

Women**Speak**
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2010 Election Platform
Recommendations

**JOURNEY TO
GENDER EQUALITY**



Women in Australia are demanding the 2010 Federal Election makes a change towards gender equality.

The following recommendations call for a change in policy and programs to achieve substantive equality between men and women in Australia.

The life situation and experiences of women in Australia are different and unique, demanding policy frameworks which appropriately respond to the diversity of women, particularly for women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and young and older women.

Included in all policy designs must be provisions for:

- Accessibility for those with a range of disabilities.
- Access to interpreters and multilingual materials.
- Recognition of particular cultural and social beliefs and obligations that may affect access and suitability of programs.
- Appropriate recognition and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values and beliefs.
- Access to education and recognition of care and family responsibilities.

Recommendations

WOMEN, EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- All Australia Government policies and programs relating to education and training, especially new programs to skill people for developing employment opportunities such as those in the 'Green Economy', must identify possible barriers specific to women's participation, in particular the barriers facing women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, and propose ways to address such barriers.
- The Australian Government must develop, implement and monitor programs that promote women into non-traditional trades and professions in Australia, with particular attention to addressing preconceived ideas about the capabilities and attributes of women and the rigours and requirements of such trades and professions.
- Long-term strategies for Vocational and Educational Training must be based on gender analyses that are necessary to inform a training framework able to provide opportunities for women at different stages of their life cycle and appropriate to their needs and circumstances. Data collected needs to be disaggregated in terms of disability as well as gender and be made publicly available.
- In order to address the problem of student poverty in the tertiary education sector equitably, the Government must develop a system of disaggregated data that will enable it to identify gender-specific financial circumstances affecting both the access and the performance of female students.

PAY EQUITY

- Political parties should commit to reducing the gender wage gap, and should respond to the recommendations in the House of Representatives Report *'Making it Fair'*.
- Government should support the 2010 Equal Pay case and ensure provision of adequate grant funding to enable community agencies to pay any increase in wages and conditions rather than have to reduce service levels.

SUPERANNUATION

- The Government should accept the principles of no-frills superannuation as forecast in the discussion papers from the *Cooper Review* of the superannuation industry, together with any other recommendations which would ensure a better return from contributions for low income female and male superannuants.
- The Government should consider any recommendations from the *Henry Review of Australia's Future Tax System* which could have the effect of re-shaping superannuation policy so as to make the system more appropriate for the different work-life balancing patterns of women's employment.

THE NATIONAL PLAN OF ACTION TO REDUCE VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) is expected to approve a National Plan of Action to Reduce Violence Against Women. To ensure the National Action Plan will be effective:

- Commonwealth support must ensure adequate and sustainable funding.
- The National Action Plan must include appropriately funded prevention measures, provision of support services and standardised prosecution approaches.
- An independent monitoring framework must be established to map the progress towards agreed goals and inform the ongoing development and implementation of the Plan.
- Women's organisations, support services and advocates must be supported and resourced to provide their experience and expertise and contribute to the development and evaluation of the National Action Plan.

NATIONAL WOMEN'S HEALTH POLICY

The new *National Women's Health Policy* for women in Australia should:

- Focus on primary prevention and health promotion and endorse and strengthen the crucially important role that community-based, not-for-profit, independent women's and Aboriginal health services play in promoting positive women's health outcomes, especially for marginalised women. A major expansion of funding would allow community based centres to provide preventive, geographically dispersed services, to disseminate information and to carry out systematic research into the needs of those most at risk of poor health outcomes.
- Be based in a Human Rights framework and provide equity for women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- Develop and adequately fund reproductive health strategies that include comprehensive sexuality education and ensure equitable access to contraceptives, pregnancy termination and women-centred maternity care services.

BODY IMAGE

- Appropriate funding must be provided to support the initiatives of the *Proposed National Strategy on Body Image*.
- The recommended *Voluntary Industry Code of Conduct on Body Image* for the fashion, media and advertising industries should be made mandatory with an accompanying body to monitor progress and report to the public on an annual basis.

REFORMING THE SEX DISCRIMINATION ACT

The *Sex Discrimination Act* to be strengthened by:

- Implementation of the recommendations of the Senate Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs as defined by their report; 'Effectiveness of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* in Eliminating Discrimination and Promoting Gender Equality.'
- Amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act* to be fully interpreted in accordance with a range of relevant international conventions such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights, and Economic, Cultural and Social and ILO conventions.

FAMILY LAW

Relating to the analysis and recommendations of the separate reports by Professor Richard Chisholm, the Australian Institute of Family Studies and the Family Law Council, the Australian Government must:

- Establish an overarching risk assessment framework to cover all stages of post separation and family law systems, and abolish the connection in the Act between shared parental responsibility (joint decision making) and shared care arrangements.
- Ensure that Family Law Courts evaluate their processes to verify that they respond in a sensitive and appropriate manner to the occurrence of family violence and to the complexity of needs and the diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and immigrant and refugee families.
- Provide and fund comprehensive cultural competency and disability awareness training for all personnel in the Family Law system.
- Remove cost penalties for making false allegations of violence as it acts as a deterrence to victims of family violence from speaking up.

CHANGES TO PRIVATE MIDWIFERY CARE

Changes to legislation and policy affecting midwifery services must ensure that Australian midwives are:

- Able to work as practitioners in their own right, which must include access to appropriate indemnity insurance.
- Appropriately remunerated, either through salary when employed in birthing centres and hospitals or on a contract basis for homebirths. Contracts should include set remuneration for modules of care, such as care during pregnancy, during labour and birth and during a specified post natal period. Fee-for-service remuneration under Medicare is not appropriate for continuity of midwifery care nor is it equitable for disadvantaged and low and middle income women.

WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP: WOMEN ON BOARDS

- The Australian Government must commit to an equitable representation of women on boards through the establishment of a target of 50% representation of women on Commonwealth government boards and advisory bodies. Gender diversity targets must include a component to reflect the proportion of people from diverse life situations and backgrounds in the population, including people with disabilities, immigrant, refugee and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This target should be achieved within two years with consideration of the introduction of quotas if targets have not been met within this timeframe.
- The Australian Government must provide a two yearly, public analysis of the representation of women in leadership roles in Australia. This analysis should measure and report on:
 - the representation of women in leadership positions and gender inequality in economic, social, cultural and political decision-making in Australia.
 - the representation of men and women in leadership positions in local government, public sector boards and committees (Commonwealth and State), the judiciary, unions, professional associations, education, police, media, and the military.

CHILDCARE

Relating to the recommendations of the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, *Provision of Childcare*, the Australian Government must:

- Provide a substantial increase in the level of funds paid directly to childcare operators in particular areas of need, such as for children with additional needs and, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander children and services operating in rural and remote areas or areas of high unmet demand such as low socio-economic areas.
- Conduct economic modelling of various and alternative childcare funding models to establish the most efficient means of funding quality childcare services to meet the needs of families.
- Implement increases to funding in accordance with those funding mechanisms that are identified as most effective at providing quality, affordable and accessible childcare.

OUT OF SCHOOL HOURS CARE

- Government should give consideration to any recommendations from the *Henry Review of Australia's Future Tax System* which aim to reduce disincentives for women to participate in the workforce.
- Government should de-couple funding of care services for school age children from the funding for services for the preschool children (including infants).
- Government should develop new funding options for both under school age and school aged children's services which will also support services for low population areas in regional Australia. Greater assistance with provision of services for culturally and linguistically different service models, facilities and access for parents with disabilities, and services for children with special needs. Capital and recurrent grants as well as fee relief should be offered.
- Government should promote the connections between school/education, recreation and sport/health related programs, and services for children of primary school age.

INCOME SUPPORT FOR WOMEN

The Australian Government must ensure that:

- The proposed Income Management legislation is not passed or implemented in its current form.
- Sole parents are allowed to stay on Parenting Payment until their child starts high school and job search requirements be relaxed.
- Levels of income support payments for women are adequate for long-term living on benefits – this is currently not the case for many sole parents, and women with a disability. The Age Pension ought to be indexed appropriately.

WOMEN AND TRANSPORT

- A comprehensive study to be undertaken by the Australian Government to examine the gender issues of transport, private and public, and transport infrastructure. This would include examining the issues women in regional, rural and remote areas experience when faced with limited transport options.
- Any proposed user-pay model for road pricing reforms to provide an analysis of women's transport use and needs must:
 - Ensure that women's participation in the workforce is not negatively affected by user-pay models, and
 - Attract subsidies for women with disabilities who are not able, in practice, to use public transport alternatives.

WOMEN AND HOMELESSNESS

- The Australian Government must ensure that women who are rebuilding their life post-crisis have the necessary income to support themselves and their families, as well as access to affordable and appropriate accommodation.
- Funding is needed for services to employ specialist children's support workers who can work with children and families to provide the specific support services they need.
- Support and accommodation options provided for homeless women must be flexible and appropriate for different women's complex situations and needs, in particular women with disabilities, immigrant and refugee women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.
- More funding must be provided for crisis services and safe and secure crisis, transitional and long term housing options in regional and rural Australia.

HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

The Australian Government must introduce a Human Rights Act for Australia which will bring domestic laws in line with Australia's international obligations.

A Human Rights Act must encompass:

- the protection of economic, social and cultural rights, giving them a status on par with civil and political rights,
- the better protection of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and
- the central rights of equality and non-discrimination.

AUSTRALIA, THE UNITED NATIONS AND WOMEN

- Australia should pledge core, predictable, and multi-year voluntary funds now for the new Composite Entity for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment and continue to offer strong moral support for the new entity. Further, Australia should advocate in support of recognition of the vital role that civil society, particularly women's organisations, should play in the work of the new entity.
- Australia should fully implement the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 through a National Action Plan. The Plan must articulate protection as an integrated component and must link to other relevant United Nations Resolutions.
- Australia to continue to support the role and full participation of civil society in United Nations meetings, conferences and international human rights forums.

Journey to Gender Equality: From WomenSpeak to Equality Rights Alliance

Since 2001 WomenSpeak has been a non government network of 48 diverse women's organisations and women's advocates from across Australia, supporting and strengthening the voices of many different women and advocating for gender equality.

Between 2001 and 2010 WomenSpeak was one of four National Women's Alliances, supported by the Federal Office for Women to consult with women in Australia and provide information and policy advice to the Australian Government.

WomenSpeak was auspiced by the YWCA Australia, a movement which aims to promote gender equality and improve the lives of women and girls, their families and communities. WomenSpeak's work covered issues such as health, childcare, women's leadership, women's economic security, women in the workforce and violence against women.

In May 2010, WomenSpeak will be relaunched as the **Equality Rights Alliance**. The **Equality Rights Alliance** will include all current members of WomenSpeak together with new organisational members. The Alliance is one of six new National Women's Alliances, funded by the Federal Office for Women. **Equality Rights Alliance** will be managed by the YWCA Australia and will build on the work of WomenSpeak, focusing on women's equality, diversity and leadership.

For more information about **WomenSpeak** and the establishment of the **Equality Rights Alliance** visit www.ywca.org.au/policy-and-campaigns/womenspeak

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