

Submission on the NSW Women's Plan



November 2010

Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS), 66 Albion Street, Surry Hills 2010

Ph: 02 9211 2599, Fax: 9281 1968, email: samantha@ncoss.org.au

Contents

NCOSS Recommendations	3
1. About NCOSS	5
2. Introduction	5
3. General Comments.....	6
4. The Objective	6
5. The Principles	7
6. The Plan's Priority Areas	8
6.1 General.....	8
6.2 What's Missing?.....	8
6.3 Increasing Women's Representation in All Areas of Public Life	9
6.4 Supporting Women in Education, Work and Care	9
6.5 Supporting Women to Live Free From Violence	10
6.6 Improving Women's Health and Wellbeing	11
7. Conclusion	11

NCOSS Recommendations

1. That the Office for Women's Policy on behalf of the NSW Government, when reviewing this plan and developing the next Women's Plan, consults with women and the organisations that work with them prior to the actual writing of the Plan.
2. That timeframes for submissions be reasonable; recognising that non government organisations and other groups have high demands and need time to properly consult with their members. At a minimum this should be 6 weeks.
3. That the objective of the Women's Plan is re-written in line with the discussions at the consultation on the Women's Plan on 11 November 2010.
4. That the principle of the recognition of the human rights of women is explicitly stated as a principle.
5. That the principles of equity and social justice are included within the principles, recognising that equity enables equality.
6. That the principle to 'ensure women's voices are heard by policy makers' is expanded to include the Women's Peaks Forum and measures to consult directly with women in the broader community across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote NSW.
7. The Plan must be developed to include strategies for implementation, timeframes, measurable publicly available key performance indicators, both quantitative and qualitative (outputs and outcomes) and a comprehensive, publicly reported regular evaluation process.
8. That the Plan becomes a NSW plan and includes outcomes and future directions for women in both the private and non-government sectors.
9. That the Plan is given 'more teeth', stronger language and ambitious targets.
10. That the Plan includes a priority area for supporting and enabling women living in poverty.
11. That the future directions and strategic outcomes of the priority to increase women's representation in all areas of public life are expanded to include the private and non-government sectors.
12. That there is an aim to improve participation not just leadership.
13. That there is recognition and inclusion of strategies enabling men to take on greater caring roles instead of focusing primarily on women as carers.

14. That to enable women to be aware of all their rights there must be promotion of all the various anti-discrimination legislation and human rights instruments that women are protected by.
15. That the NSW Government expand the focus of pay equity to both the private and non-government sectors and actively support and fund the pay equity case in the non-government sector in recognition of the high proportion of women that work in this sector.
16. That barriers to education and employment such as affordable child care and respite care are addressed.
17. That the NSW Government, under the priority area of reducing violence against women, address the issue of strip searching of women in prison with the aim to stop this practice all together.
18. That the priority area on health and wellbeing is expanded to include the health and wellbeing needs of women beyond maternity and child birth.

1. About NCOSS

The Council of Social Service of NSW (NCOSS) provides independent and informed policy development, advice and review and plays a key coordination and leadership role for the non government social and community services sector in New South Wales. NCOSS works with our members, the sector, the NSW Government and its departments and other relevant agencies on current and emerging (and ongoing) social, systemic and operational issues.

NCOSS has a vision for a society where there is social and economic equity, based on co-operation, participation, sustainability and respect.

NCOSS membership is composed of community organisations and interested individuals.

Affiliate members include local government councils, business organisations and Government agencies. Member organisations are diverse, including unfunded self-help groups, children's services, youth services, emergency relief agencies, chronic illness and community care organisations, family support agencies, housing and homeless services, mental health, alcohol and other drug organisations, local indigenous community organisations, church groups, peak organisations and a range of population-specific consumer advocacy agencies.

2. Introduction

Women in NSW still face a range of barriers to full participation in the social, cultural, economic and political life of the community. While there has been progress it remains true that women have lower salaries, a greater share of caring responsibilities and face more hurdles to their recognition in social, cultural, economic and political spheres of life than men. For women who are disadvantaged these issues are exacerbated.

As noted within the Women's Plan (the Plan), Australia, and therefore NSW, has a range of obligations under International Conventions to improve women's human rights, but this will need to be done with an equity focus. That is more support, services and changes need to be made to enable women to be on equal terms with men. When we refer to equality we mean to be treated at the same high standard rather than to the lowest common denominator.

NCOSS congratulates the NSW Government in taking the step to create a Women's Plan for NSW, however we see this Plan as in need of much more development if it is to be truly effective across all areas of women's lives.

3. General Comments

NCOSS is concerned about the process that was used to develop the Plan. While we understand the political imperatives that have driven the timetable for the Plan, the lack of consultation with women in NSW and the short turnaround time for submissions, does not give the Plan the status it deserves and in fact implies that the Plan has no value.

The Plan was not actually developed in consultation with the women of NSW and yet, it is the plan that is going to “achieve justice and equality for women”. It is difficult to understand how the Plan can achieve this if the very people it is to effect have not had an opportunity to contribute to its development and have ownership of its outcomes.

The short turnaround time for submissions also shows a disregard for the perspectives of non-government organisations and the people, communities and groups that they represent. For example, NCOSS as a statewide peak would need more than two-weeks in order to canvass the views of our members, and the disadvantaged people they support, across NSW.

Recommendations

1. That the Office for Women’s Policy on behalf of the NSW Government, when reviewing this plan and developing the next Women’s Plan, consults with women and the organisations that work with them prior to the actual writing of the Plan.
2. That timeframes for submissions be reasonable; recognising that non government organisations and other groups have high demands and need time to properly consult with their members. At a minimum this should be 6 weeks.

4. The Objective

NCOSS supports the discussion at the consultation on the NSW Women’s Plan on the 11 November that the objective be shortened to “... achieving justice and equality for women in NSW”.

Recommendation

3. That the objective of the Women’s Plan is re-written in line with the discussions at the consultation on the Women’s Plan on 11 November 2010.

5. The Principles

Overall NCOSS supports the principles as written in the Plan; however we would like to see the inclusion of the recognition of the Human Rights of women as outlined in the various United Nation Conventions that Australia is a signatory to as a principle¹.

NCOSS believes that the principles of social justice and equity need to be explicitly stated. Equality presumes that everyone is starting at the same point. However equity recognises that not everyone has the same starting point or the same opportunities to be able to participate equally and recognises greater support, services or changes needed to enable equal participation to happen.

NCOSS supports the principle that women's voices are heard by policy makers, noting that the Women's Plan was developed without consultation with women in NSW. We support the discussion at the consultation where it was suggested that the Women's Peaks Forum should form part of the mechanism for ensuring women's voices are heard. NCOSS also strongly argues that while the various groups mentioned are an important part of listening to women's voices there also needs to be ways of engaging directly with women in the community. Appointments to the various Women's Councils are on an individual basis rather than on a 'community representative' basis. Therefore direct engagement with women in the community is important especially women from disadvantaged backgrounds, women with disability, women living in poverty, women in rural and remote areas, women from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds, women who are homeless and women with mental health issues.

Recommendations

4. That the principle of the recognition of the human rights of women is explicitly stated as a principle.
5. That the principles of equity and social justice are included within the principles, recognising that equity enables equality.
6. That the principle to 'ensure women's voices are heard by policy makers' is expanded to include the Women's Peaks Forum and measures to consult directly with women in the broader community across metropolitan, regional, rural and remote NSW.

¹ This includes the broader conventions on Human Rights not just those that are specific for women, for example the International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities etc.

6. The Plan's Priority Areas

6.1 General

Overall, the Plan and the priority areas are reasonably good catch-all statements, but there is not enough depth to the plan. The Plan has no strategies for implementation, no timeframes for implementation, no measurements for success/key performance indicators (these must be both outputs and outcomes. For example, having more women on Boards is good and yet if women feel that they are not listened to or respected it is not a success) and no evaluation process. Rather it is a statement of what is being done and what will be done. This is not a Plan but more an overarching commentary.

As well, the Plan is titled the NSW Women's Plan, however the focus of the priority areas are very much based in the public sector, with nothing or very little aimed at women in the private or non-government sectors. A plan for the women of NSW must include all areas of life where women participate.

NCOSS again supports discussions at the consultation on the Plan where it was argued that the Plan needs 'more teeth', stronger language and ambitious targets – for example rather than a 7% increase of women in senior positions in the public sector the aim should be 50% or higher.

Recommendations

7. The Plan must be developed to include strategies for implementation, timeframes, measurable publicly available key performance indicators, both quantitative and qualitative (outputs and outcomes) and a comprehensive, publicly reported regular evaluation process.
8. That the Plan becomes a NSW plan and includes outcomes and future directions for women in both the private and non-government sectors.
9. That the Plan is given 'more teeth', stronger language and ambitious targets.

6.2 What's Missing?

The priority areas in the Plan presume a level of engagement and participation by women already, or that women are in a position to be able to engage. There needs to be a priority area that takes a step 'back' and deals with the basics in women's lives – a priority area especially aimed at women living in poverty. For example a woman who is homeless is not going to be worrying about getting on a board when what she needs to enable her participation in the community is safe, long-term, secure accommodation. This priority area would cover issues such as economic security to deal with the long-term financial impact

of broken work patterns, lower levels of superannuation and less access to well-paid employment.

Recommendation

10. That the Plan includes a priority area for supporting and enabling women living in poverty.

6.3 Increasing Women's Representation in All Areas of Public Life

This priority area needs to be expanded to include:

- Future directions aimed at increasing the participation of women in private companies and the non-government sector for example in increasing the proportion of women on boards and in senior positions
- Increasing overall participation, it is not always about leadership and not all women want to lead, therefore there needs to be recognition of increasing both participation and leadership capacity of women

Recommendations

11. That the future directions and strategic outcomes of the priority to increase women's representation in all areas of public life are expanded to include the private and non-government sectors.
12. That there is an aim to improve participation not just leadership.

6.4 Supporting Women in Education, Work and Care

There is an ongoing argument that there are not enough skilled people for the workforce and yet there is not enough focus on enabling women to participate in the workforce.

Therefore a number of issues need to be better addressed in this priority area:

- One future direction is aimed at helping women to balance work and care responsibilities; however this cannot be achieved if steps are not in place to enable men to take on caring roles. Instead focusing only on women perpetuates the myth that only women can be carers.
- To ensure that women are aware of their rights there needs to be more than promotion of the Anti-Discrimination Act, women should also have knowledge of the

Sex Discrimination Act, the Disability Discrimination Act, the Age Discrimination Act and their rights under the various human rights instruments that Australia is a signatory to.

- Another future direction is to work to close the pay gap between men and women in the public sector. This must be expanded to addressing the pay gap between men and women in the private and non-government sectors. There is a great deal of evidence that shows that the non-government workforce is predominantly women and on low salaries compared to their counterparts in the public sector. This must be addressed if the Government is serious about supporting women in work.
- There are two other barriers to education and employment for women that need to be addressed under this priority. These are access to affordable child care and access to affordable respite care.

Recommendations

13. That there is recognition and inclusion of strategies enabling men to take on greater caring roles instead of focusing primarily on women as carers.
14. That to enable women to be aware of all their rights there must be promotion of all the various anti-discrimination legislation and human rights instruments that women are protected by.
15. That the NSW Government expand the focus of pay equity to both the private and non-government sectors and actively support and fund the pay equity case in the non-government sector in recognition of the high proportion of women that work in this sector.
16. That barriers to education and employment such as affordable child care and respite care are addressed.

6.5 Supporting Women to Live Free From Violence

Overall NCOSS supports the future direction in this priority area.

However NCOSS strongly argues that under this priority area the Plan must address the issue of strip searching of women in prisons. Increasing evidence is being produced showing the ongoing traumatising affect that strip searching has on women in prison, especially as up to 80% of women in prison have experienced sexual or domestic violence. Strip searching perpetuates the violation that these women have experienced. The practice also reduces the time women spend with families and children as many will stop visiting the woman in prison when they realise that she is strip-searched after each

visit. Research also shows that strip-searching does not reduce the amount of contraband brought into a prison.²

Recommendation

17. That the NSW Government, under the priority area of reducing violence against women, addresses the issue of strip searching of women in prison with the aim to stop this practice all together.

6.6 Improving Women's Health and Wellbeing

Overall NCOSS supports the future directions under this priority area but would argue that it needs to be expanded to include broader areas of health and wellbeing. Women's health is not just about maternity services and having babies – many women choose not to have children. In this section there needs to be stronger recognition of non-government women's health services and a commitment to the development of a Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy in NSW. As well as broader issues of health care for older women, women with disability, women with mental health issues and women who have drug and alcohol dependencies.

Recommendation

18. That the priority area on health and wellbeing is expanded to include the health and wellbeing needs of women beyond maternity and child birth.

7. Conclusion

Once again NCOSS would like to congratulate the Office for Women's Policy for taking this first important step in improving the equality of women in NSW. However, as noted above, there are many more steps that need to be taken before this Plan can be affective across the whole of NSW and for all women in NSW.

It is also important to acknowledge that many aspects of this plan would not be possible without safe, effective, regular and affordable transport and NCOSS would encourage the Office for Women's Policy to consider this when further development of the Plan takes place.

² NCOSS would be happy to provide copies of papers supporting this.