



Women's  
Electoral  
Lobby (NSW)

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# W E L N S W P O S I T I O N S T A T E M E N T

## NSW State Election

26 March 2011



In NSW many women and girls still suffer from disadvantage and cannot realise their full potential or participate freely in society in the ways men and boys can. There have been recent initiatives designed to address this inequity, but there are still many barriers that women and girls face in this state.

In putting forward this Position Statement, WEL NSW has selected key areas in which women and girls are subject to disadvantage, and has identified specific measures which the NSW Government should adopt to create a fairer society for all NSW residents. Successfully addressing these issues not only requires policy and legislative reform, but systemic initiatives to generate cultural change over time.

In many of these key areas WEL encountered great difficulty in analysing the real position of women in NSW. There is a lack of social reporting and available indicators demonstrating differential impact on women and girls. While there is a requirement for reporting on women as part of annual reports, this does not provide an adequate coverage or assessment for the public, or for organisations advocating for women. WEL recommends that Government programs be outcomes driven, with identified achievements and performance measures which clearly show how they affect women and girls in NSW. Accountability and performance measurement should be strengthened, including the use of performance data and gender sensitive indicators.

Other key WEL recommendations include:

1. The NSW Government commit to addressing pay equity and the gender pay gap, including committing to funding the outcome of the Australian Services Union Equal Pay (ASU) case currently before Fair Work Australia.
2. The decriminalisation of abortion in NSW to protect the women of NSW and their reproductive rights.
3. The NSW Government introduce targets of 40% of female membership (or the underrepresented gender) of NSW Government boards and committees and women in 50% of Senior Executive and Chief Executive roles.

WEL's recommendations have resource implications. Our expectation is that additional staff and funds will be made available to departments and agencies to enable the implementation of our proposals.

Following further discussion with other women's organisations, the policies outlined in this document may be supplemented over time.

Melanie Fernandez  
Convenor, Women's Electoral Lobby (NSW Inc.)

## ABOUT WEL

The Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) NSW is an independent feminist, non-profit, non-party political, lobby group founded in 1972. WEL is dedicated to creating a society where women's participation and potential are unrestricted, acknowledged and respected and where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards.

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# ABORTION LAW REFORM

## Background

In NSW abortion remains under the criminal code, Crimes Act 1900 Division 12. NSW women are denied autonomy over their own bodies and their reproductive choices can be subject to criminal prosecution. A woman can only legally procure an abortion if her doctor believes that an abortion is necessary to protect her from serious danger to her life or her physical or mental health. NSW case law allows for doctors to consider economic and social reasons along with medical grounds. Under current NSW legislation a woman, her partner and her doctor can risk prosecution under the criminal code.

The accessibility of abortion for all NSW women is still limited. The affordability of these services throughout NSW and the availability to women in rural areas are major concerns.

## Recent developments

In October 2010 a young couple in Cairns, Queensland were tried under charges brought under the States anti-abortion laws. The couple were charged with procuring an illegal abortion as they obtained RU486 from overseas relatives. RU486 is a legal treatment in Australia and is considered safe, but there is limited access to this drug for Australian women. The young woman faced charges that carry a maximum penalty of seven years imprisonment and her partner faced a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment.

The case was heard on 14 October 2010 and a jury found the couple not guilty in less than an hour. The speed of the couples acquittal and the public reaction at the time, including marches in solidarity around the country and letters of support for the couple to Queensland Premier Anna Bligh, demonstrated that the current Queensland and NSW anti-abortion laws are outdated and do not reflect widespread community sentiment.

Anna Bligh's response to a letter of solidarity for the couple from WEL NSW was that she:

- Believes that decisions in relation to abortion are best made by a woman, her partner and her doctor and that these decisions are ultimately private matters.
- Any moves to change the current legislative provisions concerning abortion would have to be introduced as a Private Member's Bill and be subject to a conscience vote. The Premier does not believe there are sufficient numbers in the current Parliament to pass a Bill decriminalising abortion.
- In fact, it is possible any such Bill would be amended in the Parliament, or alternatively another Bill introduced, which would make these services less accessible. That is the last thing the Premier wants to see happen.

This view is also often expressed in regards to NSW abortion legislation. While requiring consideration, it holds less validity when young couples are being subjected to criminal prosecution and public exposure for procuring an abortion. NSW abortion law must be reformed to reflect the view of NSW women, the wider community and the current clinical practice.

## WEL recommendations

- The decriminalisation of abortion in NSW to protect the women of NSW and their reproductive rights.
- Abortion be regulated by health legislation in the same way as any other medical procedure. In Victoria such legislation has been implemented, Abortion Law Reform Act. In Victoria abortions before the 24th week of pregnancy are regulated in the same way as other medical procedures. From the 24th week of pregnancy a doctor must determine that the abortion is necessary to prevent risk to the woman from continuing the pregnancy. WEL recommends that NSW adopt similar legislation.
- Funding to health services to ensure the increased availability and accessibility of abortion, with a particular focus on the affordability of abortion and access in rural areas.

# PAY EQUITY

## Background

The gender pay gap in Australia is currently 17% which means that the average weekly ordinary time earnings of women working full-time is [17% less than the earnings of men](#). In August 2010, the gender pay gap in [NSW was 14.4%](#).

The NSW Government is the largest single employer in the southern hemisphere. [It employs over 235,100 women](#), which represents approximately [60% of the NSW public service](#) workforce.

WEL notes that the [government has stated its support](#) for the contentions raised by ASU in the current equal remuneration case before Fair Work Australia. WEL also notes that the government has not committed to funding any wage increase resulting from the case. This is despite the government's own findings that the impact of the ASU's claim on the NSW budget is likely to be only [1.6% per annum over five years](#).

## Recent developments

WEL notes the following initiatives announced by the NSW Government in the last term that relate to pay equity:

- The government's commitment to [reduce the gender pay gap](#) in the NSW public sector
- The Premier's announcement of a [gender pay equity audit](#) for the NSW public service and promise to develop best practices principles to promote good quality flexible work for NSW employees in private and public sector jobs in May 2010
- Commissioning the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney to undertake a project investigating [trends and issues in women's employment](#) in NSW.

## WEL recommendations

### *Commit to funding Equal Pay case outcome*

- The government should publicly support the ASU's application in the equal remuneration case and commit to achieving real pay equity in the NSW public sector. Any wage increase which results from the national ASU pay equity case needs to be funded by governments at all levels so that the community sector workers, the majority of whom are women, are able to be adequately remunerated for the scope and complexity of work which they undertake in the not-for-profit sector.

### *Pay equity audit*

- Ensure the promised public sector pay equity audit covers the whole of the NSW public sector, including teachers and the NSW Health Service.
- Publicise the results of the pay equity audit and devise and publish appropriate policies to reduce any identified gender pay gap in the NSW public sector which should include developing benchmarks. Progress should be monitored by the Public Sector Workforce Office in the Department of Premier and Cabinet and reported to parliament by the Minister for Industrial Relations.

### *Flexible work*

- The government should provide a clear timeframe for the promised development of best practices principles to promote good quality flexible work for NSW employees in private and public sector jobs as announced in May 2010.
- The government should implement all recommendations of the Report of the NSW Premier's Council for Women Survey.

# WOMEN IN PAID WORK

## Background

Despite a large increase in part-time work, most workplaces still operate on the basis of a traditional male norm. Full-time workers are viewed more seriously, and there is often an assumption of the existence of full-time unpaid domestic support from a female partner.

Part-time paid work and flexibility to deal with family responsibilities are generally seen as "women's issues", and those who demand them are given fewer training and promotion opportunities.

- One-quarter to one-third of the workforce in Australia work part time, a higher percentage than in most other OECD countries
- The part-time work force grew from 19.7% in 1987 to 28.6% in 2006
- Over 60% of the part-time workforce are female

Even though women are graduating from TAFE and university in greater numbers than men in a number of areas, this is not translating into women's participation in senior positions in the workplace. Women's work patterns often lock them out of additional training and line-management positions, which in turn lead to senior management and board positions.

The Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Agency 2010 Annual Report showed, amongst other things, a decrease in women in management among reporting organisations from 33.5% to 32.4%.



## Recent developments

WEL notes the following initiatives announced by the NSW Government in the last term that relate to the working conditions of women:

- Hosting the [NSW Quality Part Time Work Round Table](#) on 19 February 2009
- Conducting the NSW Premier's Council for Women Survey – "[A conversation with NSW Women about paid work](#)" in February 2010 and producing a report on that survey in May 2010
- Commissioning the Workplace Research Centre at the University of Sydney to undertake a project investigating [trends and issues in women's employment](#) in NSW
- Policy document [Making the public sector work better for women](#) 2008-2012 which sets out the proposals to develop flexible work practices and encourage the promotion of women to senior positions.

## WEL recommendations

### *Public Sector*

- Barriers to women's progression to management positions be reviewed and action taken to remove them. This should include providing developmental opportunities to enable women to become more competitive in merit selection.
- Proactive measures should be taken to open up career paths for women in agencies with male dominated areas.
- HR Directors should be made accountable for driving initiatives and accounting for EEO outcomes for women. This should be a Key Result Area in performance agreements for the next five years.
- The government introduce targets of 40% of female membership (or the underrepresented gender) of NSW Government boards and committees and women in 50% of Senior Executive and Chief Executive roles.

### *Private Sector*

- Sponsor community and industry wide seminars and training programs to encourage more flexibility and respect for part-time workers.

# SKILLS TRAINING

## Background

Women are less likely than men to have non-school qualifications. (Source: ABS 1301.0 *Year Book 2008*). *The Barriers to Women's Employment: Women and Recession Project* identified a number of issues which remain barriers for women wishing to enter or re-enter the workforce, including eligibility, access, costs and child care. There were also issues for specific disadvantaged groups of women.

Although more women are studying TAFE or VET courses, specially targeted and funded women's programs are essential to meet disadvantaged women's needs and achieve enduring employment outcomes. Barriers to enrolment and successful completion of training persist for certain groups of women.

Performance and outcomes data tracking trends over time and disaggregated by gender and demographic characteristics is no longer routinely collected and published. This makes advocacy and support for specifically targeted programs more difficult.



## Recent developments

*The TAFE Women's Strategy – 2004-2010* has expired and there is no action to develop a new plan. The proposal is for a *TAFE NSW Gender Equity Strategy*. The *TAFE Women's Unit* has been abolished and replaced with a *Social Inclusion and Vocational Access Unit*. The position of TAFE Women's Strategy Officer is gradually being abolished in TAFE Institutes. Teachers and trainers with specific experience in women's programs are fewer in number and there is little incentive for these skills to flourish.

The NSW Government has implemented a program with a number of schools to encourage girls to be involved in Information Technology (Digi-Girls), the automotive industry (Jump-Start) and robotics. The Lucy program was used to target young women in business, law and management studies at university. All these programs are small scale, piecemeal and usually dependent on one-off funding. They are grossly inadequate to meet needs which disadvantaged women continue to identify as critical to their becoming successful and productive workers.

The Federal Government introduced a major initiative in the Budget, 2010-2011 allocating \$67m over four years for programs in language, literacy and numeracy. The additional training places will not be adequate in meeting all needs.



# skills training

## WEL recommendations

- WEL NSW believes current approaches for women's education and training do not cater adequately for specific groups of disadvantaged women. Funding needs to be allocated to targeted programs. It is grossly inadequate to meet all needs. While NSW Government policy in education and training is nationally driven, there is room for action.
- The NSW Government, as part of its State Women's Plan should request the Department of Education and Training to incorporate in its social inclusion plan a TAFE Women's Strategy.
- Gender performance and outcomes indicators in education and training need to be collected, analysed and published to ensure evidence-based approaches to program planning.
- Indicators data need to be linked to demographic characteristics such as Aboriginal, disability, migrant and refugee (or Culturally and Linguistically Different – CALD).
- TAFE NSW and private VET providers should reinstate women's pre-vocational and Outreach programs as an entry point to skills training.

- The NSW Government should argue for policy and program changes with the Commonwealth at COAG which would enable all VET providers to offer specially targeted women's programs.
- Training costs can limit access for disadvantaged women of all backgrounds. Access needs to be improved through a reform of national student allowances and income support measures to assist disadvantaged people to train and retrain.
- Recognition of prior learning, current competencies and overseas qualifications should be facilitated by relevant agencies for migrant and refugee women.
- Customised and culturally appropriate programs should be developed for Aboriginal women to be offered by TAFE Institutes and VET providers. Resources for such programs need to be quarantined.
- The Skills for Sustainable Growth program announced in the federal budget should publish outcomes data for each state and territory on the number of training places allocated to women for Language, Literacy and Numeracy illustrating how migrant and refugee women are benefitting from this program.

# YOUNG MOTHERS IN EDUCATION

## Background

It is essential that young mothers with babies and young children continue to avail themselves of education and training opportunities with a view to further education or joining the workforce.

WEL NSW advocated the expansion statewide of a range of targeted programs offered through TAFE NSW Outreach in collaboration with schools, Family Support Services and other agencies in its 2006 *Policy Proposals for NSW*.

Many teenage mothers are early school leavers, in some cases lacking basic literacy and numeracy. They require budgeting, parenting and living skills including information on healthy diets. Most have had little or no transitional training to assist them to gain employment, or to seek further education or complete their schooling in supportive settings. Young Aboriginal women in country areas are particularly vulnerable, but socially and economically disadvantaged women from a range of backgrounds are all vulnerable to the long term effects of struggling on inadequate income support.

## Recent developments

Various education and training initiatives targeted to concentrations of disadvantaged young women have been offered in Western and South Western Sydney, Central Coast, Hunter, Illawarra regions and some country areas over the years. Many of these were based with TAFE NSW Outreach. WEL NSW has been advised that the revenue raising or commercial approach in TAFE has resulted in these programs no longer being affordable.

All these programs struggle to survive due to inadequacy of funds, a lack of TAFE or school funding support, a scarcity of adequate alternative venues, inaccessible or unaffordable child care or transport difficulties.

Where some funds are available these need to be augmented by financial or in kind support from community agencies, health and other government departments or local councils. Raising the funds each year is a major challenge for program coordinators.

One such program in Umina on the Central Coast, *Babes with Babes: Young Mothers Alternative Education Program* is provided with \$1000 per student from *Break Thru*. This small sum must fund a tutor or teacher, learning resources, transport and child care. The young mothers enrolled in the program register with an employment agency. Each young mother attracts different levels of federal funding depending on her background and circumstances.

This program struggles each year to marshal sufficient funding to stay viable. Child care is a major component and needs to be provided on site or very near the education venue. It is critical to the success of the program. Quality child care also provides benefits for children as mothers are exposed to early child development information by qualified early childhood education staff.

There is a range and diversity of program approaches and participating agencies across the state. What these programs all need is a secure funding base with an education and training provider like TAFE so that participating agencies can contribute their expert support for other components of the program.



# young mothers in education

## WEL recommendations

- WEL NSW acknowledges that community-based programs through Family Support Services and the like have an important role to play in education and training for socially and economically disadvantaged young mothers. TAFE Outreach, however, is best placed to coordinate these programs, link them to skills development and employment outcomes. WEL considers that the struggle faced by these programs to achieve financial sustainability and continuity should not continue. A modest base budget allocation to TAFE NSW Institutes succeeded in the past and should be made for the future.
- A statewide Young Mothers Alternative Education Program should be funded through TAFE by the Department of Education and Training and be managed by each TAFE Institute Outreach.

- The statewide program should be funded in a partnership model with community agencies. Each program should be allocated at least \$200,000, that is, each TAFE Institute in NSW be required to make a budget commitment to the program with participating agencies to include: Community Services, School Education, Health and local councils where relevant.
- The statewide program should aim to facilitate learning in a safe, stimulating and supportive environment. It should provide flexible individualised learning pathways; be located in a community setting; have a parenting component; set clear and achievable learning goals for participants and report statewide on outcomes.
- The statewide program should target young women, including Aboriginal women in rural areas, to ensure that they can transition confidently to work or further education to secure their future income. The program needs to be appropriately promoted and advertised at the local level and through social media.



# CHILDREN'S SERVICES

## Background

Access to adequate children's services for children under school age or out of school hours is essential for parents. To ensure that children's services in NSW are accessible, appropriate and affordable, there needs to be both a state and federal response. The historic split in both the funding and regulation of children's services is currently being restructured under COAG agreements, and includes new national regulations on staffing qualifications and ratios, quality frameworks and other aspects of accreditation and monitoring.

However, some areas will remain the responsibility of the NSW Government. For now, NSW still licenses services and building standards. Importantly, it also provides most of the funding for 800 plus community preschool services, that is those that run for less than 8 hours per day, and directly operates 100 preschools attached to primary schools. The costs of fees range from \$50 per day to almost nothing, places are limited and the overall attendance rate in NSW is lower than in most other states.

The current NSW Government funding formula for preschools suggests that the focus is firmly on child development and educational assistance rather than more traditional child needs for time away from parents and vice versa. Places are funded on the basis of two and a half days a week allocation per child with priority for those in the year before starting primary school. As there are not enough places, many three year olds are missing out, as are those who may need five days a week.

These problems are exacerbated because NSW significantly lacks any serious state based system for planning and co-ordinating services or negotiating with COAG. DOCS is the licensing and funding department for all community based services, but has no planning powers or state wide policy development powers. There is no use of SEP instruments for the local planning of services.

## Recent developments

The NSW Government's Preschool Investment and Reform Plan (PIRP) provides \$29.8 million in new funding to preschools each year.

In addition, the COAG National Partnership on Early Childhood Education provides new funds to NSW to achieve universal access to early childhood education in the year before school by 2013.

This is being used to boost preschool funding and reform in NSW. From July 2009, \$21.3 million is being invested in community preschools in NSW and since July, 87% of NSW preschools have received increased funding.



# children's services

## WEL recommendations

WEL recommended before the last election that a children's services co-ordinating unit be set up in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to plan and oversee the children's services needs across the NSW Government departments and to negotiate effectively with the Commonwealth. It did not happen and still needs to.

- Strengthen the planning and delivery of services for children in NSW by establishing a high level unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet to negotiate with the Commonwealth and COAG as well as make policy, plan and co-ordinate children's services.
- The new unit develop state strategies on the following areas:
  - Introduce a State Environmental Policy instrument, such as SEPP 5 used for aged care



housing, for early childhood services to improve distribution and access.

- Ensure that state schools built in the future include a community-based multipurpose preschool.
- Ensure all state primary schools have facilities for before and after school care services.
- Develop and negotiate funding that ensures all children have access to affordable quality services
- Enhance access to qualifications by using TAFE facilities to ensure that there is early childhood training and qualifications available in rural areas and also targeted specifically to Aboriginal communities.
- Address the problem of recruiting 4 year trained teachers for those services that operate for longer hours and more weeks than preschools, and cannot match Government salary levels.
- Support the implementation of the findings of the Productivity Commission 's Early Childhood Development Workforce Study.

# DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

## Background

Domestic violence encompasses violence that is physical, sexual, emotional and psychological in nature, which takes place in domestic settings – very often between intimate partners. A small percentage of men can be victims of domestic violence, however in a majority of cases men are the perpetrators of domestic violence against women and children.

The effects of domestic violence are well known, and the impact of domestic violence continues to reverberate in the lives of victims and their families long after the abuse has ended.

One of the weaknesses that WEL seeks to highlight is that highly vulnerable groups often receive marginal attention in the mainstream arena. Compared with their English speaking counterparts, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women are often faced with additional barriers which actively impede their ability to access the necessary services available to them.

Women with intellectual and physical disability, especially those of non English speaking backgrounds (NESB), are more likely to experience increased incidences of domestic violence that are both severe and long lasting. They are less likely to report the abuse, and have limited access to services and avenues of escape.

Although much has been done to combat domestic violence, different groups have their own set of complex experiences that should determine policy response.

One of the problems highlighted by some community service providers has been the limited amount of Australian research conducted about CALD women and DV. The very little data that is available, apart from needing urgent updating, is often conflicting and doesn't provide a concrete picture of how things stand. Before any decision on how to proceed in this area can be made, more research is needed to accurately identify the necessary weak points before.

Immigrant and refugee women in particular are often treated as one homogenous group, yet very often they face very different and unique sets of circumstances. In addition, they are more dependent on their sponsor (often the perpetrator) for their citizenship status. Research will help to tease out specific issues that affect these women and help to formulate better targeted programs.



## Recent developments

Since the last state election the government made notable progress in some areas.

- The Domestic and Family Violence Action Plan includes the creation of the Violence Prevention Coordination Unit (VPCU) in the Department of Premier and Cabinet.
- \$2.2 million to support five existing Domestic Violence Proactive Support Services (DVPASS) in Sutherland, the Inner West, Wollongong, Redfern and Canterbury regions
- \$1.5 million to expand DVPASS to 5 new high-risk locations across NSW including Coffs Harbour, Rockdale/Kogarah, the Eastern Suburbs, Parramatta and Armidale
- \$2.4 million to expand the Domestic Violence Duty Solicitor Scheme to 15 additional court regions, with an emphasis on rural and regional areas
- \$1.3 million to expand the Rural Women's Outreach program, providing Legal Aid services and support to women in isolated farming communities and predominantly Aboriginal areas of remote NSW
- 9.5 million in Commonwealth funding to support the Orana Far West Safe House project model, providing safe accommodation and support services for women and their children escaping violence in the Far West, particularly Aboriginal communities

# domestic violence

In 2009 the government also established the DV Homicide Review Panel (DVHRP) consisting of government and non-government experts which is being chaired by the State Coroner. The DVHRP is backed by legislation and reports annually to Parliament.

## WEL recommendations

- The NSW Government needs to invest in and encourage research that focuses specifically on CALD women and NESB women with disabilities to help all involved better assess and estimate the size and severity of the problem and how many women in this group are affected or at risk.
- Indicators measuring the level of domestic violence and safety of women be developed and included in the data set being developed by the ABS for Australian Council of Women Ministers.
- Research be undertaken on best practice programs which can be successfully implemented in NSW.
- The NSW Government takes a lead role and continues to raise awareness through community education campaigns that are matched with adequately planned response services.
- Specific funding for Aboriginal, migrant and refugee services be provided, and their communities assisted to apply for these.
- The legal definition of consent in relation to sexual assault offences as stated in s 61HA of the *Crimes Act 1900* (NSW) be included as a mandatory starting point for education on consent as covered in "LS.16 A student demonstrates an understanding of issues associated with sexuality" in the NSW PD/H/PE Years 7-10 syllabus.



# AFFORDABLE HOUSING

## Background

WEL believes that the availability of affordable, suitable and secure housing for all Australians is critical for achieving social justice and cohesion. It is of particular concern for women who are disproportionately represented amongst lower income earners and as the victims of domestic and family violence, and who are more likely to be responsible for the upbringing of children. Yet a significant number of Australians, mainly low to moderate income earners, are suffering from housing stress or homelessness.

Some key concerns are:

- Over one million families in Australia are estimated to be in housing stress. That is, they are paying more than 30% of their income in housing costs. NSW has the highest rate of rental stress of all states and territories, particularly in Sydney.
- There is a significant shortage of affordable private rental housing stock throughout Australia. In NSW in September 2010, [only 44% of available rental stock was affordable](#) for low to very low-income families.
- In June 2009, the waitlist for public, community and state owned/managed Aboriginal housing in NSW was [69,624 households](#).
- While there has in the past been a bias towards home ownership (just below 70% of households), house prices have risen more rapidly than incomes for the last 50 years and especially in the last decade, creating high barriers to home ownership for low income households.

- [About 105,000 Australians are estimated to be homeless](#) – 27,374 homeless people were counted in NSW in the 2006 census. There is some evidence that rising rents, family breakdown and the current economic downturn are pushing more women, especially older women, into homelessness. Since 2007/08, women over the age of 45 outnumber older men in government funded shelters.
- Barriers to accessing affordable housing mean that women escaping from domestic violence will continue to rely heavily on emergency accommodation, and for longer periods of time. For victims of domestic violence and their children, this situation increases the risk of long term homelessness or a return to a violent situation.
  - [One study](#) has indicated that the housing situation for women and children experiencing domestic violence has deteriorated significantly, with women facing lengthy and fragmented processes when attempting to obtain safe, secure and affordable housing.
  - There is significant concern about the lack of exit points from crisis accommodation into longer term housing. [Another recent study](#) confirms the urgent need for more safe, secure, affordable and stable housing options to allow women to re-establish their and their children's lives post violence.



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# affordable housing

## Recent developments

While the provision of social housing is the primary responsibility of State and Territory Governments, the Commonwealth Government provides significant funding, principally through the National Affordable Housing Agreement (NAHA) (replacing the Commonwealth State Housing Agreement (CSHA)) and Commonwealth Rental Assistance (CRA) as well as indirectly through the taxation system.

WEL welcomes a number of significant initiatives taken by the Australian Government since 2007 such as appointing a Minister for Housing; increased funding through the NAHA; initiatives to increase supply of affordable housing such as the National Rental Affordability Scheme which encourages private investment, and allocation of additional funds under the Social Housing Initiative of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan.

We also recognise that the Australian Government has committed to halving the number of homeless people by 2020. In addition, a number of policies have been announced in the last 2 years by both the Commonwealth and NSW Governments which have the potential to improve housing outcomes for women and children experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence, such as a 20% increase in the number of such families securing safe & sustainable housing by 2013.

Many of these initiatives rely on State/Commonwealth co-operation for their effective implementation. One key initiative, the National Rental Affordability Scheme (NRAS) – described as *the* growth fund for Australia's social housing - requires both a tax credit from the Commonwealth and a subsidy from the State Government. Shelter has pointed out that the NSW Government is only promising a limited number of base rate NRAS subsidies and needs to allocate additional subsidies in order to establish a fair share of NRAS dwellings in NSW (around 15,000 rather than around 5,000 as currently projected). WEL also notes the proposal to cut funding to this program to pay for reconstruction to recent flooding.

## WEL Recommendations

WEL supports Shelter's recommendation that the NSW Government commit to sufficient matching subsidies so that NSW receives at least 30% of all future NRAS incentives and that it commit to combining in-kind state contributions (such as free or discounted land and planning) with NRAS subsidies.

WEL also endorses the call by the NSW Women's Refuge Movement that a percentage of social and affordable housing stock be specifically allocated to women and children who are homeless because of domestic and family violence.

WEL further joins Shelter & other advocacy groups in urging the NSW State Government to work with the Australian Government to:

- Develop a National Housing Strategy as a policy framework for the NAHA, covering a range of affordable housing options such as affordable rental, transitional/supported housing, home ownership programs and housing controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Review income support and tax systems to improve equity and efficiency in the housing system.
- Review the planning and regulatory framework such as land use planning and development approval system, residential tenancies regulations and regulations covering mortgage lending. The State Government has a critical role to play in urban and regional planning and transport strategies to assist in achieving a fairer housing system. The NSW Department of Planning's current review of its one year old State Environment Planning Policy (Affordable rental housing) (AHSEPP) aimed at encouraging and fast tracking approval for affordable rental homes may point the way to further initiatives in this area.
- Tackle the growing problem of homelessness by increasing the access of highly disadvantaged households to social housing properties and closely integrating housing strategies with other strategies aimed at dealing with homelessness, family violence and child protection.

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# AGED CARE

## Background

The need for substantive reform in support and care for older Australians has been well documented and is now the subject of the most recent Productivity Commission Public Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians. However, as cited in the submission made to the Inquiry by the [National Foundation for Women](#) (Submission No. 95) "it is impossible, and moreover inappropriate, to consider the redesign of the systems for caring for older Australians without a framework of analysis by gender." This is because:

- Women live longer than men
- Women in retirement are generally poorer than men
- Women provide the bulk of the informal care given to older Australians
- Many women carers have poor health
- Women predominate as both recipients of extended care at home packages and users of residential care.

The issue of affordable housing for older women is also closely related to their ongoing health and their capacity to continue to live in the community with access to in-home support services.

## Recent developments

The 2006 WEL Position Statement and recommendations focused on the health of older women and on nursing homes and the provision of aged care services.

There have been some additional services for dementia and the introduction of the Sub Acute Fast Track Elderly Care program, but on the whole there has not been a great deal of change in the provision of aged care services which are funded and delivered predominantly through the Home and Community Care (HACC) program.

There continues to be a general lack of funding for the community aged care system and therefore limited capacity to provide services particularly in rural and remote locations.

The NSW Government has produced the *Women's Health Plan 2009-2011* which includes some priority actions which will affect older women, notably the development of services that support women from CALD backgrounds and Aboriginal women who are carers.

A major change is the agreement reached, through the Council of Australian Governments, for the Commonwealth to take over full responsibility for care services for aged persons (apart from Victoria and Western Australia). Implementation of this change, together with governmental responses to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians (final report due June 2011) may result in better integration of policy and programs responding to the needs of ageing Australians.

## WEL recommendations

- A clearer focus on gender including the collection and publication of data for aged care services, disaggregated by gender.
- Given the extent of the feminisation of the caring sector (paid and unpaid) and the extent to which women outnumber men as users of aged care services, it is important that the specific issues affecting women be identified and managed by planners and managers.
- [A continuing focus on respite care](#) and the need for greater flexibility both in the type of respite provided and when it is delivered.
- The Department of Premier and Cabinet should undertake appropriate and extensive evaluation of changes which are implemented in NSW as a result of the Commonwealth Government takeover of funding of aged care services, and the implications of the outcomes of the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Caring for Older Australians, particularly as they affect older women.

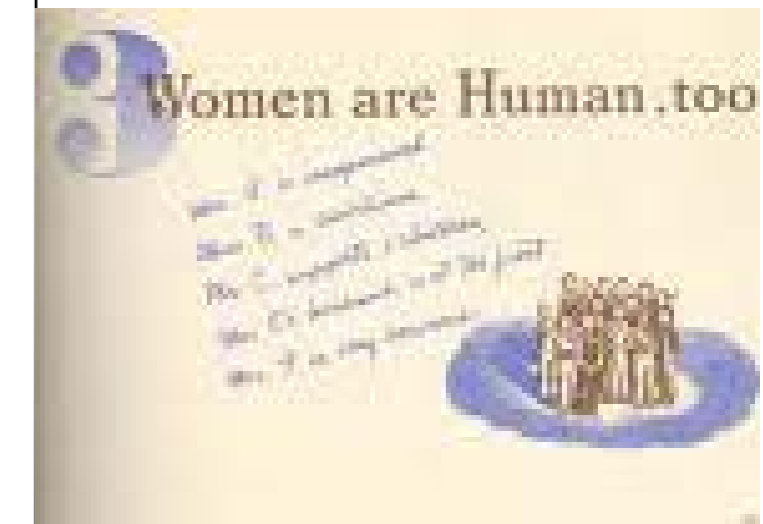
# HUMAN RIGHTS

In the absence of any specific protection of human rights in the NSW constitution, WEL notes the significant impact that a statutory human rights act could have on protecting the human rights of all individuals in NSW, including women.

WEL notes with disappointment the current NSW Attorney General's opposition to statutory human rights protection. However, we also note that the Attorney General has stated that he is not opposed to a "general consultation process on how best to protect human rights."

## WEL recommendation

The NSW Government conduct a comprehensive inquiry (including community consultation) on how to best protect and promote human rights in NSW and commit to implementing any recommendations of the inquiry.



# GOVERNMENT SYSTEMS

In 2007 WEL sought the following changes to the way in which government operates in order to support women's progress in NSW. Regrettably, none of these changes have been put in place. WEL is still seeking these changes to government.

## Office for Women

### Background

NSW needs to reinvigorate its efforts to attain gender equality for girls and women. NSW moved, like many states and countries, to mainstream gender with departments and agencies having carriage of ensuring positive outcomes for girls and women. Women's policy and program units in NSW Government machinery were cut back with the expectation that line areas would take responsibility for positive outcomes for girls and women.

This expectation has been inadequately met and as a result girls and women have been missing out, for example disabilities and mental health packages had no reference to the different needs of girls and women.

While there is a requirement for reporting on women as part of the annual report, what is reported does not provide an adequate coverage or assessment for the public, and, in particular, women's organisations.

### WEL recommendations

- The Premier assumes responsibility for women's issues and have a Minister Assisting. The Premier's Department should identify priority issues for women and build them into comprehensive state plans.
- Each department and agency be required to clearly articulate gender sensitive policy and action plans with concrete planned outcomes for girls and women. More use should be made of Gender Action Plans, gender analysis, and audits. For this to work there needs to be:
  - Strong women's machinery and greater collaboration between those working on gender equity and equality and those working in human rights, health, education, employment, legal reform, and other mainstream fields.
  - Strong interdepartmental and interagency women's policy and program network so that human services and other areas are developing integrated program approaches which are reinforcing and complementary.
- The Office for Women be strengthened so that the Office work as the hub and be given a strong mandate and resourced to work effectively. Strategies for this are:
  - Establish a strong Policy Branch within the Office to contribute to integrated state wide plans, identify emerging issues including those going to COAG Reform Council.
  - Create a Child Care Policy Coordination Branch in the Office.
  - Ensure direct access to the Premier.
  - Clearly define reporting lines to the Minister Assisting the Premier for example, collaborating on matters arising in other portfolio areas.
  - Lead intra-government policy coordination and integration
- Women's units and liaison officers in departments and agencies be appointed at a high level and resourced - not a duty added onto other work and not a responsibility assigned to junior officers who do not have negotiating power.

# government systems

## Public Sector Resourcing

### Background

There are some 290,000 equivalent full time positions in the public sector including state owned corporations. The February 2006 NSW Audit of Expenditure and Assets Report estimated that 80 per cent (232,000) are frontline staff. The remaining 20% of positions provided essential support 8% (23,000), corporate services 10.4 % (30,000) and policy 1.4% (5,000).

There are plans from both parties to cut positions.

While WEL recognises that the government needs to ensure that its services are provided in a cost effective way, we are concerned that some areas of the public sector are already facing workload pressures, and that an undue focus on cost cutting will further reduce the capabilities of public sector agencies to deliver much needed services, especially in the front line.

WEL NSW therefore calls on the NSW Government to ensure that public sector agencies remain adequately resourced to provide quality, effective services, including improvements to services recommended in this document.

### WEL recommendations

- That the pressure on front line services be reduced by ensuring that support services are adequately resourced.
- That additional workloads and responsibilities on front line workers be assessed for their impact on the work and family balance of staff members.
- That a proactive approach be taken to identifying permanent part time positions which make return to work policies realistic.
- That strategies be put in place to avoid burn out by frontline staff.

# GENDER SENSITIVE INDICATORS

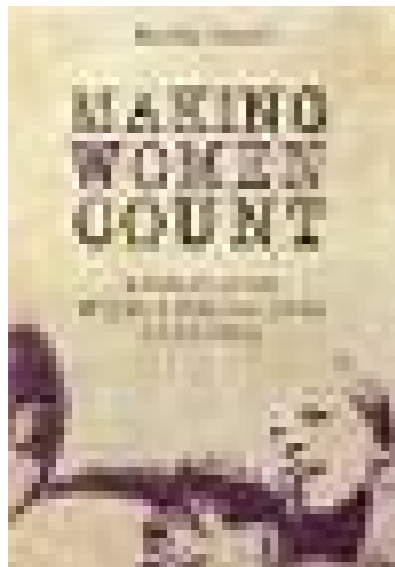
## Background

When compiling this document, WEL encountered great difficulty in analysing the real position of women in NSW. This was due to a lack of identified outcomes and available indicators in a number of important areas affecting women.

While there is a requirement for reporting on women as part of annual reports, what is reported does not provide an adequate coverage or assessment for the public, or for organisations working on behalf of women.

WEL has a longstanding interest in the identification and use of data for measurement of progress. As a consequence, we have considerable expertise in identifying the data that is required for reliable gender-based measurement in these areas.

We understand that the Federal Office for Women is funding a National Gender Indicators Project at the ABS, and that these indicators will be expanded periodically to build a more comprehensive set of indicators over time.



## WEL recommendations

Reporting on gender performance be improved in the following ways:

- Government programs should be outcomes driven, with identified achievements and performance measures which clearly show how they affect women and girls in NSW.
- Chief Executive Officers and senior officers should be made accountable for driving initiatives and accounting for outcomes for women and girls. This should be a Key Result Area for the next five years in performance agreements, in the same way as is currently required for Aboriginal progress.
- Accountability and performance measurement should be strengthened, including the use of performance data and gender sensitive indicators. Appropriate gender specific and gender sensitive data should be collected and monitored in each department and agency and published in Annual Reports to demonstrate trends over time and improvement in performance of services.
- The Office for Women and the Auditor General should jointly publish Annual Review and Outlook Reports, including budget analysis. In October 2010 Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women (MINCO) received a presentation from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) about the status of the Australian Gender Indicators project. In the long term these Australian Gender Indicators will perform a useful function in measuring progress on the status of women and provide a means by which the effectiveness of equality initiatives across Australia can be measured.
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## **ABOUT WEL**

The Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) NSW is an independent feminist, non-profit, non-party political, lobby group founded in 1972. WEL is dedicated to creating a society where women's participation and potential are unrestricted, acknowledged and respected and where women and men share equally in society's responsibilities and rewards.

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