



NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026

Championing gender equality

Acknowledgements

The NSW Government extends its thanks and appreciation to every person who has contributed to the NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026 (the Strategy). We heard from women right across NSW — from girls to older women; from women living in Greater Sydney to regional, rural and remote NSW; and women from diverse communities and cultural backgrounds.

**Thank you for sharing your time and your stories.
This Strategy reflects what you have told us is
most important to you.**





Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the oldest continuing culture in the world.

We pay respect to Elders past and present, and commit to respecting the lands we walk on and the communities we walk with.

We celebrate the deep and enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country and acknowledge their continuing custodianship of the lands, seas and sky.

We acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the important contribution they make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies and practices and recognise our responsibility to work together with, and support, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes. We support local decision-making and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We acknowledge and thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who have contributed to the development of the NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026.

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Minister's message

As the Minister for Women in NSW, it is my role every single day to advocate for increasing economic and social opportunities for women and girls from all corners of our state. I am extremely proud to present the NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026.

The Strategy is a continuation of the fantastic work done in the previous *NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022*.

It is important to acknowledge that the previous Strategy covered a time when NSW experienced severe drought, bushfires, flooding, and the health and social impacts of COVID-19. Evidence demonstrates that these events often have a disproportionate impact on women. We know women's parenting and caring responsibilities increased, women were overrepresented in industries hardest hit by COVID-19, and women were often at the front of supporting communities as they rebuilt.

Despite these challenging times, I am incredibly proud of the progress we have achieved over the last 4 years. We have increased the number of women on boards and in senior leadership roles, more than doubled funding for pregnancy, parenting and perinatal health supports, removed barriers for women returning to work and expanded access to affordable childcare. The NSW Government is championing women and girls by making it easier for women to enter, stay in, and return to work through a \$16.5 billion investment in the inaugural *Women's Opportunity Statement*, which was released alongside the NSW Budget 2022–23. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the expert panel that informed the NSW Budget, led by Sam Mostyn AO, with regional input from the incredible Jillian Kilby. It has been an honour to work alongside the panel.

Now is the time to build on this momentum and drive future opportunities for women and girls in NSW. Through this Strategy, I want to give young girls the chance to become astrophysicists, lead our tech companies, become sporting superstars; to excel in whatever field they choose.

I want to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation for the more than 2,000 women and girls who contributed to the development of the Strategy. We heard directly from women right across NSW – from girls to older women; women living in metro areas to regional, rural and remote NSW; and women from diverse communities and cultural backgrounds. Thank you to the NSW Council for Women's Economic Opportunity for your continued guidance and contributions.

The Strategy aims for a real shift in our society. Achieving such bold change will take persistence and partnerships with other governments, businesses and the community. I call on all our partners to do all they can to create the equal society that NSW deserves.

I look forward to working with my Parliamentary colleagues to maintain momentum on issues that matter most to women and girls in NSW and to ensure that women's voices are heard. We know that when women thrive, everyone thrives.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Taylor".

The Hon Bronnie Taylor MLC
Minister for Women
Minister for Regional Health
Minister for Mental Health

Strategy in brief

Vision

All women and girls live and work in a safe and fair society where they are treated with respect and dignity.

All women and girls have equitable access to services, resources, opportunities and protections that enable them to thrive.

Three pillars

The Strategy focuses on 3 key priority areas for action that women from across NSW have consistently said are important to them.

1.



1. Economic opportunity and advancement

- Gender equality in the workplace
 - Transitions between careers and life stages
 - Pathways into work and careers
 - Financial wellbeing and retirement
-

2.



2. Health and wellbeing

- Safe relationships, safe communities
 - Understanding and awareness of women's and girls' health needs
 - Services and support for women's and girls' physical and mental health
 - Secure housing, preventing homelessness
-

3.



3. Participation and empowerment

- Leaders in community and work
 - Uplifting focus communities
 - Rebuilding connections, engaging with community
-

Guiding principles

The Strategy is guided by the following principles:

Principles	
Equality is a right	Equality is a human right. We are obligated to ensure laws, policies and programs are not discriminatory, and recognise the unique challenges that women may face.
Equality of opportunity	Everyone has the right to participate fully in social and economic life, access opportunities and succeed.
We all benefit	Achieving gender equality benefits all and is everyone's responsibility.
Working together	Achieving gender equality requires that governments, corporations, industry and the community work together to achieve change.
Compounding discrimination	To achieve gender equality for all, it is important to recognise the complex ways in which an individual's identity may lead to a compounding of barriers and disadvantage.
Inclusivity	We all share the responsibility to improve outcomes for women and girls, regardless of their cultural background, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, age, disability, socioeconomic status or location.
Immediate and longer-term	Work should be done on achieving immediate change, as well as shifting the structures that perpetuate discriminatory social norms and attitudes, and economic and social inequality.

Focus communities

The NSW Women's Strategy aims to improve outcomes for all women and girls; however, it has a particular focus on improving outcomes for those who experience greater disadvantage and/or discrimination. Our focus communities are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls
- carers
- girls and young women living in, or who have lived in, out-of-home care
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and/or asexual (LGBTIQ+) women and girls
- older women
- women and girls experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage
- women and girls facing homelessness
- women and girls from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system
- women and girls living in regional, rural, remote and cross-border areas
- women and girls with disability
- women and girls with a mental illness
- women and girls who have a history of, or are currently experiencing, domestic, family or sexual violence
- women veterans (and the women partners of veterans and service members)
- young women.

Responses: the NSW Government commitment

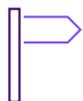
The Strategy includes many commitments, which are grouped into 3 categories.



Successful approaches to continue and scale up



New initiatives to advance equality and inclusion



Signposts for future action and investment



Women and girls in NSW



4,087,995
women in NSW.¹

139,856 women in NSW
are Aboriginal and/or Torres
Strait Islander.²

51% of people in NSW
are women.³



**For every
dollar**

a man in NSW earns, a
woman earns
88 cents.⁴



Women are **2x** as likely as men to
be victim-survivors of domestic and
family violence assault.⁵

Men are **3x** more likely
to be domestic and family
violence offenders.⁶

83% of sexual assault victims in
NSW are women, an increase of
10% since 2018.⁷



18.6% of graduates in
engineering and information
technology in 2020 were
women, up from **14.3%**
in 2010.⁸ In 2021, women
comprised 34.9% of completions
for all apprenticeships and
traineeships.⁹



In 2020–21, women were
69%
more likely than men to
have an anxiety disorder.¹⁰



453,328
women in NSW are carers.

Almost **60%** of all carers
are women.¹¹

Women across NSW
provide unpaid care valued
at **\$12.6 billion**
per annum.¹²



42.7% of the NSW Public
Service senior leaders in 2021
were women.¹³



34% of directors
in ASX 300 companies in
2022 were women.¹⁴



Almost **40%** of local
government councillors in NSW
in 2021 were women, up from
31% in 2016–17.¹⁵



Women made up **42%** of
government boards in 2022,
up from **38%** in 2014.¹⁶



33% of women in
NSW use a language other
than English at home.¹⁷



Women retire with **42%** less
superannuation on average
compared to men.¹⁸

23% of women retire with no
superannuation at all.¹⁹



Working across government to champion opportunities for women

In the 4 years since the *NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022* was released, there has been significant action by the NSW Government and the broader community in advancing women's economic opportunities and social equality.

The *NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026* identifies priorities for women across NSW, and the response represents a huge effort across NSW Government agencies. The Strategy recognises the important work happening and establishes a whole-of-government approach to improving outcomes for women and girls in NSW. Women NSW, in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, is responsible for overseeing implementation of the Strategy.

The NSW Government's commitment towards better outcomes for women and girls

The *NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026* complements and strengthens the NSW Government's existing actions to advance women's economic opportunities and social equality, and end violence against women and girls. Key commitments in these areas are set out in the *Women's Opportunity Statement*, the draft *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027*, the draft *NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022–2027*, and the *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023*.

Alongside the NSW Government's existing reform priorities, the *NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026* will embed a commitment to pursuing gender equality, recognising the importance of challenging gendered norms, roles and expectations that may limit women's opportunities.

Women's Opportunity Statement	NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027 and NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022–2027 (currently in draft format)	NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023
<p>The NSW Government is investing \$16.5 billion over 10 years to improve women's opportunities and child development. Key priorities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing women's workforce participation • improving the experience of women in the workforce • supporting women in small business and entrepreneurs • supporting and raising awareness of women's health needs • promoting respect for women and women's financial security. <p>Coordinating agency – NSW Treasury</p>	<p>The NSW Government is investing \$262.7 million in 2022–23 for programs to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prevent domestic, family and sexual violence • reduce reoffending • support victim safety. <p>A key priority for the NSW Government is working with the Commonwealth Government to implement the <i>National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032</i>.</p> <p>The NSW Government's plans to address domestic and family violence and sexual violence are currently under development. These are intended to align with the National Plan and will strengthen prevention and responses for women in NSW.</p> <p>The plans will continue evidence-based early intervention, victim support and perpetrator interventions, including \$484.3 million over 4 years from 2021–22 for housing and related supports for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence.</p> <p>Lead agency – NSW Department of Communities and Justice</p>	<p>The NSW Government is investing \$141.4 million over 5 years to prevent and improve the way we respond to homelessness, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • targeted support to prevent homelessness or intervene early to reduce its longer-term impact • tailored, flexible support • an integrated person-centred service system. <p>Lead agency – NSW Department of Communities and Justice</p>

The NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026 also works alongside other NSW strategies to deliver outcomes for women across all domains, including:

- *NSW Women's Health Framework*
- *Future Health Guiding the next decade of care in NSW 2022–2032*
- *NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022–2027*
- *Her Sport Her Way 2019–2023*
- *Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy*
- *Multicultural NSW Strategic Plan*
- *NSW Carers Strategy: Caring in NSW 2020–2030*
- *Ageing well in NSW: Seniors Strategy 2021–2031*
- *NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021–2025*
- *Women in Trades Strategy – Trade Pathways Program 2021–2024*
- *NSW Social Impact Investment Policy 2.0: Growing our impact*
- *NSW Veteran's Strategy 2021–2024*
- *NSW Service Plan for People with Eating Disorders 2021–25*
- *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2022–2024*
- *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW*

A partnership approach

The Strategy will deliver progress for women by using the levers available to the NSW Government, through direct policy, program and actions, and by engaging with our partners. These partners include:

- the Commonwealth Government, which delivers policies and programs at the national level to advance gender equality and improve the lives of Australian women. Key focus areas include strengthening women's economic security and workforce participation and the safety of women and girls from violence. The Commonwealth Government also supports Australia's international work on gender equality
- local governments across NSW, which represent women, deliver services to local women, and play a critical role in cohesive and resilient communities
- employers and businesses, which drive reform, opportunities and progress for women in workplaces
- not-for-profit and service providers, which are at the forefront of engaging with women and supporting women to achieve better outcomes.

Working with these partners gives us an opportunity to increase gender equality for women in NSW, beyond the direct influence of the NSW Government. The NSW Government will continue to advocate and engage with the Commonwealth Government in relation to critical areas it has influence over, such as superannuation, employment legislation, income support, primary health, veterans affairs and higher education.

Shaping the Strategy

More than 2,000 women and girls directly contributed to this Strategy

Consultations for this Strategy were undertaken in mid 2022. They were designed to listen to as many women and girls as possible, and directly from women from diverse communities and backgrounds. Consultations deepened evidence in key areas.

Women and girls

We heard directly from more than 2,000 women and girls across NSW through in-depth consultation in online and in-person forums, and through the 2022 NSW Women's Strategy Have Your Say Survey.

Those who work with women and girls

Many organisations have an interest in outcomes and opportunities for women and girls and have gained insights from working closely with them. We consulted with organisations across a range of areas including:

- focus communities: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, older women, young women, LGBTIQ+ women, women with disability, and women from CALD backgrounds
- themed areas including health, housing and homelessness, rights and justice, education, and local government.

Stakeholders

We engaged with representative bodies and organisations that have specific expertise in providing advice on priorities and the experiences of women and girls through:

- consultation with NSW Ministerial Advisory Council members
- submissions from peak bodies and stakeholders responding to the Have Your Say survey on the discussion paper.

An evidence base has guided our responses

In addition to listening to women, this Strategy was developed on a foundation of research including:

- recent analysis by NSW Treasury for the Women's Economic Opportunities Review, including the Women's Voices consultation led by Women NSW
- consultation submissions
- work by Commonwealth agencies including the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics
- extensive work by academics, the private sector and not-for-profit organisations.

The AHRC's *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future 2020* report, which elevates the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and provides recommendations to improve the lives of women and girls across a broad range of areas, has helped inform this Strategy.

Australian and international research provides us with a clear picture of the pathways to improving outcomes for women in many areas of their lives. For example, it offers a greater understanding of the contribution that women-led businesses and diverse workplaces make towards building profitable and productive businesses and economies.



Pillar 1: Economic opportunity and advancement



Key themes

- » Increasing women's opportunities in the workplace
- » Transitions between careers and life stages
- » Pathways into work and careers
- » Financial security, capability and wellbeing throughout life stages, including retirement

Across their lifespan, women and girls may participate in education, enter the workforce, take leave for parental and other caring responsibilities, retrain, transition to other careers and retire. Women face barriers at each of these life stages, which affect choice and opportunity.

This pillar aims to shape workplaces that make it safer and easier for women to be heard, to progress in their career and to advance their economic opportunities. It also aims to increase pathways into work, foster ambition in young women and boost career choice and earning potential. Importantly, it aims to share parenting responsibilities more equitably between men and women by positioning childcare as a parenting issue, supporting additional childcare places and encouraging men to play a greater role in parenting and the early development of their children. Ensuring financial security and capability for women across their lifespan is also key.

Theme 1: Increasing women's opportunities in the workplace

Opening opportunities, equalising outcomes

Women's workforce participation in NSW has increased over the past 2 decades from 54% of women (15 years and over) in 2001 to 62% in 2022. This can be attributed to:

- gender discrimination policies
- wider access to paid parental leave and childcare
- changing societal attitudes
- strong growth in female-dominated service industries
- an increase in part-time and flexible work options.^{20 21}

However, women continue to work fewer hours than men; they are more likely to be underemployed and spend longer periods of time out of the workforce.

Unequal division of household tasks and caring responsibilities, as well as unequal sharing of paid parental leave, all continue to drive the workforce participation gap.²²

Alongside benefits for individuals, there are economic and social benefits to driving women's workforce participation:

- The NSW economy would increase 8% by 2061 if women in NSW participated in the paid workforce at the same rate as men over the next 20 years – the equivalent of increasing household income by \$22,000 per annum (in 2019–20 dollars).²³ If the gap between women and men's labour force participation in Australia halved, Australia's gross domestic product would increase by an estimated \$60 billion from 2018 to 2038.²⁴

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- In general, ‘the higher a person’s socioeconomic position, the healthier they tend to be – a phenomenon often termed the “social gradient of health”’.²⁵ As well as providing a more productive workforce, healthier populations reduce the fiscal burden of healthcare on governments.

Workforce participation rates of women from focus communities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have a considerably lower workforce participation rate compared to all women. In 2019, the average workforce participation rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in NSW aged 15 to 64 was 62%, compared to 73% for all women.²⁶

The average level of labour force participation for women aged 15 to 64 who speak a language other than English at home was 66%, below the average for all women aged 15 to 64 (73%) and considerably below the 83% rate for men who speak a language other than English at home.²⁷

Research shows that people with disability have higher retention and attendance rates in the workplace; however, women with disability also experience lower rates of workforce participation (51%) compared to men with disability (56%).^{28 29}

In 2019, women aged 15 to 64 with low socio-economic status had one of the lowest absolute rates of workforce participation in NSW, at just 54%.³⁰

Some of the signs of gender inequality

- Women are less likely to be in paid work than men. Even with the significant increases since 2001, the women’s labour force participation rate in July 2022 of 61.6% is substantially lower than men’s, at 70.5% (for people aged 15 years and over).³¹
- As of May 2022, the gender pay gap in NSW was 12.4%, reflecting a pay difference of \$233 per week.³²
- Men are more likely than women to be promoted and be in management positions. For example, in healthcare and social services, the management gap in 2020 was 6%. Nationally the management gap is 7%.³³
- Only 19.4% of CEOs in Australia and 18% of board chairs are women.³⁴

Eliminating workplace harassment, boosting safety and respect

Many women face sexism and harassment at work. A national survey conducted by the AHRC in 2018 found that nearly 40% of women had experienced sexual harassment at work in the past 5 years, compared to 26% of men.³⁵ Many women report experiencing sexual harassment multiple times, which further deteriorates women’s safety and ability to progress at work. It’s important to note that many women don’t report their experiences of sexual harassment out of fear of the repercussions and impact on career progression.³⁶ A workplace fostering or ignoring sexual harassment can have negative effects on all workers, potentially impacting productivity, employee morale and staff turnover rates. It is estimated that workplace harassment costs the Australian economy \$3.5 billion per year.³⁷

The *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report (2020)* made 55 recommendations to address workplace sexual harassment, including primary prevention initiatives, resources, education for young people and the establishment of a Workplace Sexual Harassment Council.

The *Women’s Budget Statement* for the 2022–23 Federal Budget notes that the Commonwealth Government has fully implemented or fully funded 42 of the 55 recommendations of the *Respect@Work* report, with over \$66.5 million committed to date. The NSW Government continues to work with the Commonwealth Government to implement the agreed recommendations.

In addition to gender, there are other factors that increase the likelihood of sexual harassment in the workplace. Workers who report having experienced sexual harassment at higher rates include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (55%)
- people of diverse sexualities (52%)
- women with disability (52%)
- people aged 18 to 29 (45%).³⁸

During the National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, the AHRC heard from women that there is little existing research on why some women, including those from diverse communities and backgrounds, are more likely to experience sexual harassment in the workplace and that further research is required to better understand this.³⁹

In addition, there are other risks to safety and wellbeing in the workplace that women may experience, such as occupational violence, psychosocial hazards and inappropriate equipment and uniforms.

A key commitment of the NSW Government is the requirement for all government agencies to develop women's action plans. These plans will require agencies to develop a strategy to improve delivery of services to women and outline how they will address gender equality and women's economic outcomes within their own workforce, including the gender pay gap.

'We have to stop paying less for perceived women's work.' Young Aboriginal woman, rural NSW

'I worked in software development for 2 years but switched because of the horrific culture of sexual harassment and treating women badly. I didn't notice it was making me sick until I realised I had to leave.' Young woman, forum participant

'Conversations need to be started, unsafe and disrespectful behaviour needs to be recognised and called out. Accountability for perpetrators and support services in place to assist with any issues. We have to make sure there are preventative measures such as training and seminars.' Survey respondent, Sydney

Reducing the gender pay gap

The gender pay gap measures the difference between the average earnings of women and men in the workforce. The three key drivers of the pay gap are:

- **Gender discrimination:** 36% of the pay gap is due to sexual harassment; discrimination in hiring, training and promoting women; and sexism.
- **Care, family and workforce participation:** 33% of the pay gap arises from expectations of women as carers and parents, time out of the workforce, and unpaid work.
- **Type of job:** 24% of the pay gap is related to fewer women in management roles and segregation in industries, women not entering fields where they are under-represented, and lower wages in industries where women are strongly represented.⁴⁰

Pay gap reporting by individual organisations, in both the public and private sectors, encourages employers to track progress and take practical steps to improve pay equity.⁴¹

The *Women's Opportunity Statement* commits the NSW Government to work towards closing the gender pay gap by tackling gender discrimination and industry and occupational segregation, which sees women working in lower-paid industries.

Workplace flexibility and leave arrangements

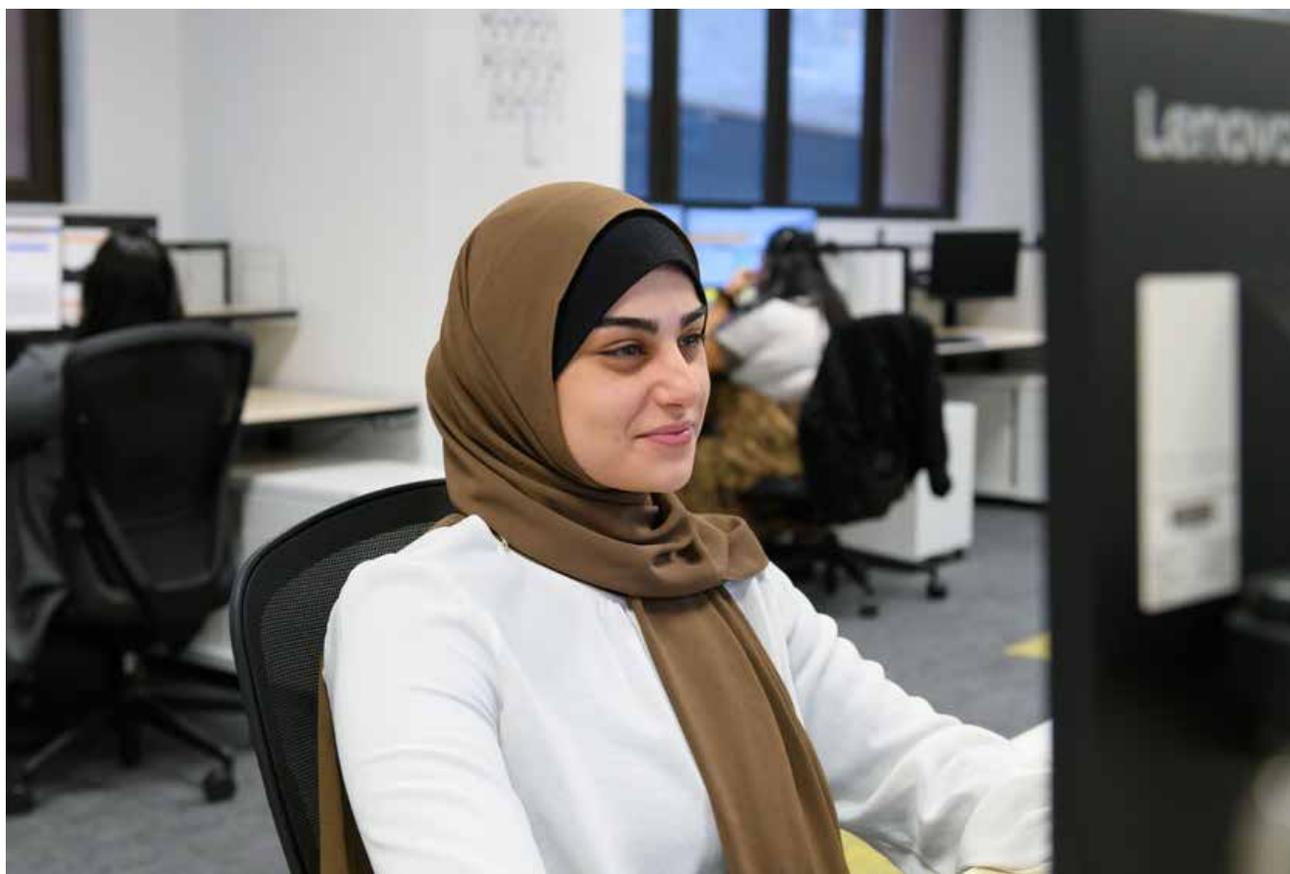
In NSW and internationally, flexible work is becoming the new standard. Organisations are recognising that it increases diversity in teams, supports innovation, and respects and encourages people to take on interests and activities outside of work.⁴² Many workplaces have shown that flexible working arrangements increase productivity and profitability.⁴³ These workplaces are more attractive to employees as they give them time to manage their own health and wellbeing, projects outside of work, and family and community commitments.

The COVID-19 pandemic helped normalise remote and flexible work arrangements in Australia. Prior to COVID-19 only 20% of Australians worked one day or more a week from home. By September 2020 this had more than doubled to 46%.⁴⁴ A survey of Australian employees found that almost 80% reported having maintained or improved productivity, engagement and achievement while working from home.⁴⁵

Women are more likely than men to have flexible working arrangements, such as working part-time hours or in casual roles.⁴⁶ Many women feel they are less likely to be promoted and more likely to be excluded from meetings and other opportunities if they work flexibly.⁴⁷ Where they cannot access flexible work arrangements, women may accept jobs at a lower skill level or other lower-paid, less secure options, inhibiting their career development. Critically, by shifting work culture to support and encourage men and women to take advantage of flexible work, the bias against women who work flexibly can also be tackled.

Leave arrangements that accommodate unique circumstances faced by women can also play a vital role in supporting women's participation in the workforce. For example, NSW public sector employees are entitled to miscarriage and pre-term birth leave and leave for fertility treatment, as well as domestic and family violence leave.

'Men can work unlimited hours, but then women have to juggle work and caring. There's a perception issue in the workplace that women don't work as hard as men.'
Regional NSW woman



Theme 2: Transitions between careers and life stages

Returning to work after children and accessing childcare

Childcare and the gender pay gap

Current Commonwealth Government settings for childcare rebates along with the gender pay gap mean that childcare affordability has a greater impact on secondary earners, who are typically women. Since the level of childcare subsidy is based on household income, and women are more likely to earn less than their male partner, there are financial incentives for women to be the partner that leaves the workforce or reduces hours worked to get a higher childcare subsidy. This becomes a disincentive for women to return to work if their work is seen as 'not worth it'.

Workforce disincentive rates vary for each household depending on its specific characteristics, including the income of each partner and the number of children. Recent NSW Treasury modelling found that under the current childcare subsidy levels, a woman in a low-income household with 2 children in childcare – where the father (or primary earner) earns \$70,000 per year and the mother (or secondary earner) earns \$50,000 – would only retain around 25 cents of each additional dollar earned if when she works more than one day a week and would only take home 21 cents for each dollar earned if she worked a fifth day. The cost of childcare can have a long-term impact on women's career opportunities and progression.

Access to appropriate childcare is a challenge for many families, particularly in locations with limited childcare placements, for families who require care outside of school hours or flexible hours of care, and for children with disability, for whom care may need to be specialised and extend throughout their high school years.

Workforce shortages and thin markets have led to 'childcare deserts' where access to childcare is scarce. Research by the Mitchell Institute shows there is limited availability in lower socio-economic locations, including regional NSW, South-West Sydney, and Western Sydney.⁴⁸ The higher marginal costs of providing early childhood education and care on a small scale mean that potential suppliers are unwilling to enter the market, particularly in remote and regional areas. The demand for childcare can be difficult to gauge in local markets, exacerbating difficulties in meeting demand. Early childhood educator shortages are also impacting the availability of early childhood education and care.

The Commonwealth bears greater responsibility to address workforce disincentive rates through better access to childcare. However, the NSW Government is also working to help shift the dial for many working parents through recent commitments to improve access to early childhood education and care. Key investments include:

- \$5.8 billion over 10 years towards introducing universal pre-kindergarten
- \$1.3 billion over 4 years in fee relief for preschool
- up to \$5 billion over 10 years to boost accessibility and affordability of childcare.⁴⁹

NSW families will save up to \$4,000 per year for children aged 3 to 5 who attend community and mobile preschool, and \$2,000 for children aged 4 to 5 who attend long day care, in addition to existing fee relief.⁵⁰

'When my job pays less than my husband's, it ends up being me who has to sacrifice my career and superannuation when someone needs to stay home.' **Woman with disability, metro area**

Childcare as a parenting issue

The conversation is starting to change around parenting and childcare. There have been some shifts in attitudes that support men and women as equal partners in parenting and caring. More men taking parental leave and taking advantage of workplace flexibility allowances supports more equitable sharing of domestic responsibilities and paid work. Despite these shifts, progress has been limited, and women still continue to perform a greater share of caring responsibilities than men.

In NSW and internationally, equal parental leave is seen as benefiting both women's economic opportunities and gender equality. In some countries, like Sweden, around 45% of people who take parental leave are men, compared to Australia, where less than 12% of men take parental leave.^{51 52}

Supporting work transitions

At different stages of women's lives, they may seek to return to work after time out of the workforce, whether for parenting or caring responsibilities, for health reasons, or if they are new migrants or refugees. Other women may enter the workforce later in life or may transition from one industry to another when leaving the Australian Defence Force (becoming veterans) or stepping back from their career as they approach retirement.

Some women may need to update or refresh their skills if they are entering a new field or if they have been out of the workforce for some time. Covering the costs of returning to work – including childcare, getting to and from interviews, and accessing a computer – can be a barrier when women aren't earning an income.

Women from CALD backgrounds are more likely to experience additional barriers when returning to work. This is particularly relevant for women who are newly arrived migrants, or who have refugee or refugee-like experiences. Barriers may include lower levels of English proficiency, unfamiliarity with existing structures and systems, and lower workforce participation.⁵³

These disincentives and barriers can further delay women's participation in the workforce and can magnify the challenge of returning if their skills, networks and knowledge are not current. The hurdles associated with returning to work mean that a proportion of women, potentially up to 30%, never re-enter the workforce.⁵⁴

In 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW Government provided \$10 million in funding for the Return to Work Program to help women get back into the workforce. The program provides support to women including grants to help overcome financial barriers to returning to work. In 2022–23 the NSW Government announced that it would build on the success of this program by investing a further \$32 million.

Supporting carers

Caring responsibilities have significant impacts on carers' mental and physical health, their ability to participate in the workforce and their lifelong savings and financial security. When carers seek opportunities to return to work, they often need support to address specific barriers including accessing the internet, balancing caring responsibilities with work commitments and finding training pathways to refresh their skills.⁵⁵

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women from CALD backgrounds are more likely to be carers and provide care to multiple people within their families and communities due to embedded cultural practices and kinship structures.⁵⁶ The challenges experienced by carers, including time out of paid work, are often amplified for women in these focus communities.⁵⁷

Women who are carers often report being isolated, partly because workplaces and the wider community aren't aware of carers' issues.

Workplaces with policies that support flexibility and managers that recognise caring responsibilities can have a significant impact on carers' wellbeing and their ability to stay connected to the workforce.



Theme 3: Pathways into work and careers

Supporting women entrepreneurs and business owners

Small businesses are an important part of the NSW economy. Small businesses create employment opportunities, foster innovation, provide critical goods and services and create vibrant communities. In 2017–18 there were 765,387 small businesses in NSW, which accounted for more than 95% of businesses in the state.⁵⁸

Women entrepreneurs and women-led start-ups are starting to receive greater attention and investment in Australia, with new university-led initiatives and government funding. This includes a \$12 million commitment by the NSW Government towards the Carla Zampatti venture capital fund for women-led start-ups and private investments focused on boosting women founders.⁵⁹

Despite the prevalence of small businesses in NSW and the increased growth in female-founded start-ups, only one-third of small businesses are owned by women. Women in small business and entrepreneurial roles face a range of challenges impeding growth and success.

Women business owners and entrepreneurs have fewer formal business growth networks. Women are less likely than men to know other women business owners or entrepreneurs, or to have access to sponsors, mentors or professional support networks.⁶⁰

Women also experience greater challenges than men when trying to access finance to start a business.⁶¹ When they do access finance from investors, women are often provided with less funding than start-ups led by men – despite evidence that women-led start-ups perform better.⁶²

Reduce gender segregation across industries and occupations

NSW has a highly gender-segregated workforce, with women either under-represented or over-represented in certain industries. Gendered outcomes are also present in average pay levels and job security. The factors driving gender segregation include work conditions, workplace culture and perceptions of certain work being suited to one gender.

In NSW, one-third of employed women work in education and health-related industries.⁶³ Women comprise 78% of the healthcare workforce and 72% of the education workforce, but only 13% of workers in construction and 17% in mining.⁶⁴

The industries where women are over-represented have lower average wages and poorer job security. Employees with a university degree in industries where women are over-represented earn up to 30% less than people with similar qualifications in industries where men are over-represented.⁶⁵ Women-dominated industries are also more likely to have casual roles and part-time roles with, on average, only 35% of roles being full-time, while in men-dominated industries 84% of roles are full-time.⁶⁶

Occupations are also gendered. Women are less likely to be in management and technical roles. The proportion of managers who are women is still only 39%.⁶⁷ While the proportion of women in clerical roles has slightly declined by 3%, it remains high at 73%.⁶⁸

In 2020, 37% of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) graduates were women.⁶⁹ Between 2015 and 2020, university STEM course enrolments increased by 24% for women, compared to a 9% increase for men.⁷⁰ The proportion of STEM enrolments by women increased by 3 percentage points (37% compared to 34% in 2015).⁷¹

Women's employment in STEM-related occupations continues to increase, rising by approximately 50% between 2016 and 2021, but remains low overall (15% in 2021).⁷²

Improving the proportion of women in male-dominated industries and roles is important to drive female workforce participation and improve workplace cultures.⁷³ Achieving better representation of women in these industries requires a coordinated effort from education and training providers, industry and governments. The NSW Government is committed to reducing gender segregation and attracting more women to male-dominated industries. In 2022, it set a goal of 15% of women in trades and non-

traditional roles in the construction industry by 2030.⁷⁴ To achieve this, the NSW Government has committed \$20.2 million to skills, training and industry-led initiatives, working with the sector to attract and retain more women in the workforce.⁷⁵

The NSW Government's *Women in Trades Strategy* also includes key actions to increase the representation of women in non-traditional trades.

Fostering ambition and diverse career pathways for young women

Cultural norms embedded in early childhood education and school settings play a role in shaping the career aspirations of girls and young women. They can work to both challenge and reinforce gendered stereotypes around women's participation in the paid workforce.

Girls perform well academically, with secondary school completions 15% higher than that of boys, yet gendered segregation by industry and occupation persists, as does lower representation of women in leadership and management roles. Women in business are eager to create pathways for young women and girls to be ambitious and to consider diverse career pathways.

Encouraging more young women to forge careers in STEM occupations and industries will foster ambition and encourage diverse career pathways while addressing critical labour force needs. Despite significant improvements in the rate of high-school-aged girls and tertiary-aged women studying STEM subjects, women and girls are less likely than men and boys to study STEM in years 11 and 12 and as undergraduates.

It is equally important that women have opportunities for career advancement through diverse vocational education and training pathways. The NSW Government's Trade Pathways Program aims to encourage more women to work in trades, which will help increase women's economic security while addressing critical skills shortages. The program aims to do this by providing supported pathways to trades jobs and increasing awareness of gender discrimination in trade workplaces.

Research into barriers to women choosing and progressing in engineering as a career found that the barriers start early, with most girls not even considering engineering as an option.⁷⁶ Young women who do study engineering report feeling less supported to continue with engineering, compared with those in other STEM fields.

Engineers Australia recommends long-term approaches to improve pathways into engineering for girls and engaging with girls early in their schooling about opportunities in engineering.⁷⁷

| *'Why is it girls do knitting and textiles while boys do metalwork and woodwork?'* **Schoolgirl**



Theme 4: Financial security and wellbeing throughout life stages, including retirement

Lifetime financial security

Lifetime financial security means that people can meet changes in their life circumstances with confidence and certainty. Access to economic opportunities is a critical component of financial security, as is financial capability – ‘a combination of financial knowledge, skills, attitudes and confidence that leads to positive financial behaviours and money management decisions that fit the circumstances of one’s life.’⁷⁸ Women are more likely than men to have low financial capability and are a target cohort under the National *Financial Capability Strategy 2022*.⁷⁹

The combined impacts of the gender pay gap, time out of the workforce, part-time work, the financial impact of relationship breakdowns, and lower representation in leadership and management roles mean that women’s lifetime earnings and their savings in retirement are significantly lower than men’s.⁸⁰ This limits women’s economic opportunities and puts older women and women from lower socio-economic circumstances at greater risk of financial insecurity, poverty and homelessness.

Data from the 2021 Census shows that women in NSW are more likely to be on lower incomes (\$799 per week or less), while men are more likely to earn \$1,000 per week or more.⁸¹ Almost 30% of men earn \$1,500 per week compared to only 18% of women.⁸²

Some women are more at risk of financial stress and insecurity. In 2018, the median weekly income of primary carers was \$621, compared to \$997 for non-carers. This puts carers at risk of poverty, limits their ability to meet their personal and household needs, and reduces their ability to save and contribute to superannuation.⁸³

In the LGBTIQ+ community, 42% of trans women and 33% of women of diverse sexualities report earning less than \$400 a week, below the poverty line in Australia.⁸⁴

Older women who want to work experience distinct challenges in the workforce, including ageism. It is more difficult for older women to get interviews and secure jobs.

‘Older women are deemed unemployable. They aren’t retiring – they are being retired.’ Illawarra and Shoalhaven woman

Pay gaps and time out of the workforce for parenting, caring and other responsibilities compound to create a serious deficit in the superannuation many women have at retirement. On average, women retire with 42% less superannuation than men.⁸⁵ For some, the situation is worse: the Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia calculates that, at retirement age (60 to 64 years), 23% of women have no superannuation compared to 13% of men.⁸⁶

‘On average, a person who becomes a primary carer will lose \$392,500 in lifetime earnings to age 67, and \$175,000 in superannuation at age 67.’ Carers NSW

Our commitment to economic opportunity and advancement



Continue successful approaches

- Promote the SafeWork NSW Code of Practice: Managing psychosocial hazards at work.
- Continue funding for community programs that support women and girls from migrant and refugee backgrounds with resources to get jobs.
- Implement the *NSW Disability Inclusion Plan 2021–2025*, which includes a commitment by the NSW Government to ensure that 5.6% of all government sector roles are held by people with disability by 2025.
- Extend fee relief for parents to support affordable and accessible childcare.
- Continue to provide access to services and supports that build on the strengths and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander carers and CALD carers.
- Continue return-to-work grants for women to cover common costs of re-engaging with work, such as education and training, specialist clothing and IT equipment.
- Continue the TAFE NSW Ranks to Recognition Program for veterans and their partners, recognising prior learning and creating a pathway to new careers.
- Boost women entrepreneurs through Investing in Women Funding Program and free classes from TAFE NSW through the Women in Business program.
- Continue to partner with the construction industry via the Construction Industry Leadership Forum to attract and retain more women across its workforce.
- Continue to support Generation STEM initiatives in schools, and vocational and higher education settings.
- Continue the Built for Women Program to support training places for women in trade industries.
- Continue to support pathways for women and girls into trades through the NSW Government's Trade Pathways Program for women.
- Continue to deliver the National Aboriginal Sporting Chance Academy's girls' academies, which aim to drive community-led solutions to reduce barriers to Aboriginal girls in years 7 to 12 completing their education and reaching their full potential. The programs are locally developed and locally driven, reflecting the participating schools' visions and directions for supporting and engaging female Aboriginal students.
- Continue to provide information about life stages and life events on nsw.gov.au, including on returning to work after parental leave or a career break.⁸⁷
- Continue to develop and promote the Women's Financial Toolkit and the Return to Work Toolkit.
- Continue the NSW Council for Women's Economic Opportunity, a critical source of expert advice on improving economic outcomes for women and girls.



Roll out new initiatives

Over 10 years, implement the \$16.5 billion package of initiatives announced in the *Women's Opportunity Statement*, including:⁸⁸

- boosting access to affordable before- and after-school care
- improving access to affordable early childhood education and care through the Affordable and Accessible Childcare and Economic Participation Fund⁸⁹
- investing in safe workplaces and safer cities
- supporting the success of women-led businesses through government contracts, certification and a one-stop shop for advice
- providing seed funding to establish the Carla Zampatti venture capital fund
- introduce an annual performance statement on gender equality for the largest listed companies in NSW
- \$9.7 million in the 2022–23 Budget to establish a Respect at Work Taskforce to ensure employers comply with their duty under work health and safety laws to prevent sexual harassment at work
- investing in appropriate facilities, such as appropriate bathrooms, for women at work
- increasing transparency in the NSW Public Service by reporting on gender equality
- boosting career opportunities for early childhood workers through scholarships for early childhood teacher education, and vocational education and training (VET) students; early childhood teacher supports; and partnering with tertiary and VET providers to boost the workforce pipeline⁹⁰
- implementing improvements to the NSW public sector's paid parental leave arrangements to encourage men to take more parental leave and support diverse family types
- working with the construction industry to achieve a target of 15% of trade and non-traditional roles being held by women by 2030, supported by \$20.2 million investment.⁹¹

Other initiatives, beyond the *Women's Opportunity Statement* include:

- delivering prevention and response elements under an Equity and Respect Framework to address sexual harassment and bullying in the NSW public sector
- reviewing approaches to the procurement of social services, with the aim of providing greater long-term stability
- prioritising the first 2 investment rounds of the \$30 million Social Impact Outcomes Fund to support women facing disadvantage and young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and establishing a \$1.3 million Social Enterprise Grant Program for women-focused social enterprises.



Signposts for the future

- Explore career programs to encourage more women in the screen, arts and culture sectors.
- Work with STEM industries to promote gender equality.
- Test the Future Not Followers and similar programs to build financial literacy and independence for young women and girls, and scope a wider rollout.



Pillar 2: Health and wellbeing



Key themes

- » **Safe relationships, safe communities**
- » **Understanding and awareness of women's and girls' health needs**
- » **Services and support for women's and girls' physical and mental health**
- » **Secure housing, preventing homelessness**

Our health and wellbeing support our quality of life and underpin our social and economic participation. While the women of NSW live longer and healthier lives than their predecessors, and many health indicators are showing an upward trend, there are still areas where we can improve.

Theme 1: Safe relationships, safe communities

Continued focus on domestic, family and sexual violence

The NSW Government has taken significant steps to address domestic, family and sexual violence, including introducing affirmative consent laws, increasing education and awareness of violence against women, and funding domestic and family violence services.

During consultations, women reported safety as their first priority. Domestic, family and sexual violence is perpetrated against both men and women, but women experience violence at much higher rates than men, with 1 in 6 women having experienced physical violence by a partner since the age of 15.⁹²

Domestic and family violence has profound impacts on women's physical and mental health, contributing more to the burden of disease for women aged 18 to 44 years than any other risk factor (including alcohol, tobacco use and obesity).⁹³ Similarly, sexual violence is linked with significant health impacts, including mental health conditions such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.⁹⁴

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience disproportionate rates of violence, representing nearly 30% of all hospitalisations due to domestic violence between 2010–11 and 2018–19.⁹⁵

Violence limits women's ability to work and has long-term effects on women's financial security and wellbeing.⁹⁶ Women who experience domestic and family violence are more likely to have difficulty retaining their job and being productive at work and more likely to have lower incomes.⁹⁷

Violence against women is estimated to cost the Australian economy more than \$22 billion every year.⁹⁸

'Domestic violence is a huge issue and there simply are not enough services and support available. Women should not be living in fear of their partner or other men.' **Survey respondent**

Positive work on prevention

Violence against women is preventable. The NSW Government is committed to ending violence against women; this relies on a strong focus on prevention. Preventing violence means considering the broader social, political and economic factors that drive violence against women, as well as the gender inequality that creates the conditions in which violence occurs.

Violence against women is overwhelmingly perpetrated by men. As Our Watch notes, ‘Research shows strong links between the socially dominant forms and patterns of masculinity, sexist attitudes and behaviours, and men’s perpetration of violence against women.’⁹⁹ At its heart, this means that we all need to change the way we think about gender, particularly traditionally ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ roles. Primary prevention targets the attitudes, social norms, practices, structures and power imbalances that contribute to violence.

The *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032* and the upcoming NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027 and NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022–2027 place high importance on changing behaviours.

Safety in focus communities

Women in some focus communities may experience domestic, family and/or sexual violence at higher rates than other women. In addition, they are likely to experience barriers in reporting their experiences and to accessing help and support.

Culturally appropriate and culturally safe services are critical to reaching out to women in different communities and connecting them to services. Ensuring interventions are appropriate for women who may be more isolated, including those facing issues associated with living in a cross-border area, is a priority in regional areas.

Targeted responses for women with disability are critical to ensure they are supported. Women with disability may not always be able to reach out for support. Healthcare professionals and disability support workers may be the first people to identify signs of abuse and need to have the capability to support women.

‘We know the importance of specialist services for multicultural women. Having a culturally competent person who supports them in language is essential.’ South West Sydney woman



Theme 2: Understanding and awareness of women's and girls' health needs

Understanding women's and girls' health needs

Understanding and communicating women's and girls' health needs are fundamental to ensuring women and girls receive appropriate and effective healthcare. Yet women across NSW reported feeling there was not a community-wide understanding of women's health needs.

Gender bias in clinical trials holds back improvements in women's health, both through poorer diagnostics and less effective and fewer treatments. Women are under-represented in studies across cardiology, oncology, neurology, immunology and kidney disease.¹⁰⁰ Historically, females were under-represented in pain studies, with 79% of studies only involving male animals.¹⁰¹ Combined with recent research that found women's pain is different to men's,¹⁰² it's clear that a greater focus on and investment in women's health could improve women's outcomes significantly.

Gender differences in neuropsychological diagnoses

Neuropsychological conditions like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism are overlooked and not diagnosed early enough in women and girls. Research on gender differences in ADHD shows that girls are being consistently under-identified and under-diagnosed because of differences in the way the condition is expressed between girls and boys.¹⁰³

'My neurodiversity [autism] was diagnosed at 19. The boys I went to school with were diagnosed at 6. I've missed out on over a decade of support at a time that I most needed it because it took so long to be diagnosed.' Young woman

Improving community awareness of women's health issues

Managing health in education settings and the workplace

Women's health conditions and circumstances need to be accommodated in education settings and the workplace. These conditions and circumstances include reproductive health, mental health and the impact of domestic, family and sexual violence.

Where women's health issues, such as menstruation and menopause, are considered taboo or stigmatised, it makes it more difficult for education settings (including schools), workplaces and communities to support women and promote their progression as students and at work. Younger women and girls talked about the impact of periods still being taboo, with pain leading to missed classes, disengagement from physical activity and time off work. This stigma may be experienced in different ways, with women from diverse cultural backgrounds at greater risk. The topic may also be one of sensitivity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The NSW Government is providing free menstrual hygiene products to all female students at public schools.

The reduction in women's economic participation due to health issues impacts their financial security, as well as the broader economy. Depending upon assumptions applied, endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain alone are estimated to cost the Australian economy between \$1.4 billion to \$6.5 billion each year, mostly from lost productivity at work.¹⁰⁴

From menstruation to post-menopause, reproductive health conditions and experiences are affected by:

- social attitudes
- education about reproductive health and available services
- access to appropriate facilities and services
- power relationships
- the medical profession's approach to reproductive health.

Advancing community awareness of appropriate responses to these health needs in education and workplace settings plays a critical role in improving the health and wellbeing of women and girls.

Understanding the impact of reproductive and sexual health

Women's reproductive and sexual health covers a broad range of experiences including contraception, respectful and safe relationships, sexually transmitted diseases, menstruation, preconception, pregnancy, infertility, perimenopause and menopause. The impact of these experiences on women and girls can span several areas:

- medical – through conditions that impact negatively on health and wellbeing, such as endometriosis and polycystic ovary syndrome
- social – by affecting women's ability to participate in all aspects of life freely and safely, such as being able to afford contraceptive and menstrual products
- economic – the impact on women's access to economic opportunities and advancement, such as workforce participation and educational attainment, as well as the cost of medical and other services.

Women have identified menopause as one of the top health issues where greater research and information is needed to support their health and wellbeing. While 85% of women experience symptoms of menopause,¹⁰⁵ there is still limited discussion about its impact, symptoms or treatments, making women less likely to seek help.

Endometriosis is another critical area of concern, affecting 1 in 9 women.¹⁰⁶ Women and girls often experience long diagnostic delays, with an average of 6.5 years from symptom onset.¹⁰⁷ Recent studies have found that women with endometriosis have a higher risk of several forms of cancer, including uterine cancer, ovarian cancer and breast cancer.¹⁰⁸

Period poverty, including lack of access to menstrual products, may contribute to educational disadvantage, as low-income students may miss school or higher education when they have their period.¹⁰⁹

The NSW Government has made a significant investment to holistically support women's health and wellbeing. This includes reproductive health initiatives such as:

- \$80 million to support more affordable fertility treatments
- \$40.3 million for menopause hubs to support women who have experienced or are experiencing menopause and for a menopause awareness campaign.

Theme 3: Services and support for women's and girl's physical and mental health

Access to affordable, appropriate health care

Good health depends on access to services

Women across NSW – particularly those in regional locations – identified the need for access to appropriate, affordable health services. Women who cannot take time off work or who cannot afford to pay for health services for themselves or their families are not receiving the same level of care as those who can.

Mental health supports for all, particularly young women, are a clear priority. The *NSW Women's Health Framework* recognises that suicide is the leading cause of death among young women in NSW aged 15 to 24 years, and 1 in 5 women aged 16 to 24 experience high or very high psychological distress.¹¹⁰ This is even higher for young LGBTIQ+ women, who report acute mental distress at more than 3 times the rate of other young women in NSW.¹¹¹

As part of its commitment to improving women's health outcomes, the NSW Government provides funding to Women's Health Centres across NSW. These centres provide counselling and mental health supports, reproductive healthcare and education for the community and healthcare professionals.

Access to culturally appropriate health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

The need for holistic and culturally safe health services that are free from racism and discrimination; respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health needs; and take into account traditional preventive care, healing practices and medicines has been well documented, including in the *NSW Women's Health Framework* and the AHRC's *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future* report.¹¹²

Wiyi Yani U Thangani highlights the need to address the social determinants of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and to ensure equitable and accessible health services across all of women's health needs. The report recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health and wellbeing is interconnected to culture as well as socio-economic factors.¹¹³ Integrating women's knowledge and healing practices into health systems is critical for women's health and wellbeing.

Regional access to healthcare

Health outcomes for people living in rural and remote areas are lower than those in metropolitan areas.¹¹⁴

For women in regional NSW, limited access to services, long wait times and the need to travel long distances have a negative impact on themselves, their families and their communities. The NSW Government's Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme can provide financial support for patients required to travel long distances for treatment.

Women in regional NSW are looking for an integrated long-term solution that encompasses areas such as workforce development and housing for health practitioners.

Women in the regions report difficulties accessing a wide range of specialist care, from sexual and reproductive health services to psychology and psychiatry, speech therapy and other allied health services, affordable dental care, and palliative care.

'My child has seen 5 different OTs and 6 different psychologists, and I have to take half a day off work every second week to see a psychologist because of the travel.'

Woman from Far West NSW

Mental health and wellbeing

Mental health and wellbeing are priorities for women. Women reported difficulties in accessing services, particularly in regional areas. Wait times between visiting a general practitioner (GP) – the gateway to other services – and appointments with specialists can be long, sometimes up to 12 months, which can leave women feeling unsupported. Without supports, women may feel like there are barriers to participating in all other areas of their lives. Women with family members who are struggling with mental illness may personally carry the burden.

Between 10% and 20% of women develop a mental illness during pregnancy or within the first year of having a baby. Focus communities experiencing isolation, such as migrant women, have higher rates of postnatal depression compared with non-migrant women.¹¹⁵

‘The strategy should focus on 2 broad things – extending the reach and availability of support services in the region and directing assistance to women who need it.’

Newcastle/Hunter woman

Supporting healthy mothers and babies

Access to appropriate supports and services from preconception to pregnancy, birth and postnatal care helps ensure better health outcomes for mothers and babies.

Access to preconception care has been shown to improve pregnancy and child health outcomes. Providing consistent healthcare information and including partners are important.

It is crucial that women receive maternity care that acknowledges and respects their culture, beliefs and experiences.

Antenatal care, from pregnancy through to childbirth, should be woman-centred, individualised and reflect the preferences of the woman and her family.

In NSW, considerable progress has been made over the last 2 decades towards improved perinatal outcomes, from the time a woman becomes pregnant to a year after birth. Progress includes low rates of maternal death, 80% of women attending antenatal care in the first 14 weeks of pregnancy, and fewer than 1 in 10 women smoking during pregnancy in 2020. More work needs to be done to address low birthweight, preterm birth, stillbirth and neonatal death, where rates have remained steady. For regional women in particular, improved antenatal and postnatal care is a high priority.

Theme 4: Secure housing, preventing homelessness

Housing that meets women's needs

Housing is a social determinant of health

Housing plays an important role as a social determinant of health. Living in unsafe, insecure housing can make it more difficult for women to access healthcare for themselves and their families, to participate in work and to contribute to their communities. Facing constant stress due to housing unaffordability can negatively impact women's mental health.

Women are affected by housing issues at different stages as their housing needs and financial capacity change. Single mothers and older single women often face barriers to home ownership. This is particularly true of women who separate from their partner with whom they own a home. Only 34% of these women manage to purchase another home within 5 years, and only 44% are able to do so within 10 years.¹¹⁶

Women shared how their inability to access housing impacts every part of their lives, such as when it leads to a poor diet or putting off paying bills to pay rent. In the child protection system, stakeholders report the close link between access to secure housing and the ability of women to continue to care for or regain access to their children.

In the last decade, more older women have been provided with social housing; in 2020–21 the number of older women in social housing increased by 14.6% from 2019–20.¹¹⁷ The number of older women and older women from CALD backgrounds on the social housing waitlist declined by 4.8% and 6% respectively over the same period, but the number of older Aboriginal women on the waitlist increased by 24.2%.¹¹⁸

Better responses to homelessness

Women are affected by housing issues at different stages of their lives as their housing needs and financial capacity changes. Older women are the fastest-growing cohort of people experiencing homelessness in Australia, which is a consequence of long-term systemic issues.¹¹⁹ In the decade from 2006 to 2016, the number of older women who reported experiencing homelessness on Census night increased by 44%.¹²⁰

Homelessness is also an important issue for the LGBTIQ+ community, with 32% of trans women and 20% of women of diverse sexualities having experienced homelessness, compared to 13.4% of the general population.¹²¹

Addressing homelessness – particularly for older women – is also a high priority in regional areas.

The *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023* outlines the NSW Government's approach to preventing homelessness and supporting people, including women, who are experiencing homelessness.

The strategy:

- identifies and supports people who are at risk of homelessness early
- provides effective supports and responses
- creates an integrated, person-centred service system.

'I feel like becoming homeless is something that could happen to me and many older women.'

Woman from the Central Tablelands

Our commitment to health and wellbeing



Continue successful programs

- Address the abuse of older women through the Ageing and Disability Commissioner and the Preventing and Responding to Abuse of Older People (Elder Abuse) NSW Interagency Policy.
- Expand NSW Health-funded Twenty10 specialist counselling and group support programs for young trans and gender-diverse people.
- Continue to support the *National Action Plan for Endometriosis* (introduced in 2018).
- Continue piloting free menstrual hygiene products in 30 schools across Western Sydney and Dubbo, and planned rollout across NSW.¹²²
- Continue to implement the NSW Department of Education's Wellbeing framework for schools, to create learning environments that enable students to be healthy, happy, engaged and successful.
- Complete the rollout of Wellbeing and Health In-reach Nurses in high-needs schools across the state.
- Continue the very successful Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service, which supports women to reach their healthy lifestyle goals, with a particular focus on pregnant women.
- Expand Aboriginal Child and Family Centres, which co-locate universal health, early childhood education and other family services.
- Continue the Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme to provide financial assistance to patients who need to travel long distances for treatment.
- Extend the Pregnancy Family Conferencing program and Sustaining NSW Families home visiting program.
- Revise the SAFE START policy related to antenatal and postnatal mental health and psychological screening of all mothers birthing in public maternity facilities.
- Extend access to support for mild to moderate perinatal depression to women in rural, regional and remote areas.
- Provide 3,400 dwellings under the Social and Affordable Housing Fund.
- Deliver approximately 200 sustainable, social and affordable housing dwellings for women experiencing domestic and family violence through the Community Housing Innovation Fund partnership with the community housing sector.



Roll out new initiatives

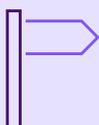
Implement measures announced in the *Women's Opportunity Statement*, which provide targeted support for a range of women's health needs, including:

- helping prevent street harassment by investing in public infrastructure including street lighting, pathway upgrades and CCTV
- \$40.3 million for menopause hubs and menopause awareness campaigns
- \$80 million to help families access fertility treatments
- \$5.2 million for postnatal mental health¹²³
- record investment in child development and family support via Brighter Beginnings and the Affordable Preschool Program.

Other initiatives beyond the *Women's Opportunity Statement* include:

- implementing the NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027 and the NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022–2027

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- establishing a new eating disorders treatment centre in Newcastle to provide wraparound care in a home-like environment
 - establishing Westmead Integrated Mental Health Complex
 - establishing a tailored suicide prevention service for people of diverse sexualities and genders (to be operated by ACON)
 - establishing a new trans mental health and wellbeing service funded by NSW Health and operated by ACON
 - establishing 2 specialist acute mental health care units for mothers and babies
 - developing digital health initiatives such as the Digital Baby Book.



Signposts for the future

- Develop a dedicated plan to address family and sexual violence in NSW Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and support Closing the Gap priorities.
- Increase knowledge and awareness of, and clinical support for, women's reproductive health, including reviewing research and exploring ways to improve experiences in education settings and the workplace.
- Continue developing telehealth to improve the reach and responsiveness of medical care.
- Develop a strategy for women and girls in correctional and youth justice centres with a focus on trauma, women and girls as parents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, and the transition from correctional centres to life in the community.
- Improve access to early intervention, mental health and wellbeing support for girls.
- Ensure the *Housing 2041: NSW Housing Strategy* addresses the needs of women and girls at risk of housing insecurity and homelessness.



Pillar 3: Participation and empowerment



Key themes

- » Challenging gendered norms, roles and expectations
- » Leaders in community and work
- » Uplifting focus communities
- » Rebuilding connections, engaging with community

Improving gender equality is fundamental to improving outcomes for women, which benefits everyone. Challenging gendered norms, roles and expectations is fundamental to driving changes to discriminatory attitudes and beliefs. From leadership in formal decision-making to leadership in the community, more women are being seen and heard. Focus communities are grounded in the strengths that their diverse backgrounds, life stages and cultures offer, yet barriers remain to achieving equality for all women and girls. Women have been affected by COVID-19 and other environmental shocks and are still working hard at keeping families and communities together.

Theme 1: Challenging gendered norms, roles and expectations

Challenging gendered attitudes, behaviour and practices is essential to achieving better outcomes for women and girls

While there have been advancements in gender equality in Australia and NSW, women still experience discrimination and inequality across many areas of their lives.¹²⁴

Some of the key drivers and contributing factors that underpin unequal outcomes for women include:

- rigid gender roles and stereotypes that reinforce differences between men and women
- men's control of decision-making and limits to women's independence in public life, the workplace and relationships
- condoning or acceptance of sexism, sexual harassment and violence against women
- relationships between men that are disrespectful towards women, and structural issues, such as laws and policies that deliberately or inadvertently embed biases that lead to inequality.

By working with the Commonwealth to develop a national gender equality strategy, we will address drivers of gender inequality across Australian society. The introduction of women's action plans for NSW public sector agencies under the *Women's Opportunity Statement* will help drive change within our policies, programs, laws and practice.

'We need to use new approaches to challenge those attitudes about women, but also about men. Get men into baking, don't focus on getting women into mechanics.' Young woman in Sydney

Gender inequality and violence against women and girls

Substantial state, national and international research has shown strong and consistent associations between gender inequality, and violence against women.¹²⁵ Examining the ways in which gender relations are structured and the social context of gender inequality is key to understanding the underlying conditions that produce violence against women.¹²⁶

Policies, laws and changes at the individual, organisational and societal level that promote gender equality make an important contribution to the prevention of violence against women. Some of these include:

- reforming legal, policy and institutional systems and practices that condone violence against women or reduce men’s accountability for their violence
- using policy, regulatory and legislative mechanisms, and processes to equalise access to power and decision-making between women and men within organisations and institutions
- school-based programs that challenge gender stereotypes and work with boys and men to challenge norms about sexual entitlement, sexual dominance and hypersexuality
- increasing awareness and understanding of gender inequality
- engaging men and boys in violence prevention and gender equality initiatives, encouraging them to challenge restrictive and rigid gender roles and identities for both men and women
- promoting gender equality across all domains of women’s and girls’ lives and continuing to address the specific drivers of violence, which are both needed to prevent violence.

Our commitment to implement the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Plan 2022–2027* and the *NSW Sexual Violence Plan 2022–2027* provides an opportunity to address the gendered drivers of violence against women.

Gender equality and men

Gender equality would not only remove barriers for women, but also free men and boys from the constraints of what are traditionally perceived as masculine behaviours, which lead to poor health, poor relationships and men’s experiences of violence.

Gender equality would improve men’s ability to play an active role in parenting and other interests through work flexibility. Evidence shows links between rigid gender norms for men and poorer health outcomes. Working with men and boys to address rigid gender norms and harmful forms of masculinity also has the potential to improve mental health outcomes, physical health and help-seeking behaviours, and reduce the incidence of violence by men.

Men’s violence harms women as well as other men. Data shows the majority of victims of violence (whether male or female) report the perpetrator as male.¹²⁷

Theme 2: Leaders in community and work

Creating pathways for more women in formal leadership and decision-making roles

There have been clear gains in the representation of women in public leadership and decision-making positions. Women now hold 1 in 3 seats in the NSW Parliament and make up 42% of all senior executives in the NSW Public Service, a 5% increase since 2017.^{128 129}

Similarly, there have been significant gains in women's representation on boards. As of August 2022, 34.3% of directors in ASX 300 companies are women, an increase from 29.6% in October 2020.^{130 131} Although women are more likely to hold leadership roles in female-dominated industries, they are still under-represented generally.¹³² Increasing the representation of women on boards has a direct impact on outcomes for businesses and women. Having more women on boards is linked to increases in women in leadership, reducing the pay gap and improving business performance.¹³³

Despite the significant gains in women's representation on boards, more progress is needed in women's representation as board chairs and CEOs. According to WGEA data, in 2020–21, 19.4% of CEOs and 17.6% of chairs were women.¹³⁴ There are many industries where the representation of women lags behind that of men, such as higher education (in which 29% of lecturers, senior lecturers or higher positions are women); law firms (in which 33% of principals are women); and arts, film and media, where men are more likely to be in full-time roles (64%).^{135 136 137}

Greater representation of women on boards and in key leadership roles is better for business:

- An increase of 10 percentage points in female representation on boards leads to a 6% increase in the likelihood of the company outperforming its sector.¹³⁸
- Women in business can offer different insights into the needs of customers, stakeholders, the community and shareholders, benefiting all.

Increasing women in leadership is a priority across industries

A recent KPMG, Diversity Council Australia and WGEA report on the gender pay gap highlights that nationally, the average management gap – the difference between the proportion of employees who are women and the proportion of management who are women – is 7%, which is mostly unchanged from 2017. In part, this may be due to a drop in the proportion of women being promoted during the COVID-19 pandemic period.¹³⁹

The management gap persists across industries where women are under-represented and industries where women are over-represented, including education and training, which has a majority-women workforce, but a 17% management gap.¹⁴⁰

'[I want to see] more women in more decision-making positions. There's a lot of pressure on a smaller number of women so they have to be exceptional.' **Woman veteran, Sydney**

Representations of women

Promoting positive and diverse images of women, and increasing the visibility of women from focus communities is important. Diverse representation of women will support young girls to build a more positive self-image, to recognise their importance in the community and to realise their potential in all aspects of life.

There is a compelling case for a shift in how women leaders are represented in society. Through the media and other communications, expanded definitions of leadership could broaden community expectations of, and support for, women leaders.

'Mainstream schools should have better understanding of people with disability. We should get more people with disabilities to talk at schools, especially women.' **Young woman with intellectual disability, Sydney**

We need greater representation of women from diverse communities – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls – who are in leadership roles, whether in the community, in workplaces or in the media.

Women and girls with disability and their representatives have highlighted the invisibility of women with disability in the community. This can diminish community understanding of, and engagement with, women and girls with disability and affect whether they feel accepted in the community.

Older women, particularly in regional areas, want to see more women in leadership, achieved through merit-based pathways. By contrast, younger women and girls repeatedly highlight that men in power may not recognise talented young women, because they don't look like them.



Theme 3: Uplifting focus communities

Meaningful engagement

Women's lives and experiences are shaped by many factors including where they live; whether they have a disability; and their age, culture and ethnicity, sexuality and gender. These layered identities and the many dimensions of women's lives provide a deep connection to their communities and cultures.

Genuinely uplifting women from diverse communities requires meaningful engagement, improving their visibility and representation in all aspects of the community, and including and advocating for them in decision-making.

Active consultation that reaches out to women and girls in these communities, in the spaces where they feel safe and in ways that enable them to raise their concerns, is vital.

To ensure action to deliver gender equality improves outcomes for all women, the experiences of all women must be recognised. The drivers of inequality for women with layered identities, including geography, racism, ageism and discrimination, are often entrenched in policy, services, social norms and practices. Poorer outcomes for women from diverse backgrounds across different domains, including physical and mental health and employment, illustrate their experiences of compounded disadvantage. Women from CALD backgrounds often experience more barriers to accessing opportunities and have less representation in leadership.¹⁴¹

Diversity of culture is a strength

Women's diverse cultures and identities support the wellbeing and positive development of both themselves and their communities. The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future* report brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's voices, celebrating their strengths and their connections to Country, culture and communities. Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's and girls' connection to their culture is fundamental to their wellbeing and improvements in social, economic and ecological outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and communities.¹⁴²

'For First Nations women, economic prosperity starts with strength in culture. If we don't have culture, we don't have anything. Culture is family, it's connection to Country and community.'
Aboriginal woman, regional NSW

By contrast, isolation from communities and cultures can lead to poorer outcomes for women. LGBTIQ+ women who are also Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and LGBTIQ+ women who are from CALD communities, are more likely to feel a lack of connection or recognition within both the LGBTIQ+ communities and communities of their racial or cultural backgrounds. They are also more likely to report barriers in healthcare settings, where cultural safety can impact their access to services and supports. Greater mental health support along with visibility and representation of women with layered identities would help build resilience.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are from a range of cultural, social, geographic and economic backgrounds. Many are leaders in their families and communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's lives have been affected by dispossession and intergenerational trauma. This, combined with socio-economic factors, barriers to accessing services, and racism in the community and workforce, mean Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience poorer outcomes across health, education, financial security, safety and housing – highlighting a profound systemic problem.

Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women includes ensuring they can lead on gender equality. Wiyi Yani U Thangani outlines a framework for structural change to deliver meaningful action on gender inequality.

Carers

In NSW, carers provide essential care, support and assistance to people with disability, mental illness, drug and/or alcohol dependency, chronic conditions and terminal illness, as well as older and frail people. Both women and men provide care, but of the more than 854,000 carers in NSW, almost 60% are women.¹⁴³ The gender imbalance is even more pronounced among carers who are caring for both older people and children – 95% of these carers are women.¹⁴⁴

LGBTIQA+ women and girls

Celebrating community and healthy relationships is a source of strength for many people in the LGBTIQA+ community. Strong community networks and relationships, and increasing community awareness of LGBTIQA+ issues are leading to better physical and mental health outcomes for the LGBTIQA+ community.

However, LGBTIQA+ women and girls are among the most disadvantaged women in NSW, particularly where they have layered identities, including being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, an older woman, a regionally based woman or a woman from a CALD, migrant or refugee background.

Trans women are particularly marginalised. Two in 5 young trans women in Australia have attempted suicide and more than 90% report suicidal ideation.¹⁴⁵ They experience poorer mental health, higher rates of unemployment and homelessness, low levels of financial security and high rates of sexual harassment. Research demonstrates that access to gender-affirming care improves mental health outcomes among trans people.¹⁴⁶

Older women

Older women face ageism in addition to other barriers. These women are often invisible and undervalued in the community and at work. They have fewer opportunities and due to the gender pay gap, are more likely than men to be on low incomes as they age.

Social connections are critical, particularly for women with intersecting identities, and are associated with living longer.¹⁴⁷ For older women from CALD backgrounds, connecting with women from their community can have a positive impact on their wellbeing.

Older women's invisibility can affect their safety at home and in the community – for example, when violence against women in aged care is not adequately prevented or responded to, and women are denied appropriate reproductive health care in aged care settings.



Women and girls experiencing socio-economic disadvantage

Socio-economic disadvantage is one of the social determinants of health and wellbeing. A woman's financial security, ability to progress with education, and access to opportunities and support all impact her health and wellbeing. Women who experience socio-economic disadvantage are more likely to be in insecure housing and to experience social isolation.¹⁴⁸

For women in focus communities, the impacts of socio-economic disadvantage are multiplied as they face increased barriers to accessing services and opportunities.

Women and girls from CALD communities

Women from CALD communities represent a large proportion of the NSW community. In the 2021 Census, almost a third of the population in NSW were born overseas, with a steady increase in the number of languages (other than English) spoken across households.¹⁴⁹

As with all discussions of focus communities, it is important to recognise that women from CALD communities have diverse standpoints shaped by their individual identities and experiences. These include their cultures, unique experiences and personalities, socio-economic backgrounds, preferred languages, settlement journey, current or historic trauma and religious backgrounds.

Women from CALD backgrounds, including migrants and those with refugee experiences, can face a range of challenges, such as navigating cultural expectations, racism and discrimination, lower workforce participation and a lack of culturally safe services.¹⁵⁰ Certain cohorts of women from CALD communities face compounded barriers, including women on temporary visas, who are at greater risk of violence, financial insecurity and dependence on their partners.¹⁵¹

Women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system

Women and girls who come in contact with the criminal justice system are usually highly disadvantaged. They are more likely to have experienced violence and abuse, mental health issues and high rates of substance use.¹⁵²

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are over-represented in the criminal justice system, comprising 32% of women in prison in 2019.¹⁵³

Gender-responsive models that are tailored to the underlying causes of women's offending and divert them from prison or re-offending have shown potential in reducing the number of women being incarcerated.

Women and girls living in regional, rural, remote and cross-border areas

Regional, rural and remote women are the backbone of their communities, keeping them connected. Their resilience supports communities to work through natural disasters and invest in growth opportunities.

More-limited access to services, including health care, and reproductive and sexual health services, means women in the regions often work harder to get the support they need. Costs associated with travel and accommodation to access health services can be a significant barrier for women in regional, rural and remote areas. Travelling to access perinatal services and to give birth causes additional stress and can be disruptive. Women living in cross-border environments face specific challenges, such as referral to and accessibility of services across state borders.

Isolation and limited access to communication services makes it harder for women in the regions to connect and take up new opportunities. However, through new pathways to leadership and expanding skills and networks, women are leading development in the regions.

Ensuring regional women have access to social and physical infrastructure and critical health services will create opportunities for more women in the regions to connect and succeed.

Women and girls with disability

As with other focus communities, women and girls with disability are incredibly diverse, with a variety of interests, talents and skills. Women with disability say they want people to better understand disability and they want to be respected and treated with dignity. Their priorities are the same as those of other women in NSW: safety from violence, good health care, the ability to work, and improved visibility in the community and in leadership.

However, there are greater barriers for women with disability to achieve these priorities. For example:

- They are less likely to be in paid employment and when they are in employment, they are paid less.¹⁵⁴
- Women with intellectual disability are more than twice as likely to die from preventable causes.¹⁵⁵
- Women with disability are over-represented in the criminal justice system.¹⁵⁶

Women veterans and families of veterans

Women now make up 21% of Australian Defence Force members and reservists, although only 13% of veterans are women. The experience of being in the military can be isolating for women, as they find it difficult to connect with other people with similar experiences in the community.¹⁵⁷ Historically, many veterans' services have focused on male veterans, and such services may be unwelcoming to women.

Despite being highly skilled and resilient, 33% of surveyed spouses and partners of serving and ex-serving defence force members reported experiencing problems associated with their mental health.¹⁵⁸

Young women

Experiences of disadvantage are often magnified for young women and can have a long-term impact on their wellbeing, particularly when they are part of another focus community. Young women are more likely to experience violence and sexual harassment. Girls who experience harassment early in their life are more likely to avoid walking or travelling alone, have ongoing distrust of men, and have ongoing anxiety and depression.¹⁵⁹

Access to appropriate and affordable sexual health services, support and education, including contraception and abortion, is critical for all young women, but particularly women experiencing socio-economic disadvantage.

Lack of equal opportunities for young women and girls have led many to hold back on their ambition. Those who have had negative experiences in workplaces dominated by men may seek to avoid similar experiences in the future because of the impact on their health and wellbeing.

Theme 4: Rebuilding connections, engaging with community

Supporting women's efforts to rebuild community connections

Women are now re-establishing social and community connections as we emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions. The challenges of re-joining community activities in a time of uncertainty have led to calls for a roadmap back to normality.

Women with disability highlighted how COVID-19 disrupted their ability to engage in the community and access peer supports and other programs. Leadership programs and peer support meetings at the time of the consultation (May to June 2022) had still not returned to face-to-face format.

On the whole, women are largely engaging in social and cultural activities at the same rates as before the pandemic, including going to restaurants, attending social events and taking public transport. However, other areas of women's lives have been impacted, with almost double the number of women now working from home.¹⁶⁰

Overall, women have called for a plan for rebuilding their communities, particularly a common and scientifically safe approach to bring people back together regularly to re-establish social connections.

'I feel like we have forgotten how to come back together as a community, and we need a roadmap back to normality.' **Central Tablelands woman**

'Celebrating community connection is a strength in the LGBTIQ+ community, and is fundamental to community health, healthy relationships and mental health.'
LGBTIQ+ forum participant

Reducing social isolation and supporting older women to maintain connections through the arts

We heard from older women that isolation is an increasing challenge, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic. Women over 55 years old told us that the number-one negative impact of COVID-19 was the loss of connections to family, followed by poorer social connections. We know that older people in NSW are vulnerable to increased loneliness and social isolation due to a decline in social networks and cultural engagement.¹⁶¹

Participating in the creative arts provides positive outcomes for both the health and wellbeing of women. In NSW, the active participation rate of women over 65 years old in the creative arts is 37.6%, compared to 20.7% of men, highlighting the significance of the role of creative arts in the lives of older women.

The NSW Health and The Arts Framework recognises that experiencing, making and performing in the creative arts can bring people together in a way that fosters social inclusion, community participation, and intergenerational and cultural exchange.

Similarly, the *NSW Creative Ageing Framework* identifies the benefits of creative ageing programs in tackling loneliness, isolation and health issues for older people.

There is scope to increase participation and employment in these programs as the population of older people grows. This will bring significant benefits and opportunities for older people, our communities and the economy.

Supporting women and girls to take up and continue to participate in sport

Physical activity, exercise and sport all support health, wellbeing and mental health. However, there are many different barriers to women and girls participating in sports and exercise, including not feeling comfortable exercising in public and fear of judgment.

AusPlay data indicates that women and girls are more likely to be involved in physical activity than men and boys, but significantly less likely to be involved in sporting clubs.¹⁶²

COVID-19 impacted women's participation in exercise and sport, although 68% of women who were participating in exercise and sport pre-COVID-19 had returned to community sport by early 2022.¹⁶³

The NSW Government encourages primary and secondary students, including young women and girls, to stay active through the Live Life Well @ School and Healthy Eating Active Living programs. The Share Our Space program is another NSW Government initiative aimed at increasing physical activity, by providing the community with access to additional recreation spaces in NSW schools, including playgrounds, ovals and sports courts. NSW Government investment under the Stronger Country Community Fund promotes participation in sport for regional women and girls.

'For women's sport to be successful and sustainable we need to fundamentally rethink, through a gender lens, the way that sport is delivered, coached, marketed, led, sponsored and consumed.'
Her Sport, Her Way

Women and volunteering

The 2021 Census data shows that women in NSW across all ages are 20% more likely to volunteer than men, with women aged 35 to 44 being 30% more likely to volunteer.

However, the 2021 Census showed volunteering was down 24% from 2016. While women across NSW have resumed many of their social activities, volunteering commitments have been slower to recover.

Women experienced more domestic labour and childcare responsibilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The mental load of the past several years and ongoing responsibilities may have reduced their capacity and commitment to volunteering.

Our commitment to participation and empowerment



Continue successful approaches

- Continue to deliver the annual NSW Women of the Year Awards to recognise and celebrate the outstanding contribution made by women across NSW to industry, communities and society.
- Continue to deliver the annual Women's Week program to celebrate the diverse contributions of women from all walks of life, through a program of activities that promote gender equality.
- Continue the annual investment in the NSW Women's Week Grants program to support organisations to deliver an event or activity that meets the objectives of NSW Women's Week.
- Continue the annual investment in the Investing in Women program to support organisations to develop and implement projects that advance the role, status and contribution of women and girls in our communities.
- Maintain and expand the NSW Gender Equality Dashboard to make valuable data more easily accessible to researchers, policy advisors, decision-makers and the community.
- Explore the evidence regarding the benefits of applying a gendered approach to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from disasters and emergencies.
- Continue implementing the *Election of Women to Local Government Action Plan* to increase the proportion of women elected to local councils.
- Continue to drive towards the target of women occupying 50% of senior executive positions in the NSW Public Service by 2025.
- Promote women in STEM disciplines through the Distance and Rural Technologies and other programs by the NSW Department of Education.
- Maintain and expand the suite of Women NSW toolkits that brings together a range of trusted online resources to help women find reliable information regarding career and life stages.
- Continue support for community programs that focus on building self-confidence and job readiness for migrant and refugee women, to boost participation and empowerment.
- Implement the *NSW Disability Inclusion Plan* and review the implementation of disability inclusion action plans by all NSW Government agencies and local councils.
- Implement the *NSW Carers Strategy: Caring in NSW 2020–2030* to improve support for carers, the majority of whom are women.
- Continue providing grants for sports organisations to support women, including a focus on diversity and inclusion.
- Extend support for the Rural Women's Network to provide information and services, build and maintain networks and strengthen rural communities.
- Continue to implement the *NSW Creative Ageing Framework* and the *NSW Health and The Arts Framework* to support women's participation in the arts so they maintain social connection and wellbeing.
- Continue to educate children and young people on respectful and positive relationships, in line with the new and strengthened Kindergarten to Year 10 Personal Development, Health and Physical Education syllabus.
- Enhance funding for facilities for women at sports grounds, such as toilets, change rooms and improved lighting.
- Extend the successful Daughters and Dads Active and Empowered program to help fathers support the wellbeing and activity of their daughters.
- Continue Live Life Well @ School Program to promote healthy eating and physical activity among primary school students.
- Continue the Healthy Eating Active Living program to promote daily movement and support good health.
- Continue to implement the Share Our Space program to provide access to recreation spaces in schools for local communities.



Roll out new initiatives

- Drive towards the target of women to occupy 50% of all board positions of state entities (state-owned corporations and public financial corporations).
- Foster the representation of women on the boards of sports organisations, as a target in its own right and as a pathway to board positions in other organisations (government entities, private companies).
- Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and establish a taskforce to provide expert advice on the implementation of the reforms set out in the *Women's Opportunity Statement*.
- Implement the *LGBTQI+ Health Strategy 2022–2027* to achieve the health outcomes that matter to people of diverse sexualities and genders, and intersex people.¹⁶⁴
- Support the community to manage mental health issues arising from the COVID-19 pandemic through a comprehensive package to support mental health.



Signposts for the future

- Implement programs that foster leadership in younger women and create pathways to leadership positions in public and private organisations.
- Advocate for meaningful engagement with focus communities across all relevant areas of government, including in policy development and program design and implementation.
- Engage the government and community to build opportunities for women in focus communities to be leaders and to promote positive representations of women in these communities.
- Consider the next iteration of a strategy to increase women's and girls' participation in sport following *Her Sport Her Way*.
- Develop *Keep Girls in Sport*, a program focused on encouraging girls to be physically active through sport from adolescence into adulthood.
- Encourage community sports organisations to ensure all sports are inclusive and safe.

Governance

This Strategy will be overseen by an interdepartmental committee, which takes a whole-of-government perspective on the issues covered. The committee will review progress against these commitments, identify emerging issues and help shape responses to emerging needs. The agency representatives on the committee will report progress directly to their relevant Secretary.

Reporting

The NSW Government has committed to requiring government agencies to develop women's action plans. These plans will outline a strategy to improve the delivery of services to women, as well as how the agency will address gender equality and women's economic outcomes within its own workforce. Women's action plans will be reviewed by the Audit Office of NSW every 2 years and made publicly available.

Detail provided in the plans will be used to inform reporting against success measures, which will outline our progress towards gender equality in NSW. Progress will be published annually.



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Key terms

Acronyms

Acronyms	Meaning
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
CALD	cultural and linguistically diverse
COVID-19	coronavirus disease 2019
FY	Financial Year (e.g. FY22 is 2021–22)
IVF	in vitro fertilisation
LGBTIQA+	lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer, asexual and people of diverse sexualities and genders not captured in the letters of the acronym
STEM	science, technology, engineering and mathematics
TAFE NSW	NSW Tertiary and Further Education agency
VET	vocational education and training
WGEA	Workplace Gender Equality Agency (Commonwealth Government agency)

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