



Discussion Paper

Women's Voices: Building a stronger WA together

Minister's message

Western Australia is home to a modern, energetic and diverse population. We have seen significant advances towards gender equality and women's empowerment. Progress has been achieved through community activism, as well as through policy and legislative change.

In recent years there has been growing global momentum calling for gender equality and women's rights. Australians have contributed to the activism taking place around the world, including women's marches and the #metoo and #timesup campaigns. However, with economic modelling revealing that gender parity is over 200 years away, there is still a long way to go. Now is an ideal time to build on our progress with a new framework that sets the agenda for Western Australia for the next 10 years.

The Western Australian Government is developing a plan to address this gender inequality. Addressing systemic gender inequalities requires significant cultural change. There is no quick fix. A strategic, multi-faceted approach is essential to bringing about lasting solutions.

The plan will provide a coordinated approach and framework across government agencies and Ministerial portfolios. It will also outline the role that individuals and organisations can play to advance gender equality.

Women deserve equality in all aspects of life — from schools to the workplace, during retirement, at home and in our communities. Empowering women to wholly participate in all aspects of society is the smart thing to do and will ensure that we harness the full potential of WA's population.

Hon Simone McGurk MLA
Minister for Women's Interests





Priority areas

Health and wellbeing

Gender is a social determinant which can have a negative impact on women's health and wellbeing outcomes. Women are more likely than men to experience family and domestic violence, which can lead to trauma, injury, mental health issues and death. Women's lower average earnings across the lifespan and lower superannuation balances on retirement reduce their access to health care choices. Women are more likely than men to undertake unpaid family care responsibilities and domestic work, which impacts on their ability to prioritise their own health needs.

Women are at higher risk than men of experiencing mental illness, such as anxiety, depression, self-harm, attempted suicide and eating disorders. Health and mental health problems impact upon, and are impacted by, economic and social engagement.

Reproductive and maternal health issues intersect with other health risks for women. These include osteoporosis, which is linked to decreased oestrogen levels after menopause, and sexually transmissible infections such as chlamydia, which can lead to infertility. Other health issues as such obesity and diabetes can cause complications during pregnancy and birth.

Safety and justice

Women are much more likely than men to experience violence and abuse in their own homes, at the hands of their partners. Family and domestic violence puts women at increased risk of poverty and homelessness, and contributes to negative health outcomes.

There are substantial costs to the community in relation to family and domestic violence, but it is usually women who bear the social and financial costs. Western Australia is developing a Family and Domestic Violence Strategy that will be closely aligned to this plan.

Women are also more likely than men to face the risk of sexual assault, harassment and discrimination in public, in the workplace, at places of education and at places of entertainment. Young women are particularly likely to experience significant levels of sexual harassment and violence in nightclubs, live music venues, pubs and at music festivals. Fear of experiencing violence, harassment and abuse can negatively affect women's ability to participate in their communities.



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Economic independence

Australia has slipped 24 places down the global gender equality ladder, from 15 in 2006 to 39 in 2018. The World Economic Forum reports that this is largely due to the persistent gender pay gap.¹ Women's participation in the workforce is affected by the unequal distribution of unpaid labour. Women still undertake the majority of caring duties for children and other family members, as well as an unequal share of domestic labour.

The gender pay gap starts early, with girls receiving less pocket money than boys, on average, despite contributing more to their homes and communities.² This inequality continues throughout the lifespan and contributes to women's significantly lower levels of superannuation and increased risk of poverty and homelessness in older age.

Women's earning capacity is further affected by unequal gender distribution across workplaces and industries. Fields that have traditionally been male-dominated, including science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM), generally have higher levels of pay than professional caring roles which have traditionally been female-dominated, such as child care and nursing.

Leadership

Increasing women's leadership opportunities positively impacts on economic independence across the lifespan, including retirement. There is a well-established business case for gender diversity in leadership and decision-making roles³, but women still encounter barriers to reaching senior levels, especially across the corporate and government sectors. This is despite women scoring, on average, higher than men across all indicators of educational achievement for at least the last two decades.⁴

Research by the Committee for Perth⁵ has suggested that Perth has a particularly masculinised corporate and social culture, which is quite different to other Australian cities. This is evident in the continued gendered stereotypes in the workplace and in the home, which can create discrimination against women who want to be leaders. Lack of flexible work practices for both women and men, limited child care options and unconscious bias in selection and promotion processes all impede women's career progression.

¹ The Global Gender Gap Report (2018). Switzerland, World Economic Forum.

² Mark Doman (2018). Home is where the hard work begins. ABC news 29 May 2018.

<http://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-05-29/home-is-where-the-hard-work-begins/9770986>

³ McKinsey Quarterly: Is there a payoff from top-team diversity, McKinsey & Company, April 2012
<https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/is-there-a-payoff-from-top-team-diversity>

⁴ Olsen, A, *The Gender Agenda: Gender Differences in Australian Higher Education*, Strategy Policy and Research in Education P/L, September 2013

⁵ Fitzsimmons, T.W., & Callan, V.J. (2015). *Filling the Pool*. Perth, the Committee for Perth.



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Intersectionality

Gender inequality does not affect all women in the same way. Many women experience other types of discrimination or disadvantage that are interrelated with gender inequality and have an additional impact on women's ability to fully participate in their communities.⁶ Some of the groups most affected include:

- women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds
- women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds
- women with disability
- younger and older women
- LGBTQI+ women, and
- women from regional and remote areas.

Support is available if you need it

- **1800 Respect National Helpline:**
1800 737 732
- **Women's Domestic Violence Helpline:**
(08) 9223 1188
1800 007 339
- **Men's Domestic Violence Helpline:**
(08) 9223 1199
1800 000 599
- **Lifeline (24 hour crisis line):**
131 114
- **Relationships Australia:**
1300 364 277

Further information

To find out more, please visit our website www.communities.wa.gov.au or email women@communities.wa.gov.au.

⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission (2017). A conversation in gender equality. Sydney, AHRC.