

August 2019

YWCA Australia submission to the Western Australian (WA) Government Women's Plan

"I want to see men in political leadership positions join the campaign to end gender inequality, and for young women like me to believe them when they say they will."

"(There is a) real opportunity to create a gender equality framework that has the potential to impact every woman... This framework must recognise the specific challenges that groups of different women face, as well as addressing the shared experiences that women identify as a problem to achieving gender equality in their lives. Moreover, this framework should aim to go beyond meeting the basic human rights of all women but should strive to empower them, which will overall contribute to the growth and development of the region as a whole."

YWCA Australia's Young Women's Council members reflection on gender equality frameworks

YWCA Australia is a leading national not-for-profit women's organisation working towards a future where all women and girls are safe and respected with equal access to power, opportunity and resources. YWCA Australia is part of World YWCA, a global membership movement of women and young women who have been leading social and economic change in 125 countries, for over 150 years. YWCAs around the world have a strong history of advocating for gender equality in all its forms as part of our commitment to the full realisation of the human rights of women, young women and girls.

YWCA Australia undertakes advocacy and delivers programs and services that develop the leadership and collective power of women, young women and girls; support individuals, their families and communities at critical times; and promotes gender equality to strengthen communities across Australia's diverse social and geographic landscape. YWCA Australia has been providing invaluable community services since the 1880s and has been operating in Western Australia since 1920.

In the era of the 'MeToo' and 'Times Up' movements, and with the national implementation of federally funded gender equality mechanisms such as the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) and the Fourth National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, it is clear that the inclination to address gender inequality is increasing, and that it is everybody's business. Overwhelming evidence suggests that gender inequality does not just impact women, young women and girls, but also men, boys and gender diverse people.

Despite this, a concerning proportion of Australians believe that gender inequality is exaggerated or no longer a problem¹. Significant structural and cultural shifts, propelled by leaders within and outside of government, are required to see a measurable difference in the impact of gender inequalities. This requires male leadership and champions and those that see beyond the benefits for women, young women and girls.

¹ 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)



An intersectional approach

We commend the WA Government for including language and focus on 'intersectionality' in their 'Women's Voices' discussion paper, acknowledging that gender inequality is not experienced the same way by all women. To achieve equality for all women, gender inequality cannot be siloed from other forms of discrimination and disadvantage. Integrating intersectional thinking should consider such things as Aboriginality, culture, race, ethnicity, faith, socio-economic status, ability, sexuality, gender identity, education, age, and migration status.²

Given this commitment to implementing an intersectional lens to the Women's Plan, YWCA Australia recommends a shift in language from a 'Women's Plan to a 'Gender Equality Strategy'. This recongises that it is not just women who are impacted by and benefit from gender equality, and that it is everyone's responsibility to work towards achieving gender equality.

In developing and implementing a gender equality strategy, an intersectional approach should be used in applying **best practice language** as well as **taking a flexible and tailored approach to implementation**, ensuring that more vulnerable and marginalised groups are reached and supported.

YWCA's engagement with young women

YWCA Australia engages with women, young women and girls across the country and internationally through our service delivery, public policy engagement with state/territory and federal governments, and advocacy across the women's sector globally. In addition, YWCA Australia has a **Young Women's Council**, which plays an advisory role to the board and the organisation, including future planning, advocacy, policy, research, communications and stakeholder engagement.

YWCA Australia's submission

We welcome this opportunity to provide a submission to the development of a plan to address gender inequality in WA and commend the WA Government on their commitment to implementing structural change that aims to improve the lives of women in WA. The WA Government has a unique opportunity to lead Australia's efforts in tackling gender inequalities and showcase on a world stage innovative and ground-breaking initiatives that improve the lives of everyone living in WA.

In this submission we will provide some high-level recommendations, as well as insights into the four key focus areas based on our unique local community experience, program expertise and gender equality knowledge. This submission is also informed by our consultation and engagement with women, young women and girls, including young women members from Western Australia and across the country.

² For example there is growing evidence that women with disabilities are more likely to experience violence, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report experiencing violence at 3.1 times the rate of non-Indigenous women.



Government machinery:

YWCA Australia affirms the need for inclusion of mechanisms and initiatives into a gender equality framework that make tangible and measurable progress on gender inequality. Below we highlight some key opportunities for leadership and best practice in this space. These recommendations are:

- Gender Equality Action Plans within government
- Gender Expert Facilitation and Partnerships with non-government
- Reporting and Accountability mechanisms
- Tackling policy and legislative change

Gender Equality Action Plans within government

It is essential that workforce development be integrated into a gender equality strategy, including in all government departments. This could take the form of Gender Equality Action Plans, which will enable workplaces to be supported through change management process and be connected to evidence based resources on gender equality planning and measurement.

This approach is similar to what is being implemented in Victoria. As part of Victoria's *Gender Equality* and *Gender Equality Bill,* internal gender equality auditing is mandated within all public sector organisations, including public sector entities with over 100 full-time employees, as well as local government. Under this strategy, these organisations are required to report on progress towards achieving targets and against key indicators. ³ YWCA Australia recommends a similar model, ensuring all WA Government entities are accountable and invested in the gender equality framework.

Gender Expert Facilitation and Partnerships with non-government

Importantly, a gender equality framework should include partnerships between government and gender equality specialists including representation from diverse backgrounds. This supports the commitment in the Women's Voices discussion paper of providing a 'coordinated approach and framework across government agencies and Ministerial portfolios'.

It is critical that implementation of a gender equality framework is carried out within best practice and evidence based frameworks, and facilitated by experts in gender equality. For example, the WA Government could partner with YWCA Australia as experts in gender equality facilitation and implementation, on initiatives including:

- The Gender Equity Matters (GEM) program, delivered within government departments as part of a Gender Equality Action Plan. The GEM program undertakes a gender audit as an activation point for organisations to advance gender equality and enhance diversity in their workplace.
- YWCA's evidence-based training on Unconscious Gender Bias and Bystander Intervention into government departments and other organisations.

³ https://engage.vic.gov.au/gender-equality



- Collaboration on implementation of innovative housing models that address intersecting issues such as domestic and family violence and women's economic disadvantage, for example YWCA's <u>'Pathways to Independence'</u> program for women at risk of homelessness, or 'pop up housing' models that provide medium-long term housing security.
- Primary prevention respectful relationships programs within community-based settings given that many vulnerable young people are not in engaged in the school system. This would be delivered in partnership with organisations such as YWCA Australia who have expertise in best practice delivery of primary prevention programs.
- Collaboration with the women's sector on the rollout of a campaign to shift social attitudes to gender equality. The 50/50 by 2030 Report on social attitudes to gender equality highlights a 'profound knowledge gap' in understanding of gender inequality in Australia. This highlights the critical role of government and their partnerships with gender experts in filling that gap and bringing about structural as well as cultural change.

Reporting and Accountability mechanisms

Reporting and accountability mechanisms are essential for measuring and mandating the success of a gender equality framework. The below mechanisms are best practice examples of how effective reporting and accountability can be integrated:

Outcomes, indicators and targets

A gender equality framework must include ambitious outcomes and targets to enhance and measure progress and impact, while still allowing for a flexible and tailored approach. YWCA Australia advocates for the implementation of affirmative action measures or 'temporary special measures'⁴, which evidence shows is effective in contributing to achieving gender equality.⁵

For example, a **40:40:20 gender equality quota** for leadership positions within government (such as government boards) provides a clear incentive, while still allowing for flexibility, scalability, and the inclusion of non-binary and gender diverse people. This could be incrementally applied to varying levels of management across government, and provide incentives for non-government organisations and businesses to follow suit.

Effective monitoring and accountability should include **adopting indicators** and evaluation and compliance processes that have a **gendered analysis**. For example, YWCA Australia recommends **the WA Government reinstate the 'Women's Report Card'** which detail the statistical status of WA women across a range of key indicators in areas such as leadership, education, work, housing, family and domestic violence, safety, health and wellbeing, and provide an 'evidence base to inform the policies, services and programs of government and the corporate and community sectors.'. ⁶ These indicators should be both quantifiable and qualitative, and measure both social and economic progress.

Another outcomes-based mechanism that embeds shared community responsibility and accountability is the implementation of a 'community or practice' planning and evaluation model. YWCA Australia's

⁴ https://www.humanrights.gov.au/quick-guide/12099

⁵ https://sage-pilot.uq.edu.au/files/121/targets_and_quotas_report_2012.pdf

⁶ https://dlgc.communities.wa.gov.au/CommunityInitiatives/Pages/Womens-Report-Card.aspx#sthash.nTj4vDZM.dpuf



recommends the implementation of something similar to YWCA's Young Women's Council, and the Victorian Government's 'citizens' jury' where committees made up of diverse community members inform and analyse the implementation and impact of policies with a gender lens. This committee-style accountability model could be implemented internally within government.

In addition to mandated targets and indicators, organisations and individuals who achieve gender targets should be **rewarded and incentivised**. YWCA New Zealand have created the NZ Equal Pay Awards, finding phenomenal success celebrating leaders in pay parity. YWCA Australia would be keen to work closely with the WA Government in sharing our expertise in building and implementing gender equality action plans through our Gender Equality Matters (GEM) program.

Align to other government outcomes frameworks and commitments

Any gender equality framework should take a 'Whole of Government' and 'Whole of Community' approach to advancing gender equality, including mandates and opportunities for collaboration across and within government to increase accountability and impact.

For example we recommend the Women's Plan align to other WA Government frameworks and commitments, as well as national and international commitments such as the 4th National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence against Women (CEDAW). These joint agreements provide a significant blueprint for a comprehensive and aligned gender equality strategy in WA.

Gender Responsive Budgeting

A gender equality strategy should consider the introduction of 'Gender Responsive Budgeting' (GRB), an effective form of policy analysis that assesses the budget in terms of its gendered reach and impact.

An effective GRB process in government would:

- sit at a range of points across the policy and budget development cycle, rather than at a single point in the process;
- identify gender biases and improve awareness of gender among policy and decision makers;
- identify the resources needed to achieve equality;
- increase transparency and accountability on gender issues; and
- incorporate an increasingly sophisticated intersectional analysis as the process builds over time.

Tackling policy and legislative change

There is compelling evidence, through the International Gender Gap Index, to suggest that gender disparity can be tackled effectively through legislative action on quotas, action plans and reporting. This research also shows that gender equality legislation improves gender equality overall, including outside of the public sector. In other words, legislating on gender equality is effective in speeding up the pace of change and is critical to shifts in policy, social norms, attitudes and expectations. A Gender Equality Framework and its underpinning legislation can thus play a significant role in facilitating real progress for women and other marginalised groups.

⁷ https://engage.vic.gov.au/gender-equality

⁸ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2018.pdf



YWCA Australia recommends the **implementation of a Gender Equality Bill** to mandate action on gender equality across the WA government. This will require a bi-partisan approach across all levels of government, including in the development and implementation of the legislation. This could include implementing mandates and incentives for the broader workforce, and ensuring anti-discrimination legislation is up-to-date and being rigorously implemented.

In line with this, the WA Government should consider **revision and development of all government and public sector policies** with a gender lens, with clearly delegated responsibility to all departments. This also includes encouraging the workforce more broadly to undertake policy review and more rigorous implementation of existing policies including special measures and flexible work arrangements.

Key Focus Areas

Given our expertise in supporting young women and girls and understanding the large body of evidence highlighting that young women often experience higher levels of disadvantage and discrimination; YWCA Australia will mostly focus our recommendations upon this demographic.

Safety

Young women aged 18-24 are among the most vulnerable to varying forms of violence. For example, young women experience significantly higher rates of physical and sexual violence than women in older age groups,⁹ young women as young as 11 years old report street harassment of a sexual nature¹⁰, and one in four young women in Australia have reported experiencing the non-consensual sharing of sexual images. ¹¹ The strongest predictors of attitudes supportive of violence against women are people having a low level of support for gender equality and a low level of understanding of the behaviours constituting violence against women (relative to other respondents)¹².

We know more than we ever have about the issues of safety for women, and YWCA's consultations shows that young women are frustrated with the lack of action to address their safety. Our Young Women's Council members report changing their behaviours depending on their perception and experiences of safety in public spaces. They recalled avoiding walking in certain areas in Perth and Fremantle by themselves or after dark. Incidences of street harassment, verbal and physical abuse are not uncommon and go largely unreported; it is expected normalized. When talking about how to tackle this issue young women often express an acceptance that "this is the way it will always be".

⁹ ABS 2017. Personal Safety, Australia, 2016. ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS.

¹⁰ https://www.plan.org.au/-/media/plan/documents/reports/sexism-in-the-city-plan-international-australia-embargoed-copy.pdf

¹¹ https://www.esafety.gov.au/image-based-abuse/about/research

¹² 2017 National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS)



YWCA Australia recommendations on Safety:

Improving young women's safety will need to incorporate low-cost initiatives driven by community as well as critical resource allocation measures not limited to but including:

- Implementing community Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles into urban planning, which is proven to reduce criminal activity and increase perceptions of safety in the community. Integrating a gender mainstreaming approach into urban and environmental design is also key to ensuring women's experiences and interests are incorporated (e.g. sufficient lighting in urban spaces, encouragement of pedestrian and bicycle traffic in streets and artwork that provides social commentary on gender equality and women's empowerment in public spaces).
- Amending the WA Equal Opportunity Act to include language and protections around 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity'.
- Resourcing comprehensive Respectful Relationships Education, such as the YWCA's Respect Communicate Choose program in schools to build gender equitable attitudes and behaviours in young people.
- Guaranteeing adequate, accessible and sustainable provision of domestic and family violence services across urban, rural and regional/remote locations in Western Australia. These services must be culturally appropriate and take a wholistic, rights-based approach to the safety of women and children in all their diversity. This should also include support for those with pets who are feeling violence.
- Introducing legislation to implement 250 metre Safe Access Zones at abortion service providers to protect the privacy and safety of women and staff outside those services.
- Resourcing comprehensive trauma-recovery programming such as the YWCA's Young Women's Accommodation and Trauma Recovery Program. Recognising and responding to experiences domestic and/or family violence for children and young people is critical to breaking the cycles of violence, decreasing the likelihood of further trauma and increasing feelings of safety and recovery. We know that comprehensive support is required at this critical time of development for young people.
- Partner with organisations, like YWCA Australia, and listen to and involve the voices of women, young women and girls in the development, implementation and evaluation of safety service provision.

Health and wellbeing

The evidence is clear: gender is considered one of the most powerful determinants of health outcomes. Women and gender diverse people-are significantly affected by systemic, cultural and social gendered health inequalities and an intersectional approach to health and wellbeing would seek to address this.

Although Australian women have one of the best life expectancy rates in the world, shockingly, this is not the case if you are an Indigenous woman, with a gap in life expectancy of ten years (82 for non-



Indigenous women compared to 72 for Indigenous women). This is of particular concern for Western Australia, which has the third largest Indigenous population in Australia.

YWCA delivers the <u>Encore</u> program across Western Australia, a breast cancer exercise and support program for women who have experienced mastectomy, lumpectomy or breast reconstruction surgery at any time in their lives.

In providing measures for women's health in a gender equality framework, YWCA Australia recommends the consideration of the **life cycle of women's health**, in that women have different health needs and interests across their lifespan.

A critical and yet often overlooked issue that disproportionately affects young women is the need for **comprehensive sexuality education**. A survey of young women aged 18-30 in Australia showed they believe sex education is limited and does not meet their needs.¹³ This survey also indicated that young women want more education on positive and respectful relationships, which should be incorporated into sex education in schools and communities.

An intersectional approach to health and wellbeing in WA must also consider how to address violence, risk-taking behaviors and excessive alcohol consumption by young men. Young men are also more likely to work in dangerous occupations and less likely to visit the doctor or follow up a consultation. These are harmful cultural norms perpetuate gender roles and stereotypes, which impact on mental health, and contribute to high suicide rates in young men.

YWCA Australia recommendations on Health and Wellbeing:

- Increasing access to affordable and appropriate sexual health services in WA
- Making comprehensive sexuality education encompassing respectful relationships education available to every young person in WA
- Investing in health promotion and primary prevention services to improve health outcomes for Indigenous women, particularly those in rural and remote areas
- **Fully decriminalising abortion** in WA to ensure that reproductive health care is guided by the expertise of health professionals with women at the centre of decisions.
- Challenging unhealthy female beauty standards and promoting healthy body images for men, women and gender diverse people
- Providing support for women and girls who have experienced female genital mutilation
- Promoting positive health norms to boys and men that contradict gender stereotypes that men must be physically and emotionally strong and dominant

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¹³ https://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Lets-Talk-Final-Report.pdf



- Providing comprehensive and inclusive mental health services, particularly targeting young
 Aboriginal people in rural and remote areas
- Investing in YWCA's Women of Worth program and other programs that provide a gender lens on the justice system and recidivism, and support community participation, education, and employment opportunities for marginalised women such as those involved in the justice system (and acknowledging that Aboriginal women are disproportionately represented in custody)
- Partner with organisations like YWCA Australia, and listen to and incorporate the voices of women, young women and girls in the development, implementation and evaluation of health service provision

Economic security

Women and in particular, young women, still face obvious barriers to workplace equality and economic security. A common theme in our consultations with young women is that they want action now, they can see the impact that a lifetime of disproportionate earning has on superannuation and their economic security in the future. There is a clear mandate for governments, businesses and the not-for-profit sector to take the gender pay gap seriously and address it comprehensively through a gender equality framework that has buy in across government. This should be coupled with efforts to promote flexibility and better work-life balance for all people in the workplace.

YWCA Australia notes that Western Australia has highest gender pay gap in Australia at 23.1%, and is only one of two states or territories whose pay gap has in fact increased since 2017 (from 22.5%).¹⁴ This pay gap begins at young age and builds throughout women's lives, resulting in women retiring with on average half the amount of superannuation than men. Young women are also more likely to other forms of experience economic disadvantage and abuse. For example young women are at a higher risk of 'sexually transmitted debt', which is debt inherited from a partner or a relationship with a former partner.

Over the past 20 years the number of female-run small businesses in Australia has increased significantly, at almost double the rate of male-run small businesses. Promoting entrepreneurship as an economic opportunity is a key avenue for women, particularly for newly arrived migrants and refugees, those in regional areas, and those living with a disability.¹⁵ In Australia women are in part-time employment at three times the rate of men. Significant numbers of women choose part-time and casual employment below their skill level so they can manage unpaid care and paid work.

Young women and girls are also a group in need of secure housing and at risk of homelessness due to various reasons including domestic violence, caring responsibilities, and lack of financial stability. Youth

 $^{^{14}\,\}underline{\text{https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/fact-sheets/australias-gender-pay-gap-statistics}}$

¹⁵ Almost a third of female business operators are born overseas, close to a third of female small business operators live in regional areas, and 12 per cent of women employers and sole operators identify as living with a disability.



services indicate that there are often a lack of housing and homelessness services for young people under 18, and this is exacerbated when young women have children in their care. 16

Care and domestic work is another key area for women, and despite being a critical element to a functioning society, it is drastically undervalued. Women largely carry the burden of unpaid care and domestic work¹⁷. Many Indigenous Australians living remotely have further challenges around work and labour. Work 'on country' where Indigenous peoples undertake customary work for their livelihoods is severely undervalued and rarely incentivised by government policies¹⁸.

YWCA Australia recommendations on Economic Security:

- Developing a gender-responsive approach to housing and homelessness and play a leading role in negotiating with the Commonwealth Government to develop National Housing and Homelessness Agreements that address gender and other forms of marginalisation
- Significantly increasing social and affordable housing stock to ensure women, young women
 and girls have access to safe and affordable housing, particularly in regional and remote areas, in
 an effort to increase their economic security
- Promoting and supporting women's entrepreneurship and small businesses through grant mechanisms and other opportunities, with particular attention to women living with disability
- Encouraging employers in WA to reduce the gender pay gap by (1) identifying barriers for women in their workplace (2) setting targets and action plans to reduce barriers (3) being accountable for results through external reporting
- Providing superannuation during paid parental leave to all employees within the public sector and encourage business to do the same
- Partner with organisations like YWCA Australia and listen to and involve the voices of women, young women and girls in the development, implementation and evaluation of economic security initiatives

Leadership & Participation

Gender equality leadership is crucial to the implementation of a gender equality framework. Data from WGEA shows that women and men are concentrated in particular industries, showing that six in ten Australians work in an industry that is dominated by one gender.

Research shows that if women are supported to transition into STEM careers, they could be on the path to more productive, better-paid work. If they cannot, they could face a growing wage gap or be left further behind when progress toward gender parity in work is already slow.¹⁹ At the same time we are encouraging more women into STEM industries we need to be encouraging men into female-dominated

¹⁶ Flinders University Institute for Housing, Urban and Regional Research 2008, *Women, Domestic and Family Violence and Homelessness*, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05 2012/synthesis report2008.pdf

¹⁷ [1] Waring, M. (1999). Counting for Nothing: What men value and what women are worth. Toronto: Toronto University Press.

¹⁸ See Jordan, K. (ed.) (2016). Better than welfare? Work and livelihood for Indigenous Australians after CDEP. Canberra: ANU Press.http://www.5050foundation.edu.au/assets/reports/documents/From-Girls-to-Men.pdf

¹⁹McKinsey Global Institute 2019, <u>The Future of Women at Work: Transitions into the age of automation</u>,



professions including nursing and aged care. This is because economic forecasts show significant growth in human services, and global trends towards increased automation are reducing the need for some male dominated industries, so a balance must be struck that does not perpetuate a gendered workforce that leads to economic inequalities.

Discrimination in the workplace is another key issue that should be addressed by a Gender Equality Framework. Women in Australia report experiencing high rates of sexual harassment in the workplace, and at higher rates than men (39% compared to 26%). However less than one in five of those who experienced sexual harassment made a formal complaint and almost one in five of those who did were labelled 'troublemakers', were ostracized, victimized or ignored by colleagues, or resigned.²⁰

The WA Government can play a significant role in enabling structural and cultural change in workplaces to encourage more women to feel supported make complaints. This includes reviewing and updating policy and processes for reporting, providing staff training, and framing workplace sexual harassment within Workplace Health and Safety approaches.

YWCA Australia recommendations on Leadership & Participation:

- Move the Women's portfolio into the Department of Premier and Cabinet to elevate and mainstream its status, ensuring sufficient resourcing and effective integration of a gender equality framework
- Providing workplace training for public sector entities such as Unconscious Bias Training and Bystander Intervention Training to shift attitudes and behaviours based on gender inequality in the workplace.
- Implementing **Gender Equality Action Plans** into all government departments to embed gender equity into workplaces and increase leadership pathways for women.
- Establishing a WA Women's Roundtable to actioning gender equality strategy and leadership in the local government sector
- Acknowledging and celebrate the achievements of WA women
- Investing in Indigenous women's leadership initiatives (for example through programs such as YWCA's Aboriginal Women's Leadership Program)
- Supporting women on boards in leadership programming to provide flexible support packages for women pursuing a board career, including through networking, scholarship programs, mentoring and capacity building
- Fostering youth and emerging leadership initiatives for women and gender diverse people to support a pipeline of new leaders through development, networking and mentoring
- Fostering the leadership of women from culturally diverse backgrounds, LGBTI communities, as well as women with a disability as a key intersectional approach to leadership
- Increasing **investment into women's sport**, including upgrading facilitates to ensure they are appropriate and accessible for young women and girls.
- Continuing to support initiatives that promote young women in STEM fields and conversely,
 promote care, health and social work fields to young men

²⁰ Australian Human Rights Commission, Everyone's Business: Fourth national survey on sexual harassment in Australian Workplaces (2018)



 Partner with organisations like YWCA Australia and listen to and involve the voices of women, young women and girls in the development, implementation and evaluation of leadership initiatives

Conclusion

YWCA Australia thanks the Western Australian Government for the opportunity to provide feedback to the development of the Women's Plan and we look forward to a robust and comprehensive strategy, and implementation.

Please visit our website for more information on our programs and services in the Australia and Western Australia: https://www.ywca.org.au/