households too.

Energy Bill Relief Fund

The Government is continuing to shield households and small businesses from energy price increases, providing \$3.5 billion in additional energy bill relief and expanding eligibility from 5.0 million to more than 10.0 million households. From 1 July 2024, all households will receive rebates of \$300 on their electricity bills and around 1.0 million eligible small businesses will receive \$325. This is in addition to the up to \$1.5 billion committed in Budget 2023–24, which provided targeted relief for around 5.0 million households and 1.0 million small businesses.

Reducing student debt

The Government is capping indexation of student debt to the lower of the Consumer Price Index or the Wage Price Index, so that growth in debt does not outpace wages growth. Of the around \$3.0 billion in student debt expected to be written off, more than half of this is held by women.

Building a gender-balanced workforce for a future made in Australia

In building the skills Australia needs for the workforce of the future, the Government is taking action to ensure that women are well represented across all key industries.

A future made in Australia requires a highly skilled and diverse workforce. Currently women are under-represented in industries that will support Australia's net-zero transition. Within the clean energy industry, women make up 35 per cent of the workforce.²⁶ For some occupations, the numbers are much lower. In 2022, women made up only 6 per cent of solar installers, 8 per cent of energy efficiency engineers and 4 per cent of wind turbine technicians.²⁷ Construction is Australia's second most male-dominated industry, after mining, with women making up only 26 per cent of the workforce.²⁸

Reducing gender segregation in these industries requires more women and girls in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) fields. In 2021, women made up only 37 per cent of enrolments in university STEM courses and 17 per cent of vocational education and training STEM enrolments.²⁹ In the same year, women represented only 15 per cent of Australia's STEM workforce.³⁰

Reducing workforce gender segregation is integral to addressing and preventing skills shortages in high-growth industries. It is likely that there will need to be a 127 per cent increase in Australia's clean energy supply workforce by 2033 to achieve Australia's legislated target of net zero emissions by 2050.³¹ Increasing women's participation in currently male-dominated industries can help address skill shortages by supporting increased labour mobility and expanding the talent pool for businesses to draw on.

Workforce gender segregation is driven by undervaluation of many feminised jobs, structural and cultural barriers to women's participation in male-dominated industries, the unequal division of unpaid care work within households and education and career choices influenced by gender stereotypes.

The Government's investments to create a future made in Australia will seek to address these drivers of workforce gender segregation to ensure that women share in the jobs of the future. The Australian Skills Guarantee, which comes into effect on 1 July 2024, will help to increase the number of women working on major Government-funded construction and ICT projects, and investments via the new National Skills Agreement and Fee-Free TAFE will improve access and support VET completion rates for women.

The Commonwealth and state and territory governments' Fee-Free TAFE initiative is continuing to exceed targets and remove financial barriers to training and upskilling. Fee-Free TAFE is targeted towards priority cohorts, including women facing economic insecurity, women undertaking study in non-traditional fields and unpaid carers. In 2023, more than 355,000 Australians enrolled in Fee-Free TAFE, surpassing the initial first year target of 180,000 places, with 62 per cent of these enrolments by women. As part of the Fee-Free TAFE commitment, a further 300,000 places are available from 2024 to 2026.

In addition, the Government is continuing to address current and emerging workforce skills and training needs through Jobs and Skills Australia. Jobs and Skills Australia has a legislative function to provide advice on opportunities to remove barriers to gender equality in the provision of training and in the labour market, to improve gender equality outcomes.

This Budget builds on these investments in skills and training, by establishing the Building Women's Careers program to increase women's participation in construction, clean energy and advanced manufacturing sectors. This Budget also includes funding to scale up the Government's Women in STEM and science engagement programs, which will enable more women to make the most of opportunities in growing industries, such as technology, renewable energy and quantum.

Budget highlights: Reducing industry gender segregation for a future made in Australia

Building Women's Careers program

The Government will invest \$55.6 million over four years, commencing in 2024–25, in the Building Women's Careers program which will drive structural and systemic change in training and work environments. The program will fund large-scale projects and smaller, place-based partnerships to improve women's access to flexible, safe and inclusive training and work opportunities in key male-dominated industries. The Government will work with women's services, industry, employers, training providers across target industries and sectors including construction, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, digital and technology to support women and create the conditions for them to train and take up jobs in these sectors. This will help to build a future made in Australia and help to address barriers to women's participation in priority industries. Around ten large-scale projects and several smaller projects will be funded by the program through a grants process.

Diversity in STEM

In February 2024, the Government released the independent Pathway to Diversity in STEM Review final recommendations report. The report makes 11 recommendations on how policies and programs can help overcome cultural and structural barriers that limit women and girls, and other under-represented groups, from participating in STEM education and careers.

In response to the Pathway to Diversity in STEM Review, the Government is providing \$38.2 million over eight years from 2023–24 (and \$1.3 million ongoing) to support a thriving, skilled and diverse STEM workforce. This funding will scale up Women in STEM and science engagement programs that are creating positive change to attract and retain more women, and other under-represented groups, in STEM education and jobs.

MYEFO highlights: Supporting women's skills development

The new five-year National Skills Agreement with all states and territories commenced on 1 January 2024, with gender equality identified as one of the national priorities. The National Skills Agreement will see the Commonwealth Government invest up to \$12.6 billion in state and territory training systems, taking the total combined investment to \$30.0 billion. \$250.0 million of Commonwealth funding, to be matched by states and territories, is dedicated to improving VET qualification completion rates for women as well as other cohorts who face completion challenges. Governments will work collaboratively and purposefully towards this national priority and will apply focussed effort to addressing gender equality in the VET sector. The National Skills Agreement commits to deliver training for critical industries, including essential care services.

Making student loans fairer

The Government is also ensuring that women benefit from the changing workforce needs of the future by acting on the recommendations of the Australian Universities Accord. This includes supporting students during and after their study, through the new Commonwealth Prac Payment for nursing and midwifery, teaching and social work students, and reforms to make student loans fairer so all Australians can access higher education without upfront fees.

The Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) system has supported increased access to higher education without upfront fees, including for women. Australian women are now more educated than ever before, and increasingly, more educated than men. 36 per cent of women aged 15–74 held a bachelor's degree or above in 2023, compared with 28 per cent of men.³² Despite more women obtaining higher education qualifications than men, a gender pay gap is present on women's entry to the workforce. In 2017, men's undergraduate median starting salaries were greater than women's in 16 out of 20 fields of education.³³ This can impact women's ability to repay their HELP debt.

Around 61.1 per cent of HELP debtors are women, equivalent to nearly 2.0 million people.³⁴ Women also hold 58.5 per cent of the total amount of outstanding HELP debt. Women are more impacted by increases in indexation rates as they typically take longer to repay their HELP debt. Women's ability to repay debt is affected by historic underpayment in feminised industries, occupational segregation, and because they take more time out of the workforce to undertake unpaid care.

The Government is capping indexation of HELP debt to the lower of the Consumer Price Index or Wage Price Index, which will benefit women and make student loans fairer.

Budget highlights: Making the HELP system fairer and investing in women's skills

This Budget makes the HELP system fairer, including for women. To ensure that growth in HELP debts does not outpace wages growth, the Government will cap indexation of HELP debts to the lower of the Consumer Price Index or Wage Price Index. The change in indexation will be retroactively applied from 1 June 2023, reducing indexation in 2023 from 7.1 per cent to 3.2 per cent for more than 3.0 million individuals with outstanding HELP, VET Student Loan, Australian Apprenticeship Support Loan and other student support loan accounts at that time.

Narrowing the gender pay gap

The national gender pay gap monitored by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which measures the difference in base salary earnings between women and men in full-time work, has fallen for the third consecutive time to a record low of 12.0 per cent in November 2023. Progress over the last 12 months is partly attributable to a strong outcome for award wages from the annual wage review and newly implemented enterprise agreements for essential workers in the health care and social assistance and education and training industries, which generally have a higher proportion of women. Women's average weekly ordinary time earnings increased 5.5 per cent in 2023, compared with growth of 4.0 per cent for men.

Despite this progress, the gender gap remains significant. Women working full-time earn, on average, \$238 less per week than men working full-time. This is a difference of around \$12,376 per year. When total remuneration for full-time, part-time and casual employees is considered, the gender pay gap is greater. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) calculates the average total remuneration gap for employees in organisations with 100 or more employees at 21.7 per cent in 2022–23.³⁵ Total remuneration includes base salary, superannuation, overtime, bonuses, and other additional payments, with part-time and casual roles converted into annualised full-time equivalent earnings.

This gap is driven by a range of factors, including differences in gender representation and remuneration across occupations and industries, the impact of caring responsibilities on patterns of work, and gender discrimination and bias. These factors are complex, interrelated and can often compound over a woman's lifetime.

There is a clear link between more women in management and in executive leadership positions, such as directors, CEOs and key management personnel, and a lower gender pay gap. This is not only because women managers and executives are paid more than the average employee; employers with women CEOs have, on average, lower gender pay gaps even when their pay is not included in the calculation.³⁶ Despite this, in 2021 there were almost twice as many men than women in Australia's highest paid 5 per cent of occupations.³⁷

Reporting employer gender pay gaps

Following amendments to the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* in 2023, the Government has taken action to close the gender pay gap through publishing employer gender pay gap data. In February 2024, WGEA published, for the first time, the gender pay gaps for private sector employers with 100 or more employees in 2022–23. The dataset captures the gender pay gaps for almost 5,000 Australian private sector employers, covering almost five million employees.

The Government's decision to publish employer gender pay gaps is a catalyst for change, bringing transparency and accountability as well as creating healthy competition among peers. For employers, it is an opportunity to reconsider how they hire, promote, retain and remunerate their staff. For employees, it equips them with the information they need when choosing employers and to raise questions with their current employer. In early 2025, WGEA will publish Commonwealth Government employer gender pay gaps.

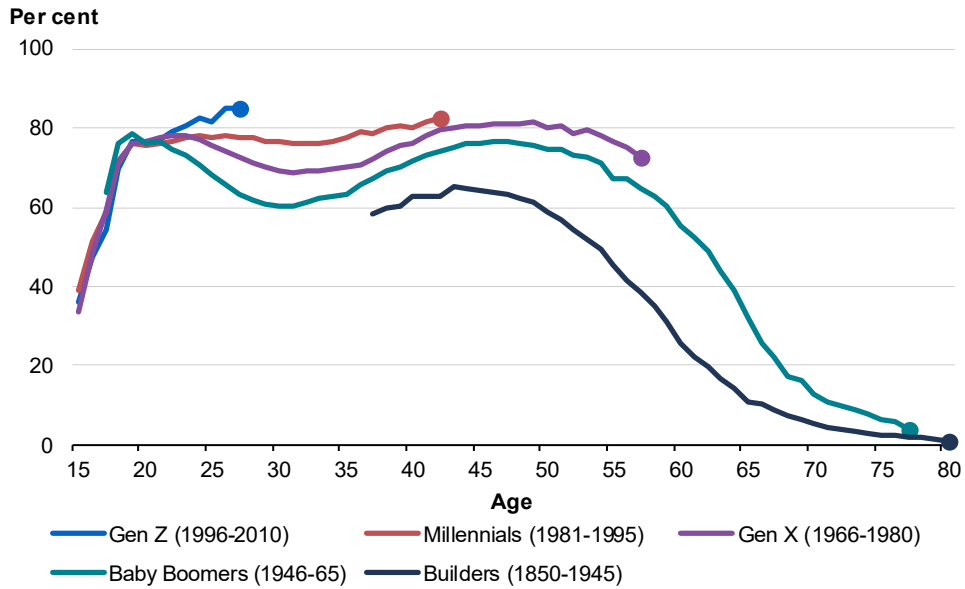
Women's workforce participation

Reducing barriers to women's labour force participation is central to improving women's economic equality and security. Women's workforce participation has increased significantly over the past 40 years, from 44.6 per cent in 1984 to 62.6 per cent in 2024.³⁸ Younger generations of women are now more likely to participate in the workforce, and for longer (Chart 3.1).

Recent strength in the labour market has improved prospects for cohorts who have traditionally faced barriers to employment. Women's labour force participation rate rose to a record high in November 2023 at 63.1 per cent, along with a record high employment-to-population ratio of 60.7 per cent.

The increase in participation has been driven by changing social attitudes, increased educational attainment for women, increased flexibility offered by employers, and caring work moving into the formal economy. Government action aims to break down barriers to participation. This action includes the Cheaper Child Care reforms, broadening access to early childhood education and care, reforming the Government-funded Paid Parental Leave scheme and investing in skills development. In addition, the Government is implementing a new voluntary pre-employment service for disadvantaged parents of children under six years of age from 1 November 2024, following the abolition of ParentsNext.

Chart 3.1: Women's workforce participation rates by age and generation



Source: Treasury analysis of ABS Labour Force microdata, 1982 – 2023.

Note: Generations are defined as: Builders (1850 to 1945), Baby Boomers (1946 to 1965), Gen X (1966 to 1980), Millennials (1981 to 1995) and Gen Z (1996 to 2010).

Budget highlights: Better evidence for better outcomes

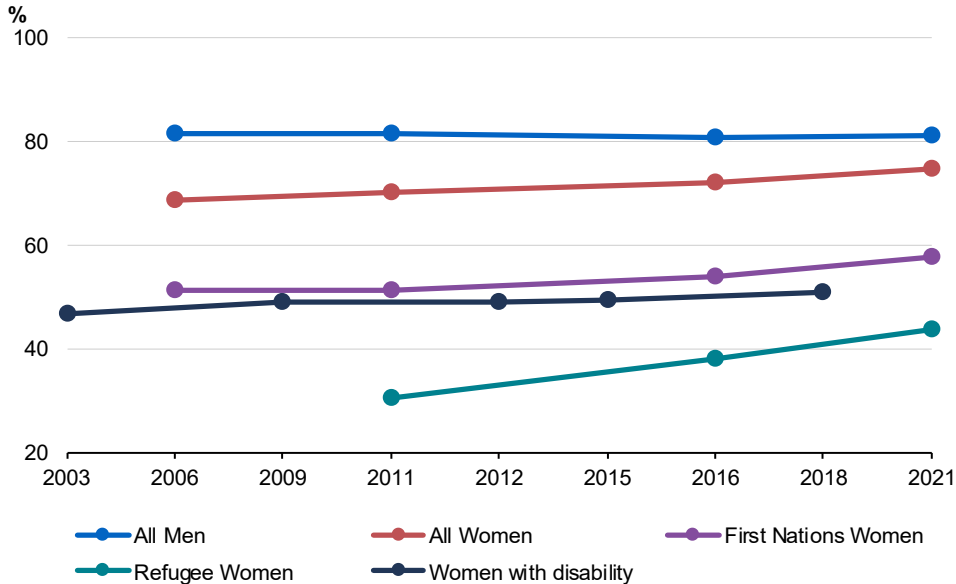
The Government is taking steps to improve the measurement of wellbeing, disaggregate social trends by cohort, and to drive new outcomes-focussed policy approaches that prioritise meaningful results for people and communities.

- The Government's \$100.0 million Outcomes Fund will be established from 2024–25 to fund projects aimed at supporting those experiencing entrenched disadvantage. The Fund will focus on three key areas: improving outcomes for children and families; helping those experiencing barriers to employment; and, improving access to services for people facing or experiencing homelessness. Consideration will be given to projects that align with the Government's strategic priorities, including gender equality.
- The Government released Measuring What Matters, Australia's National Wellbeing Framework, in July 2023 to put people and progress, fairness and opportunity at the very core of thinking about the economy and society, now and into the future. The Government has committed to \$14.8 million over five years to deliver the General Social Survey on an annual basis for timely insights on the wellbeing of Australians. This funding will also increase the sample of the General Social Survey to ensure the overarching themes of inclusion, fairness and equity are representative for all segments of the Australian population. It will increase the data that is available by gender, strengthening the capacity of the Framework to identify opportunities to improve wellbeing and inform policy change.

Women in Australia have not experienced equal progress

Workforce participation by First Nations women, women with disability and refugee women has increased over time (Chart 3.2). However, unique and diverse barriers to work mean labour market outcomes for these cohorts continue to lag, with employment rates well below the national average.

Chart 3.2: Participation rates of people aged 15–64 for select cohorts



Source: Census (ABS, 2006, 2011, 2016, 2021), Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers (ABS 2019), Australian Census and Migrants (ABS, 2021)

In 2020, the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women’s Voices) Report identified several barriers to employment and economic participation for First Nations women including: extensive family and community roles and a lack of job opportunities in remote areas. Within workplaces, First Nations women experience a lack of diversity across sectors and roles, impediments to employment and career progression, a lack of respect and cultural safety, and inadequate supports in the workplace.

While participation rates for First Nations women rose to 58 per cent in 2021 (up from 51 per cent in 2006), a gap remains. As of 2021, workforce participation rates for First Nations women were 17.7 percentage points lower than that of other women in Australia. Although, the gap in the employment rate between First Nations people and other Australians narrowed with higher levels of education. Furthermore, First Nations women with a Bachelor degree or higher had a higher full-time employment rate than other women, with a gap of 5.4 percentage points.³⁹

Budget highlights: Increasing economic opportunities in remote areas

The Government is investing \$777.4 million over five years from 2023–24 (and \$255.5 million per year ongoing) in a new Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program to create up to 3,000 jobs in remote Australia and support income support recipients move into paid employment. Funding includes establishing a Community Jobs and Business Fund to support community development and the creation of employment opportunities through funding capital, equipment and capacity building services. It will be developed in partnership with First Nations people commencing in the second half of 2024. It is the first step by Government to replace the Community Development Program with real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions.

Employment supports many people with disability to have more control over their lives, be financially independent and improve their standard of living. This can have positive impacts on their mental and physical health and wellbeing. The intersection of gender inequality and disability discrimination means women with disability experience unique challenges entering the workforce, working to their capacity, or being supported to remain in the workforce. Women with disability have poorer employment outcomes and experience lower labour force participation rates, higher rates of casual employment and lower pay than men with disability, and women without disability. Employed women with disability are also almost twice as likely to be working part-time (54 per cent), compared with men with disability (28 per cent).⁴⁰

To enhance support for people with disability, this Budget includes \$227.6 million over five years to implement a new specialist disability employment program to replace the existing program by 1 July 2025.

Gender analysis in practice: A new disability employment program

Labour force participation is lower for women with disability than for men with disability, and women with disability are also more likely to be casually employed than men.⁴¹ To address these imbalances, the design of the new specialist disability employment program will reduce barriers and improve the tailoring of support, enabling more women with disability to participate.

The changes will have a positive impact on advancing gender equality by improving access to employment support for women with disability. In particular, the more flexible service offering of the new program will allow women to stay connected to the program and continue receiving support while also balancing other responsibilities. This is expected to benefit women who have caring responsibilities, are working part-time or who contribute to their community in other ways.

The new specialist disability employment program will also provide more tailored support, which will benefit women looking for work or wanting to increase their participation. Up to an additional 1,900 women per year are anticipated to participate in the program as a result of expanding eligibility to include people with a future work capacity of under eight hours per week. Up to an additional 5,000 women per year are anticipated to enter the program as a result of removing the requirement to be on an income support payment.

Workforce participation for migrant and refugee women has increased over the last decade but remains significantly lower than for migrant and refugee men and Australian-born women. Issues of gender discrimination and bias are magnified for migrant women. They are more likely to be secondary visa holders, often to their male partners. They can also face difficulty having their qualifications recognised and, as a result, finding work to match their skills. Other challenges faced by migrant and refugee women in entering the workforce can include limited language proficiency and cultural differences (for example, in relation to child care and domestic responsibilities).

Budget highlights: Empowering migrant and refugee women

The Government will provide \$15.0 million over three years from 2024–25 for information and education activities to provide migrant workers with accurate and appropriate information about workplace safeguards, protections and compliance measures related to migration laws. This will empower migrant women, who are over-represented in insecure work, to report allegations of worker exploitation without fear of reprisals.

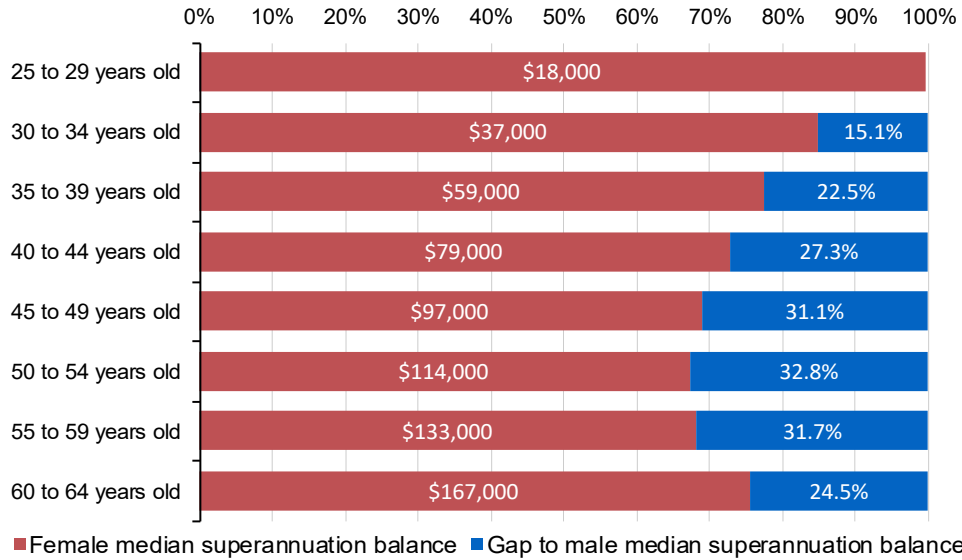
The Government also will provide \$3.8 million over four years from 2024–25 to continue conversational English classes in Community Hubs. These classes remove a barrier for many migrant women accessing English language support through the provision of on-site childminding facilities.

Enhancing lifetime economic security and gender equality

Throughout a woman's lifetime, lower hourly and weekly earnings and lower wealth accumulation compound to produce lower superannuation balances and less economic security in retirement. Women aged 60 to 64 have a median superannuation balance 25 per cent less than men of the same age. Although this difference is narrowing over time, as long as women have lower workforce participation and lower incomes than men, a gender gap in superannuation balances will remain (Chart 3.3).

The Women's Economic Equality Taskforce recommended paying superannuation on Paid Parental Leave (PPL) to help reduce the gender wealth and superannuation gap. Additionally, *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Implementation Framework identified paying superannuation on PPL as a policy action to make superannuation schemes fairer for First Nations women.

Chart 3.3: Female median superannuation balance and gap to male median superannuation balance by age cohort, as a percentage of male median superannuation balance



Source: ATO Member Account Attribute Service/Member Account Transaction Service, 2020–21

Note: The median superannuation balance is calculated based on those with superannuation balances.

Budget highlights: Paying Superannuation on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave

The Government is providing \$1.1 billion over four years from 2024–25 and \$0.6 billion per year from 2028–29 to pay superannuation on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave (PPL) for births or adoptions on or after 1 July 2025.

The Government-funded PPL scheme signals that taking time out of the paid workforce to care for a child is part of the usual course of life and work for both parents. Adding a superannuation payment to PPL recognises the contribution parents make to society.

All recipients of Government-funded PPL will be eligible for the payment, regardless of gender, with the majority of Government-funded PPL scheme recipients being women. In 2022–23, around 66 per cent of recipients were women.

Paying an annual superannuation payment of 12 per cent on the full partnered entitlement of 22 weeks will increase a median earning mother's superannuation balance at retirement by around \$4,250 or 1.15 per cent. This is a key step towards reducing the retirement savings gap and improving the fairness of Australia's retirement income system, and an important signal that care is valued.

Health

Australia has one of the best health systems in the world, supporting Australians to experience some of the best health outcomes. However, women and girls continue to experience gender bias in the health system, which can lead to poorer health outcomes like delayed diagnosis and treatment, over-prescribing medications and dismissal of pain. The symptoms of heart failure, for example, are less likely to be recognised in women than in men, and older women are more likely than men to have prescriptions for five or more medications. In addition, women are more likely to have a chronic condition and require more time with their general practitioner, which can lead to higher out-of-pocket costs for healthcare.

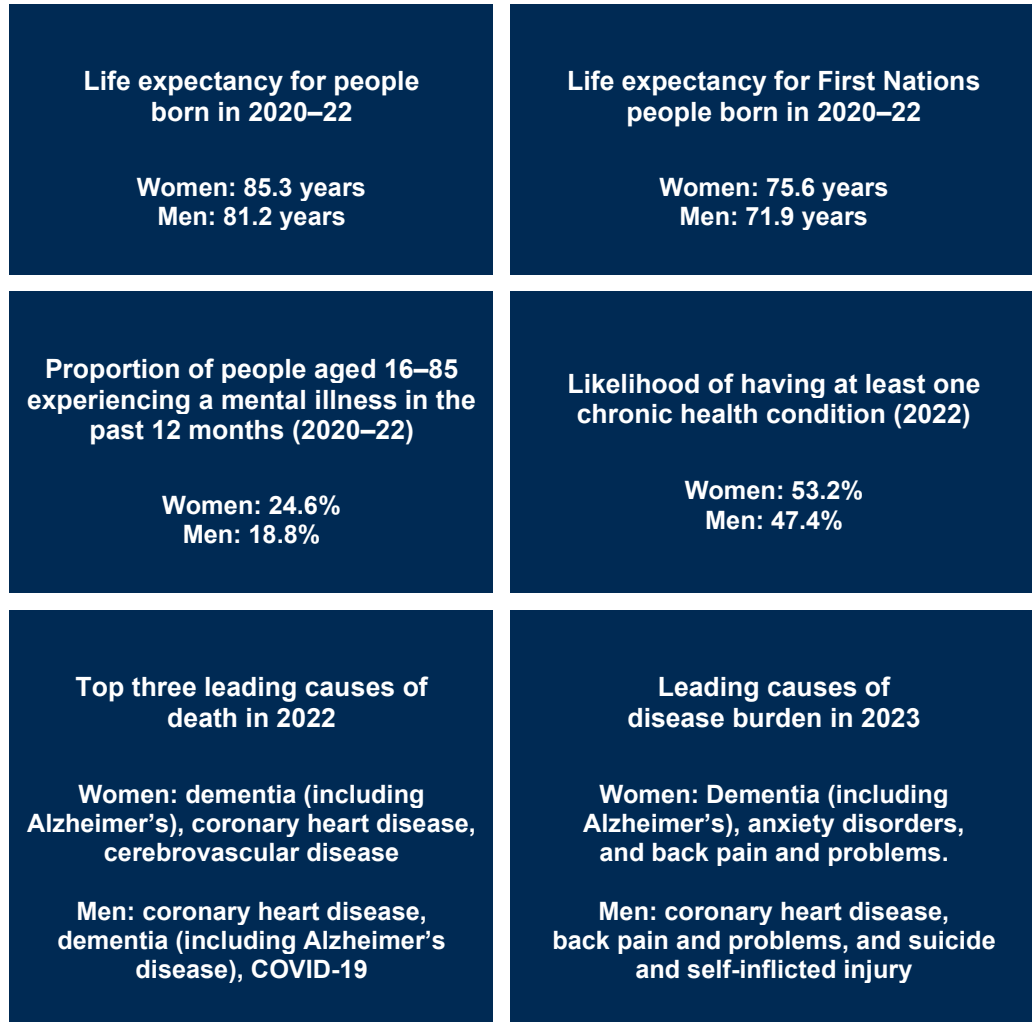
Women and girls can face stigma on a range of health issues from menstruation to miscarriage to menopause. A more gender equitable system is vital for improving women's health outcomes and is a measure of a well-functioning healthcare system.

Through *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, the Government has committed to a number of outcomes to reach its ambition to achieve gender equity in healthcare. The outcomes include:

- the healthcare system recognising and being responsive to gendered health issues and provides women and men with increased access to information, diagnosis, treatment and services
- women having choice and access to safe and affordable maternal, sexual and reproductive healthcare
- improving the mental health of women, men and gender diverse people.

The Government is advancing efforts to improve the accessibility and affordability of health care for Australian women throughout the different stages of their lives. Over their lifetime, women spend more on out-of-pocket healthcare costs than men and are more likely to defer or skip care because of costs. New initiatives in this Budget aim to reduce gender bias in the healthcare system, improve affordability of essential healthcare and medicines, and improve access to maternal, sexual and reproductive health services. The Government will also provide trauma-informed local outreach healthcare in crisis and temporary accommodation services for women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence.

Women's health – key statistics



Gender equity and health

Gender is a key social determinant of health, with women facing different obstacles in accessing healthcare compared to men. Women are more likely to be at risk of ill health than men in all stages of life.⁴² The *National Women's Health Strategy 2020–2030* (Women's Health Strategy) outlines a national approach to improving health outcomes for all women and girls and aims to reduce inequities. The Government is committed to improving women's health across their lifetime, recognising that women and girls can experience a range of diverse health needs and risks across their lives. The Government is also working to establish the ten-year National Action Plan for the health and wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ people.

To contribute to our understanding of gender bias in the health system, the Government established the National Women’s Health Advisory Council (Council) in February 2023. The Council provides strategic advice and recommendations directly to Government to improve health outcomes for Australian women and girls and advice on implementation of the Women’s Health Strategy. The Council undertook the #EndGenderBias survey to better understand the unique barriers and gender biases women face in Australia’s healthcare system. The survey found two-thirds of women experienced healthcare related gender bias or discrimination and almost 80 per cent of caregivers reported that a person they cared for had similar experiences.⁴³

Consistent themes from the survey included women feeling dismissed and disbelieved, being stereotyped due to their gender, and women’s symptoms being readily attributed to other causes such as menstruation and lifestyle factors. Women from diverse backgrounds were more likely to experience bias. A higher number (80 per cent) of women with disability and LGBTIQ+ respondents reported discrimination and bias compared to around 67 per cent of other women.

For the first time, the Government is addressing the complex and systemic bias against women in the healthcare system. Quality health data is needed to develop strong evidence-based policy and better understand the gap between women’s experiences seeking healthcare, and healthcare professionals’ understanding of people’s needs.

Budget highlights: Better research and data on women’s health

- Through an updated Medical Research Future Fund 10-year Investment Plan, the Government is allocating \$53.6 million over four years from 2024–25 for research into health priorities such as women’s health including menopause, pregnancy loss and infertility.
- The Government is also providing \$8.0 million over three years from 2024–25 to support the development of datasets on miscarriages, sexual and reproductive health, as well as evaluation activities for early pregnancy assessment services. Enhancing data collection and evidence will help inform future women’s health policy.

Improving women’s access to care and medicines

Access to new and affordable medicines is critical to support good health outcomes for Australians. Across most of the income spectrum, women spend more out-of-pocket than men.⁴⁴

The Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Continuous Review Program will consider the appropriateness of a number of MBS items to ensure they support equitable and affordable access for Australian women. The review will also consider how high-quality, safe services

can be provided by appropriately trained health practitioners, including doctors, nurse practitioners and nurses.

The Government has continued to invest in treatments for women's health conditions through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) including through this Budget to support a new medicine for breast cancer.

Budget highlights: More affordable breast cancer treatment

The Government remains committed to providing Australians with affordable and timely access to medicines through the PBS. From 1 May 2024, access to abemaciclib (Verzenio®) will be expanded on the PBS to treat patients with a type of early breast cancer that has a high risk of returning. Without subsidy, this treatment could cost individuals around \$97,000 per course. The listing of this treatment means that eligible individuals will pay a maximum of only \$31.60 per script, or just \$7.70 with a concession card. The expanded listing of Verzenio® is expected to benefit around 2,400 Australians each year.

Sexual and reproductive health

Women have unique health experiences, risks and needs across their lifetimes, such as during puberty, pregnancy, motherhood, perimenopause and menopause. The #EndGenderBias Survey highlighted that many women do not always receive support from health professionals when discussing these issues. Gender bias was reported most often by women seeking care for sexual and reproductive health issues and chronic pain.⁴⁵

Access, cost barriers and feelings of shame can contribute to women not seeking medical care for sexual and reproductive health issues such as infections. Serious sexual and reproductive health consequences from undiagnosed and untreated infections include ectopic pregnancy, foetal and neonatal deaths, pelvic inflammatory disease and infertility.

Budget highlights: Improving quality of care with longer consults on the MBS

- Telehealth services by general practitioners and prescribed medical practitioners specifically for blood borne virus and sexual and reproductive health services will transition from temporary to permanent MBS items from 1 July 2024. Telehealth services for sexual and reproductive health can address unmet clinical need, support vulnerable populations and enable access to time-critical treatment such as medical termination.
- To support more timely diagnosis and ongoing management for women impacted by endometriosis and other complex gynaecological conditions, \$49.1 million over four years is being provided for longer gynaecology consultations. From 1 July 2025, the addition of two new MBS items will allow patients with suspected endometriosis and pelvic pain to access subsidised consultations of 45 minutes or longer with gynaecologists.

Enhancing contraception choice and access

The ability for women to choose if and when they have children is a fundamental human right, and central to women's empowerment and involvement in their communities. Approximately 70 per cent of Australian women of reproductive age are using some form of contraception.⁴⁶ Despite this, an estimated one-third have an unplanned pregnancy at some point in their lives.⁴⁷ This has been partially attributed to low uptake of more effective long-acting reversible contraception (LARC), due to low awareness and limited access to health practitioners providing this service. The cost and availability of LARC training is a significant barrier to service delivery in primary care settings, particularly for intrauterine devices.

A key priority of the Women's Health Strategy is to increase access to sexual and reproductive health information. The Council has also identified empowerment as one of its key focus areas to improve health outcomes for women and girls. Many women make decisions about their preferred contraception before visiting a healthcare provider, so access to comprehensive, medically accurate, and consistent information, particularly online, is essential to support informed decision-making.

A gender audit of Medicare rebates, as part of the MBS Continuous Review Program, will look specifically at MBS items for LARC insertion and removal, as well as any gendered differences across diagnostic imaging rebates.

Budget highlights: Giving women more contraception choice

- The Government will provide \$5.2 million over three years from 2024–25 to support placement costs for health practitioners, including regional and remote practitioners, to undertake training in LARC insertion and removal. This will increase the number of healthcare practitioners trained in LARC so women have more access to these highly effective, reversible forms of contraception.
- The Government will provide \$1.1 million over four years from 2024–25 to support the development of a virtual contraception decision-making tool for women and health practitioners.

Improving access to period products

Purchasing sexual and reproductive health products and services is not affordable for all women. Despite the removal of the goods and services tax on period products in January 2019, the cost of period products remains a barrier for many women and girls. Women living in remote communities can experience barriers to accessing period products due to travelling greater distances, and remoteness can increase the cost of period products as much as 100 per cent.⁴⁸ This issue particularly impacts First Nations women and girls, as the proportion of the First Nations population increases with remoteness (from 1.9 per cent in major cities to 32 per cent in remote and very remote areas).⁴⁹

Research has shown that some girls in remote communities may skip school for several days during their periods, because period products are unaffordable or unavailable, or buying period products is too shameful.⁵⁰

Budget highlights: Improving access to period products

- The Government will provide \$12.5 million over four years from 2024–25 to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to facilitate community-led, culturally appropriate distribution of free period products – including pads, tampons and other products – to girls, women and gender diverse people in rural and remote First Nations communities.
- From 1 July 2024, the Government will abolish 457 nuisance tariffs in the largest unilateral tariff reform in two decades, to cut compliance costs, reduce red tape, and improve outcomes for women. Tariffs will be eliminated on types of menstrual cups, menstrual underwear, and other goods.

Safe access to medical termination

Access to pregnancy termination services is a key measure under the Women's Health Strategy. The Government provides support for pregnancy termination services through MBS rebates for relevant services, including telehealth consultations, subsidies for the cost of medicines under the PBS and via the National Health Reform Agreement.

The Government, supported by expert advice from the Therapeutic Goods Administration and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee, introduced changes to the dispensing and prescribing of the medical abortion drug, mifepristone and misoprostol (MS-2 Step[®]). This will reduce barriers to safe and affordable abortions, especially for women in rural and remote areas.

Budget highlights: Improving access to affordable termination services

The expansion of ultrasound imaging request rights for nurse practitioners under the MBS will enable them to request ultrasounds to support the before and after care for women who are accessing medical abortions. The use of ultrasound helps to ensure safety and eligibility for the procedure. From 1 November 2024, these recommendations will be implemented to improve women's access to safe and affordable termination services.

MYEFO highlights: Supporting health practitioners

The Government committed \$1.1 million over four years from 2023–24 for the Australian Contraception and Abortion Primary Care Practitioner Support Network (AusCAPPS) to support training and critical information to deliver essential women's healthcare. The Network provides a free voluntary online multidisciplinary Community of Practice which supports more than 2,400 eligible health practitioners who provide access to safe, affordable medical termination of pregnancy.

Supporting women experiencing menopause

A greater understanding of the health needs of women affected by perimenopause and menopause has the potential to make a significant difference to the health outcomes of women. Menopause transition can affect women's physical and mental health and increases risk for future cardiometabolic health issues. Recent research found fewer than half of the women aged under 44 surveyed who had experienced menopause symptoms discussed these symptoms with their doctor.⁵¹

There has been a significant and positive increase in public discourse on the impacts of menopause symptoms on Australian women and the need for greater support to increase health professional capability to help women manage their menopause symptoms. Recent research highlights the need for general practitioners to be able to provide responsive menopause management, including the need to assess all women at midlife for increased risks of chronic disease, such as osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease.⁵²

Budget highlights: Support for menopause training

The Government will provide \$1.2 million over two years from 2024–25 to support training for health practitioners to better treat, care and manage women's health during menopause. This measure will make it easier for health practitioners to access training so that they can provide well-informed, up-to-date advice and treatment to women during menopause.

Maternal health

Australia is regarded as a safe country in which to have a baby and compares well on several accepted measures of safety and quality care. However, as for all systems of healthcare and service delivery, there are areas for continued improvement. Across the country there are differences in women's access to services, their choice of care, and the provision of culturally appropriate care that ensures women are always treated with respect and dignity.

Improved model of care choice for pregnant women

Antenatal care is care provided to a pregnant woman by a midwife or doctor to assess and improve the wellbeing of the mother and baby throughout pregnancy. In 2021, 80 per cent of women who gave birth accessed antenatal care in the first trimester of their pregnancy, and 96 per cent of first-time mothers had five or more antenatal care visits.⁵³ Regular antenatal care in the first trimester is associated with better maternal health in pregnancy, fewer interventions in late pregnancy and positive child health outcomes.

Budget highlights: Participating midwives package

The Government has committed \$56.5 million over four years from 2024–25 to promote high-quality and tailored maternity care, by implementing recommendations from the MBS Review Taskforce for participating midwives. This package will:

- ensure women receive high-quality care by increasing the time for antenatal and postnatal attendance items so that they appropriately reflect the time care takes
- ensure women receive best practice clinical care by introducing a birth debrief and mental health screening at the six-week postnatal attendance
- support continuity of care by ensuring women can continue to receive care from their participating midwife when being admitted to hospital.

Box 9: Enabling eligible nurse practitioners and midwives to prescribe PBS medicines

The Government has committed to removing the legislated requirement for an eligible nurse practitioner or eligible midwife to collaborate with a medical practitioner in order to prescribe PBS medicines. This arrangement will allow eligible midwives or nurse practitioners to prescribe PBS medicines or provide services under Medicare, removing barriers to primary care for Australians, particularly in rural and remote areas. It will support more effective use of the existing health workforce by recognising that nurse practitioners and midwives are autonomous professionals who can deliver high-quality care to patients within their scope of practice.

Supporting women experiencing pregnancy loss

Miscarriage can be a traumatic experience for women and can have lasting impacts on their physical and mental health. Women who have experienced miscarriage commonly report a lack of information, poor access to follow-up care and limited referral to support services.

Miscarriage Australia estimates that around 285 miscarriages occur every day in Australia, which amounts to one in four pregnancies.⁵⁴ However, statistics on miscarriage are not collected in Australia so it is difficult to know exactly how frequently it occurs, particularly as it may occur when a woman is not aware she is pregnant.

There can be significant stigma, shame and guilt linked to miscarriage, and access to appropriate support services is important to enable women and families to process their grief and associated impacts. The Government is providing increased support for families

experiencing miscarriage to ensure that bereaved women and families can access support at a time when they are at most risk of isolation and distress.

Budget highlights: Support for women experiencing miscarriage

The Government is providing \$7.0 million over four years from 2024–25 to support the development of miscarriage education and awareness materials and provide funding for bereavement care services for women and families experiencing miscarriage.

Gender analysis in practice: Miscarriage awareness program and data collection

The Government is improving healthcare for women who have experienced miscarriage through delivering a public education and awareness program and building the evidence base on the impact of miscarriage.

Miscarriage is, sadly, a common complication of early pregnancy, yet too often it is shrouded in silence and shame. It is estimated that up to 110,000 women experience miscarriage annually in Australia.⁵⁵ Furthermore, 1–2 per cent of women will experience three or more consecutive miscarriages.⁵⁶ The experience of miscarriage can be extremely distressing and can lead to anxiety, depression, or post-traumatic stress disorder for some women. There is also a lack of rigorous data collection on miscarriage, while gender bias in the healthcare system and a lack of targeted services mean that many women are not receiving adequate care during and after miscarriage.

Delivering a public education program will help start a public conversation about miscarriage and better support women and their families to process this loss and grief. The program will also educate health professionals to provide more sensitive support for women and families experiencing miscarriage and early pregnancy loss. It will also have an indirect impact on the partners and families of women who have experienced miscarriage.

A data scoping study on a national data collection on miscarriage will contribute to the development of evidence-based policies and programs, which will have positive impacts for women who experience miscarriage.

Australia is one of the safest places in the world for a baby to be born, yet death occurring within the perinatal period (from 20 weeks of gestation to 28 days after birth) is sadly more common than it should be. In 2021, there were 3,016 perinatal deaths (1 per cent of babies born).⁵⁷ Of these deaths, just over three-quarters (76 per cent) were stillbirths and 24 per cent were neonatal deaths.⁵⁸ Spontaneous preterm labour or rupture of membranes

was the most common cause of neonatal deaths. The Government is committed to continuing services that reduce the rates of pre-term births in Australia.

There is increasing evidence that some stillbirths are preventable. Some countries – including the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland and New Zealand – have successfully reduced stillbirth rates. The Government is working to reduce stillbirth through the *National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan 2020–2030*.

Budget highlights: Support for preterm birth and stillbirth

- The Government is providing \$5.8 million over two years from 2024–25 to continue strategies to prevent preterm and early-term birth and reduce the number of babies born too early in participating maternity services and First Nations communities.
- The Government is committing \$0.9 million over two years from 2024–25 to continue to monitor and evaluate activities under the *National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan 2020–2030*. This will help measure Australia’s success in meeting stillbirth reduction targets since the Stillbirth Action Plan’s publication in December 2020.

Safe births on Country for First Nations women

The Government is improving antenatal care for First Nations women by providing First Nations communities with access to culturally appropriate midwifery and continuity of care models such as ‘Birthing on Country’.

The Birthing on Country model of care includes access to professional indemnity insurance for privately practising midwives. This means midwives can continue to work to their full scope of practice and First Nations women have the choice to seek care outside of a hospital setting, and with their choice of midwife. It also means that all women who choose to have a low-risk homebirth or intrapartum care outside a hospital with a midwife can do so knowing professional indemnity insurance would be available in case of an adverse event.

Budget highlights: Safeguarding the Birthing on Country model of care

The Government has committed \$3.5 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$0.4 million per year ongoing) to expand the Midwife Professional Indemnity Scheme. The expansion will support improved health outcomes for First Nations women and babies by enabling Birthing on Country programs to engage midwives who can provide culturally safe, continuous midwifery care.

Mental health

Mental health, and access to care, is impacted by a range of social and economic inequities which are disproportionately experienced by women. Socioeconomic risks for mental ill health in women include lower income, poorer job conditions and insecure work, primary carer responsibilities, and physical and sexual violence.⁵⁹ Critical points in the life of women and girls, such as puberty, pregnancy, motherhood and menopause can also influence mental health and have flow-on effects for families and children.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics found that in 2020–2022, one in four women (24.6 per cent) had a mental health disorder in the previous 12 months, compared with almost one in five men (18.3 per cent).⁶⁰ Transgender and gender diverse Australians had higher rates of 12-month mental health disorders than cisgender Australians (33.1 per cent compared with 21.3 per cent). In 2020–2022, women with a 12-month mental health disorder were more likely to have seen a health professional for their mental health than men (51.1 per cent compared to 36.4 per cent).

Budget highlights: Expanding mental health services

The Government is providing \$888.1 million over eight years from 2024–25 to expand the range of free mental health services available to all Australians, including women.

To address the gap for people experiencing mild mental health symptoms, a new national, low-intensity digital service will be provided. From 1 January 2026, every Australian will be able to access this free service without a referral, providing them timely, high quality mental health support. Once fully established, 150,000 people are expected to make use of this service each year.

The Government is also improving access to free mental health services through a network of walk-in Medicare Mental Health Centres, built on the established Head to Health network. The upgraded national network of 61 Medicare Mental Health Centres will be open by 30 June 2026.

For people who have complex needs, the Government is providing funding for Primary Health Networks to work in partnerships with GPs to deliver multidisciplinary wraparound supports and care coordination.

Leadership, representation and decision-making

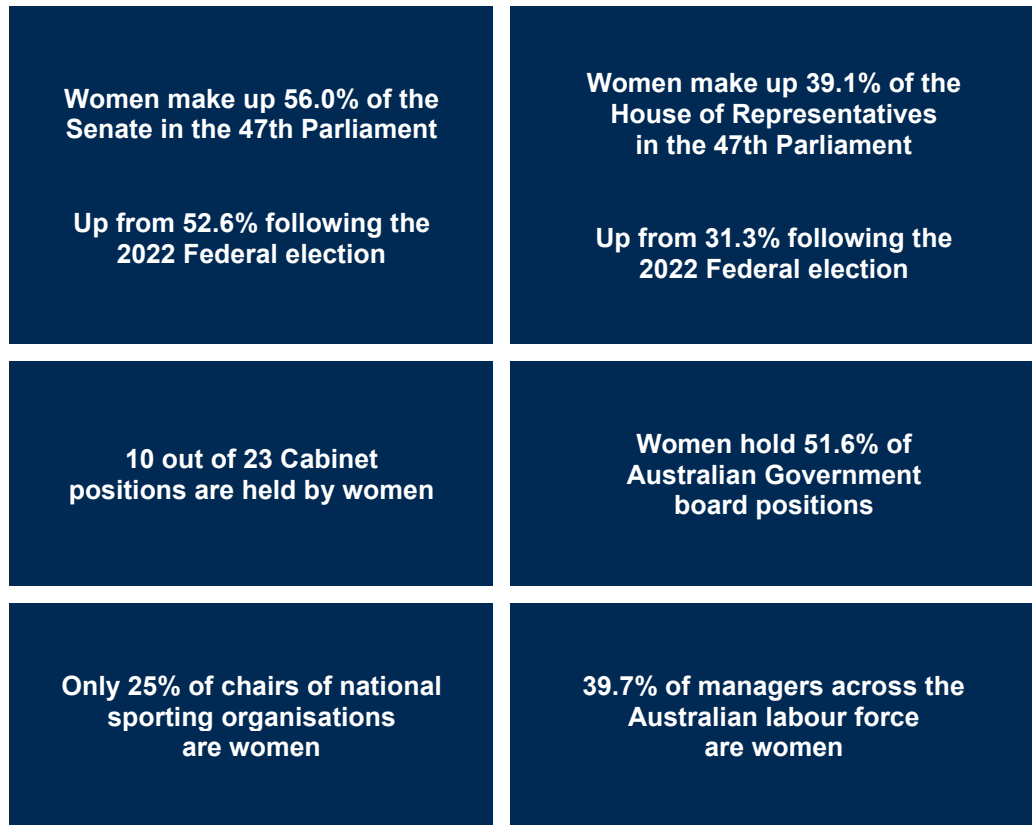
Gender equality cannot be achieved without women's meaningful participation in leadership and decision-making roles. When women take part in decision-making processes, this can help to ensure institutions and systems that shape and deliver programs, policies and services not only better meet women's needs, but also achieve better and more inclusive outcomes overall. Excluding women from leadership and decision-making roles can create barriers to women's access to resources and services.

The Government is committed to addressing the barriers women face and improving women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles, and women's representation overall. In *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (Working for Women)*, the Government has committed to driving action to increase women's representation across all levels of political, public service and non-government leadership and decision-making.

Inclusive and diverse leadership creates better outcomes in a number of ways. Gender diversity benefits organisations and decision-making bodies when they can draw upon the widest and best pool of leaders. Research shows that companies with more women on their boards outperform those without and organisations with greater gender diversity among senior leaders are more profitable.

This chapter provides a snapshot of women's leadership in Australia in the public and private sectors. It also outlines actions the Government is taking to improve women's participation in leadership and decision-making roles, and women's participation in sport, which will help to change gender stereotypes.

Women's leadership – key statistics



Women in leadership and decision-making

The Government is committed to promoting gender equality and supporting women's leadership in every aspect of Australian life, from corporate boards to community leadership to parliaments across Australia. This includes ensuring diverse women are represented in visible and influential decision-making roles across all sectors and leadership levels. The Government must also set the standard by ensuring the diversity of the Australian community is represented in government decision-making.

Women in leadership

To achieve gender equality, more women, including First Nations women, women with disability and women from diverse backgrounds, need to be represented in decision-making and leadership positions as well as in public life. Although women continue to remain under-represented in leadership roles across Australia, there has been some progress towards gender parity.

In 2023, Australia's world gender equality ranking in the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Report increased from 43rd to 26th.⁶¹ This was largely due to the gains made in women's representation in Parliament.

Women held 53 per cent of all Senior Executive Service roles in the Australian Public Service (APS) in 2023 – an increase from 46 per cent in 2019.⁶² For the first time, women's representation in the APS reached gender parity at the SES Band 2 level in 2023. This progress is a result of targeted gender equality strategies implemented within the APS to promote more women into senior leadership positions.

The 2023 Chief Executive Women's Senior Executive Census found that women's representation in private sector leadership roles has increased since 2022. However, change continues to be slow. In the top 300 ranked Australian companies (ASX 300), women held 9 per cent of Chief Executive Officer (CEO) positions in 2023, up from 6 per cent in 2022.⁶³

Women on boards

As at 30 June 2023, women held 51.6 per cent of Australian Government board positions and 42.3 per cent of Chair and Deputy Chair positions on Australian Government boards.⁶⁴ These are the highest rates of representation since reporting began in the 2008–09 financial year. However, only ten of the 17 portfolios reported at least 50 per cent representation of women overall in their Australian Government board positions. Without further action, it could take at least six years to reach gender parity in Chair and Deputy Chair positions at the current rate.

To accelerate progress in women's representation in board positions and Chair and Deputy Chair positions, the Government introduced new targets for women's representation on Australian Government boards as part of *Working for Women*. The Government has also expanded reporting for gender balance on Australian Government boards to capture data on all positions for boards that meet the reporting requirements. This will allow more comprehensive reporting against targets and provides an opportunity to drive further progress towards gender equality on Australian Government boards.

Budget highlights: New targets for Government boards

As part of *Working for Women*, the Government is implementing new targets for women's representation on Australian Government boards. The new targets are at the portfolio level:

- 50 per cent representation of women on Australian Government boards
- 50 per cent representation of women in Chair and Deputy Chair positions

The Government also renewed its commitment to targets for women to hold 50 per cent of all Australian Government board positions and at least 40 per cent of positions on individual Australian Government boards.

The private sector has made gains in women's representation on boards. The ASX 20, which comprises the top 20 Australian Securities Exchange listed companies, made history by achieving an aggregate 40 per cent of women on their respective boards. Across the ASX 300 in 2023, women held only 35.6 per cent of board positions and 11 companies had no women on their boards.⁶⁵

Including women's voices and experiences in policy-making

The Government will continue to listen to and respond to the voices of women to create a better, gender equal Australia for everyone. When policy is informed by the voices and lived experiences of diverse people, this can help ensure that programs have more equitable outcomes and better meet people's needs.

To support implementation of *Working for Women* the Government will redesign the existing Women's Leadership and Development Program to create the Working for Women Program.

Budget highlights: Working for Women Program

The Government has established the Working for Women Program to fund key partnerships to engage with women and the Australian community on gender equality, and further support the inclusion of women's voices and experiences in policy-making. This includes:

- increased investment for a network of National Women's Alliances to inform ongoing implementation of *Working for Women* by providing evidence based, intersectional gender equality advice and civil society expertise to Government. The National Women's Alliances elevate the voices of First Nations women, culturally and linguistically diverse and migrant and refugee women, women with disability and women living in regional, rural and remote areas. In addition, they provide expertise on policy solutions for gender-based violence and women's economic equality and leadership.
- establishing a research partnership to help build the evidence base on what works to achieve gender equality, especially in relation to driving economic equality. This will also allow policymakers to hear directly from the Australian community, particularly women about their priorities for achieving gender equality to inform and support the development of public policy.

The Working for Women Program will also support actions to drive progress across the *Working for Women's* priority areas.

Gender analysis has been used to guide the development of programs under the Future Drought Fund to give voice to women's needs and experiences in responses to drought and climate change.

Gender analysis in practice: Future Drought Fund

The design and delivery of programs under the Future Drought Fund (FDF) aim to boost the representation of women in leadership roles and promote gender equality when building resilience to drought and other climate risks.

The objectives of the FDF are to build social, economic and environmental resilience. Gender inequality limits the way women and girls, men and boys can respond to and manage change. This compounds the effects of drought and other climate change related events and plays a large part in the roles people have in preparation, response and recovery. These events can also increase the prevalence of gender-based violence.⁶⁶ Consultation on the FDF found that lack of access to services such as mental health services are amplified in rural Australia. The agricultural workforce is also heavily gender segregated with women's participation at 30.1 per cent.⁶⁷

While women face disadvantage, they also have skills and experiences critical for building resilience to the effects of drought and climate change, such as innovation, adaptation, caring for the environment and food security. Women need to be represented at all stages of preparation, response and recovery.

The revised Future Drought Fund Communities program will identify women as a priority for investment through Community Impact Grants, Small Network Grants and the Mentoring Initiative. Other FDF programs will maximise participation and leadership opportunities for women, encourage locally led co-design processes to consider the impact of gender equality on drought resilience, and link with existing programs that build personal and community resilience, such as non-clinical mental health and family violence support. This recognises that the representation and leadership of women, and promotion of gender equality are critical for building social resilience as part of the Government's climate resilience agenda.

Driving gender equality through government systems

Australia's gender responsive budgeting framework places gender equality at the centre of Government decision-making. Since the 2023–24 MYEFO process, gender responsive budgeting tools have been applied across the Budget. This enables Government to make informed decisions on investment and resource allocation to address gender gaps and drive improvements for gender equality. The ongoing work to improve data and gender analysis capability across Government will ensure high-quality and comprehensive advice to inform decision-making over future budgets.

The Government is also driving change through procurement systems. As part of *Working for Women*, the Government announced it will introduce a new legislative requirement for businesses with 500 or more employees to commit to targets to improve gender equality in their workplaces. Compliance with the requirement will be necessary to access Australian

Government procurement opportunities over a certain threshold. This will address a key recommendation from the 2021 review of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012*.

Budget highlights: Driving gender equality through procurement

The Government will implement a voluntary Commonwealth Supplier Registration process through AusTender. Through the registration process businesses will be able to self-nominate on AusTender as women-owned and led businesses. This will give the Government the ability to measure and analyse women-owned and led businesses the Commonwealth is contracting with. This process will help to identify relevant suppliers for Government, and will support development of future actions by building the evidence base on the experiences of women owned and led businesses navigating Government procurement processes.

Partnering to advance equality for First Nations women

First Nations women and girls are leading efforts to enhance gender equality. First Nations women's experiences of gender inequality intersects with the impact of racism and the ongoing effects of colonisation. The importance of ensuring First Nations women's voices in policy development and decision-making is widely understood. The Government is committed to elevating and empowering First Nations women in leadership and decision-making roles. Through *Working for Women*, the Government will be guided by the key principle that efforts to drive gender equality for First Nations Australians must be led by First Nations Australians.

Box 10: Institute for First Nations Gender Justice

The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* Institute for First Nations Gender Justice (the Institute) at the Australian National University was launched on 19 March 2024 by Ms June Oscar AO, the new Chair of the Institute and the outgoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. The Government has provided \$3.0 million over four years for the Institute to support the legacy of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Project. It is the first of its kind in the world and will bring together First Nations researchers to develop and design initiatives to improve life outcomes for First Nations women and girls. Research will focus on a range of issues including health and wellbeing, family violence, housing, education, child removals, financial security and environmental conservation – elevating the voices of more than 2,300 First Nations women and girls to drive efforts to achieve gender equality.

Improving women's and girls' representation and participation in sport

The participation of women and girls in sport provides important health, social and economic benefits and drives gender equality.

Women and girls still face significant challenges in playing and volunteering in sport that stem from socio-cultural factors such as caring responsibilities, experiences of harassment and lack of role models. There is a significant gender gap in sport participation. Only 33.6 per cent of women aged 15 years and over participate in sport related activity once per week. This compares to 49.8 per cent of men.⁶⁸

The 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup showcased the popularity of women's sport, with the Matildas semi-final breaking all Australian TV broadcasting records. This success has promoted discussions on parity and equality for women across all aspects of sport. Australia will continue to demonstrate the excellence of women's sport through the hosting the 2027 Netball World Cup, 2029 Women's Rugby World Cup and Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Government has committed funding to the Australian Sports Commission to drive sector wide change, including the development of a National Gender Equity in Sport Governance Policy. This policy is being developed in partnership with all states and territories, and will outline ways to increase the representation of women and gender diverse people in key governance positions.

MYEFO highlights: Improving women's participation and safety in sport

The Government is providing \$200.0 million over four years from 2023–24 for the Play Our Way program. This provides targeted grants for sporting infrastructure and facilities to support women and girls to engage and participate in sports and physical activity. Funding will be provided through a competitive grant opportunity. Successful organisations will use the grants to provide safe, inclusive, quality and sustainable sporting facilities and initiatives for women and girls. This funding will also help them to remain involved in sport and physical activity for life.

To improve the safety of sport in Australia, the Government is investing more than \$36.3 million from 2023–24 to 2027–28, to tackle abuse, bullying, discrimination and sexual misconduct. This funding will allow Sports Integrity Australia to enhance their existing capabilities, and to deliver new initiatives to improve safety in sport, with a focus on women and girls.

Strengthening global leadership

The Government is committed to being a global leader on gender equality. To this end, the Government is developing a new International Gender Equality Strategy to recognise gender equality as central to Australia's foreign policy, international development, humanitarian action, trade, peace and security, and consular efforts. It will retain Australia's existing focus on addressing sexual and gender-based violence, and advancing women's voice and leadership, the Women, Peace, and Security agenda, and women's economic equality.

Australia is committed to meeting the target that 80 per cent of development investments are implemented in a way that effectively supports gender equality. In 2022–23, 75 per cent of Australia's development investments effectively addressed gender equality. The Government implemented a new requirement for development and humanitarian investments valued at \$3.0 million and above to have a gender equality objective. This requirement is driving an increase in our development expenditure on gender equality. In 2022–23, Australia invested \$1.7 billion in development programs that targeted gender equality, up from \$1.5 billion in 2021–22.⁶⁹

Gender equality is a priority in Australia's engagement in regional and multilateral fora, including the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Pacific Islands Forum, G20, and United Nations bodies, including the Commission on the Status of Women, Human Rights Council, General Assembly and Security Council.

The Government is currently supporting the re-election of Natasha Stott Despoja AO to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) for the term 2025–28. Ms Stott Despoja was first elected to the Committee for the term 2021–24 and is the first Australian to serve on the Committee in almost 30 years, and only the second Australian to serve on the Committee.

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