



Australian Government



BUDGET

2010-11

WOMEN

The Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for the Status of Women

A message from the Minister for the Status of Women

Moving towards equality



Women and men, alike, aim to pursue what satisfies them most in life. We all seek the opportunity to contribute fully to our families, our communities and our economy.

Inequality between women and men shapes and limits our ability to contribute. While Australia ranks highly compared to other nations in its progress towards equality between women and men, we still face some obstacles.

Three main challenges to equality in Australia, as around the world, are improving women's economic security, reducing violence against women and ensuring women's equal place in society.

Over the last two and a half years the Government has done the hard work to introduce the practical supports to progress equality between women and men.

New initiatives contained within the 2010-11 Budget complement these ongoing efforts.

The Government's superannuation reforms under the *Stronger, Fairer, Simpler: Tax Plan for our Future* will deliver substantial improvements in women's retirement savings.

The establishment of the National Health and Hospitals Network includes significant investments in the training and skill development of the health workforce. Women form the majority of people working in health occupations and will benefit greatly from this initiative.

Boosting the quality of child care and early childhood education will enable parents, especially women, to better participate in paid work while their children receive quality care.

An additional \$154 million over four years to enhance access to justice through increased funding for legal aid commissions, community legal centres and Indigenous legal services will help increase the availability of legal assistance generally, including for women facing legal problems.

Effective government is aware of the different effects of policies on women and men as well as other population groups.

Measures chosen for inclusion in this Statement are those that will contribute to equality between women and men, or will address areas of social exclusion for women.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tanya Plibersek". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a set of horizontal lines.

Minister for Housing
Minister for the Status of Women

Women's economic security

New measures

Stronger, Fairer, Simpler: Tax Plan for our Future

The Australian Government's response to the Henry Review of Australia's Future Tax System, *Stronger, Fairer, Simpler: A Tax Plan for Our Future*, was announced on 2 May 2010. The plan is designed to generate more superannuation savings and is key to ensuring more Australian women gain financial security in their retirement. The superannuation measures, costing the Government \$2.4 billion over the next four years, will benefit women, who are overrepresented among low income earners, and who have significantly lower superannuation balances as a result of pay inequities¹ and broken work patterns to accommodate caring responsibilities.

At present, women, on average have only around 60 per cent of the superannuation balances of men.² In general, this reflects their lower average incomes and shorter working careers.

The *Stronger, Fairer and Simpler* measures are part of a framework that will, over time, help to ensure that both women and men are able to secure adequate retirement incomes. The superannuation reforms will boost national savings, support investment and help give Australian women and men financial security in retirement.

The Government will provide a rebate of up to \$500 annually on superannuation contributions tax paid by individuals with adjusted taxable income up to \$37,000, with effect from 1 July 2012. This is a super contribution of up to \$500 annually to those earning under \$37,000, while retaining the current co-contribution scheme. In 2010-13, this measure will boost the retirement savings of 2.1 million lower income women, such as those working part-time.⁴ In 2012-13 women will represent around 60 per cent of all rebate recipients. The average rebate size is almost equal for male and female recipients, at around \$265.⁵

Women tend to be overrepresented in the lowest-paying occupations like cleaning, hospitality and tourism.⁶ Given women are also more likely to work part-time or casually, this reform is particularly welcome and will benefit a great number of Australian women.

Women and men on incomes up to \$61,920 may also take advantage of the existing superannuation co-contribution scheme, under which the Government matches the personal undeducted contributions of eligible low- to middle-income earners dollar for dollar, up to an annual maximum contribution of \$1,000.⁷

Stronger, Fairer, Simpler: Tax Plan for our Future

Government superannuation contribution for low income earners

- It is estimated that in 2012-13 around 2.1 million women will be eligible, representing around 60 per cent of all rebate recipients.

Increasing the superannuation guarantee rate to 12 per cent

- In 2013-14, it is estimated that around 4.1 million women will have increased SG contributions, almost half of all people estimated to benefit from increased SG contributions in that year.

Helping older workers make catch-up contributions

- It is estimated that in 2012-13 almost 100,000 women will benefit.³

The Government has committed to increasing the superannuation guarantee (SG) rate to 12 per cent by 2019-20. In 2013-14, it is estimated that around 4.1 million women will have increased SG contributions as a result of this policy.⁸

On average, it is estimated that women will receive 64 per cent of the increase in SG contributions received by men in that year (\$110 increase for women compared with a \$172 increase for men). This reflects women's lower average taxable incomes.⁹

The Government has committed to permanently extend the \$50,000 Concessional Contributions Cap from 1 July 2012, for people aged 50 or over with total superannuation balances of less than \$500,000.

The measure will enable older workers with lower superannuation savings, including an estimated 100,000 women in 2012-13, to make additional 'catch-up' contributions close to retirement.¹⁰

The Government has also announced that it intends to raise the superannuation guarantee (SG) age limit from 70 to 75. Workers aged 70 to 74 will be eligible to have SG contributions made on their behalf for the first time. The new SG age limit will now match the age limit for voluntary and self-employed contributions. This measure will commence from 1 July 2013.

The Treasury estimates that as a result of the changes to superannuation, announced in the 2010-11 Budget, a woman aged 30 now on full-time average weekly earnings with a broken work pattern will have an extra \$78,000 in retirement savings, while it is estimated to be an extra \$108,000 in retirement savings for the same female without broken work patterns.

Currently, the SG only applies to people aged up to 70. In contrast, employers can make voluntary deductible superannuation contributions for employees aged under 75, and self-employed people can make deductible contributions until they turn 75. Individuals aged from 70 to 74 are less likely to be able to negotiate voluntary superannuation contributions with their employers. Increasing the SG age limit will provide an incentive for mature workers to remain in the workforce.

Around 33,000 employees are expected to benefit from increasing the SG age limit. This measure, commencing from 1 July 2013, will improve the adequacy and equity of the SG system and coincide with the increase in the rate of the superannuation guarantee.

The Treasury estimates that as a result of the changes to superannuation, announced in the 2010-11 Budget, a woman aged 30 now on full-time average weekly earnings with a broken work pattern will have an extra \$78,000 in retirement savings, while it is estimated to be an extra \$108,000 in retirement savings for the same female without broken work patterns.¹¹

Boosting the quality of child care and early childhood education

The Australian Government is committed to ensuring families have access to high-quality, affordable child care and is investing \$17.1 billion over the next four years in early childhood education and child care. This includes \$14.4 billion to help more than 800,000 Australian families annually with the cost of child care.

Child care is critical to enabling parents with primary care of children to participate in paid work. Mothers and fathers need to be assured that their children receive quality care.

The Government is introducing a new National Quality Framework to improve the quality of child care, providing peace of mind to parents as they return to work. The Government has stabilised the child care system, which will help deliver a more sustainable supply of child care into the future. The Government continues to support families, particularly low and middle income families, with the cost of child care with the increase of the Child Care Rebate to 50 per cent.

The Government is investing \$273.7 million to support the introduction of the new National Quality Framework to improve the quality of child care, providing peace of mind to parents as they return to work.

The Australian Government is investing \$273.7 million to support the introduction of the new National Quality Framework for early childhood education and child care. The National Quality Framework, agreed in partnership with the State and

Territory Governments, will for the first time set a national quality standard for early childhood education and child care providers across the country.

Child care providers will be required to deliver better staff-to-child ratios so that each child gets more individual care and attention, and improve staff qualifications so staff are better able to lead activities that help children learn and develop.

The measures include the following:

- \$59.4 million to improve the quality of 142 Budget Based Funded early childhood services located in rural and remote Australia. This will improve the infrastructure and staff qualifications to support some of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; and
- \$81.9 million to implement the new National Quality Framework, which includes payments to States and Territories, the cost of establishing the new National Body, and the development of a ratings system so parents know the quality of care on offer.

Consistent with the Government's strict fiscal strategy, these measures will be funded in part by fixing the Child Care Rebate (CCR) annual cap at \$7,500 per child per year in line with the Government's election commitment to increase the CCR from 30 per cent to 50 per cent (from \$4,354 to \$7,500 per child per year). It is important to note that 97 per cent of Australian families receiving CCR will not reach this cap in 2010-2011 and consequently are not expected to be affected by this adjustment.

Stronger Sex Discrimination Act 1984

The Government has responded to the report of the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Inquiry into the effectiveness of the Commonwealth *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* in eliminating discrimination and promoting gender equality. Legislation will soon be introduced to Parliament to:

- ensure the protections from discrimination provided by the Sex Discrimination Act apply equally to women and men, through reference to additional international instruments which create obligations in relation to gender equality;
- establish breastfeeding as a separate ground of discrimination;

The amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act will ensure the protections from discrimination provided by the Sex Discrimination Act apply equally to women and men

- provide greater protection from sexual harassment for students and workers; and
- extend protection from discrimination on the ground of family responsibilities to both women and men in all areas of employment.

National Health and Hospitals Network

National Health and Hospitals Network

The Government will put in place the most significant reforms to Australia's health and hospitals system since the introduction of Medicare – to create a National Health and Hospitals Network that is funded nationally and run locally. The 2010-11 Budget delivers an additional \$2.2 billion over four years – for better access to more doctors, especially GPs, an unprecedented level of support and training for our nurses and the introduction of personally controlled electronic health records for every Australian. The Budget is the culmination of the Rudd Government's first term health reform agenda, with a focus on better hospitals and improved primary care and preventive health.

In total, this will see the Government provide a package of \$7.3 billion over five years in additional investment to deliver more doctors, more nurses, more hospital beds, and shorter waiting times for all Australians.

National Health and Hospitals Network – Workforce

The establishment of the National Health and Hospitals Network includes significant investments in the training and skill development of the health workforce over the next four years, particularly in aged care and in nursing more generally as well as in rural and regional communities.

Women form the majority of people working in health occupations. The latest estimates from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), based on unpublished data from the ABS *Labour Force Survey*, show that in 2006, women represented 73 per cent of the health workforce, compared with 45 per cent across all occupations.¹²

The AIHW also found that in 2006 the health occupations with the highest proportion of females included professional nursing workers and enrolled nurses (both 90 per cent) as well as other allied health workers and nursing and personal care assistants (both 80 per cent).¹³ Estimates on the composition of the workforce in community services show that in aged care, women also represent around 90 per cent of all workers.¹⁴

The National Health and Hospitals Network includes significant investments in the training and skill development of the health workforce with a particular focus on building the practice nursing workforce, nurses and personal care workers in aged care and in supporting nurses in rural and regional communities. It is clear that the Government's investments in the health workforce will significantly benefit women.

The measures include the following.

- Building nursing careers - \$21.0 million over four years for an additional 600 enrolled nursing training places and 300 undergraduate nursing scholarships, commencing in January 2011. These training places and scholarships will be specifically for people working in the aged care sector.
- Expanding clinical placement scholarships for allied health students - \$6.5 million over four years to provide 100 additional clinical placement scholarships per year for allied health

students who, as part of their studies, undertake clinical placements for up to six weeks in rural and remote communities.

- Rural locum scheme for allied health professionals - \$5.3 million over four years to establish a rural locum scheme for allied health professionals. The scheme will provide around 100 locum placements annually, allowing allied health professionals, such as physiotherapists, occupational therapists and podiatrists, in rural areas to undertake professional development opportunities and take leave.
- Rural locum scheme for nurses - \$28.8 million over four years to establish a rural locum scheme for nurses. The scheme will allow nurses in rural areas to take leave and undertake continuing professional development.
- Support for practice nurses - \$390.3 million over four years (including capital costs of \$1.4 million) to introduce a new practice nurse grants initiative, which will replace existing incentives for general practices to engage practice nurses. This new initiative will be available to general practices that are accredited to access the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) and will subsidise the cost of hiring a practice nurse.

Building the aged care workforce

The Australian Government will provide more than \$310 million over four years for aged care workforce development programs, funding more than 31,000 aged care training places and scholarships focused on improving clinical care.

Building on achievements to date

The Australian Government has already boosted women's economic security through a range of practical measures to support women's workforce participation, make it easier for women and men to make decisions about balancing paid work and family life and increase women's retirement incomes.

The Government is intent on improving economic opportunities and outcomes for women across the life course, particularly for women who face particular disadvantage, and has already taken key steps to addressing this challenge.

Fair Work Act 2009

The *Fair Work Act 2009* puts in place practical measures to restore fairness and make it easier for women and men to make choices about how to balance paid work and family life. The Fair Work Act commenced operation on 1 July 2009 and became fully operational on 1 January 2010, with the National Employment Standards and Modern Awards.

The safety net of ten National Employment Standards and modern awards provides all employees in the federal system with clear, comprehensive and enforceable minimum protections.

The National Employment Standards include a right for parents to request flexible working arrangements until their child reaches school age or until a child with a disability turns 18. The National Employment Standards have also effectively doubled the amount of unpaid parental leave available to families, providing both parents with separate periods of up to 12 months' leave, or one parent with the ability to request up to 12 months' extra unpaid parental leave.

Challenges for equality between women and men remain

- Women earn about 83 cents for every dollar men earn.¹⁵
- Many women are stretched between paid work and caring obligations.¹⁶
- For too many women, the consequences of caring have been lower incomes and a less financially secure retirement.¹⁷
- Most men remain locked out of caring roles because of the emphasis on the male breadwinner role.¹⁸
- About a quarter to a third of mothers return to work within six months of the birth of their child. Two thirds of them return to work because they need the money.¹⁹
- In November 2009 28 per cent of Australian women, mostly casual workers, did not have paid leave entitlements of any kind.²⁰
- In June 2009, 67 per cent of jobless families with children under 15 years old were single parent families, and 93 per cent of those were headed by mothers.²¹

The Fair Work Act improves measures aimed at delivering pay equity between women and men. The Act's equal remuneration provision has been amended to provide for equal remuneration for work of equal or comparable value. The principle allows for comparisons to be carried out between different but comparable work (for instance between the work of an executive administrative assistant and a research officer) using skill and job evaluation techniques. Importantly, the provision also removed the previous requirement for an applicant to demonstrate (as a threshold issue) that there had been discrimination involved in setting the remuneration.

The Australian Services Union and others have lodged an application to improve wages for community services workers that will test the new provisions. The test case will look at the value of work done by 200,000 workers who are mostly women and will likely have long term effects on other female dominated industries in years to come.

The Fair Work Act also provides for applications to vary modern awards for work value reasons. This can provide an avenue to improve wages in feminised industries where there are work value grounds which would justify an increase in the amount employees are paid.

Low paid women and the Fair Work Act

It is important to ensure a fair minimum wage that delivers a decent standard of living. This is particularly important for women who form the majority (59 per cent) of the nearly 1.5 million workers reliant on minimum wages.²² A specialist Minimum Wage Panel within Fair Work Australia has the responsibility for setting minimum wages through an annual wage review.

The Fair Work Act also provides a new stream of bargaining for low paid employees and those who have not historically had access to the benefits of collective bargaining, intended to be of particular benefit to women.

Paid Parental Leave

From 1 January 2011, the Government will deliver Australia's first national Paid Parental Leave scheme. The Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

introduced the legislation into the Parliament on 12 May 2010. This historic reform is a major win for working families who have been waiting decades for a national Paid Parental Leave scheme.

Paid Parental Leave will give babies the best start in life. It will give parents more time to stay at home to care for their baby during the vital early months of their baby's life. The Government's scheme supports women to maintain their connection with the workforce and boosts workforce participation. The scheme gives parents more options to balance work and family and helps employers retain skilled and experienced staff.

The Paid Parental Leave scheme has been designed to be flexible and to allow parents to make their own decisions about who cares for their child during the first year.

The [Family Assistance Office website](http://www.familyassist.gov.au) has comprehensive information on the draft Paid Parental Leave legislation for parents and employers. This includes information products detailing key dates for implementation, eligibility and the process for parents to lodge a claim in the draft legislation.

<http://www.familyassist.gov.au/New/2010/Pages/ProposedPaidParentalLeaveScheme.aspx>

Currently only half of all Australian women have access to paid parental leave, with those on low incomes more likely to miss out. Australian Bureau of Statistics data from August 2008 shows less than a quarter of women on very low wages (under \$400 per week) have access to employer-provided paid parental leave, compared to 70 per cent of women on high wages. Under the Government's scheme, casual and part-time workers, contractors and the self-employed will be eligible for paid parental leave, many for the first time.

Generally, it will be mothers who claim Parental Leave payments in the first instance as they usually provide the primary care of their child during the initial months of the child's life. However it is becoming increasingly common for men to spend some time being the primary carer of the child during the first year. The Government's Paid Parental Leave scheme is flexible and will allow parents to make their own work and family decisions, and all or part of the parental leave pay can be transferred to the child's other parent, provided they also meet the eligibility requirements and are the primary carer of the child. The Government has committed more than \$1 billion over the next four years for this historic reform.

Pay equity and equal employment opportunity

The consultation processes associated with the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations report *Making it Fair: Pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce* (the Pay Equity Inquiry), and the review of the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999*, generated a comprehensive and significant response during consultations. The Government's response to these inquiries will be announced soon.

Participation requirements

From 1 July 2010, new measures will be introduced to improve participation requirements for parents on income support that will give them the opportunity to gain more skills and improve their job opportunities while recognising the difficulties they may face in balancing their family and caring responsibilities with their part-time participation requirements.

Pension reform

The Government delivered significant improvements to the pension system through *Secure and Sustainable Pension Reforms* in September 2009. Since the reforms were implemented the maximum age pension rate has increased by around \$100 a fortnight for singles and around \$74 for couples combined. The reforms make the pension sustainable into the future and respond to the challenges of an ageing population.

The improvements focused on the adequacy, sustainability and flexibility of the pension system. Particularly for the 71.8 per cent of single age pensioners who are women, this is a significant reform.

Ensuring women's equal place in society

New Measures

People with disability and their carers

A new Budget measure will facilitate the participation of people with disability and their carers in the development of national disability and carer policy. Seventy-one per cent of primary carers are women.²³

As part of the Government's disability reform agenda, the Productivity Commission is undertaking an inquiry into a national long-term care and support scheme. Women's groups will be encouraged to participate in these policy consultations.

Aged care – building a national aged care system

The 2010-11 Budget builds on the Australian Government's reforms to aged care that will create a national aged care system to provide better support for older Australians.

The Government will invest more than \$900 million over four years to deliver more highly qualified aged care workers, more aged care places, more health care services and greater protections for older Australians, including providing up to \$280 million to the States and Territories to support long stay older patients in public hospitals. This investment will support the integration of the aged care system with Local Hospital Networks through the Government's National Health and Hospitals Network reforms, to provide better health and better care for older Australians. Over the next four years, the Australian Government will provide more than \$47 billion for aged and community care services, including \$10.8 billion in 2010-11.

These initiatives will be important for women, who, overall, represent more than 72 per cent of those who receive aged care.²⁴

These initiatives are also important for women as carers, as they take major responsibility for caring for aged parents. Most aged care in Australia, like child care, is informal, unpaid and takes place within families. It is undertaken by the adult children of the elderly, mainly women, since care continues to be perceived as a female role,²⁵ and by spouses.²⁶ Many studies of carers²⁷ restrict their scope to women in recognition of their much greater numbers.²⁸

Future funding arrangements for the delivery of aged care will be reviewed in light of the findings of the Productivity Commission inquiry into aged care.

Australian Sports Commission - long term sustainability of Australian sport

Women have a vital role to play in the development of sport in Australia as participants, volunteers, athletes, coaches and administrators. In its report, *The future of sport in Australia*, the Independent Sport Panel identified nine areas which must be a focus of the strategic work done by the reformed Australian Sports Commission. In each area, specific strategies were required to understand and remove existing barriers to participation in sport and to create inclusive environments where participation can grow. The first of those nine areas was "Women—taking leadership roles in sport and recognising presence".²⁹

About Time! Women in Sport and Active Recreation in Australia, the report produced by the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Reference Committee, outlined a range of recommendations aimed at broadening participation of women in sport. In response to this inquiry the Government has invested in a range of important initiatives that have supported women in sport.

The Women and Sport unit of the Australian Sports Commission conducts research, and identifies and develops innovative policies, programs and practices that address gender and equality issues in sport in Australia.

The Government will provide \$324.8 million over four years to the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), including \$62.1 million already provided for in the forward estimates, to support the long term sustainability of the Australian sport system, as its final response to the Independent Sport Panel's report - *The Future of Sport in Australia*.

Overseas development assistance

The Government will deliver on its election promise to boost Australia's commitment to Official Development Assistance (ODA) funding to 0.5 per cent of Gross National Income (GNI) by 2015-16. Australia's ODA/GNI ratio is forecast to increase to 0.33 per cent over the coming financial year and reach 0.42 per cent in 2013-14. This money will be used to help developing countries improve the delivery of basic services, particularly education and health.

Investing in health

The Government will provide \$173.4 million over four years (including \$1.1 million in capital funding) to enhance Australia's contribution to the health Millennium Development Goal in East and South East Asia, Papua New Guinea, Pacific Island countries and Timor-Leste. This measure will include funding for sexual and reproductive health including for antenatal care.

Enhancing education

The Government will provide an additional \$303.7 million over four years (including \$1.1 million in capital funding) to enhance Australia's contribution to the education Millennium Development Goal. This measure will expand the Australian Development Awards program by providing additional scholarships to strengthen leadership in developing countries; provide more people with training and internationally recognised technical qualifications that prepare them for work; and support global efforts to get more children into primary school and ensure more children complete primary school with reading, writing and numeracy skills.

Building on achievements to date

The Government wants to see women and men more equally represented in parliaments, government, and senior levels in the public and private sectors, as well as in leadership roles in communities throughout Australia. Organisations which include women leaders perform better in a variety of ways, from increased profits to improved reputation.³³ Encouraging women's voices to be heard from the community, including the voices of rural and Indigenous women, is also important.

National Women's Alliances

In March 2010, the Australian Government announced funding of \$3.6 million over three years for six National Women's Alliances that will engage actively with the Australian Government on policy issues as part of more informed and representative dialogue between women and government.

The Alliances, made up of more than 100 women's organisations as well as individual members, are encouraged to align strategically with government priorities, building broad collaborative networks to ensure representation for all women, especially those who in the past have found it difficult to engage in advocacy and decision making.

National Congress of Australia's First Peoples

The new national Indigenous representative body was announced in November 2009. The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples has now been incorporated and eight founding directors have been appointed. The Congress has mandated equal representation of men and women in the two co-chairs and six directors of the National Executive and in the co-chairing of the Congress' Ethics Council.

Gender equality across government

The Office for Women supports the Minister for the Status of Women by co-ordinating across government to promote equality between women and men.

The Office for Women has established a Women's Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) to advance cultural and systemic change in government by ensuring gender sensitivity in government policy development and implementation. It acts as a co-ordination and consultation mechanism to ensure work across government promotes equality between women and men.

The Australian Government is again taking an active role in international discussion on equality and women's empowerment.

Ensuring women's equal place in society

- In the private sector, women hold around one in eight private sector executive management positions. Women hold less than nine per cent of private board directorships.³⁰
- Half of all ASX 200 companies have no female board directors, and the number of companies with no female board directors has increased over the past five years.³¹
- Women represent 34 per cent of board positions on government boards, three out of seven High Court Judges are women, and Australia has a female Governor General, a female Deputy Prime Minister and a female Deputy Leader of the Opposition.³²

Indigenous women's leadership in Australia and internationally

- The Government's Indigenous Women's Program provides grants to communities to enhance Indigenous women's leadership, representation, safety, wellbeing and economic status.
- The Indigenous Leadership Program offers leadership training and introduction to networks for Indigenous women.
- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA) is one of six National Women's Alliances that make up the key engagement mechanism between Government and Australian women. NATSIWA will work collaboratively with other Indigenous representative bodies and Government groups to influence Government and policy outcomes for Indigenous women, and all of the six new Women's Alliances will have a broad mandate to network with and represent the interests of Indigenous women.
- To give Indigenous women a voice in the international arena, two Indigenous women were funded to participate on the official Australian Delegation to the 54th session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in New York from 1-12 March 2010.
- Since 2002, the Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women has been funding a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gathering (NATSIWG).

Carers and people with disability

Women are the majority of recipients of Carer's Payments and are increasingly receiving the Disability Support Pension (DSP), although the majority of DSP recipients are men.³⁴

The National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy was released in September 2009. The new Disability Employment Services were introduced in March 2010, representing an investment of over \$1.2 billion over the next three years. The Disability Employment Services are a significant improvement in services for people with disability, their families and carers and employers as the services are uncapped, ensuring immediate access to the service, and tailored to the needs of people with disability and employers.

New strategies for people with disability and carers are being introduced that will support women carers and women with disability as both potential employees and as recipients of payments and users of services. These new initiatives include the National Disability Strategy and the National Carer Recognition Framework. The Carer Recognition Bill 2010 will recognise in law the role and contribution of Australia's carers. The National Carer Strategy will shape the agenda for reform and guide policy development and the delivery of services.

Service delivery reform

In December 2009 the Government announced major reform of the Human Services Portfolio and the way in which services are delivered by Centrelink, Medicare Australia, and the Child Support Program. Service delivery reform will be implemented progressively to improve the way in which customers access and receive services from Government. While these reforms will assist all customers, they will particularly benefit women who are balancing paid work or job-seeking with family and caring responsibilities, women in rural and remote areas, seniors and women at risk.

These customers will have more control over their dealings with service delivery agencies and better support and assistance when they need it.

Through these changes, the Human Services portfolio will be better placed to respond to the needs of women in the Australian community.

Providing choice in maternity care

The Government is providing \$120 million over the next three years, as announced in 2009-10, to improve choice and support for Australian mothers.

For the first time, new arrangements will allow eligible midwives working in collaboration with doctors to provide certain services subsidised by the Medicare Benefits Schedule and prescribe certain medications subsidised under the Pharmaceutical benefits Scheme. This will be in place from 1 November 2010.

The Government has also signed a contract with Medical Insurance Group Australia to provide the first ever Commonwealth-supported professional indemnity insurance for midwives. Privately practising midwives will be able to purchase their own insurance, and be covered from 1 July 2010. The Commonwealth-supported insurance will not cover services provided during home births.

These are important steps for Australia's midwives and important steps for Australian women and their families.

Year of Women in Local Government and Year of the Girl Guides

The Government is supporting women's engagement in leadership through the Year of Women in Local Government and Year of the Guides. With Australian Government support the local government sector has designated 2010 as the Year of Women in Local Government to celebrate and promote the advancement of women into senior management positions.

In August 2009, the Australian Government designated 2010 the Year of the Girl Guide in recognition of 100 years of the Guiding movement. The motto for the centenary year is "Let's celebrate our past, live the present and power into the future".

To acknowledge the valuable contribution of Girl Guides Australia, the Government is supporting the centenary celebrations through a range of initiatives, including a circulating one dollar coin to commemorate the Guides and their centenary year, three commemorative stamps (one domestic and two international) to be issued in September 2010, and funding support.

Reducing violence against women

New Measures

Access to justice – legal assistance priorities

The Australian Government is providing an additional \$154 million over four years to enhance access to justice through increased funding for legal aid commissions, community legal centres and Indigenous legal services. This funding will help to increase the availability of legal assistance generally, including for women facing legal problems.

Legal Aid

\$92.3 million over four years will be allocated to enhance the services provided by legal aid commissions. This funding will increase the availability of legal aid for people undergoing family breakdown, including those in 'high conflict' cases and victims of family violence. The new funding will underpin a new National Partnership Agreement for legal assistance services with the States and Territories which will seek to ensure that women and their children at risk of violence are a key priority for legal assistance services. Legal aid funding policy will also be revised to ensure that Commonwealth funds can also be used for State family violence and child protection matters where there is an overlapping Commonwealth family law matter.

Funding will also increase the availability of legal assistance in a range of other areas, including consumer credit and debt and for civil law matters which may, left unaddressed, lead to greater problems and social exclusion.

Community Legal Centres

\$26.8 million over four years will enable community legal centres to enhance provision of legal assistance services. Each component of the initiative has the potential to enhance significantly access to services in areas of particular importance for women facing legal problems. These components include consumer credit matters, family law and family violence matters and enhanced services for people in rural, regional and remote areas.

Indigenous Legal Services

A further \$34.9 million over four years will be provided for the Indigenous Legal Services program to increase the availability of high quality and culturally sensitive legal aid services including legal advice, duty lawyer and casework services in criminal, civil and family law to eligible Indigenous men, women, youth and children. The additional funding will assist in meeting increasing demand for these services and improve access to justice for Indigenous people across Australia, supporting key Government priorities, including social inclusion and closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. In addition to this, Indigenous women will be able to access legal assistance through the ongoing Family Violence Prevention Legal program which provides culturally sensitive assistance to Indigenous victim-survivors of family violence and sexual assault.

Addressing domestic violence – continuing training for health workers in regional and rural areas

The Government will provide \$1.8 million in 2010-11 to continue providing incentives and support payments for practice nurses and Aboriginal health workers in regional and rural areas to undertake training to help them recognise the signs of domestic violence, and to assist them to provide appropriate referrals to available resources in the community.

Women living in rural and remote areas who experience domestic violence will have improved access to appropriate support services. The improved health system resulting from the Government's reforms will ensure a better health response for women experiencing violence generally.

Closing the Gap - Strengthening Indigenous Communities - Community Safety

Measures to strengthen community safety in the Northern Territory will help to address violence against women. Support for Australian Federal Police work in the Territory, at a cost of \$9.2 million over two years and funding of \$6.6 million for the national Indigenous Child Abuse and Violence Intelligence Task Force will assist community safety.

National Binge Drinking Strategy – expansion

The 2005 Personal Safety Survey found that 45 per cent of women who reported a physical assault of them by a man in the last 12 months also reported that alcohol or drugs was a factor, and 50.6 per cent of women who reported an assault against them by another woman in the last 12 months also reported that alcohol or drugs was a factor.

According to the 2004-05 National Health Survey, among people aged 18 years and over, 12 per cent of men and four per cent of women had consumed alcohol at risky/high risk levels in the short term at least once a week over the previous 12 months.³⁵

In addition, according to the 2007 National Drug Strategy Household Survey, among people aged 14 years and over, 38.7 per cent of males and 30.5 per cent of females consume alcohol at levels that risk harm in the short-term.

The Government will provide \$50 million over four years - expanding the funding for the National Binge Drinking Strategy to \$103.5 million – to increase current efforts to tackle the incidence of binge drinking in the community. The measure will reduce visible alcohol promotion at public events, expand community level programs to combat the binge drinking culture and support people with alcohol misuse problems.

Building on achievements to date

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

Violence against women is one of the most serious causes and consequences of continued inequality. It is one of the key risk factors for women slipping into poverty and disadvantage.³⁶

Nearly one in three Australian women experience physical violence — almost four million women around the nation. Almost one in five women experience sexual violence over their lifetimes. Up to one-quarter of young people in Australia have witnessed an incident of physical or domestic violence against their mother or stepmother. Despite the efforts of governments and the community, violence against women continues to destroy livelihoods, families and communities.

The Government, together with the States and Territories, is in the final stages of the development of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women*. The *National Plan* will coordinate a national violence prevention agenda across all States and Territories and across both the public and private sectors. It will sustain continued communication and education campaigns to redress prevailing myths and misconceptions about women.

The Government has already invested \$42 million including:

- \$12.5 million for a new national domestic violence and sexual assault telephone and online crisis service;
- \$9.1 million in respectful relationships education to give young men and women the communication skills they need to establish good friendships and relationships that are based on equality and respect;
- \$17 million for a social marketing campaign focused on changing attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence; and
- \$3 million to support research on perpetrator treatment and nationally consistent laws.

Attitudes to violence against women

Nearly half a million Australian women suffer violence each year.³⁷

The *National Survey on Community Attitudes to Violence Against Women 2009* surveyed over 12,000 people from diverse backgrounds, comparing results to a 1995 survey. Key results included:

- that people were more likely to understand that domestic violence can take a variety of forms, including physical and sexual assault, threats of harm to family members, and psychological, verbal and economic abuse;
- that two-thirds of the general community considered that there had been an increase in the readiness of victims to talk about domestic violence (compared to 1995);
- that the majority of respondents agreed that they would intervene in some way in a domestic violence situation, especially where the victim is a family member or close friend (95 per cent).³⁸

Housing support

On Census night in 2006, over 46,000 women were homeless across Australia.³⁹ Domestic and family violence continues to be a major driver of homelessness, with escaping violence being the most common reason provided by people who seek help from specialist homelessness services. Where women are forced to leave home due to violence they will be supported by the Government's record \$20 billion investment in homelessness and affordable housing programs.

The Rudd Government is investing \$4.9 billion over four years to address homelessness, with an additional \$400 million from the States and Territories, as part of an ambitious target to halve homelessness and offer accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020. This includes the \$1.2 billion committed at the time of the release of the Homelessness White Paper in December 2008.

The Rudd Government is:

- increasing spending on homelessness services by 55 per cent as a substantial down payment on a twelve year reform agenda;
- increasing the supply of affordable housing homes by 80,000 over four years - 50,000 through the National Rental Affordability Scheme and 30,000 through the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan;
- providing an additional \$80.4 million in emergency relief and financial counselling services until mid 2011 to support Australians through difficult times; and

- funding 41 specialist homelessness projects across our housing programs, to provide more than 1,680 new units of accommodation.

Under the National Affordable Housing Agreement and the supporting National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, States and Territories provide services that support all vulnerable people, including women, and their children. 'Support for women and children experiencing domestic and family violence to stay in the present housing where it is safe to do so' is a specific output under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness to prevent women from becoming homeless. A range of initiatives is rolling out under these agreements including long-term supportive housing for women and children, and support services to enable them to remain in their family home.

Over a million individuals or families were receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) on 4 December 2009, and of these 63 per cent were women receiving either the maximum or reduced rate. Under the National Rental Affordability Scheme, the Government is investing \$623 million to build 50,000 new affordable rental homes by June 2012. Over 1,000 properties are already available for rent at 20 per cent below market rent and some are already tenanted. This program will greatly help women who are seeking rental accommodation, to live in new, modern and well-positioned housing.

The Australian Government has invested more in housing and homelessness than any other government in Australia's history.

Preventing trafficking in people, particularly women

Australia is a destination country for trafficking. The Government provides support to people identified in Australia as potential victims of trafficking, under the Support for Victims of People Trafficking Program (the Program). To date 154 people have been given support and assistance, of whom all but eleven were women. 131 of clients on the Program were identified as being possible victims of sexual exploitation.

In 2009, the Australian Government implemented changes to the People Trafficking Visa Framework and the Program to implement a more humane approach.

On 1 July 2009, the Australian Government implemented changes to the People Trafficking Visa Framework and the Program to implement a more humane approach by simplifying the visa framework, enabling a wider range of victims and their immediate families to access support and improved services through the Program. These reforms are in line with international best practice and the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' Principles and Guidelines on Human Rights and Trafficking. Eligibility for the Program is no longer dependent on a person holding a people trafficking-related visa, ensuring that victims who already hold another valid Australian visa are not at a disadvantage.

Equality is an issue for men

New measures

National Male Health Policy — Building on the strengths of Australian males

Inequality limits men's as well as women's life choices. One of the most serious gendered effects for men is their different and often poorer health outcomes.

The National Male Health Policy, the first for Australia, was released on 6 May 2010. The Policy recognises that while the life expectancy of the Australian man at 78.7 years is among the highest in the world, this is still five years shorter than the expected life of an Australian woman at 83.7 years.

The Government will invest \$16.7 million to assist in addressing male health challenges in Australia. The measure will provide \$3 million for the Australian Men's Sheds Association. Men's sheds provide a valuable meeting place for men in the community setting. It also includes \$6.9 million to establish the first Australian longitudinal study into the social, economic and behavioural determinants of health that affect the length and quality of life of Australian men.

Strong Fathers, Strong Families

The Government's \$16.7 million commitment to tackle health challenges facing Australian men includes \$6 million for a new parenting initiative, *Strong Fathers, Strong Families* for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. The aim of the *Strong Fathers, Strong Families* initiative is to strengthen the knowledge, skills, confidence of Indigenous males in their roles as fathers, grandfathers and significant male relatives in the lives of their children, by increasing their participation.

The initiative will give Indigenous men access to appropriate antenatal programs to support men in preparing for fatherhood. It will deliver activities, information and referrals to Indigenous men to promote positive, healthy and active fatherhood and grandfatherhood. *Strong Fathers, Strong Families* initiative will complement existing Australian Government programs that support Indigenous mothers and babies.

Notes

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