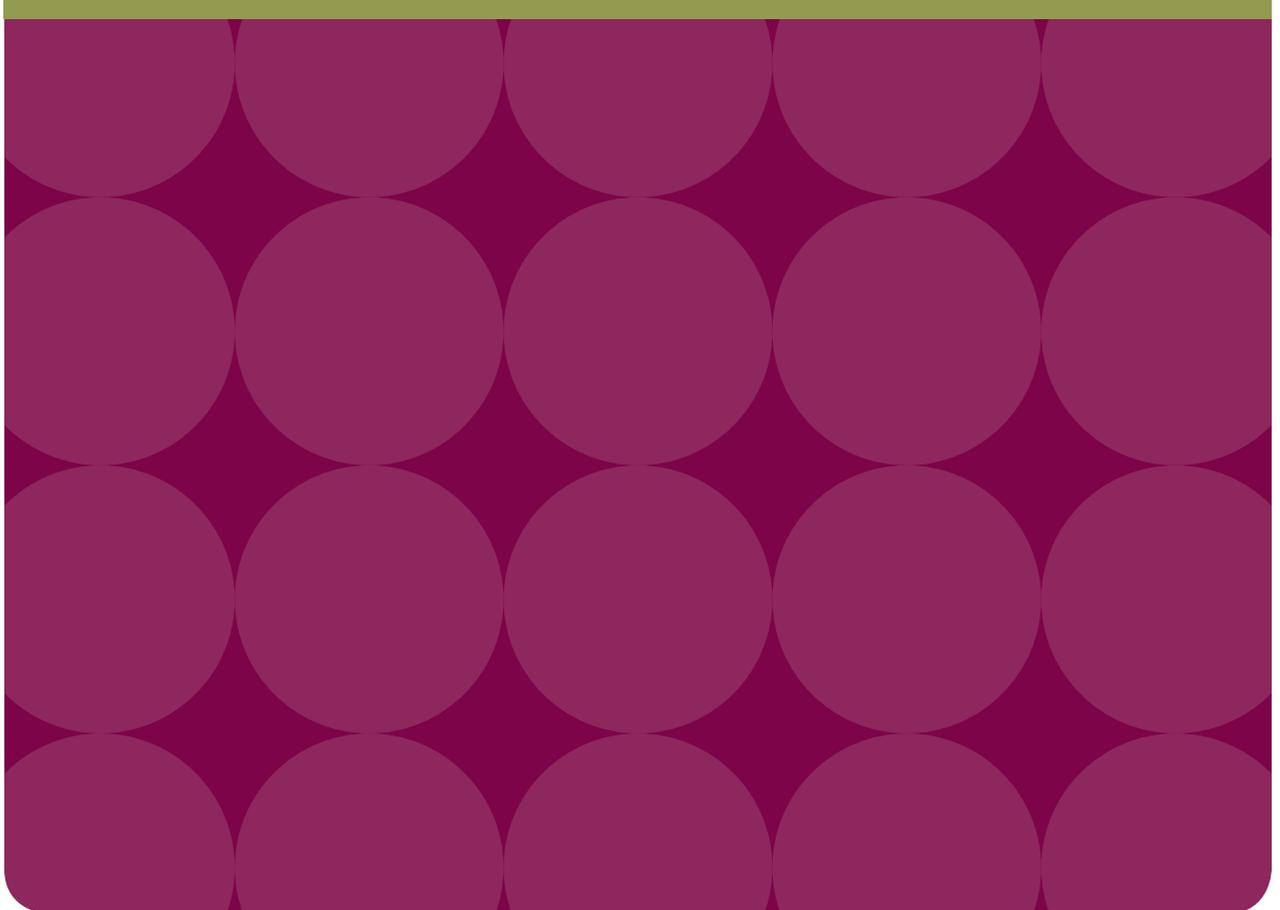




Australian Government

Women's Budget Statement 2011–12

The Hon Kate Ellis MP
Minister for the Status of Women



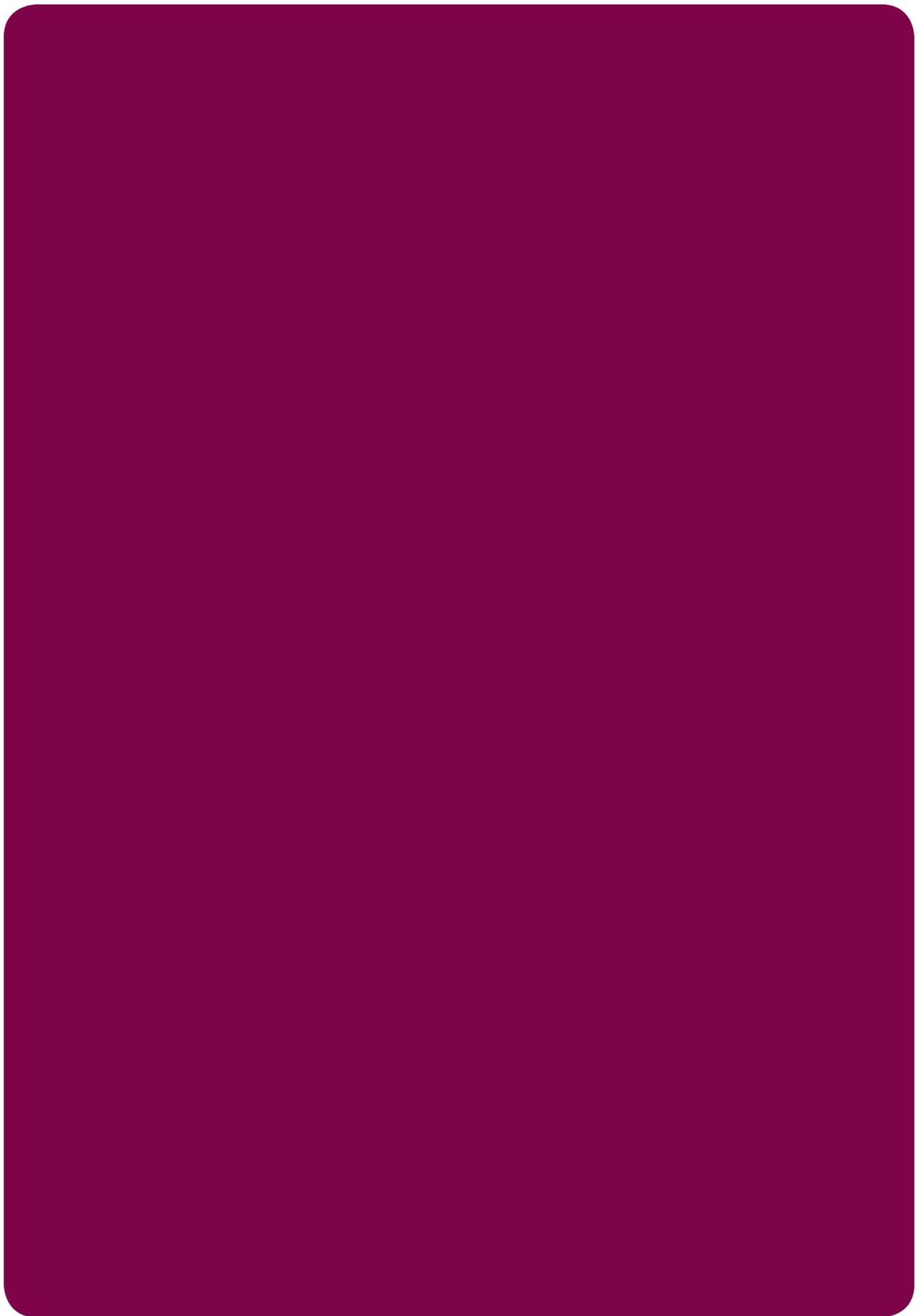
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Contents

Introduction	3
Enhancing equality in the workplace and at home	4
Creating opportunity and providing support	10
Helping families and carers	17
Improving men's and women's health and wellbeing	22
Reducing violence and fostering respect	28
Advancing equality in leadership and representation	33
Considering equality across government	36



Introduction

The Australian Government is committed to achieving gender equality. In recent years, the Government has set a strategic agenda with three priorities – reducing violence against women, improving women’s economic security and ensuring women’s equal place in society. This agenda has progressed significantly, prioritising work to address some of the most evident inequalities that remain between women and men in Australia.

Gender equality will not only benefit individual women and men, but also enhance social and economic participation. This is integral to boosting Australia’s long term prosperity and ensuring a strong economy now and into the future.

The 2011–12 Budget remains on track for a return to surplus in 2012–13. The Budget includes a range of measures that will strengthen Australia’s future workforce by boosting participation, rewarding work, providing new opportunities through training, education and services, and introducing new incentives for some groups. A number of measures in this Budget also provide extra support and more timely and flexible assistance for families.

The Women’s Budget Statement 2011–12 highlights measures that will advance gender equality through building a productive workforce, plans for participation that address entrenched disadvantage, provide cost of living relief for families, support children with disability and their carers and respond to men’s and women’s mental health needs. This Statement also outlines other key initiatives that the Australian Government has put in place to ensure equality of outcomes between women and men.

Enhancing equality in the workplace and at home

Women in Australia are leaving school and university as well-educated as their male counterparts, if not more so.¹ However, we know that women continue to spend less time in the paid workforce than men, and tend to fare less well than men on a number of key indicators while at work. Women's labour force participation rate is less than 60 per cent, compared with almost 73 per cent for men, and women working full time currently earn only 83 cents for every dollar earned by men.²

- Time use data shows that men spend almost double the amount of time that women spend on paid work.³
- Conversely, women spend much more time than men doing unpaid work, such as domestic activities and, in particular, child care.⁴
- The decisions that women make over their lifetime impact on their ability to support themselves financially as they grow older. Women have lower superannuation balances when they retire and greater dependence on the Age Pension than men.⁵
- The gendered division of labour also constrains men's ability to balance work and home life. Men can experience more pressure to work long hours, limiting their capacity to play an equal parenting role.⁶

As well as improving outcomes for women and men, a more equal balance in the roles people play at work and at home has clear economic benefits. For the Australian economy to be productive and grow, it is essential to boost workforce participation. Women represent a large pool of skilled labour in Australia. A report released in 2009 suggests that closing the gap between women's and men's workforce participation rate could increase Australia's Gross Domestic Product by 11 per cent. The research also notes that "much progress in closing this gap has already occurred over the past 30 years with the rise in the female employment rate since 1974 boosting economic activity by 22 per cent."⁷

Research shows that incentives to increase women's workforce participation include initiatives to better support both men and women to balance caring and paid work, such as more flexible workplaces and increased access to child care.⁸ Addressing the gender pay gap has also been identified as a strong economic incentive for women to increase participation.⁹

The following measures, and other recent initiatives, will help to increase workforce participation and open up women's and men's options about balancing paid work, domestic work and care.

Gender Equality in the Workplace

In March 2011, the Government announced a package of reforms to the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* (the Act) and the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (the Agency). These reforms follow a review in 2009–10 and the Government's subsequent commitment to improve and retain the Act and the Agency. Under the reforms, the Agency will receive an additional \$11.2 million over four years, almost doubling its existing resources.

The key elements of the reform are:

- Modernising the coverage of the Act to better reflect the goal of gender equality so that it:
 - encompasses women and men, particularly in relation to caring responsibilities
 - explicitly refers to pay equity
 - requires employers to report on the gender composition of their boards
 - enables smaller organisations (less than 100 employees), which will continue not to be formally required to report, to access the Agency's advice, education and incentive activities.
- Stronger, fairer and more effective compliance measures.
- Enhancing the role of the Agency in providing support, advice and assistance to business and industry.
- Importantly, streamlining and refocusing the existing reporting requirements on outcomes, to reduce the paperwork burden on business, and ensure real progress towards gender equality for men and women in the workplace.

Reforms to the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* are now being developed and will be introduced into Parliament this year. The Government is working with business and other key stakeholders during each step of the reform process. For more information, go to:
www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/news/2011/Pages/EOWAFactSheet.aspx.

Early childhood education and care

Child care is essential in enabling parents who are primary carers of children, often women, to enter and remain in the workforce. The Australian Government is investing over \$20 billion over four years in its agenda for early childhood education and child care. This agenda focuses on providing Australian families with high-quality, accessible and affordable integrated early childhood education and child care.

Child Care Reform Agenda Workforce Package

Building the capacity of the early childhood workforce will support the successful delivery of the existing early childhood reform agenda, including the introduction of the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care services and the delivery of universal access to early childhood education.

Through the 2011–12 Budget, the Australian Government will invest \$9.7 million over four years in the Child Care Reform Agenda Workforce Package to support early childhood education and care workers by:

- improving the quality and uptake of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- examining the extent to which nationally consistent mental health and wellbeing competencies are included in both Higher Education and VET early childhood education and care qualifications.

This Package aims to build the capacity of existing early childhood education and care workers and will be particularly important for women, who represent 95.4 per cent of the early childhood workforce.¹⁰ This measure will encourage more workers to upgrade their qualifications.

Introduction of Fortnightly Payments of Child Care Rebate

The over \$20 billion that the Government is investing in early childhood education and care includes over \$7 billion to assist working families with out-of-pocket costs under the Child Care Rebate. Around 700,000 families are assisted currently by this payment.

Following the passage of legislation in Parliament earlier this year, from July 2011 families will be able to choose to have their Child Care Rebate paid fortnightly either directly into their bank account or as a fee reduction via their child care service. This means families can choose to receive their entitlements in a more timely manner, with the potential to settle their child care accounts more frequently. The option of fortnightly Child Care Rebate fee reduction payments to families through child care services will also reduce the upfront costs of child care for families and the potential debt burden for services. The introduction of the fortnightly Child Care Rebate does not change eligibility for the payment.

Schools – national rewards for great teachers

Of the estimated 251,422 full-time equivalent teaching staff in schools in 2010, 69.4 per cent (174,594) were women.¹¹ The Australian Government will provide \$425 million over four years to build the quality and status of Australia's teaching workforce through better performance management and feedback processes for teachers and by rewarding teaching excellence.

The measure will have two elements:

- development of a nationally consistent, rigorous and objective performance management process linked to the national teaching standards
- bonus payments to the top ten percent of Australia's teachers in recognition of their performance, to be paid in 2014 based on performance in 2013.

National rewards for great teachers will provide up to a 10 per cent salary bonus to around one in ten, or 25,000 teachers from 2014. The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling estimates that 25 per cent of the gender pay gap is caused by occupational segregation¹² (the concentration of men and women in particular occupations and industries). Although it is not possible to predict the relative proportions of men and women teachers who will receive a performance bonus, this measure will assist to build the quality and status of a traditionally female dominated profession. It is likely that a significant number of women will receive the bonus on top of their usual remuneration.

Research Workforce Strategy

The Australian Government has developed a research workforce strategy in response to issues raised in a number of reviews concerning research training and the research workforce. Equity issues, including the underrepresentation of women in the research workforce, were examined as part of the development of the research workforce strategy.

The final strategy document, *Research Skills for an Innovative Future: a research workforce strategy to cover the decade to 2020 and beyond*, was launched on 19 April 2011.

One of the five priority areas identified in the strategy focuses on increasing participation in Australia's research workforce. Future priorities contained in the strategy relating to equity issues also include:

- removal of impediments within research training support programs for part-time higher degree by research candidature
- development and promotion of family-friendly research workplaces.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – Phasing out the dependent spouse tax offset

The Australian Government will phase out the dependent spouse tax offset (DSTO) for dependent spouses born on or after 1 July 1971. This measure will commence from 1 July 2011.

The DSTO is a disincentive for low income spouses, who are typically women, from entering the labour force or increasing their participation. It has its origins in the initial *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936* when there were limited opportunities for women and men were expected to maintain a low-income wife with no children. However, women's participation has increased significantly and it is no longer appropriate to assume men are responsible for maintaining a wife with no children. The changing role of women, and evolution in the welfare system, mean the DSTO no longer accords with community expectations about workforce participation.

Taxpayers with a dependent spouse aged more than 40 years will continue to be eligible for the DSTO. Taxpayers maintaining a dependent spouse who is a carer or an invalid and permanently unable to work will not be affected. Taxpayers receiving the zone, overseas forces and overseas civilian tax offsets will also have their DSTO entitlement unaffected.

Paid Paternity Leave – implementation – new start date

The Paid Parental Leave scheme began on 1 January 2011, and is already helping working mothers as they take time off to care for their newborns. The Australian Government will also provide eligible working fathers or partners (including same sex and de facto partners) with two weeks Paid Paternity Leave at the National Minimum Wage – currently \$570 a week in 2010–11. The payment will provide additional financial assistance at a time when family income is reduced, particularly if the father would otherwise be taking unpaid leave. A father or partner may receive Paid Paternity Leave either on its own or in addition to their partner claiming 18 weeks of Parental Leave Pay. Alternatively, Paid Paternity Leave may be claimed in addition to other family assistance payments such as Baby Bonus and Family Tax Benefit.

Most working fathers take some time off work around the birth of a child to be with their family, but this is usually for a short period. The Productivity Commission estimated that, in 2007, fathers took on average two weeks of leave, around the birth of their child. Of the fathers who took leave, only around nine per cent took unpaid paternity leave.¹³

Paid Paternity Leave will enhance gender equality by helping embed paternity leave as a normal aspect of work and family life and sending a signal to employers and colleagues that a father's role in caring for babies is important.

The Paid Paternity Leave scheme is estimated to cost \$188.5 million over five years (2010–11 to 2014–15).

To ensure the smooth delivery of the first Paid Paternity Leave scheme for Australian fathers, the scheme will begin on 1 January 2013 instead of 1 July 2012. This will allow more time for consultation with businesses and families, and ensure legislation can be drafted and considered by the Parliament during 2012.

Amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*

The Australian Government has introduced legislation into Parliament to change the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* to better protect men and women, working families and students from discrimination and sexual harassment. If passed, this legislation will amend the Act to provide equal protection for men and women from discrimination on the basis of sex and family responsibilities, establish breastfeeding as a separate ground of discrimination and strengthen protections for students and workers from sexual harassment.

In terms of promoting greater equality in the workplace and at home, under the amendments working parents will be better protected from discrimination in the workplace on the basis of their family responsibilities. These protections will extend to all areas of work and will, for example, prevent employers from denying training opportunities to mothers who work part-time in order to look after their families. Extending these protections to men and women equally will enable men to play a greater role in caring for children, which will in turn assist women to return to the workforce.

Strengthening the Australian Human Rights Commission

The Australian Government has introduced legislation into Parliament to establish a stand alone Age Discrimination Commissioner. The Government has committed \$5.7 million over four years to fund the position and a support team in the Commission, and to restore the stand-alone positions of Race, Sex and Disability Discrimination Commissioners in the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Creating opportunity and providing support

Sometimes people need extra opportunities and support to reach their potential and participate fully in Australia's economic and community life. Men and women can have very different needs in terms of social and economic support. Gender and other characteristics, such as age, geographic location and ethnic and cultural background impact on people's lives and experiences of disadvantage.

A number of measures in the 2011–12 Budget, and other recent Australian Government initiatives, will provide much needed support to many Australians. This is being balanced and complemented by policies to create opportunities and enhance participation, which will benefit individuals and the nation more broadly.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – Compulsory participation requirements for jobless families – targeted locations

Even in times of economic strength, Australia has a high proportion of long term jobless families compared to other OECD countries. Around 70 per cent of jobless families with children aged under 15 are single parents, and the majority of these families are headed by single mothers.¹⁴ Extended periods on income support can lead to significant barriers to future workforce participation, and entrenched disadvantage.

To address this issue, the Australian Government is investing \$71.1 million over four years to provide new supports to help jobless parents living in ten disadvantaged locations who have been on income support for at least two years or are under 23 years of age; and not currently working or studying. Eligible parents will be required to attend a series of interviews and workshops at Centrelink that will raise awareness of and help them access locally available services for themselves and their children. Service offers will be tailored to the needs of families and encourage parents to prepare to re-engage in employment as their youngest child ages. This increased responsibility will be matched by greater opportunity.

Participating parents will be able to access the Communities for Children program that will support them to connect to childhood services and prepare their children for school.

Parents will also be able to receive more help with the costs of child care with the Jobs Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) being extended from 26 to 52 weeks for employment related activities.

Through the provision of extra services, this measure will ensure these women and men, and their children, have the opportunity to participate as fully as they are able in economic, social and educational opportunities available in their local community.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – Compulsory Participation Plans and Support for Teenage Parents – targeted locations

The majority of teenage parents on Parenting Payment are young women.¹⁵ Teenage parents will now receive more intensive support from Centrelink and will engage in activities to improve education outcomes for themselves and their children. The Government is investing \$47.3 million over four years in this measure, which will benefit, in total, around 4,000 teenage parents and their children.

From 1 January 2012, teenage parents in ten disadvantaged locations who are on Parenting Payment will be required to attend six-monthly compulsory support and engagement interviews with Centrelink (from when their child is six months old) – an early intervention designed to have a positive impact on the long term future wellbeing of both teenage parents and their children.

These teenage parents will work with Centrelink to develop a participation plan that includes activities to be undertaken when their child is one year old. The plans will focus on education pathways and activities will be designed to help them attain a Year 12 or equivalent qualification, and they will be connected to services to help with any non-vocational barriers. Parents will access early childhood and family services to assist with their parenting role, for example, through the Communities for Children initiative and will have access to child care fee assistance. No parent will be required to put their child in child care if they do not wish to do so. If a teenage parent already has Year 12 or equivalent attainment, they will have an initial interview with Centrelink to inform them of local services and supports but will not have to participate further in the program.

Targeted locations – jobless families and teenage parents

- Playford (South Australia)
- Hume (Victoria)
- Greater Shepparton (Victoria)
- Burnie (Tasmania)
- Bankstown (New South Wales)
- Shellharbour (New South Wales)
- Wyong (New South Wales)
- Logan (Queensland)
- Rockhampton (Queensland)
- Kwinana (Western Australia)

Building Australia's Future Workforce – training places for single and teenage parents

The Australian Government is providing \$80 million over four years to support training, at the Certificate II level or above, for single and teenage parents on income support. Funding will be provided to the states and territories under a new National Partnership Agreement to commence in January 2012. Under this arrangement flexible, vocationally oriented training will be available to single and teenage parents with sufficient foundation skills to undertake further training, but insufficient work-related skills and experience to find and maintain employment.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – services to assist single parents enter the workforce

In 2009, over 90 per cent of people receiving Parenting Payment Single were women.¹⁶ The Australian Government will provide \$22.7 million over four years to assist single parents to improve their skills and plan for a transition to the workforce when they move off Parenting Payment Single.

This amount includes \$19.1 million to enhance the current Communities for Children program to provide early intervention initiatives to people receiving Parenting Payment Single. The enhanced Communities for Children service model will operate across the 49 existing and three new Communities for Children sites from 1 July 2012. It will ensure single parents receive support to effectively participate in the workforce, and develop their children's skills ready for a successful education. The initiatives will include playgroups, parenting education classes, mentoring and support groups, and early learning programs.

Communities for Children services for teen parents will commence operation from 1 January 2012 in three new sites: Bankstown in New South Wales, Shepparton in Victoria and Rockhampton in Queensland.

Under this measure, single parents will also be provided with professional career advisory services through employment service providers.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – incentives for single parents and Parenting Payment reforms

This measure is designed to encourage single principal carer parents, most of whom are women, to work by rewarding those who are earning income while on Newstart Allowance establishing their connection to the labour market.

A single, lower taper rate of 40 cents in the dollar for single principal carer parents' income above \$62 a fortnight will replace the current Newstart Allowance taper rate of 50 cents in the dollar for income between \$62 and \$250 and 60 cents in the dollar for income above \$250.

This means many recipients will be able to earn almost \$400 extra per fortnight (to a total of \$1,346 per fortnight) before they lose eligibility for at least some income support, providing greater incentives for these parents to undertake or increase their hours of paid work while still having the security of income support.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – targeted locations income management

Income management is a key part of the Australian Government's commitment to protecting and providing for children and vulnerable people. By ensuring that money is available for food, housing, and the necessities of life it provides a tool to stabilise people's circumstances, easing immediate financial stress, while limiting expenditure of income support payments on excluded items. Evaluations in the Northern Territory and Western Australia have shown that many women have reported reduced financial exploitation and more available resources to support themselves and their families.¹⁷

In another of the reforms aimed at assisting people to move into work and education, the Government has committed \$117.5 million for a targeted model of income management in five locations until 2015–16. The new model will introduce voluntary income management to help vulnerable people stabilise their lives prior to workforce participation. Financial management support services will also be available to all eligible clients.

The targeted model of income management will take place in Playford, South Australia; Bankstown, New South Wales; Rockhampton and Logan, Queensland and Shepparton in Victoria. The five locations have been chosen based on a range of factors that measure disadvantage including the prevalence of jobless families, youth unemployment, the overall level of welfare dependence, and the length of time recipients have been receiving welfare. It is estimated that up to 1000 people per year, per location, will be subject to income management.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – School Enrolment and Attendance Measure

The Australian Government will also continue to target families that are not engaged with the school system, through the commitment of \$6.4 million to continue the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure in the existing 12 trial locations, until 30 June 2012.

Up to 3,000 families receiving income support will benefit from the School Enrolment and Attendance Measure trial, which is designed to encourage parents to ensure that their children are enrolled in school and attending school regularly. Other Government investment has aimed to promote attendance through measures to improve teacher quality, increase resources for low socio-economic status schools and improve schools.

Child Protection and Voluntary Income Management in Western Australia

The Australian Government will invest an extra \$17.9 million to continue Child Protection and Voluntary Income Management currently operating in Western Australia for one year from 1 July 2011.

The majority of people who have participated in the income management trials in Western Australia since their introduction in November 2008 have been women – both in the child protection measure (75.9 per cent) and voluntary management (71.8 per cent).¹⁸

A 2010 evaluation undertaken by ORIMA Research found that a majority of those surveyed reported income management had made a positive difference in their lives, and in those of their children and families.¹⁹

Funding includes \$5.7 million in 2011–12 to ensure people on income management can access financial literacy and counselling services, to help them improve their budgeting and money management skills. More than 5,500 people across Western Australia accessed money management and financial counselling to help them better manage their money in 2009–10. Around 64 per cent of people who accessed these services in Western Australia were women. The organisations that deliver these services are encouraged to employ local people, with over 70 per cent of the workforce being local Indigenous people, the majority of whom are women.²⁰

Building Australia's Future Workforce — Low Income Tax Offset — bring forward

The Australian Government will increase the proportion of Low Income Tax Offset (LITO) that can be delivered during the year from 50 per cent to 70 per cent. Delivering more of the LITO during the year will benefit women, who make up more than half of the 6.5 million low and middle income earners who will receive up to \$300 more tax relief from week to week.

For a low-income earner on \$30,000, who is entitled to the maximum \$1,500 of LITO, this increases the amount that is delivered in a year from \$750 to \$1,050. The remaining \$450 will continue to be paid in a lump sum after income tax returns are assessed.

Building Australia's Future Workforce – Disability Support Pension – allow all recipients to work up to 30 hours a week

From 1 July 2012, DSP recipients granted on or after 11 May 2005 will be able to work for up to 30 hours a week continuously for up to two years without losing their DSP eligibility and be able to receive a part pension (subject to the income test). Currently, DSP recipients granted on or after 11 May 2005 can only work up to 15 hours a week before their payment is suspended. DSP recipients granted before this date were 'grandfathered' and can work up to 30 hours a week before their DSP is suspended. This change will remove the disincentive for DSP recipients granted on or after 11 May 2005 to work if they are able and will help to address the low workforce participation rate of people with disability. This measure will cost \$7.6 million over four years.

More men receive the Disability Support Pension (DSP) than women²¹ and men are more likely than women to receive disability support services.²² In 2006–07, it was also found that men were more likely to access disability employment services (63 per cent) than women (37 per cent).²³

Sustainable Australia – suburban jobs

The Australian Government will provide \$100 million over four years to support local and state governments to plan and provide for increased employment opportunities outside capital city CBDs.

The development of outer metropolitan areas often occurs with limited access to employment opportunities and services. The proximity of existing and planned housing to employment is a growing problem for some Australian communities.

Research undertaken in 2010 found that women living in areas with poor access to transport, child care, or local employment would sometimes give up full-time work in exchange for a lower-status job, part-time or casual work, or no work at all in order to have enough time to meet the needs of their children. Men on the other hand, find they often have to give up time with their children for time spent commuting to their workplaces.²⁴ This demonstrates the importance of locational characteristics and how they can affect the wellbeing and workforce participation of women and men.

Emergency Relief and Commonwealth Financial Counselling

Emergency relief services support vulnerable families and individuals with essentials such as food and clothing, pharmacy and transport vouchers, and help with accommodation and utility bills. Commonwealth Financial Counselling services deliver free, confidential and professional counselling for people experiencing financial difficulties. Demand for emergency relief and financial counselling services remains strong with more than 1.1 million vulnerable Australians accessing a service in 2009–10.²⁵

The Australian Government will provide an ongoing funding increase for Emergency Relief and Commonwealth Financial Counselling services across Australia investing an additional \$128.1 million over the next four years. This includes additional funding for disaster affected areas.

Service provider data indicates that the majority of people accessing Emergency Relief and Commonwealth Financial Counselling services are women. Approximately 59 per cent of all emergency relief clients are women aged between 25 and 44 years old, single parents, or people living alone without dependent children, renting and receiving a government pension or allowance.²⁶ In 2009–10, 56.9 per cent of all new Commonwealth Financial Counselling clients were women.²⁷

The funding will be allocated to existing service providers. Around 500,000 people are expected to have access to support through Emergency Relief and around 20,000 additional people will have access to a financial counsellor each year as a result of this funding increase. This funding will also continue the Government's current investment of \$1 million a year for Foodbank Australia which supplies food and grocery items to community organisations including emergency relief providers and specialist housing services.

Service Delivery Reform

The Australian Government is reforming its approach to service delivery to provide more one stop shops, more self service options and more intensive support for people who need it.

This includes co-locating services such as Centrelink and Medicare, to make it easier for people to access the support and assistance they need. More convenient access to services will be particularly helpful to women who are balancing their work and family and caring responsibilities.

Helping families and carers

Through the 2011–12 Budget, the Australian Government is providing a range of assistance to Australian families, especially those managing complex challenges.

Generally, men and women contribute to family life in different ways. Men are still more commonly the main earners in households, reflected by their higher workforce participation rate and incomes, whereas women are more likely to be primary carers of children. However, each family's circumstances are different – there are many families that do not fit this traditional model. For example, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2006–07, 20 per cent of families with children aged 0–17 years were single parent families, with the parent having to provide both financial support and care. Over 85 per cent of these single parent families were headed by mothers.²⁸ Single parent and low income families are more likely to experience financial stress than other families, with single parent families being less likely to be able to raise \$2000 in an emergency and more likely to have a cash flow problem than couples with children.²⁹

Many Australian families are faced with the multiple challenges that come with caring for a child, partner, or parent with a disability. In 2009, there were 2.6 million carers who provided assistance to those who needed help because of disability or old age.³⁰ In 2009, 68 per cent of primary carers for people with disability or older people were women.³¹

Caring responsibilities can impact on a range of areas of people's lives, including their capacity to participate in the workforce.³² In 2003 it was found that this disproportionately affects women carers, who were less likely to be in paid work than men in caring roles (54 per cent compared with 74 per cent). Women carers who did work were also more likely to work part time (56 per cent compared with 20 per cent).³³

Building Australia's Future Workforce – supporting families with teenagers

From 1 January next year, the Government will deliver on its election commitment to increase Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTB Part A) by up to around \$160 per fortnight for teenagers aged 16 to 19 who are in full-time secondary study. This represents up to an extra \$4,208 each year per eligible child.

In total, the Government is spending \$771.9 million over five years to help families with the cost of raising older teenage children while these children complete their secondary schooling. The families of around 650,000 children turning 16 over the next five years may be eligible for the increased assistance if their child stays on at school.

It is expected that this increase will particularly encourage teenagers from lower socio-economic backgrounds, whose families may not otherwise be able to support them, to finish school and better prepare themselves for further education or training. Family composition also impacts on school completion, with children from blended families or one parent families, more often headed by mothers, being more likely to leave school before completing Year 12.³⁴

Under another measure, the Government is lowering the maximum age of eligibility for FTB Part A from 24 to 21 on 1 January 2012, consistent with previously announced changes to the Youth Allowance Age of Independence. Young people aged 22 and over in full-time study may be able to access Youth Allowance instead, subject to means testing and academic progress rules. This will deliver a saving of \$29.2 million over four years.

Family Tax Benefit Part A – more flexible advances

From 1 July 2011, families will have access to more flexible advance payments of FTB Part A. This will mean families facing unexpected costs – such as the family car breaking down – will have quick and easy access to advance payments and will not have to resort to high-interest loans on credit cards.

Families will be able to advance a maximum of 7.5 per cent of their annual rate of FTB Part A payment, up to \$1,000. For example, a family with two children under 12 will be able to receive an advance payment of up to \$644.

Families will be assessed to ensure they are able to repay the advance without falling into financial hardship.

The new flexible family payment advance arrangements will cost \$62.4 million over five years.

Increasing the Medicare levy low-income thresholds

The Australian Government will increase the Medicare low-income thresholds to \$18,839 for individuals and \$31,789 for families, with effect from 1 July 2010. The additional amount of threshold for each dependent child or student will be increased to \$2,919.

These increases, which take into account movements in the Consumer Price Index, will ensure that low-income families and individuals are not liable to pay the Medicare levy.

The Government will also increase the Medicare levy threshold for single pensioners below Age Pension age to \$30,439, with effect from 1 July 2010. This increase will ensure that pensioners below Age Pension age do not pay the Medicare levy when they do not have an income tax liability.

Increasing the Medicare low-income thresholds will benefit women, who are more likely to be low-income earners, by ensuring that they are not liable to pay the Medicare levy if their income is below \$18,839 for singles, or combined income is below \$31,789 for

couples. The largest group to benefit from increasing the threshold for single pensioners below Age Pension age will be single parents receiving Parenting Payment Single. In 2009, over 90 per cent of Parenting Payment Single recipients were women.³⁵ This measure will cost \$125 million over the next four years.

Strengthening Compliance for Child Support

Currently, when a parent has not lodged a tax return, their child support assessment is estimated at two-thirds of the Male Total Average Weekly Earnings. However, this figure often understates the parent's actual income. Almost one in four child support cases have incorrect assessments due to late or non-lodgement of tax returns. Some parents have failed to lodge returns for over seven years.

From 1 July 2011, the current default income policy will be altered for participants in the Child Support Scheme and replaced with a more accurate default income arrangement. In cases where the parent has not lodged a tax return for two years or more, the parent's last known taxable income indexed by wages growth will be used instead of the current lower default income of two thirds Male Total Average Weekly Earnings. The new default income policy will lead to more accurate child support assessments, which will benefit children. It will ensure that children receive financial support from both of their parents according to each parent's capacity to pay.

Expanding the Education Tax Refund

The Education Tax Refund (ETR) assists parents and carers with expenses such as computers, stationery and textbooks which can place pressure on the family budget. The Government is extending the ETR, at an estimated cost of \$460 million over four years, to cover school uniforms, including optional uniforms and sports uniforms.

Supporting Grandparent Carers – peer support groups

The Australian Government is allocating \$1.2 million over four years to establish 25 grandparent carer peer support groups in selected locations nationally commencing from 1 July 2011. The peer support groups will give grandparent carers the opportunity to discuss their circumstances, seek peer support, and gain knowledge of services and assistance available to them. All grandparent carers who are full-time carers of their grandchildren will have access to these peer support groups regardless of whether their arrangements are formal or informal.

The ABS estimated that in 2006–07, there were 14,000 grandparent families in which the grandparents were guardians or main carers of co-resident children aged 0 to 17 years.³⁶ In 2003, the ABS estimated that almost half of grandparent families were lone grandparent families and most of those were lone grandmothers caring for grandchildren.³⁷

Better Start for Children with Disability

The Australian Government is committing a further \$146.5 million over five years to deliver the Better Start for Children with Disability initiative. The initiative aims to improve access to targeted early intervention services for children under the age of six years who have hearing impairments, sight impairments, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy or Fragile X syndrome. Improved access to early intervention services will help these children make a successful transition to school and help families with costs of raising a child with disability.

From 1 July 2011, families of eligible children will be able to access up to \$12,000 in funding to pay for early intervention services provided by occupational therapists, speech pathologists, audiologists, orthoptists, psychologists, physiotherapists and other professionals. Up to 9,000 eligible children and their families are expected to register for the early intervention funding over the first four years of the initiative. In addition, families of eligible children who live in outer regional, rural or remote areas will be able to access a one-off payment of \$2,000 to help meet the costs of accessing early intervention services.

Eligible children will also have access to new Medicare items for a range of allied health services. It is expected that up to 20,000 children will access the new Medicare items over the first four years of the initiative.

The cost of caring

- The estimated 'opportunity cost' of caring in Australia in 2010 was \$49,818 per annum per carer, or for all carers in 2010, a total of \$6.5 billion.³⁸
- Women aged 30 years, with two or more children, caring for a child with a disability and whose highest level of education is less than, or equal to, completion of secondary school are expected to earn less than \$100,000 (2006 dollars) over their working life. Women sharing the same characteristics, but without the primary caring responsibility, will earn four times that amount over their working life.³⁹
- While women with post-secondary education also show a difference in individual income earned over their working life, the difference between primary carers and other females is double (about \$400,000 versus \$800,000) as opposed to the four fold difference observed with those with lower levels of education.⁴⁰

Helping Children with Autism – Additional Funding

The Australian Government is continuing to provide targeted support for children with autism and their families through the Helping Children with Autism initiative. The Government is investing an additional \$15 million in 2011–12 to better meet the demand for early intervention services under the Helping Children with Autism Package.

Since its introduction in October 2008, more than 12,500 children have accessed early intervention services through the Helping Children with Autism initiative.

Schools — Support for Improving Learning Experiences and Educational Outcomes for School Students with Disability

The Australian Government will invest \$200 million over the three years to provide additional assistance to teachers and schools to support students with disability and improve their learning outcomes.

Funding will be provided through a National Partnership Agreement with states and territories, and through funding agreements with non-government schools. Initiatives supported under the measure may include: additional skills development and support for teachers to meet students' needs, and further assistance to schools to create extended service schools that offer co-ordinated support for students and connect them with health, welfare, transport and other services.

Initiatives will be developed by education authorities in consultation with schools, parents and communities, and agreed with the Government. This initiative will commence from 1 January 2012 and will also provide an opportunity to identify the strategies which most improve the learning experiences of students with disability.

Improving men's and women's health and wellbeing

While recent decades have seen remarkable health gains for both Australian men and women, the burden of chronic disease remains high, especially among some groups. The way that women and men experience health differs in terms of their likelihood of experiencing certain conditions, their presentation of symptoms and their interactions with the health system. Gender is recognised as a major social determinant of health, with gender roles, expectations and stereotypes impacting on people's life circumstances and the choices available to them.

The Australian Government is aware that women and men have different experiences and needs when it comes to health and wellbeing, reflected through the release of both the *National Male Health Policy* and the *National Women's Health Policy 2010*. These policies continue the commitment to improve the health and wellbeing of both men and women, especially those at greatest risk of poorer health outcomes, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women, migrant and refugee men and women and men and women living in rural and remote areas.

National Mental Health Reform

Untreated mental illness can lead to disengagement, unemployment, family breakdown, substance abuse, homelessness and suicide. Men and women have different experiences when it comes to mental health.

- In 2007, it was found that women had higher rates than men of anxiety and disorders like depression, whereas men were twice as likely to experience substance use disorders.
- When it comes to accessing mental health services, men are less likely than women to seek help.⁴¹
- Mental illness remains the biggest risk factor for suicide. In 2009, over three-quarters (76.6 per cent) of suicides were males.⁴²
- The relationship between workforce participation, social contact and mental health is also different between women and men.
- In 2007, around one third of women who were unemployed experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months, compared with one in five Australians more broadly.⁴³

Carers and families play an important role in providing support for people with mental illness. The provision of care is highly gendered, with over two-thirds of primary carers being women.⁴⁴

Women and men will benefit from the Government's *National Mental Health Reform* package – with the Australian Government providing \$2.2 billion over five years. The reforms focus on five key areas as well as creating a new National Partnership with the states and territories.

Improving outcomes for people with severe and debilitating mental illness \$571.3 million over five years

The Government is improving outcomes for people with severe and debilitating mental illness by expanding services and improving service coordination. These measures will deliver significant benefits for the most vulnerable group of Australians with mental illness by providing them with access to a wider range of care options designed specifically for their individual needs. Increased service capacity, namely in housing, social support and clinical care, will complement important structural changes that promote a “no wrong door” approach to service provision.

Amongst other things, this Budget will provide:

- \$343.8 million over five years to expand services and improve their delivery for people with severely disabling, persistent mental illness and complex care needs and their families.
- \$208.3 million over five years to provide an additional 425 personal helpers and mentors across Australia to provide on-on-one support for people with severe mental illness. This will support an additional 3,400 people with severe mental illness and also give around 1,100 mental health carers access to respite and support. Since the Personal Helpers and Mentors program commenced in 2007, approximately 57 per cent of participants assisted have been women.⁴⁵
- \$19.3 million over five years for more support services through the Support for Day to Day Living Program for people with severe mental illness, to assist around an additional 18,000 people over five years.

Better targeting primary mental health care services \$220.3 million over five years

The Australian Government will provide a major boost to primary mental health services for groups that are hard to reach and currently underserved, such as people in rural and regional Australia and low income areas, Indigenous Australians, men, young people under 25 and other disadvantaged groups.

Amongst other things, this Budget will provide:

- \$205.9 million over five years to expand access to psychological services to better reach groups who continue to miss out on Medicare funded services. This will support over 180,000 people over five years, comprising 50,000 children and families, 18,000 Indigenous Australians and 116,000 other individuals in hard to reach groups.
- \$14.4 million over five years to develop online and telephone support into a single national e-mental health portal and an e-clinic to assist 45,000 people over five years. This proven and cost-effective way of treating people with mental illnesses, particularly those with mild to moderate illness, will particularly benefit rural and regional Australians and individuals wishing to keep some form of anonymity.

The mental health of children and young people \$491.7 million over five years

These initiatives will expand and establish new youth focussed mental health services, and improve responsiveness to childhood risk factors when interventions are most effective.

Amongst other things, this Budget will provide:

- \$197 million over five years in 30 new headspace centres to bring the total number of sites to 90 and achieve complete national coverage with the capacity to assist 72,000 young people a year.
- \$222 million over five years with matching contributions from states and territories, to provide up to 12 Early Psychosis Prevention and Intervention Centres (EPPIC). In addition to the four additional centres committed to in the 2010 Budget, this will deliver up to 16 new EPPICs around the country.
- \$61 million over five years to fund an additional 40 Family Mental Health Support Services to provide integrated prevention and early intervention services to over 32,000 children and young people at risk of mental illness, their families and carers. Since the commencement of this initiative in 2007, 62 per cent of participants have been women.⁴⁶
- \$11 million over five years to introduce a universal voluntary health check for three year olds that, for the first time, will include social and emotional wellbeing and development. An Expert Group will also be established to advise on its implementation and to assist in mapping health services nationally. This will help families locate services in their local area.

Increasing economic and social participation for people with mental illness – \$2.4 million over five years, supported by \$50.0 million for personal helpers and mentors, plus substantial new investment in the Building Australia's Future Workforce package

People with mental illness often require a more intensive level of support to obtain and stabilise their employment. The Government will improve the ability of employment service providers to identify and assist people with mental illness to gain employment.

- Staff will be provided with the skills to develop effective employment strategies for the recruitment of job seekers with mental illness.
- There will be better arrangements to support employers of people with a mental illness through the JobAccess information and advice service.
- Over five years, \$50 million of the additional funding for personal helpers and mentors in this package will be allocated to specifically support people with a mental illness on the Disability Support Pension, or other income support payments, who are working with employment services.

Other major new initiatives to improve assistance for job seekers, including those with mental illness, are included in the *Building Australia's Future Workforce Package* and reforms to employment services from 2012.

Ensuring quality, accountability and innovation in mental health services

The Government will provide \$32 million over five years, including \$12 million in new funding, to establish Australia's first National Mental Health Commission within the Prime Minister's portfolio. This will increase accountability and transparency in the mental health system and give mental health prominence at a national level.

A National Partnership Agreement on Mental Health \$201.3 million over five years

The Government will provide \$201.3 million over the next five years through a proposed National Partnership Agreement with states and territories to focus on accommodation support, and presentation, admission and discharge planning from the emergency departments of hospitals.

National Women's Health Policy

The *National Women's Health Policy 2010*, released on 29 December 2010, provides a comprehensive framework for addressing the health needs of women and acknowledges that health needs vary across the population. The Policy identifies four priority health challenges: prevention of chronic disease through the control of risk factors; mental health and wellbeing; sexual and reproductive health; and healthy ageing.

The *National Women's Health Policy 2010* identifies five goals to address the social determinants of health:

1. Highlight the significance of gender as a key determinant of women's health and wellbeing
2. Acknowledge that women's health needs differ according to their life stages
3. Prioritise the needs of women with the highest risk of poor health
4. Ensure the health system is responsive to all women, with a clear focus on prevention and health promotion
5. Support effective research, data collection, monitoring, evaluation and knowledge transfer to advance the evidence base on women's health.

The Policy is available at:

www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/national+omens+health

Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health

The Government has committed \$5.3 million in funding over the next three years to support the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health to continue to build the evidence base on women's health. This funding will enable a new younger cohort of women to be added to the study, providing valuable information on the changes and challenges to women's health over time across a broader range of age groups.

National Male Health Policy

The *National Male Health Policy* was released in May 2010 with the overarching aim of providing a framework for improving the health of Australian males and achieving equal health outcomes for population groups of males at risk of poor health. Funding of \$16.7 million accompanied the Policy. The Policy and supporting documents can be found at: www.health.gov.au/malehealthpolicy.

Strong Fathers, Strong Families

Announced in the 2010–11 Budget as part of the *National Male Health Policy*, \$6 million has been provided for a new parenting initiative, *Strong Fathers, Strong Families* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. In 2010–11, applications were sought and assessed under the program. Projects under the initiative give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men access to appropriate antenatal and education programs, as well as deliver activities, information and referrals to promote positive, healthy and active fatherhood and grandfatherhood.

Specialist Obstetrician Locum Scheme – continuation of funding

The Specialist Obstetrician Locum Scheme (SOLS) maintains and improves access to quality medical care for rural communities by providing locum relief to the rural obstetric and anaesthetic workforce. In the 2011–12 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$2.0 million to subsidise for a further 12 months at least 100 locum placements for Specialist and GP obstetricians and GP anaesthetists practising in inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote locations.

An independent review of SOLS is currently being finalised and is expected to propose ways of streamlining the scheme. The Government will consider ways to increase the effectiveness and efficiency of the scheme using the outcomes of the review in the 2012–13 Budget.

Since the Specialist Obstetrician Locum Scheme commenced in August 2009, it has eliminated the need for 224 women to travel from rural areas to urban hospitals. The program has also enabled the facilitation of 156 surgical cases.

Official development assistance – Maternal and child health

New funding in the 2011–12 Budget will support the \$140 million *Africa Maternal and Child Health Initiative* announced by the Minister for Foreign Affairs at the UN MDG Summit in September 2010. This new funding will train 300 midwives, improve obstetric and newborn care, and expand access to family planning in Eastern and the Horn of Africa. Support will be targeted at vulnerable groups of women, including women in rural and remote areas, women with fistula and other birthing-related disabilities, young women, migrating populations, and women in conflict affected regions. This funding will reduce the number of women and children dying or becoming disabled in childbirth or from related complications.

The Australian Government plans to spend at least \$1.6 billion for maternal and child health programs by 2015–16 as part of the UN Secretary General's Global Strategy for Women's and Children's Health.

Refer to the Ministerial Statement on Aid for more information on AusAID's work with women and girls.

Other existing health and wellbeing initiatives

The Australian Government is continuing to implement major initiatives to improve men's and women's health outcomes, including:

- Rural Women's General Practice Service – The Government will provide \$14.3 million over the period 2011–12 to 2014–15 to the Australian Council of the Royal Flying Doctor Service to facilitate the travel of women general practitioners (GPs) to communities that currently have little or no access to a woman GP.
- National Perinatal Depression Initiative – The Government is providing \$55 million over five years from 2008–09 towards this initiative. The initiative aims to improve prevention and early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression and provide better support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing depression.
- Improving Maternity Services Package – This Package was announced in the 2009–10 Federal Budget, with the Government committing \$120.5 million over four years. The aim of this Package is to provide Australian women with more choice in maternity care whilst maintaining Australia's strong record of safe, high quality maternity services.

The Government is also continuing to provide support and career development for the nursing and allied health workforce, both of which are dominated by women:

- Rural Nurses Locum Scheme – The Government is providing \$28.8 million over four years (2010–11 to 2013–14) to support 750 locum places per annum to enable rural based nurses to take leave to undertake continuing professional development activities.
- Rural Allied Health Locum Scheme – \$5.3 million is being provided over four years (2010–11 to 2013–14) to support 100 locum places per annum to enable rural based allied health professionals to take leave to undertake continuing professional development activities.
- Expanding allied health clinical placements scholarships – \$6.5 million is being provided over four years (2010–11 to 2013–14) to support an additional 100 scholarships per annum for allied health students undertaking clinical placements in rural areas.

Reducing violence and fostering respect

Everyone has a right to be respected, safe and live in an environment free from violence. Positive and respectful attitudes are critical to Australian women and their children being able to access the opportunities available to them and reach their full potential. There is a strong relationship between attitudes to violence and attitudes towards gender equality, with individuals who follow traditional gender stereotypes being more likely to express violence-supportive attitudes.⁴⁷

- The rates of domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by Australian women and their children are unacceptable.
- According to the *Personal Safety Survey*, one in three Australian women have experienced physical violence since the age of 15, and almost one in five have experienced sexual violence.⁴⁸
- Domestic and sexual violence perpetrated against women costs the nation an estimated \$13.6 billion each year.⁴⁹

The National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children

The *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* (the *National Plan*), released on 15 February 2011, brings together the efforts of Commonwealth, State, and Territory governments to make a real and sustained reduction in the levels of violence against women.

The *National Plan* is unprecedented in the way it focuses on preventing violence by raising awareness and building respectful relationships in the next generation. The aim is to bring attitudinal and behavioural change at the cultural, institutional and individual levels, with a particular focus on young people.

In recent years, the Australian Government has committed \$86 million for measures to reduce violence against women and their children – \$42 million in April 2009 and \$44 million in August 2010.

Initiatives the Australian Government is funding to reduce violence against women and their children under the *National Plan* include:

- **\$17 million** over four years for *The Line* social marketing campaign.
- **\$12.5 million** over four year in the 1800 RESPECT Helpline.
- **\$3.75 million** over three years for Community Action Grants.
- **\$8.8 million** over three years to provide support for frontline workers, such as allied health, child care and paramedics, to better assist clients who have experienced violence.
- **\$4.8 million** over three years for projects to improve services for women with children who are experiencing domestic and family violence.
- **\$6.9 million** over four years to establish a National Centre of Excellence for the Prevention of Violence against Women.
- **\$14.5 million** over four years to conduct the Personal Safety Survey and a National Community Attitudes Survey to ensure we have the most accurate and up to date information about the prevalence of violence against women in our community and track the impact of the *National Plan* on a four-year cycle.
- **\$7.6 million** for research to improve perpetrator interventions, develop national standards and provide a once-off reward payment for states and territories.

1800 RESPECT National Helpline

The Australian Government is investing \$12.5 million over four years in the 1800 RESPECT Helpline, which was launched in October 2010. 1800 RESPECT is a free of charge 24/7 telephone and online professional counselling service for anyone in Australia who has experienced, or is at risk of, sexual assault and/or domestic and family violence. 1800 RESPECT has been established to help both women and men, but approximately 90 per cent of callers to the service since it commenced have been women.⁵⁰

Community Action Grants

Australian community groups and sports codes are being encouraged to take action to reduce violence against women and promote respectful relationships through Community Action Grants.

Funding of up to \$250,000 over three years is being provided for innovative projects that help prevent violence before it occurs.

The grants will help strengthen the ability of communities to discuss the problem of violence against women and to take responsibility for the solutions.

More information is available at: www.fahcsia.gov.au

Primary Care – redirection of the domestic violence referral points project

The Practice Nurses and Aboriginal Health Workers as Domestic Violence Referral Points Project aims to improve regional, rural and remote communities' access to domestic and family violence support by providing training for health and Aboriginal Health Workers.

The training is designed to enable better understanding and identification of domestic and family violence and to improve referral and support skills. Through the 2011–12 Budget, the Project is being expanded to include a wider range of health and allied health workers, including those in urban locations.

Reviews into the Australian Defence Force Academy, the Australian Defence Force and Defence Culture

In April 2011, the Australian Government announced a number of reviews into the culture of Defence, including reviews into career pathways for women in leadership roles in the Australian Defence Force and the Australian Public Service. It also announced that gender restrictions on frontline employment categories in the Australian Defence Force would be removed.

Domestic violence orders

In March 2011, the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General agreed to implement a national scheme for domestic and family violence orders that will improve protection for victims of domestic violence. Under the national scheme, victims of domestic violence will be able to travel or move to another state and territory and be automatically protected by their court issued domestic violence order.

Closing the Gap: Breaking the Cycle of Indigenous Alcohol and Drug Abuse

The Australian Government is providing \$20 million over three years (2011–12 to 2013–14) to support new community-led solutions for fighting alcohol and drug abuse in Indigenous communities.

Between 70 and 90 per cent of family assaults in Aboriginal communities are committed while the perpetrator is under the influence of alcohol or drugs.⁵¹

Evidence shows that the majority of such family assaults are against women, with Indigenous women being 34 times more likely than non-Indigenous women to be hospitalised due to family violence and Indigenous women living in rural and remote areas being 45 times more likely to be a victim of domestic violence than the non-Indigenous population.⁵²

Child Support Program – responding to family violence

To better meet the complex needs of customers, the Child Support Program in the Human Services portfolio, has embarked upon a Responding to Family Violence project. This project aims to ensure that customers (both women and men) experiencing or at risk of family violence, are given prompt and effective service. Increased effectiveness will occur through providing customers with prompt referrals to support services, including the police if a threat is serious and immediate. In addition, customer screening processes will be improved, staff will receive targeted training, and the Department will engage with key stakeholders and family violence support services, and collaborate with other government departments.

Preventing people trafficking and supporting victims

People trafficking is a major violation of human rights and it can affect women in a particularly severe way. As a destination country for people trafficking, Australia has adopted a whole of government response to trafficking, which includes a national policing strategy, specialist police investigation teams and the Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program (SVPT Program).

From 2011 to 2014, a further \$1.4 million will be provided to support the continuation and expansion of the work of four Australian non-government organisations to combat people trafficking.* These funds will be used for a range of purposes including providing legal services and other forms of support to trafficking victims, continuing outreach to sex workers and raising community awareness.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

The Australian Government is developing a national action plan to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Resolution 1325 is the first Security Council resolution to specifically address gender equality. It formally recognises the disproportionate impact of war and armed conflict on women and highlights the critical role of women in conflict resolution and sustainable peace. The Government will launch a draft National Action Plan for public consultation in the coming year.

* The Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, Anti-Slavery Project, Project Respect and Scarlet Alliance

Official development assistance – Eliminating violence against women

Reflecting the Australian Government's determination to reduce violence against women globally and in our region, new funding of \$96.4 million over four years will support services for women affected by violence, including crisis services, counselling and legal support. It will include work with UN Women in the Pacific to raise awareness and change attitudes to violence against women. Australia will also support international efforts to combat violence against women in conflict and post-conflict environments.

Refer to the Ministerial Statement on Aid for more information on AusAID's work with women and girls.

Advancing equality in leadership and representation

Women, who make up over 50 per cent of the population in Australia, are under-represented in public life and decision-making.

In the boardroom, the *EOWA Australian Census of Women in Leadership 2010*, showed that only 8.4 per cent of board directorships and 2.5 per cent of Chair positions in the ASX 200 are held by women.⁵³ While more recent private sector data show improvements in the representation of women on private sector boards, it is clear there is a long way to go. The situation with Australian Government decision-making bodies is stronger, however there is still room for improvement, with women's representation sitting at over 30 per cent.⁵⁴

It is also essential that women have their voices heard at the grass-roots level. The Australian Government wants to empower women to have a say in decisions that affect them – from the community level up to the Boardroom.

Government boards – 40 per cent gender target

The Australian Government has set a target of at least 40 per cent women and men on Australian Government boards by 2015. Efforts towards meeting this election commitment are accelerating, with five portfolios meeting or exceeding the gender target in 2009–10.

As at 30 June 2010, the number of female sitting members on Australian Government boards stood at 34.5 per cent,⁵⁵ providing a solid base for achieving the Government's 40 per cent target.

Private sector boards

To address the low representation of women on private sector boards, in 2010 the Australian Government committed funding of \$200,000 over two years to partner with the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD). The AICD matched the government's funding to deliver the Board Diversity Scholarship Program, which has provided 70 scholarships for board-ready women to attend highly regarded boardroom training courses.

Strengthening women's leadership in primary industries and Rural Industries Research Development Corporation Rural Women's Award

Women make a significant contribution to the productivity, profitability and sustainability of agriculture, food, fisheries and forestry industries in Australia. They contribute to these industries through owning or partnering in farming and rural businesses, through their support for rural families and communities, and through their leadership in business, family and community, health and education. In 2009, the Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC) found that the total on-farm contribution of women in agriculture was valued at more than \$8.5 billion.⁵⁶ However, while women make up about 30 per cent of the rural workforce they are poorly represented in higher-level decision making positions and forums where significant and strategic industry decisions occur.

The Australian Government's Community Networks and Capacity Building program will continue in 2011–12. This program aims to increase women's leadership and representative capacity within the primary industries sector. The Government has invested more than \$4.2 million for projects that develop women's leadership and management skills, increase women's access to information, networks and support and encourages their contribution to policy debates and industry decision making.

In 2011–12, the RIRDC Rural Women's Award will continue its legacy of supporting rural women's leadership and contributing to primary industries, natural resource management and rural Australia. While the award acknowledges past achievements, it focuses on the future by providing rural women with professional support, including a \$10,000 Bursary, participation in the AICD course and acts as a conduit to leadership opportunities and industry collaboration.

RIRDC also manages a collaborative Investing in Youth Undergraduate Studentships program on behalf of the Government and private sector sponsors in an effort to increase the number of skilled graduates progressing to careers in primary industries. A majority of the students who have been successful in winning these studentships in 2010 and 2011 have been young women who will be future rural leaders.

Women in Sport Leadership Register

In Australia, while figures are increasing slowly, only 37 per cent of chief executive officers and 19 per cent of presidents of national sporting organisations are women. Overall, women comprise only 23 per cent of all board positions on national sporting organisations.⁵⁷

The Women in Sport Leadership Register has been designed to connect sport with potential female board and administration candidates. It is aimed at increasing the number of women on Australia's sports boards and helping to promote inclusive cultures that support women in sport. The Australian Sports Commission will record the gender composition of Australian Government funded national sporting organisation boards annually to track the progress of this initiative. This information will help to track Australia's progress against other countries through the Sydney Scorecard, which is a web based database for recording gender composition of the boards of national sport organisations.

National Women's Alliances

In March 2010, the Australian Government committed \$3.6 million in core funding for six National Women's Alliances over three years from 2010–11 to 2012–13. The Alliances, which are collectives of over 100 women's organisations, are made up of a mix of sector-based and issues-based women's groups each with a distinct focus and a strong capacity for networking and advocacy activities. In addition to core funding, the Government also provides the Alliances with access to a total of \$300,000 in additional funding to support them to respond to emerging issues relating to women and gender equality.

The Alliances have been established to:

- bring together women's organisations and individuals from across Australia to share information, identify issues that affect them, and identify solutions
- actively engage with the Government on policy issues as part of a more informed and representative dialogue between the broadest possible cross-section of women and government.

Considering equality across government

The Australian Government is working to enhance its approach to considering equality of outcomes between women and men across all of its work. Considering gender equality and performing gender analyses of policies is beneficial for a range of reasons. Focusing on the different needs and experiences of men and women, including those that contribute to social and economic differences, leads to greater social inclusion by making full use of all human resources. It also results in better targeted, more cost-effective and efficient policies, leading to stronger outcomes.⁵⁸

The Office for Women, based in the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, is the central source of advice for Government departments on the impact of policies and programs on gender equality. In recent years, a number of additional structures have been set up to better support departments to consider gender equality.

Women's Interdepartmental Committee

The Women's Interdepartmental Committee was established in March 2009 as the most efficient means to achieve direct whole of government engagement in the Office for Women work program and advancing gender equality.

Australian Government Panel of Gender Experts

In March 2011, the Australian Government Panel of Gender Experts was launched. It is a panel of gender experts that has been established to make gender expertise available across all Australian Government departments and agencies.

It will provide a range of services to promote the integration of gender equality into policy, programs and research and will operate until 31 December 2013.

More information about the Gender Panel is available at:
www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/women/progserv/gender_panel_user.

Australian Gender Indicators

To build the evidence base and provide a picture of how Australia is faring in terms of gender equality, the ABS is developing a set of Australian Gender Indicators. This work was initiated by the Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women. The value of gender equality indicators as a means of benchmarking women's progress has been recognised by a range of government and non-government organisations around the world.

The Australian Gender Indicators are based on national and international research and will enable governments to better identify where equality gaps between women and men exist in Australia. They will help to measure progress and set the direction of gender equality policy at a national level – highlighting where the Government needs to focus its activities. They will also play an important role in informing gender analysis in policy development. The first release of these Indicators will be available on the ABS website from June 2011.

Select Council on Women's Issues

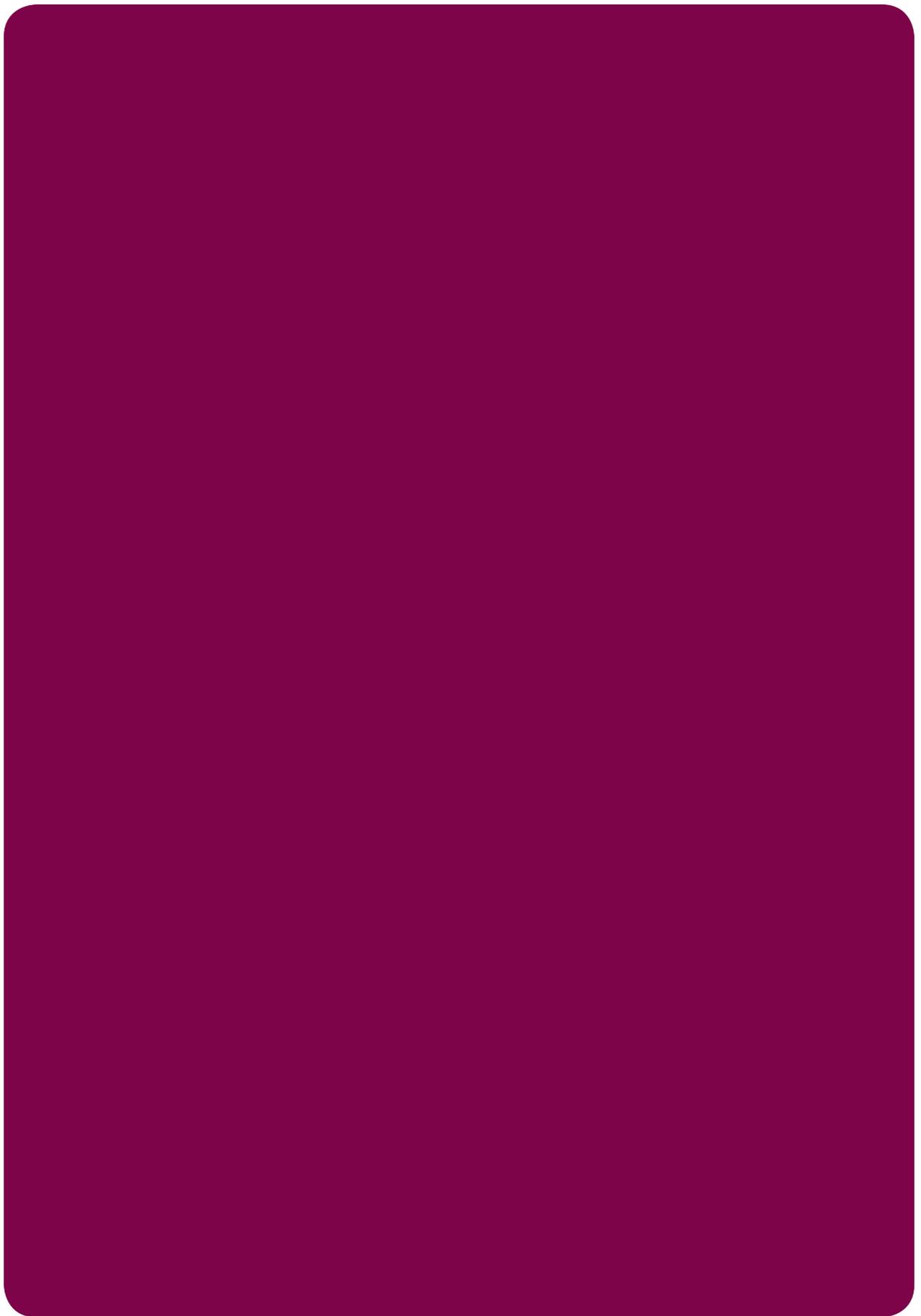
To continue an ongoing engagement between Commonwealth, State and Territory governments on gender equality and women's policy, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) will establish a Select Council on Women's Issues under its new Council system, which will commence on 30 June 2011. The establishment of the Select Council on Women's Issues demonstrates COAG's recognition that women's policy remains on the agenda as a matter of critical national importance.

Notes

- 1 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Education and training experience, 2009*, cat. no. 6278.0, ABS, Canberra, 2009.
- 2 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Labour force Australia, March 2011*, cat. no 6202.0, ABS, Canberra, 2011; These figures are based on trend estimates of the average weekly ordinary time earnings of full-time adults and are derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Average weekly earnings survey, August 2010*, cat. no. 6302.0, ABS, Canberra, 2010.
- 3 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *How Australians use their time, 2006*, cat. no. 4153.0, ABS, Canberra, 2006.
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