



**EQUALITY
RIGHTS
ALLIANCE**

HOW GOOD
IS
ACCOUNTABILITY
#ENOUGH IS ENOUGH #MARCH 4 JUSTICE

**National Strategic
Plan on Gender
Equality:
Consultation Report**

5 December 2022

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) is Australia's largest network of organisations advocating for women's economic security, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. We bring together more than 65 organisations with an interest in advancing gender equality at the national level.

ERA believes the advancement of women and the achievement of equality are matters of fundamental human rights and we advocate for gender equality, women's economic security, women's leadership and government policy responses that recognise women's diversity. Using a range of methods to consult and engage with women in Australia, ERA works to bring the voices of women from diverse life situations to policy makers to address structural barriers to gender equality, women's economic well-being and women's full participation in public life.



Report on consultations held from September - November 2022 with individuals and groups drawn from ERA, National Women's Safety Alliance and Harmony Alliance

Participants in the ERA- focused workshops included:

- Frances Quan - Women with Disabilities Australia
- Sally Moyle, Helen Hodgson and Erin Gillen - National Federation of Australian Women (NFAW)
- Kit McMahon - Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE) and Women's Health in the South-East (WHISE)
- Jan Edwards and Elaine Butler - WAVE
- Romy Listo - Womens Health Matters (WMH)
- Menaka Iyengar Cooke and Jozefa Sobski - Women's Electoral Lobby Australia (WELA)
- Marian Sawyer - Australian National University
- Katherine Berney - National Women's Safety Alliance (NWSA)
- Tanja Kovak, Carole Shaw and Gail O'Donnell - Gender Equity Victoria
- Janet Ramsey - Jessie Street Library
- Janet Salisbury - Women's Climate Congress
- Phoebe Nagorcka-Smith and Emma O'Neill - Good Shepherd Aust-NZ
- Steve O'Malley - Gender and Disaster Australia
- Katherine Berney - National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA)
- Alice Ridge - International Women's Development Agency
- Margaret Findlater-Smith - NCWA ACT
- Fiona Dorman - NCWA SA
- Diann Rodgers-Healey - Australian Centre for Leadership for Women
- Niki Vincent and Fiona Savedra - Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Service
- Hannah Woodward - Girl Guides Australia
- Bonney Corbin - MSI Australia
- Ludmilla Kwitko and Barbara O'Dwyer - Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)
- Sharyl Scott - Zonta International
- Belinda Barnett - Maternal Scholars Australia
- Anne Stephens - Violence Prevention Australia
- Dianne Hill - Women's Health Victoria
- Andrea de Silva - Women's Legal Services Australia
- Daile Kelleher - Children by Choice
- Terese Edwards - National Council of Single Mothers and their Children
- Beverley Baker - National Older Women's Network

Participants in the two parallel consultations held with Harmony Alliance members included Nyadol Nyuon (Chair, Harmony Alliance), Minh Nguyen (Wellsprings for Women), and ten other women drawn from Harmony Alliance's membership.

Human rights grounding / structure

How do we get data and measurement in? Collect the right data

Use our international commitments especially CEDAW would help to streamline reporting etc. Map to the SDGs? (Review of the Platform for Action useful). Useful link to the work done by business on the SDGs.

How do we move from a deficit model to a positive

How will this strategy enhance / interact with other existing strategies?

Map the gender and related strategies domestic and international strategies / plans etc as prep.

Legislation? Policy / settings change? values & mindset change? Where is this pitched?

Reporting and accountability - Goals and indicators, annual reporting, whole of Govt

Data makes intersectionality meaningful

National and multi-jurisdictional - levels

Ground it in the barriers actually faced by women (income, homelessness etc) avoid bandaids. Look at the structural issues.

Social, cultural and environmental determinants of health

Co Design

WPS experience - implementation plans which are so broad they're meaningless

SDGs - dropped the ball. Incorporate / reflect

Universality - childcare, housing, social security? Primary prevention

Women are currently everywhere and nowhere - synchronise

Intersectionality - include social class

Needs to have a lifecourse approach across all stages of women's life. And reporting requirements need to include data disaggregated by key characteristics to actually apply the intersectional lens eg race, social class, disability etc.

Is the strategy to advance gender equality or to improve the lives of women / close poverty gap? We want advancing gender equality to be a key part of the aim.

Sometimes the life course approach can be tricky from a disability lens so just keeping that in mind (I also think it can be useful in other ways though)

Domestic v international spend - false dichotomy - need to see review across all expenditure - SDGs are the purvue of DFAT only. Applies to Aust, not

Summary - What Matters To Our Members

Vision

Wide public support

Public campaign

Clear and relevant, with stories

Basis in the law

Human rights informed

Prioritising housing, the care and pay gaps

Climate change as overarching issue

Redistributes wealth

Regular points of review

Summary

If the Strategy is to be a success, then there must be wide public engagement and support for the process. All Australian should be able to recognise the benefits of the Strategy, which will only happen if the benefits are drawn from genuine, broad-based consultation and communicated widely. Without that awareness, risks emerge such as weak public and political interest and pushback. The participants ERA consulted with want to see a wide reach of stakeholders in the life of the Strategy; interest in having as many people invested and involved in the Strategy's development from the beginning and sustained as the Strategy is implemented.

The participants in our consultation process see the Strategy as being part of a major and interconnected project to build a better Australia, taking advantage of recent inflection points in the gender equality journey. For example, the women's movement knows that sexual harassment is harmful and costly, and we know that the best protective factor is gender equal workplaces as explained in the *Set the Standard* and *Respect@Work* reports. But does the general public know that? The ultimate success of those reports, as with the Strategy, will rely on everyone recognising the problems and their role in the solutions.

The language of the Strategy needs to be **clear and inspiring**, so a broad range of people engage with it.

“People need to see themselves in it so they can take action. It's important to ensure the Strategy has real life rather than just being printed.”

“A key question from me is, ‘How are we going to make this meaningful for people?’ This requires understanding pop culture and meeting people where they are... I think the government is under-estimating how important consultations are needed outside of the sector.”

“Surely, we must engage people who are the usual suspects; people who are not already engaged.”

“The approach needs to be co-designed to get the foundations right.”

“We can’t plonk the Strategy on the public without gauging attitudes and getting buy in.

“Men of all ages need to be engaged too.”

“We’ve got to ensure men are not sidelined.”

“There will be men who think there should not be a Federal Office for Women, and we can’t assume Australian women are on board either.”

“There is a risk this work ends up preaching to the converted.”

“The Strategy should have a roadshow, in the lead up to and after its launch, saying ‘This is coming!’”

The Strategy is not about top political actors and advocates but about ordinary people ‘to whom politics happens’. It is about power relations and so it should challenge gender norms. It’s not meant to be comfortable and yet it needs to take people along, conscious that we can’t assume there is shared language around gender equality and gender equity nor universal support for a Strategy as generations perceive the challenges differently and Australia’s diverse cultures set different gender norms. For the Strategy to succeed, there should be a campaign that tries to put everyone on the same page about the value of shared goals around gender equality and gender equity for all Australians.

“We fought for gender equality but our children, who are reaping the benefits, don’t think it matters – even though we have a way to go.”

“Simultaneously, there is a backlash against gender equality and feminism, fuelled by social media which is causing harms; the rise of the Right, radicalisation of white men who talk about the denial of ‘their rights’, and an inability within the Left to be persuasive.”

“This is complex given we are multicultural, multi-religious, multi-class. We can’t have people use culture to resist change.”

“We can’t assume a shared understanding of gender equality. We need to interrogate it.”

“We have come through choice feminism and women on boards feminism, and we seem to be in a new space, but that space doesn’t appear to be intersecting with debates about how central should paid work be in our lives.”

An effective Strategy throws into relief everything people in power are doing or not doing, like checking their privilege, seeing how they have benefitted from colonisation and/or been beneficiaries of tax and transfer systems that have punished the poor (who became poor not because of anything they have done). This is a project, participants argued, that is meant to shake things up at that level but can only work if people see that it matters to them. How else do you fight racism, for example, which is a barrier to women of ethnic and Indigenous heritage getting ahead? Participants hope for a Strategy that really transfigures the society for good with concerted Commonwealth-led efforts that drive structural commitments to gender equality and in ways that support ground-up and community-based actions and challenge attitudes and norms.

Participants want the Strategy to make the case for the **redistribution of wealth**. The Strategy can be a major way to drive substantive representation of women’s policy priorities, for example, services and environment rather than tax cuts and increases in defence spending (areas that opinion polling shows women don’t support as much as men).

“The Strategy should support the just collection and allocation of taxpayer funds.”

“We know the government is taking tentative steps in that direction, in terms of starting a conversation about tax reform, super tax concessions, and why redistribution matters from a gender equality perspective.”

Members argued that we are not going to get gender equality without tax and revenue reform and how gendered the current nature of those revenue and tax systems are. The Strategy could help highlight the inequalities of a capitalist focussed system “without saying we want to dismantle all of it.”

“We just want to redistribute the benefits accrued through those systems.”

Participants talked up the importance of having the Strategy dovetail with other current strategies and action plans.

“They need to speak to each other...Push in the spaces where we’re not performing well, and [the document] updated as we go.”

There was consensus about including **housing** (typically in health) as an objective and for **safety** to be treated in the same way, as a standalone priority as a health and education determinant. **Climate change** as a threat and opportunity should be an overarching theme that intersects with all parts of the Strategy.

There was also broad consensus about the need for an **evaluation framework** and a stronger **legislative framework** that builds on what exists in the law to support the Strategy come to life and provide insurance. The Workplace Gender Equality Act could be expanded so the agency has increased compliance powers to supercharge what has been slow workplace-based change. The Commonwealth is advised to consider a Gender Equality Act which would act as a kind of skeleton to hold the different parts of the Strategy up, however one needn’t follow the other.

Should the Strategy have an international objective? Members said, ‘no, not necessarily’.

“It’s neither here nor there. It will be tackled anyway through DFAT.”

Who is the Strategy for? Who does the Strategy speak for?

Definitions, social context and changing norms

Questions emerged in the consultation:

‘What is the Strategy attempting to change?’

‘Who is involved, and how far do we want them to go?’

This goes to the **theory of change**. Radical and sustained reform requires taking society (all key actors and broader community) along and having

media and other influencers believe and share key messages. Systems thinker and *Tipping Points* author, Malcolm Gladwell, talks about a ‘stickiness factor’ for messages and change to spread.

A comprehensive Strategy will cover multiple issues and for it to be effective, Australians need to believe in its value. It will need to carry a vision; a picture of where the Strategy will take them. They must like the picture. Visioning needs time.

There was consensus that changing gender norms is complex work:

- Shifts happens slowly.
- It happens from the ground up but also with leadership at every level.
- Seen as happening across a generation and therefore 10-15-year minimum Strategy required (as with SDGs).
- The Strategy could evolve with different versions launched at different times, to respond to the ebb and flow of priorities as they emerge and different pressure points.
- It should be higher level with touch points (not locking in what is inadequate) and mid-term analysis, to guard against funding loss/political waning.

“To be actioned, the Strategy must be underpinned by an awareness of how to constructively implement objectives.”

“The government should consider what actions will cost with a cost benefit analysis.”

“The government should look at the cost of implementing the Strategy and the cost of not (work the Productivity Commission can do?).”

“There should not be significant imposts for business otherwise there will be pushback from employers.”

ERA's international partners recommend [Analytical Framework – Gender at Work](#) as a comprehensive framework to support and map change.

The framework, developed by an international feminist network, connects individuals and families to community, institutions, and society. It makes visible the many dimensions of gender equality and gendered power relations, exploring barriers and drivers. It aligns with principles agreed in CEDAW and the Beijing Platform for Action.

The Strategy should connect with CEDAW and other international instruments, at least to support the Strategy's implementation.

Global context

Gender inequality exists in Australia and in other contexts.

- There are contextually specific dynamics, but the **drivers of gender equality happen at the global level** and interact with local drivers.
- The Strategy should acknowledge that.
- We can learn from the overseas experience.

Members want “gender equality” to be interrogated; for assumptions to be challenged.

“Will the Strategy take a feminist approach rather than merely focus on gender equality? The former is about systems of power and power framing. In foreign policy, usually gender equality becomes about gender inclusion – including women and children. But that can look like including women and children in bad systems and not changing those systems.”

“We have come through ‘choice’ feminism and ‘women on boards’ feminism, and we seem to be in a new space, but that space doesn’t appear to be intersecting with debates about how central paid work should be in our lives.”

Language: gender and sex diversity

Participants anticipate binary language in a “Women’s Strategy” which could be managed with a preamble that addresses gender complexity and fluidity.

The development of a national Strategy comes at a time when women's movements are undergoing shifts that reflect shifts in the wider society. There has been a shift in understandings of gender as less of a set of discreet indices of biological difference and more of a category of human experience and a belief that social relations determine key differences rather than biological sex alone producing social divisions between the sexes. The shift is global but has more social mileage in developed, rich nations such as Australia. For many, concerns about sex and gender have moved to concerns about power and difference, that is, a move from 'gender' understood as an individualistic character trait to analysis of the systemic, social order and structural patterns of differentiation.

Also, there is a risk that a national Strategy to advance women's equality will tend to impute universal female experience when we know there are significant variations in gendered experience. Further, women's experience of oppression are not the same. White women's experiences and the experiences of black, brown, and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women are often in different realms. Patriarchy (a habit of mind, way of thought and political system defined as a 'male power and property structure in which men are dominant to the detriment of women' and largely to the detriment of their own full development) is more likely to be a word used by white feminist women than black, brown and CALD women.

The definition of patriarchy (as a key barrier to empowerment) is limited since the oppression women of colour experience may be a combination of gender oppression and a variety of other loci of oppression, from the interweaving of power relations of race, class, and gender. Women of colour have felt and can still feel oppressed by white women. Harmony Alliance representatives worry the Strategy might widen the gap between their communities and white professional women.

A Strategy will inevitably generalise about women's experiences, so a challenge remains to not essentialise 'women', 'black' or 'white' women.

Sharing stories

ERA's consultations began with some storytelling, prompted by the two-part question, 'Where were you at 21 and what challenges did you face?'

There were extraordinary stories; recollections of entering male dominated work environments and struggles navigating cultural and social expectations. Many women highlighted the pressure of caring responsibilities, the value of education and work, supports from family and overcoming gender norms and prejudice.

Here is a sample:

“When I was 21, I was in Canberra at uni. I joined the YWCA. It was a big introduction to women’s policy. I am not going to pretend I had barriers. But what I am struck by is how different it is for young women now, it varies significantly. What loomed large for me was what life looked like for older women. I remember wondering, ‘how do I build financial security for myself?’. ‘Would there be barriers entering the workforce?’ I was a law student and conscious students were majority women and moving into a potentially hostile environment. I didn’t have a lot to help me work through that transition.”

“I had done zoology. I lived in a women’s college. I felt supported. We felt privileged to be there. The first thing that really shocked me... I had aspirations for grandeur when it came to the final exams. I was a bit disappointed [by my results]. When I had my leaving interview with the professor, and I said I aspired to do better, he said ‘You did very well for a woman’... I went onto to do a PhD in cancer research.”

“Reflecting on that time, accessing information was a barrier. Growing up, people lived in parallel universes... There were scholarships but I didn’t know about them. How did people learn about different pathways, except through your network? ... Today, the answers can’t just be on the internet. It’s everybody’s business to share information.”

“I was living in my tiny country town in the summer so I could work and going to Melbourne for semesters. Everyone in my town would stay and do a trade or get the hell out. The town had no real opportunities, especially for women being well paid if you stayed. That’s the perception I had as a teenager. In my country town, it felt there was not a lot of access to both medical help and cultural capital. It felt cut off from the rest of the world. Melbourne felt different. Staying in the city was the big goal and then I grew up and learnt that wasn’t the case. At that age I was recovering from a brain injury... And so, I was feeling grateful for whatever came up. There are lots of

opportunities in regional Victoria, but not apparent to you when you are young. I always wanted to do something where I could make influence in advocacy or policy as a public servant. It seemed all that work was in capital cities, and there was not much available in rural and regional areas. That's not the case now, but it probably was before COVID."

"At 21, or 20 I was probably getting arrested trying to get people out of Vietnam."

"When I think about 21-year-olds today, I think they are much less progressed in their education and career trajectories. When I was 21, I was at Adelaide City Council and promoted young to be the senior urban planner... I was the only person on the entire floor who was a woman and not in admin. I was as senior as the 60-year-old men, and they absolutely hated it... I won young planner of the year. My career was taking off based on my knowledge, but I got constant sexual harassment around 'you should be a model. You could make more money as a model.' There was sexual violence in the workplace. I could not move around the building safely. I had to go to building sites. There were opportunities for people to lunge at me. I was constantly physically defending myself. It was odd; I was a pedestal but constantly dealing with so much everyday... At the time also, I was living in a share-house and my mum was going through a period of domestic violence and I couldn't get her to leave the situation. I set up a bedroom for her, but I couldn't get her out. In the end when I was 21, I quit planning, my career, spent some nourishing time with my grandparents and then went overseas, not understanding why my mum chose to stay. There were layers of violence and I navigating a senior position when I couldn't circumnavigate my own life."

"I am the eldest girl in a family of 8 children. We left a refugee camp in Kenya after fleeing South Sudan... I was told that I must stay at home until I was married. I was told education is more important for boys as they carry the family name... The war (in Sudan) had taken a lot of the men. Women were expected to suffer. Suffering was praised."

"I am the eldest of nine children from a refugee family, a matriarchal South Asian culture. My mother had a large family to avoid loneliness... I became a surrogate mother to my siblings. I studied languages and literature... My parents resisted my decision to marry at 19. My

husband was made to sign a contract that providing moral understanding.”

“I was labelled a ‘wog’ but found solidarity with other Greeks... I studied and worked. I had a plan.”

“I became a shipping master, but only after applying many times and the introduction of the *Sex Discrimination Act*. I eventually moved into the public service because of the pay and conditions.”

“I did a law degree after a B.A. I was one of only two Asian students [doing my course] in the 1980s. Vietnamese people at the time were seen as either drug addicts or drug dealers. My parents were supportive but [Vietnamese Australian] society was not. I was often asked, ‘Why are you studying?’, ‘Do you have enough English?’. I was told by men that ‘You are too ambitious,’ ‘You must want to study law because you are so argumentative.’”

“My family survived the Holocaust. We carry that grief. I was a huge disappointment because I did not choose law or medicine. I studied social work and worked for the UNHCR where I got into reproductive health and women’s advocacy. I felt anything was possible but there were lots of arguments [in the movement].”

“In terms of aspirations at that age, it was everyday survival, but I really wanted was health literacy, the preventative aspects. I was not raised to know about women’s health, and I remember learning more through workplace programs than anything I learnt at school. That has improved. I was into yoga at a young age, but it was stigmatised. That has changed.”

“I was living at home. I was an adult daughter who remained at home because my parents were in a dysfunctional relationship, and I was there to provide support. My parents ultimately decided to separate which left my mum in a tricky financial situation. That caused a lot of stress. I was willing to do anything to help my mum through that. I was thinking about stopping uni, going to work but fortunately I was friends with mature age students, women doing law after going through their own separations, and they said, ‘Don’t be an idiot, you’re going to stay studying and finish that’... There were repercussions for

us though, a classic story of older women’s financial insecurity...
Looking back it set money values in place for me early on, but I wish I
had more worldliness than that I have now.”

General concerns about progressing a Strategy: tight timeline and potentially shallow

- The fast pace of this consultation (less than 6 months to April 2023) could undermine the egalitarian value of sharing power.
- “I’d really support slowing the process down. Gender equality has been here for thousands of years. It’s not going to go away. We should wait an extra year to co-produce a Strategy that means something to women in Australia, but I am not optimistic that suggestion will be taken up.”
- “I am concerned about that the capacity of federal colleagues [in the APS] has been denuded.”
- “Victoria took 2 years to consult ahead of its Gender Equality Act... There was a lot of public support, [the Commission is] getting 100% compliance.”
- It assumes a shared understanding of equality.
- The document may be full of impractical motherhood statements.
- The document may be disconnected from diverse women’s lives.
- The document needs to be results-orientated / conscious of outcomes.
- ‘Economic participation’ as a goal could be captured (neo-liberal) and/or be understood as experienced by women who are only white and professional.
- “Getting this wrong can do more harm than good”.
- That it ‘pushes policy that all women should work full-time, concerning, capitalist instead of asking what women want their lives to be like outside of work?’

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- Concern this could adversely affect state policies and see women in Australia have even greater access than others, especially of migrant and refugee background.

What we want from a Strategy

We want a Strategy which:

- values community;
- improves women's lives;
- sets targets;
- uses plain language;
- recognises and makes women visible, including:
 - shines a light on 'care'; emancipates labour from the marketplace,
 - shines a light on the Australian context (not like other international strategies, and therefore highlighting Australia's unique pressure points areas like housing),
 - explicitly includes women with a disability and diverse families,
- 'pushes against a restrictive framework that tells women working full-time is their best/only option of success';
- stops telling women to just "do stuff, do more", and creates, instead an environment that enables women's participation and engagement;
- sees all government expenditure fairly distributed to support all genders;
- makes gender equality gaps visible, and measures change, especially around financial security/stress and material deprivation;
- brings together national plans and sees what's missing in them (does not reinvent the wheel);

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- creates opportunity to have men see gender equality as about them too;
 - connects all areas of government;
 - is implemented and supported by a gender literate and gender sensitive APS with public servants growing in their capacity to do GRB; and
 - raises the visibility of human rights / uses rights-based language.

Recommended approach to drafting the Strategy

The Strategy should be:

- **human rights-based**
 - using human rights language and framing, and
 - mapped against Australia's existing human rights obligations.
- **a living document**
 - subject to regular review, and
 - capable of being refocused as new evidence and thinking emerges.
- **participatory**
 - "Participation should be both a method and an outcome."
 - "We should start the way we want to end."
 - "We need a deep consultation process, much more than consultants writing a bloody theory of change."
 - The government, with community support, should develop public logic for the change: raise awareness about why this Strategy and subsequent actions are needed.
 - "We've got to take men along. It should be awareness raising."

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- “There should be effort made to understand resistance to change and to move the discussion beyond winners and losers.”
 - **co-produced across the community with participatory processes from start to finish in order to:**
 - build community buy-in;
 - hear the voices of those the Strategy is being designed to support and recognise the lived experience of women and girls;
 - identify evidence to support the theory of change;
 - help translate the document with relatable stories;
 - help manage expectations;
 - support participants to experience participatory democracy as a co-learning exercise;
 - help build trust in government as custodians of this work;
 - **based in stories of lived experience and celebrate examples of change**
 - “Telling stories is more powerful and effective than mere facts;”
 - **drafted so that it acknowledges and explains intersectionality**
 - “We want the document [and actions plans] to support working WITH cultures - in partnership - asking women ‘what are the alternatives within your culture?’;”
 - **applicable across the life cycle**
 - **cross-sectional and involves all departments (whole-of-government) and jurisdictions**
 - **aware of systems and focus on prevention.**

- Anticipates women and men (all sex and genders) jointly sharing responsibility for gender equality and all actions affecting the economy, democracy, culture and science.

We recommend the drafters of the Strategy consider the Victorian experience of developing a gender framework, where consultation paid off:

The Victorian process included:

- a roadshow to build public awareness;
- the development of guidance documents for the entities covered and for the media;
- the development of the *Gender Equality Act (2021)*, obliging public entities and local councils to embed strong governance structures to improve and promote gender equality. That Act requires defined entities develop a Gender Equality Action Plan, conduct a workplace gender audit, submitted to the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector, which builds capacity in those sectors for addressing gender inequality;
- a gender equality strategy [*Safe and Strong*](#), drafted following wide consultation including 200 written submissions, in person consultations in metro and regional areas, and separate consultations with specific groups including Aboriginal Victorians, people with a disability, seniors, young people, culturally diverse communities, LGBTI Victorians, the corporate sector, women in leadership and a range of specific industries;
- preliminary data work, including a review of data sources to inform gender equality in the State, the establishment of gender equality baselines and gender equality targets;
- establishing the [Equal Workplaces Advisory Committee](#) (EWAC) to identify government action that will promote the achievement of gender equality including addressing gendered occupational segregation;

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- establishing the statutory body [Respect Victoria](#) as a prevention agency focused on prevention of family violence;
 - establishing Local Prevention Alliances; and
 - introducing gender ethical procurement policies in relation to contracted organisations, suppliers and funded agencies, to encourage and promote change.

What should a Strategy look like?

Preamble

- Should be optimistic and ambitious.
- Should draw on CEDAW: ensuring the ability of all men and women to enjoy human rights (we note the CEDAW committee has been asking for a national Strategy from participating nation-states for years¹).
- Explains language and points to society's complexities.

Values / Principles

- Gender equality (equal enjoyment of human rights).
- Gender equity (not just being / wanting to be like men) across intersections.
- Inclusivity (leaves no one behind).
- Safety.
- Care, including:

¹ See for example CEDAW/c/aus/co/8 July 2018, paragraph 16: “The Committee recommends that the State party, in line with the Committee’s general recommendation No. 28, adopt a comprehensive national gender equality policy with performance indicators to address the structural factors resulting in inequalities between men and women and ensure that the Office for Women has a strong mandate and sufficient human and financial resources to coordinate and monitor the implementation of that policy throughout the territory of the State party.”

- valuing caring
- considering how we can better identify and value the role care plays in the economy
- caring for each other and the environment so the economy is life-sustaining.
- Respect - as an active concept.
- A broader definition of prosperity which encompasses ‘thriving’.
- Justice - understanding power, who’s got it, how to redistribute it / share it.

Thoughts from the consultations about ‘prosperity’:

“Prosperity in the sense of prospering as part of society as a whole;”

“The values need to stretch across societal thinking to obtain societal benefits;”

‘Safe and Equal’ is the title of the Vic Strategy – comes out of that work on violence. Respect also features in the Victorian narrative. It’s about how we will all prosper when women are seen as equal – men do well when women prosper.”

What would success look like in a National Strategy?

- More Australians accepting gender equality as a principle and an active goal we should be working for.
 - A major shift in attitudes among men and boys (using baseline data to measure the change.
 - More men would be proud feminists.
 - More men would attend women’s events as allies.

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- A major shift in who is doing the care at home and more gender balance in the care economy.
 - More collaboration across society and more inclusive decision making.
 - “Australia having new norm-setting standards that comply with our human rights obligations.”
 - More women being able to lead the lives they want to live.
 - Increased accessibility to services for ALL women.
 - “More even access to childcare across Australia.”
 - Greater bodily autonomy.
 - Improved access to sexual and reproductive health.
 - Greater prevention against family and domestic violence.
 - “Moving the dial on systemic ableism.”
 - “Moving the dial on racism.”
 - “Success would look like equal representation of women in decision making – in everything from school P&Cs to local health clinics to parliaments.”
 - Greater protections for women regardless of their visa status.
 - Fewer women on precarious visas.
 - Increased funding for CALD community groups.
 - More financial wellbeing workshops for women.
 - Abolition of tertiary education fees.
 - Women enjoying a retirement system that allows them to live in mature age with dignity.

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- Affordable and accessible technology infrastructure, with women participating in the design and development of technology and more women being able to use technology safely, including:
 - unbiased algorithms and other automated systems;
 - equal access to digital resources; and
 - online systems and data management promoting women’s safety, not posing a threat (concerns raised about Medibank providing women’s details to others).
 - Work opportunities and safe workplaces, available to all women in Australia regardless of their employment or visa status;
 - Flexible and universal childcare.
 - Renumeration and acknowledgement of lived experience contributing to role.
 - A more diverse range of women represented in leadership roles in government and workplaces.
 - **“More women feel safe and are free from violence in all its forms.”**
 - Every spending program would have an intersectional gender lens from the design stage.
 - All new legislation or regulatory change would be mapped against the Strategy and if it’s not compatible, scrapped or changed (See the Victorian experience above).

Goals and outcomes

Members see the value of no more than 6 goals for simplicity. Climate change would be an over-arching theme in terms of a costs/risks and opportunities. Some participants argued for fewer than 6 goals.

“There should be four pillars as per ALP policy and [they should] become the scaffold which then allows other plans and policies to be built into it.”

There was some consensus about the importance of these following priority areas as themes and goals. One idea which emerged was to have all goals start with “Equal” and/or “Equitable”.

1. Cultural and social change

- Shifting attitudes, increased support for gender equality as a whole-of-society objective.

2. [Equitable] Health

- Intersects with violence
- Underpins all other goals, health as a determinant
- “It’s good to see more women’s health a focus in ATSI, but I would like to see progress in the CALD area too.”
- Leverage the existing Women’s Health Plan
- Increase access to reproductive health

“In my state of South Australia there are too few birthing hospitals.”

“Health care, women’s health - maternal, perinatal, abortion services - should be available regardless of your location.”

3. [Equal] Safety and Justice as a standalone goal? There was debate about this proposition. Some felt that including safety only under health was problematic as there are too many different and significant factors that disproportionately effect families and communities. Other thoughts included:

- You can’t have health without safety.
- You can’t have education and training without safety.
- All goals have an aspect of safety.
- We should be leveraging the National Plan on Violence Against Women and Children.

“Safety from violence should have its own pillar because there is momentum in this area and there is a lot of prevention work to do.”

“Stopping violence is easy to put on a list but supporting a woman who has experienced violence can be forgotten... Childcare, trauma treatment, housing, legal costs.”

“There is a danger of the impossible or immeasurable promise such as the objective of stopping violence against women in a generation.”

“The experience of violence and the language around sexual, family and domestic violence has changed. Twenty years ago, talking to friends and family, we didn’t know how to understand it or talk about it or react to it. People would not have known that they had experienced abuse. Now, the response is so different, not just from services but in the community, having capacity to hold space for it, talk about it and understand it.”

“When I was at uni and doing advocacy around violence, I remember talking to all the heads of the residential colleges about intimate partner violence and they would say, there might be something happening in our postgrad wing’. No, there is intimate partner violence between 18-year-olds. If I had those conversations now, it would be a different story. The landscape has changed in terms of recognition.”

4. [Equal and Equitable] Education and Training (including STEM and technology)

- Should acknowledge that Australian women are well educated and its problematic that they “consistently feel they have to upskill and retrained”. “What is the individual cost to women? Not training for training’s sake.”
- **Education** has touchpoints across the lifecycle, there should be an emphasis on learning for life with **technology** in that.
- “Access to technology and participation in developing tech industries should be seen as a human right.”
- Women can’t be excluded from the Internet and using it safely.

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- “You can’t participate in society without [access to tech], for example, access telehealth or education.”
 - “I’m starting to worry a little about constant calls for women to be educated in STEM and then govt failing to properly fund STEM jobs, leaving these graduates more reliant on industry jobs, which aren’t always supportive of human and planetary wellbeing.”
 - “It includes the failure to make those STEM workplaces safe and positive for women.”
 - “Tech is also about participation and accessibility, digital rights and data privacy.” “People’s experience of poverty includes disclosing data and having confidence that is held securely.”
 - Includes **Women and artificial intelligence**
 - Concern there are lots of routine jobs that are being computerised;
 - “Got to ensure women know how to do things – maths and engineering so they are in charge of AI rather than the other way around.”

5. Economic security / financial resilience, wellbeing and social security

- Paid work is part of this but participants felt it was equally important to address the State’s responsibility to reduce poverty with a targeted and universal safety net.
- The Strategy would see women bounce back from life-changing events with structural and place-based solutions.
- Members were enthusiastic about **universal basic income** as a source of financial security for men and women taking up more care responsibilities because of climate change. They saw this as part of a bigger conversation about equitable pathways so all genders can emancipate their labor in ways they wish.

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- Women should be able to contribute to and benefit from strong welfare and safety net systems including an accessible National Disability Insurance Scheme.
 - “PPL should be improved to meet ILO standard.”
 - “I feel there is a push that all women must work full-time, I feel that as a policy push, the idea that we can solve women’s economic security if we all work full-time. I am concerned about that and how that might be reflected in a national Strategy. It’s super capitalist. We are in a pandemic era and people are reflecting on what they want their lives to be beyond work. I am seeing peers have children, if have watched women to it all, and are saying, I want to value parenting and they are grappling with the choices because the success model is full-time work.”
 - It should make a distinction between “pursuing full employment” and pursuing participation that is meaningful to women. “I do wonder how we can use this process to allow people to have preferences as to how they structure their life, and they should have the right to have economic security and not worry if they dedicate their lives to parenting or something else without worrying that at 70, they live in poverty. I see this push for everyone to work more among Labor people and it concerns me.”
 - The Strategy should make the case for greater redistribution of wealth (gendered tax and revenue reform).
 - **This should include childcare as an enabler.**
 - It should include enhanced and extended parental leave as part of wider value of care.
 - “Economic participation is not about prosperity but wage parity, and the wages of brown and black women which is lower than white women... Focus is needed there.”
 - Human trafficking and modern slavery also came up in discussions.
 - The Victorian Inquiry into Women’s Economic Equity might be useful regarding removing structural barriers to leadership by diverse

women, rather than a simple ‘women on boards’ approach. Emphasising women on boards can ignore that the services or goods business deliver may doing harm to women. “Putting women on boards is only one aspect. What about changing the workings of business, so they don’t perpetuate gender equality.”

- “[there] is the problem of an **ageing population**. There’s a common story of women, in their prime, leaving the workforce to be carers for elderly parents. It is taking out a mature and experienced workforce.”
- Building capacity for greater flexibility at work and on women’s terms. “Managers being more creative with their workers, having them have a say in the pattern of work without cashflows being impacted.” “Could there be a flexible work unit to advice private sector, offering solutions and ideas to various scenarios?”
- “I am concerned that men are returning to the workplace, post peak COVID, in greater numbers while women are opting to work from home more. Men are just as if not more visible in the office which may reward them in the long term.”

6. Equal pay

- “It should be one of the goals. The government is committed to it and so should grab it and run with it.”
- “This is a longstanding and unique problem in Australia in some ways. It would be great to see some concerted work in that area.”
- “It can help focus the government and see government and APS more actively engage the business which has a major role to play.”
- “The gap begins as soon as graduates start work. They should have the ability to negotiate a better deal from the start.”
- The Strategy should define the concept of equal work for work of equal value. It was noted that this concept has evolved significantly and needs to be aligned to current ILO work in this

area: “We at NCWA have been arguing for equal pay for equal work since 1910!”

- “There has been change but a lot of young people don’t realise this is not fixed.”
- “We must remain vigilant on pay equity.”

It would be useful to align work on this area with the optional protocols to CEDAW (equal pay, PPL and women in all areas of work including defence combat) and the work of the ILO generally.

7. Equal distribution of power and influence / power sharing

- This is about having women involved in decision making. It needs to be more than ‘leadership’ or women on boards. See for example, work on women’s participation in peace processes at community level in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda.
- There was ambivalence about the importance of naming ‘leadership’ in a standalone pillar because it hooks into masculine notions of power.
- Many said **leadership** as a concept should be replaced with **participation across all areas**. “Leadership is only one aspect of active participation, just as gender equality is only one facet of equality.”
- “Women have always been leaders; the question has been one of power: recognition, payment, agency and safety exercising power.”
- “Not about who is ‘boss’ but about women being heard and having agency with men.”
- Others felt there was still work to be done in more traditional formulations of women’s leadership. “There should be financial penalties imposed on business that do not have gender parity on boards and in management.” “Power sharing is still a problem in formal politics. There is not a lot that prepares new people. It’s like wading through treacle.”

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- Women should be involved in and benefit from decision making roles negotiating and being consulted on climate policy, environment management, Indigenous ways of working, disaster risk reduction and emergency responses, with a community development approach.
 - Power sharing in new and old media is critical, including control and management of social media platforms.
 - Some members felt that the Strategy should be used to show women's preferences across policy development with public opinion polling showing what women prefer public money be spent on versus what governments generally do (bolster defence etc).
 - Some argued for quotas to be deepened with diversity targets that increase the diversity of voices across class.

8. [Equal] Care / Valuing care / Care equity

- Standalone because it is where the greatest gain can be made shifting gender norms and challenging stereotypes.
- An economy that allows space for care and supports this / life sustaining economics.
- “We must have policy to support the sharing of household and caring work.”
- “It should include caring for parents as well as kids... Breaking the pernicious nexus between caring and poverty.”
- “There's the question of whether we should put monetary value on care, but that is limited because caring is so much more than the hours spent or dollars assigned to it. It's really cheating the value and concept. As long as there is a capitalist framing, there will be women who will lose out.”
- “I think of the care and work question as a person with a disability and my partner too. We have this funny ecosystem going on where one or

both of us work, or none of us works and sometimes work is bad for health, but we need the work to pay for healthcare. The capitalist framing makes us think about accumulating wealth even if it's bad for us. An alternative farming would see us think about the value of each person and the value of community and the nurturing of each and the environment.”

9. Housing security

- This typically sits under Health as a health determinant, but the problem is so bad and critical to all other priority areas, member representatives wish to see this as a standalone goal.
- Members talked about dismantling the investor-centered model and making housing more of a human right. This is a necessary foundation for a gender equitable nation and critical in the face of climate disasters and heatwaves.
- “We need to shift the paradigm around what housing means and can do. We’ve built an entire economic system based on owning property.”
- Growing rents and record low vacancy rates in the private rental sector make it especially hard for low-income individuals and families.
- The Strategy should help address the national social housing wait list of nearly 200,000 households.
- The Strategy could “reorientate the conversation about housing”.
- Taxation settings that stimulate the cost of housing in Australia should be reviewed.
- Housing and contents insurance should be more affordable or guaranteed.
- “The good thing about the right to housing it that it encompasses the quality of that housing, not only the presence - which is important in the context of climate concerns.”
- “[Housing] could be included under poverty reduction with wellbeing as it is in Canada.”

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- The new Housing and Homelessness Agreement (NHHA) should inform the Strategy and vice versa. Members hoped to see the fulfillment of the Productivity Commission’s recommendation that the Agreement be a reform document to tackle affordability across the housing system, and not just be a funding contract.
 - The NHHA must be ambitious and recognise women’s unequal access to secure housing, and centres housing as a critical social and care infrastructure.
 - There should be an explicit focus on the gendered dimensions of housing insecurity and especially young people. “There is growing recognition of the challenges for older women but not young women, particularly as those women in mere decades, will be moving into the higher risk period.”
 - Questions emerged:
 - “What does a climate resilient home look like?”
 - “How do we ensure we have an affordable clean energy system?”
 - The Strategy should support energy efficiency access for people on low incomes.
 - “It’s good to see funding for major upgrades to energy transmission infrastructure to facilitated renewal energy, cheaper energy, funded in the budget. Temporary support is also needed as we transition from old energy.”
 - “We had this lesson in the pandemic of governments [wrongly] assuming that the home is always a place of safety and retreat. We will increasingly rely on our homes in heatwaves. If you can’t retreat to your home for safety, where do you go? At the moment it’s things like shopping centres and casinos. We need public, affordable and safe public spaces that people can retreat to.”

Climate change: Cuts across all issues

Climate change-related events threaten to exacerbate gender violence, and will worsen housing security, mental health and overall wellbeing. It also offers opportunities in sectors growing to meet the challenge of a low-carbon economy (with potential benefits for women from significant government investments in energy systems change, and a jobs strategy for women in the decarbonising economy).

Members and partners said that given the existential threats and opportunities climate change poses, the Strategy must inform what governments do in partnership with communities and business, across all policy areas.

Climate change should be in every aspect of the Strategy from prevention (drastic reductions in emissions) to adaptation, preparedness and recovery. The Strategy, with a climate change lens, should reflect the National Health and Climate Strategy to manage the risks to women's health and wellbeing.

“The Government is beginning to make ground on climate change. It's a start. There's obviously a lot of work to do if we are going to have a chance at reasonable mitigation of climate change.”

“Internationally, Australia is quick to talk about gendered impacts of climate change but that can be an excuse to not curb emissions.”

“The firefighter hero narrative does not allow men to access support.”

“It's a problem that the new National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children [2022-2032] does not deal with climate change issues.”

“We need to focus on prevention and preparedness as well as recovery. That's what we are hearing in from our workers in East Gippsland... Funding tends to dry out after that crisis stage... There should be staged and multi-year recovery plans.”

“There is family violence risk in disasters and heatwaves, and we need to make that more visible, get that into actions plans and integrate with plans to make housing safe.”

“We know that gender and climate are linked... Immediate exacerbation of everything we’ve been talking about. It must be fundamental overarching issue. It’s a driver; an essential risk factor.”

“We have observed that in Northern Rivers’ flooded communities, there’s been press coverage that forgives men for their violence. How can we talk about it without making excuses?”

“First Nations women should be acknowledged and participate as owners of land and water rights for environmental management.”

“Internationally, climate change adaptation is seen as requiring Indigenous solutions and Indigenous people are engaged, but less so here. Adaptation in the Australian context is very technical and therefore masculine.”

There are not only compound effects of gender and disaster but workplace issues that exacerbate it. Emergency management services with their rank structures and predominantly male workforces (and gender norms and expectations about men tending to see and respond to disasters, being heroes, stoic and unemotional, and women more vulnerable) have to look different to cater for diverse needs in communities responding to and recovering from disasters.

“In emergencies governments revert to ‘can do’ patriarchal attitudes and ‘helping people’ without their consent or care.”

Our climate change experts warn that more needs to be done in the gender-violence prevention area and to quicken culture change in the emergency management sector where patriarchy thrives.

There is a particular need for recovery-stage funding that assists women in the years following disasters, due to the impacts of job loss at the individual or household level, family violence, additional caring responsibilities

Policy ideas that emerged in discussions include:

- Emergency centers adopt guidelines on gender and disaster.

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- Diverse women are drawn into train the trainer programs alongside men in to advance culture change in emergency management and disaster centres.
 - As part of a reframing of leadership in disaster management, changing the parameters of decisions made, not just introducing women into the environment.
 - Training includes scenarios and drills which identify violence prevention and are trauma informed.
 - A public campaign that highlights the importance of health and wellbeing in disaster recovery for men and women (recognising different impacts such as higher rates of suicide among men and income precarity for women).
 - New social and affordable housing designed to withstand climate stresses, including urban heat and battery-operated renewable energy systems.
 - Women-only spaces providing disaster relief in communities. These spaces include sanitary bins, breastfeeding facilities, menstrual items, quiet corners. Pop-up and free childcare in disaster recovery zones.
 - Noted that the Victorian Strategy does not look at climate change. The federal government is uniquely placed to establish best planning and practice nationally.

Implementation and Accountability: Monitoring and Evaluation

Common concerns arose that the Strategy needs cross-parliamentary support for effective implementation over time and that measuring success is seen as a long-term agenda.

Comments and questions included:

- “Can it be enshrined in legislation?”
- “Labor should reach across the aisle.”

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- “There should be annual report to track implementation.”
 - “If it’s going to be owned by people there needs to be an opportunity to score performance. External and accountable. Self-monitoring is never very successful.”
 - “Couldn’t the National Women’s Alliances be funded to produce an annual report on implementation?”
 - “The public must be able to see the outcomes of the Strategy.”
 - “As with any policy development – data collection is crucial. Under Hawke there was the Government National Agenda for Women, and lots of consultations with women. Outcomes were taken seriously. There was a challenge for the federal government because of state-level policy.”
 - “There should be a national level publicity campaign using polling; a powerful tool in public education.” See similar research done before JET program which “worked well”.
 - There should be a public dashboard or portal that updates the public on progress. See [NSW Gender Equality Dashboard | NSW Government](#).

Participants want to see advisory governance arrangements or mechanisms that ensure it is a living document, developed and owned not just by governments, but owned by everyone with a monitoring and evaluation framework that delivers continuous reviews and inexpensive progress reports.

- “The Strategy must have teeth.”
- “I like the Victorian approach of collecting data, setting about doing things and then measuring success. It’s a step-by-step process in Victoria. They are not trying to do all things at once... Being realistic about having the data available. They have set the scene and set realistic first steps and have put governance around it - crucial. Reporting mechanisms are right back up to government.”
- “This is iterative - not one big jump forward, but there still a lot of burn out in Victoria. Governments tend underestimated the amount of work

required. Training and support were there in Victoria, but it's the actual doing it. What came out was very mixed."

- "We should build on what we already have: ABS gender indicators, time use, parliamentary library tracking every by-election on composition of governments. We already have many indicators. Use these to be economical."
- "Let's not reinvent the wheel."
- "We need baseline data around current attitudes and see if they change... We don't need new measures for that. There are data sources such those from WGEA to create a full and composite picture and complimentary narrative."
- "There should be a standing committee of Parliament on gender equality and other equalities, a step forward to join other western democracies in having oversight on gender equality. You need an oversight body to ensure the good intentions are implemented. Otherwise, this project could be cancelled by a new parliament."
- "I am a little worried that Australia loves to measure stuff and can get carried away, that M&E takes resources away from delivering the Strategy."

Civil society is critical

- "I want to see greater support for the sector to monitor and keep government focussed and honest."
- "It is helpful if government can provide infrastructure to have the women's movement feel it is sure-footed and funded well to do think for the long term and evaluate itself too. If there's a scarcity mindset, it can become overly responsive and not continuously improve."
- "The Office for Women has not done explicit and concerted consultation for years and rarely talked to the movement when it doesn't suit the government's agenda to do so."
- "In the past, engagement occurred well before legislation was introduced."
- "Every few years the movement would be supported to produce a CEDAW report and that should happen again."

- “Women’s organisations have been ‘dumbed down’.”

The bureaucracy matters

“Another aspect of M&E is ensuring the bureaucracy can challenge itself for continual improvements and in the best interests of those people it is setup to serve.”

Important Infrastructure or Resources Noted in the Consultations

EXISTING AND SUPPORTED: Ministerial Council for Women and Women’s Safety (federal, state and territory ministers responsible for policy priorities for women and led by Katy Gallagher and Amanda Rishworth)

RECOMMENDED: A body that acts as an implementation reform monitor such as a Standing Committee on Gender Equality. It could report to the parliament annually – mapped against CEDAW also – with a review of progress and revisions to the document as required.

RECOMMENDED: External and public reporting by something like a Women’s Gender Equality Council or a body like it that would help keep governments on track. The Council should include the National Alliances. Reporting could include a scorecard.

See and learn from the example of the Aged Care Council of Elders, which emerged from the Royal Commission into Aged Care. It ensures older Australians – people central to the aged care system – have input into shaping aged care reforms. The Council has experts and other people. Getting the balance right is important as is ensuring information that is shared is done in an environment that is trauma informed. People sharing their lived experiences should not have to repeat themselves ad nauseum nor be made to feel inadequate in the company of academics.

Legislative and policy framework

EXISTING: Sex Discrimination Act, 1984 (Cth)

EXISTING: Respect at Work Bill which inserts a new provision in the SD Act to introduce a positive duty on all employers and ‘persons conducting a business or undertaking’ (PCBUs).

RECOMMENDED: Federal Gender Equality Act

- A statutory basis that creates an enabling environment for the Strategy and one that embeds gender responsive budgeting.

Consultations and this summary report were led by Toni Hassan in the ERA Secretariat. Facilitated sessions with invited groups ran over several months from mid to late 2022.

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