

# A *new year* FOR WOMEN

## A New Plan, A New Movement, A New Year For Women

**7 Guiding Principles. 4 Starting Actions. Creating a Movement.**

*The empowerment of the world's women is a global imperative.  
Yet despite important progress in promoting gender equality, there  
remains an urgent need to address structural barriers to women's  
economic empowerment and full inclusion in economic activity.  
If the world is to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals,  
we need a quantum leap in women's economic empowerment.*

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, January 2016

## ABOUT NCOSS

For 80 years the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) has worked with people experiencing poverty and disadvantage to see positive change in our communities.

When rates of poverty and inequality are low, everyone in NSW benefits. With 80 years of knowledge and experience informing our vision, NCOSS is uniquely placed to bring civil society together to work with government and business to ensure communities in NSW are strong for everyone.

As the peak body for social and community services we support the sector to deliver innovative services that grow and evolve as needs and circumstances evolve.

Published August 2016.

© NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)

This publication is copyright. Non-profit groups have permission to reproduce part of this book as long as the original meaning is retained and proper credit is given to the NSW Council of Social Service. All other persons and organisations wanting to reproduce material from this book should obtain permission from the publishers.

NCOSS can be found at:

Suite 301, Level 3, 52-58 William St, Woolloomooloo NSW 2011

phone: (02) 9211 2599

email: [info@ncoss.org.au](mailto:info@ncoss.org.au)

facebook: [on.fb.me/ncoss](https://on.fb.me/ncoss)

website: [www.ncoss.org.au](http://www.ncoss.org.au)

twitter: [@ncoss](https://twitter.com/ncoss)

### Message from the CEO

Gender equality isn't a women's issue, but a social and economic problem affecting all of us. Women's economic empowerment is key to achieving gender equality. This realisation is taking hold around the world. This was recognised in UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 to 'achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls' and the G20 commitment to reduce the gender pay gap by 25% by 2025.

Gender equality makes social and moral sense, but it also makes good economic sense. Recent estimates have shown that if gender equality was achieved, so that women in every country played an identical role to men in labour markets, an estimated \$37 trillion would be added to the global economy by 2025.<sup>1</sup> Instead, globally women and girls continue to earn less, have fewer economic assets, bear the primary burden of unpaid work and caring responsibilities, and are largely concentrated in insecure and low-paying jobs. These gaps constrain women's socio-economic rights and stifle economic growth and productivity.

NCOSS supports the development of a global action plan to economically empower women. We plan to start our contribution in NSW and start a movement towards broader change. We recognise that gender inequality is the root cause of violence against women; that it directly contributes to women's financial insecurity and poverty; and that it is the basis for older women's homelessness.

The picture of poverty in Australia currently is highly feminised, particularly among single mothers and older women. And we know that particular groups of women are more financially vulnerable and face multiple types of discrimination. We need to recognise this intersectionality of disadvantage for some women and girls and develop targeted solutions to ensure their economic empowerment. In particular these solutions need to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women; women with disability; LGBTIQ communities and women living in rural and remote areas.

The time to act is now. We need to realise the economic empowerment of women so that all women can exercise control over their lives. We know this will require steps from each level of government – along with action from business, civil society, and the international community – to economically empower women and end gender inequality. It will require a huge shift in the gender stereotypes men and women face every day. This is the start of a plan for action so that all women and girls can make meaningful choices and freely determine the outcome of their lives.



*Tracy Howe, CEO, NCOSS*

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mckinsey.com/global-themes/employment-and-growth/how-advancing-womens-equality-can-add-12-trillion-to-global-growth>

### How we got here

To make this a reality NCOSS brought together key thinkers and stakeholders from across the community sector, business, academia, unions and government to develop this plan for action.

To start the conversation NCOSS produced a Discussion Paper<sup>2</sup> highlighting four key areas that impact the economic wellbeing of women and girls across their lifetimes: financial literacy, employment, housing and superannuation. The Discussion Paper provided an overview of the issues affecting women in each of the areas and asked what government, business and civil society could do to improve gender equality in each.

NCOSS then held a series of roundtables and consultations in both metropolitan and regional parts of NSW hearing from over 100 organisations and key stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> The roundtables brought together women from diverse backgrounds and experiences, with first-hand and expert knowledge of what is needed in communities across the state to financially empower women and prevent economic hardship. Participants included CALD women, older women, young women and girls, women with disability, Aboriginal women, representatives from LGBTIQ communities, women from regions across the State, academics, union representatives, domestic violence specialists, housing experts, financial counsellors, faith groups and community organisations.

As part of these consultations NCOSS has met with business leaders and leading industry bodies to find common ground on what action we can take together to see the economic empowerment of women. We heard of effective and innovative practices employers are adopting to progress gender equity and improve women's participation. These are all things that benefit women's economic independence over their life cycle.

Together we identified the fundamental obstacles to women's economic empowerment in the four key areas of financial literacy, employment, housing and superannuation, and the strategies that could see real change take place.<sup>4</sup>

NCOSS has taken these strategies and distilled them into a set of guiding principles for stakeholders to endorse.



<sup>2</sup> The original Discussion Paper has been reproduced on page 8.

<sup>3</sup> Roundtable participants and consultation members are listed on page 22.

<sup>4</sup> Roundtable strategies and initiatives are listed on page 16.

### Seven Guiding Principles

The seven guiding principles provide long-term common goals to inform our work over the coming weeks, months and years. The seven guiding principles are:

1. Women and girls must be able to fully participate in education, training, employment and financial decision-making, including women and girls who face intersecting disadvantage.
2. Financial literacy is intrinsically linked to women's wellbeing throughout their life cycle, and consequently such skills must be taught to young women and girls early on and refreshed at key points throughout their lives as their circumstances change, adopting a targeted approach for Aboriginal and CALD women, LGBTIQ women and women with disability.
3. There must be equal representation of women in senior roles and leadership positions – including adequate representation of Aboriginal and CALD women, women with disability, women from regional and rural areas and members of the LGBTIQ community – regardless of the industry or field.
4. Carer responsibilities should be valued, they should be shared more equitably and they should not result in economic or career disadvantage.
5. Equal pay is non-negotiable.
6. Safe, accessible and affordable housing that meets the diverse needs of women is essential in order for women to fully participate in economic life and achieve economic equality.
7. Every woman should be able to age without fear of poverty or homelessness.

### Four Starting Actions

There is action we can take now to make a difference for women over their life cycle and improve their economic empowerment. There is one starting action for each of the key areas, but each also relates to a pivotal point in a woman's life cycle where her inequality is compounded due to her gender. The four starting actions are:

#### Action 1: Young Women and Financial Literacy

Develop a comprehensive, gender specific financial literacy program to reach all young women and girls through schools, workplaces, community services, juvenile justice centres and other sites identified as having contact with young women and girls.

This must be developed in consultation with young women and girls, school leaders, financial literacy experts, Aboriginal and CALD communities, LGBTIQ communities and advocacy groups, disability advocacy groups, the Department of Education and the Department of Justice.

No young woman or girl should be allowed to fall through the cracks.

#### Action 2: Women and Employment

Improve all women's ability to participate in the workforce over their lifespan by increasing access and affordability of early childhood education and care.

NSW should align its investment in early childhood education and care with the majority of other States.

#### Action 3: Older women and Housing

Develop a shared home ownership or mixed equity model to provide older women with pathways to a secure home.

This should explore shared equity schemes, shared ownership and housing cooperatives models that have been successful in other jurisdictions and meet the diverse needs of women.

#### Action 4: Women and Superannuation

Form a shared position across business, government and civil society on improving women's ability to earn superannuation across their life cycle to address the inherent gender inequality in the current superannuation system.

NSW should take the lead in government and business and model best practice.

### Shaping the Future

To ensure this change is realised, an independent advisory panel will be established to bring together representatives from across business, government, civil society and other key stakeholders.

The panel will oversee the implementation of the four starting actions. It will then work towards achieving the seven principles and will craft a new set of action items to realise that vision. These new action items will align with UN Sustainable Development Goal 5 – achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls – and look to progress the G20 commitment to reduce the gender pay gap by 25% by 2025.

### Creating a Movement

Endorsing the seven guiding principles and committing to the four starting actions is just the beginning. We want to see widespread change within NSW, throughout Australia, and across the globe. We want a world where women are economically empowered and able to participate equally with men in the economy and in society. This will require more than the endorsement of the seven guiding principles and a commitment to the four starting actions. The economic empowerment of women – and true gender equality – will require us all working together.

This plan for action is the start of something that must grow bigger. So let's join together in supporting this new plan, this new movement, this New Year for Women.





# Starting the conversation – Discussion Paper

## Introduction

*Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance.*

Kofi Annan, UN General-Secretary 1997-2006

Gender equality isn't a women's issue. It is a social and economic problem affecting all of us, right across the globe. It is the root cause of violence against women; it directly contributes to women's financial insecurity and poverty; and it is behind older women's homelessness. The problem is big, but it is within our reach to fix it, if we work together. This is what NCOSS is seeking in our *A New Year for Women* campaign. We want to shape an *Action for Women Plan* that will improve opportunities and outcomes for women, focussing first on NSW – the region we know deeply – but a plan that has the potential for broader application. And we need your help.

This discussion paper focuses on the economic inequality that women and girls experience across their life cycle. This inequality accumulates and compounds to further disadvantage women as they move through life and impacts on their health and wellbeing across their life course. And we know that particular groups of women are more financially vulnerable and need targeted solutions to ensure their economic empowerment, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) women, women with disability, and women living in remote areas.

Although we aren't directly addressing violence against women in this instance, economic inequality is a contributing factor in domestic and family violence and a significant barrier preventing women from leaving violent relationships. Economic empowerment is a key weapon in the fight to keep women and their children physically, emotionally, and psychologically safe.

*A New Year for Women* concentrates on four strategic areas that impact the economic wellbeing of women and girls across their lifetimes:

- Financial literacy
- Employment
- Housing
- Superannuation

Women and girls need to be financially literate so they can make good financial decisions throughout their lives. They need to know how to navigate their finances and how to protect themselves from homelessness, should things go awry. A fundamental part of economic empowerment is workplace gender equality, which is crucial for achieving pay equity and ending gender stereotypes. But women also need to understand what a sound financial plan for their retirement looks like, as well as how to work towards that in light of the career breaks they are likely to encounter. These are the areas that we need to be actively working in to economically empower women. It's a two-part process: we need to arm women with the tools they need to succeed, but we also need systemic change to create real gender equality in the workplace and in society as a whole.



Gender inequality isn't a state-based issue or an Australian problem. It transcends state and national boundaries. And while it may manifest differently in diverse cultures and communities, gender inequity derives from the same root cause: valuing women and girls less than boys and men. We can end this. We must end this. Because we all lose – economically, politically, socially – when we denigrate half the world's population. Instead let's create an *Action for Women Plan* taking NSW – our home state – as our starting point, but keeping the world beyond our borders in mind. We need a plan that clearly identifies the steps that each level of government – along with business, civil society, and the international community – must take to economically empower women and end gender inequality. Together let's fix this.

### Financial Literacy

The OECD explains financial literacy as that combination of awareness, knowledge, skill, attitude and behaviour necessary to make sound financial decisions and achieve financial wellbeing.<sup>5</sup> Financial literacy enables greater economic participation, which in turn improves quality of life, social inclusion, the opportunities people can pursue, one's sense of security, and the overall economic health of society.<sup>6</sup> Low levels of financial literacy are more common in groups where disadvantage and financial exclusion is prevalent, and this includes women.<sup>7</sup> In 2010, the OECD's International Network on Financial Education (INFE) established an expert subgroup on 'Empowering Women through Financial Education and Awareness', recognising the fact that women have specific financial literacy needs and are often overrepresented in disadvantaged groups in both developed and developing countries.<sup>8</sup>

We have identified financial literacy as a critical issue because gender inequality in this area compounds women's economic disadvantage by making it more difficult for women to achieve a secure financial future and to participate confidently in economic and financial activities. As women tend to live longer while also earning less than men, they are more likely to face financial hardship as they age.<sup>9</sup> This is why it is crucial that girls and women develop the financial literacy skills they need as early as possible so that they can make better decisions from the start and continue this all the way through their life cycle.

Gendered differences in financial literacy include attitudes towards money, which is a significant problem because it results in women experiencing financial disadvantage throughout their lives. The most recent ANZ financial literacy survey showed that Australian women find it stressful to deal with money, and this is associated with behaviours such as not checking account statements, not keeping an eye on household/personal expenses, and using payday loans.<sup>10</sup> Women have lower levels of financial knowledge and numeracy than men, meaning they have less exposure to financial products and they use financial education materials less.<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Angela Hung et al., 'Empowering Women Through Financial Awareness and Education', *OECD Working Papers on Finance, Insurance and Private Pensions*, No.14, OECD Publishing, 2012, p.7.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Ali et al., 'The Financial Literacy of Young Australians: An Empirical Study and Implications for Consumer Protection and ASIC's National Financial Literacy Strategy', *Company and Securities Law Journal*, Vol.32, 2014, pp.334-352, at p.337.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.338.

<sup>8</sup> OECD and INFE, 'OECD/INFE Policy Guidance on Addressing Women's and Girls' Needs for Financial Awareness and Education', 2013, p.3.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.5.

<sup>10</sup> The Social Research Centre, 'ANZ Survey of Adult Financial Literacy in Australia', May 2015, p.6.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p.7.

Women are less likely than men to have identified a retirement income figure and are more likely to have lower levels of savings, investments, and super.<sup>12</sup> Women also have lower levels of financial control, meaning they are more likely to have missed a loan or credit card repayment and are less likely to have been able to save money.

While noting that women are not a homogenous group, and in fact have different levels of knowledge and diverse circumstances, ANZ recommends that financial materials and education targeting women should take account of attitudinal differences, as well as structural factors and life stages that affect women differently to men.<sup>13</sup> This is key because, while women experience a different trajectory through life than men, which in and of itself creates disadvantage, it is also important to recognise the impact that socio-economic status has on the ability of women to, for example, save money. Not all income levels allow an individual to save, irrespective of their financial literacy, so improving financial literacy is not a panacea for all financial disadvantages that women experience. Nevertheless, financial literacy benefits everyone, regardless of income, as it assists people to make the most of their money, manage financial risks, and avoid financial pitfalls.<sup>14</sup>

Financial literacy is important throughout a woman's life, especially when her circumstances change such as when starting a career, changing jobs, getting divorced, or retiring. Solid financial literacy skills are also crucial when choosing a mobile phone plan or financial products like a superannuation scheme, when making an investment or savings plan, when buying property or entering into a business partnership. At each stage of life, good financial literacy is an asset that can help reduce the economic inequality women and girls face.

### Employment

The issue of employment refers to the gender inequalities women face in the workplace. This includes barriers to workforce participation, income inequity, women in leadership roles, and the penalties women face due to carer responsibilities.

### Workforce Participation

In NSW, women's participation in the workforce is at its highest point since 1978, but it is still 12 percentage points lower than the male participation rate.<sup>15</sup> This is a significant issue because workforce participation is linked to both short- and long-term financial security. Workforce participation directly impacts savings and superannuation, and thus the likelihood of a woman experiencing poverty. Goldman Sachs JBWere has also estimated that closing the gap between male and female employment rates would boost Australia's GDP by 11%, and that channelling women into more economically productive (and higher paid) employment would increase GDP by 20%.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., pp.1 and 7.

<sup>14</sup> Australian Securities and Investment Commission, 'National Financial Literacy Strategy 2014-2017', August 2014.

<sup>15</sup> NSW Government, 'Women in NSW 2015: Annual Report on Women's Progress Towards Equality in NSW', 2015, p.37.

<sup>16</sup> Goldman Sachs JBWere, 'Australia's Hidden Resource: The Economic Case for Increasing Female Participation', November 2009, p.2.

Women with disability, women from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds, Aboriginal women, older women, and women from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds face additional barriers to education, training, and workforce participation, which in turn affects their employment rates, lifetime earnings, and retirement savings.<sup>17</sup> The compounded disadvantage and discrimination that such women face is a key issue in the fight to end gender inequality.

### Income Inequality

Lower income rates mean women have lower lifetime earnings, lower superannuation, and lower savings, which increases their risk of experiencing poverty. Income inequality is about gender inequality, not about the hours women work. And this negatively impacts economic growth in both developing and advanced economies.<sup>18</sup> In Australia, the latest ABS figures put the national gender pay gap at 17.3%, with women in full-time work earning on average \$277.70 less than men per week.<sup>19</sup> This means that over a typical 45-year work life, women will earn \$650,000 less than men. That's a massive difference. The gender pay gap has hovered between 15% and 19% for the past two decades, so we know these figures aren't moving much in women's favour.<sup>20</sup> And NSW has the third highest gender pay gap of all the states and territories at 17.9%,<sup>21</sup> which is especially problematic given Sydney ranks as Australia's most expensive city and the fifth most expensive city in the world.<sup>22</sup>

Workplace gender segregation is a particular concern due to its impact on women's wages. Women are severely underrepresented in the higher-earning industries such as mining, finance, utilities, and scientific and technical services.<sup>23</sup> And even when women do work in these higher-paying industries, they generally occupy lower-paying roles. However, NATSEM have determined that 60% of the income difference between men and women is due to gender discrimination.<sup>24</sup> That is, women earn less than men simply by virtue of being female. If we removed gender-based discrimination and did nothing else, the pay gap would fall to a difference of only 7%. That's irrespective of industrial segregation, labour force history, educational disparities, and underrepresentation of women in large firms.<sup>25</sup> The valuing of women less than men starts early. From their very first pay – when kids get pocket money from their parents – girls are paid less than boys. Heritage Bank's 2015 national survey shows that on average girls receive \$9.60 pocket money compared to the \$13.00 that boys receive.<sup>26</sup> That means girls are getting only 73.8% of a boy's income, and this is from the people who love them, not an employer. Income inequality is a serious issue as it is intimately linked to lower superannuation savings and thus the poverty that many women are facing as they get older.

---

<sup>17</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, pp.8-10.

<sup>18</sup> Christian Gonzales et al, 'Catalyst for Change: Empowering Women and Tackling Income Inequality', IMF Staff Discussion Note, October 2015, p.7.

<sup>19</sup> ABS, 'Average Weekly Earnings, Australia', Cat. No. 6302.0, November 2015.

<sup>20</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Gender Pay Gap Statistics', March 2016, p.3.

<sup>21</sup> ABS, 'Average Weekly Earnings, Australia', Cat. No. 6302.0, November 2015.

<sup>22</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Worldwide Cost of Living Report', 2015.

<sup>23</sup> ANZ, 'ANZ Women's Report: Barriers to Achieving Financial Gender Equity', July 2015, pp.28-29.

<sup>24</sup> NATSEM, 'The Impact of a Sustained Gender Wage Gap on the Australian Economy', November 2009, p.v.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Heritage Bank 2015 Australian Pocket Money Survey, accessed on 10 March 2016, at <https://www.heritage.com.au/blog/money-saving-tips/the-latest-aussie-guide-to-pocket-money>

### Leadership Roles

Although women comprise 46% of the Australian workforce, they occupy a small fraction of senior roles.<sup>27</sup> In Australian organisations with more than 100 employees, women comprise 15.4% of CEOs, 23.6% of directorships, and 27.4% of key management personnel (KMP) roles.<sup>28</sup> The disparity between women and men in leadership roles in the workplace perpetuates existing stereotypes about the role of women both at work and in broader society, and exacerbates gender pay inequity. Having significant numbers of women in leadership roles operates as an encouragement to other women in the workplace. Women's leadership is also important in ensuring that more women are in positions where they have the authority to decide and negotiate on issues that affect them.<sup>29</sup> In addition to being fair, diversity in leadership simply makes good business and economic sense.<sup>30</sup>

Improving the rates of women in leadership roles must start early in a woman's career. Women need to get the critical experiences that are required for advancement in an organisation. However, they are routinely – often through unconscious gender-bias – funnelled into less advantageous areas of an organisation's operations. For example, women are much less likely to be offered 'hot jobs' – those 'mission-critical roles, influential projects, international assignments or other capability and profile-building opportunities [that] provide critical experiences that facilitate career progression'.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, sponsorship is often key to advancement into senior roles and women are less likely to have sponsors.<sup>32</sup> Succession planning in organisations needs to have a gendered lens so that barriers to women's advancement into senior roles are eliminated.

### Carer Responsibilities

The onset of carer responsibilities is a critical point in a woman's life cycle when her advancement at work may be adversely affected. This is frequently as a result of negative assumptions and stereotypes about women and their commitment to their careers, and is particularly the case around pregnancy.<sup>33</sup> Half of all mothers experience workplace discrimination at some point during pregnancy, parental leave, or on their return to work.<sup>34</sup> Pregnancy - or carer-related discrimination can impact on labour force participation where employers issue demotions, redundancies, or refuse to allow flexible work conditions, so that women simply leave rather than fight the unfair practices they face.<sup>35</sup> This results in a loss of income as women attempt to find new work that will accommodate their caring responsibilities, or decide against finding new employment altogether. Significantly, women returning to work after taking

---

<sup>27</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Different Genders, Different Lives', Perspective Paper, February 2016.

<sup>28</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Australia's Gender Equality Scorecard: Key Findings from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's 2014-15 Reporting Data', November 2015, pp.8-10.

<sup>29</sup> NSW Government, 'Women in NSW 2015: Annual Report on Women's Progress Towards Equality in NSW', 2015, p.56.

<sup>30</sup> Cedric Herring, 'Does Diversity Pay? Race, Gender, and the Business Case for Diversity', *American Sociological Review*, Vol. 74, 2009, pp.208-224, at p.220; Goldman Sachs JBWere, 'Australia's Hidden Resource: The Economic Case for Increasing Female Participation', November 2009, p.2.

<sup>31</sup> Male Champions of Change, 'Accelerating the Advancement of Women in Leadership: Listening, Learning, Leading', 2013, p.25.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>33</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.12.

<sup>34</sup> ACTU, 'The Gender Pay Gap Over the Life Cycle', March 2016, p.6.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.12.

12 months parental leave following the birth of their first child earn almost 7% less income during their first year back at work and almost 12% less the following year.<sup>36</sup>

Workplace inflexibility and long work hours are major reasons for mothers not returning to full-time work after having children.<sup>37</sup> But even when employers are supportive of women with carer responsibilities, the high cost of childcare can force mothers not to continue in paid work because it doesn't make financial sense.<sup>38</sup> This is evidenced by the fact that Australian mothers with a child under six have a low workforce participation rate by international standards, coming in at 49.6% – ten percentage points lower than the OECD average.<sup>39</sup>

While pregnancy, childbirth, and caring for children are broadly accepted as negatively impacting a woman's paid workforce participation and career trajectory, it is less recognised that there are a variety of other carer responsibilities that similarly impact women. Women make up 70% of the primary carers of people with disability and older people, which is linked to lower workforce participation rates, less income, and thus less superannuation.<sup>40</sup> Aboriginal women are also more likely to be carers than non-Aboriginal women, which further compounds their disadvantaged position in the paid workforce.

### Housing

Access to housing is a basic human right, but 152,000 Australians accessed specialist homelessness services in 2014-2015. Of these, 60% were women, with young women (18-24 years old) being the highest users of these services.<sup>41</sup> Domestic and family violence and sexual assault are the main reasons for young women experiencing homelessness.<sup>42</sup> But overall, the main reason women experience homelessness is gender-based economic and financial inequality.<sup>43</sup>

Older, single women are at particular risk of housing stress and homelessness, primarily because being a woman and being a single adult over 65 are each risk factors for experiencing poverty, which together magnify the problem.<sup>44</sup> Add additional disadvantage to the mix, for example being Aboriginal, being a woman with disability, being from a CALD or lower socio-economic background, and the risk of experiencing homelessness is further multiplied. Once again we see the effects of an accumulation of inequality across a woman's life cycle.

While aging and single status are compounding factors which place non-home owning women at higher risk of homelessness, the root cause begins earlier in a woman's life. By considering the whole of a woman's life cycle, it becomes evident that the housing vulnerability of older women is directly

---

<sup>36</sup> ACTU, 'The Gender Pay Gap Over the Life Cycle', March 2016, p.6.

<sup>37</sup> ANZ, 'ANZ Women's Report: Barriers to Achieving Financial Gender Equity', July 2015, p.24.

<sup>38</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.14.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> ABS, 'Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers', 2012.

<sup>41</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Specialist Homelessness Services 2014-2015', accessed at <http://www.aihw.gov.au/homelessness/specialist-homelessness-services-2014-15/clients-services-outcomes/#t3> on 15 March 2016.

<sup>42</sup> Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness and Young People', January 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness and Women', April 2013.

<sup>44</sup> ACOSS, 'Poverty in Australia', 2014, pp.10-11.

related to earlier life experiences such as educational opportunities and work history.<sup>45</sup> There are key structural disadvantages that women experience throughout their life that place them at increased risk of homelessness as they near retirement. Indeed, older women's homelessness is intimately linked to women having occupied traditional gender roles when they were younger, for example being a primary carer to children or having reduced workforce participation.<sup>46</sup> Working part time, having career breaks, or never having participated in paid work negatively impacts income, retirement savings, and asset accumulation so that, should women find themselves single in retirement, they lack the financial resources to provide for themselves and run the risk of homelessness.

Women experiencing homelessness in later life have overwhelmingly led 'conventional' lives wherein they worked, raised a family, and rented privately. Routinely, these women become homeless because they experience a crisis such as losing their job, becoming unwell, or facing unaffordable rents.<sup>47</sup> Crucially, older women experiencing homelessness don't own their own home, and it is frequently at the point of retirement when women with inadequate superannuation funds are forced to rely on the Age Pension and are subsequently unable to afford private rental that they become homeless. The severe lack of affordable housing in many parts of Australia directly contributes to older women experiencing homelessness. But it is the entrenched social and economic disadvantages that women experience throughout their lives that is the fundamental cause of older women being at increased risk of homelessness.<sup>48</sup>

### Superannuation

The issues outlined above – financial literacy, representation at work, housing – have a compounding negative effect on a woman's superannuation savings. The gender inequality that women and girls face throughout their life cycle multiplies their economic disadvantage as they age, placing women at serious risk of poverty once they retire. Superannuation is what many Australians plan to rely on during retirement, yet the average man retires with nearly twice the size of the average woman's superannuation balance.<sup>49</sup> Lower levels of superannuation, a likelihood of early retirement, and a longer life expectancy mean women are at an increased risk of a significant decline in their standard of living during retirement.<sup>50</sup> And the situation is even worse for women who experience added layers of inequality due to race, disability, age, sexuality, or socio-economic status. For example, only 60% of Aboriginal women have superannuation coverage.<sup>51</sup>

Additionally, single women – including those who never partnered, those who are widows, and those who are divorced – are the most likely to be reliant on the Age Pension as their main source of income in retirement. This is concerning because the ability to meet one's needs on a single Age Pension is limited.<sup>52</sup> In fact, a third of single retired women on the Age Pension experience poverty.<sup>53</sup> More broadly,

---

<sup>45</sup> Maree Petersen and Cameron Parsell, 'Older Women's Pathways Out of Homelessness in Australia', A Report for the Mercy Foundation, Institute for Social Science Research, 2014, p.11.

<sup>46</sup> Sandy Darab and Yvonne Hartman, 'Understanding Single Older Women's Invisibility in Housing Issues in Australia', *Housing, Theory and Society*, Vol.30, No.4, 2013, pp.348-367, at pp.357-360.

<sup>47</sup> Maree Petersen, 'Addressing Older Women's Homelessness: Service and Housing Models', *Australian Journal of Social Issues*, Vol.50, No.4, 2015, pp.419-458, at p.421.

<sup>48</sup> Ludo McFerran 'It Could Be You: Female, Single, Older and Homeless', Homelessness NSW and Older Women's Network, 2010, p.79; Andrea Sharam, 'Homeless Women – No Home at the End of the Road', *Parity*, Vol.24, No.9, 2011, p.41.

<sup>49</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Superannuation and Gender Pay Gaps by Age Group', February 2016, p.1.

<sup>50</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.22.

<sup>51</sup> Ross Clare, 'Equity and Superannuation: The Real Issues', The Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia, 2012, p.3.

<sup>52</sup> Department of Social Services, 'Pension Review Report', 2009

<sup>53</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.23.



43.5% of single women report that their standard of living is worse or much worse following retirement. This figure rises to 54.3% for divorced or separated women.<sup>54</sup>

Good financial literacy is key to accumulating a decent amount of superannuation. Young women and girls need to understand superannuation schemes thoroughly and be able to make good financial choices from the start that will stand them in good stead come retirement. They need to ensure they are acting in their own best financial interests and that they understand the financial commitments they are making. The economic empowerment that comes from good financial literacy skills allows informed choices to be made, especially around potential income capacity and retirement planning.

Gender segregated industries and occupational structures within industries also affect a woman's earning capacity over her lifetime, and thus her superannuation balance. Young women need to be made aware of their potential earning capacity prior to choosing their careers. This is especially important given the likelihood of career breaks for many women, since in addition to income inequality, carer responsibilities significantly impact a woman's ability to build appropriate superannuation. If a woman works full-time with no career breaks, she will earn around \$650,000 less than a man over a 45-year career span, based on the current national gender pay gap. That's money that won't earn superannuation and won't be contributing to a woman's financial security in retirement. But, of course, women who take a break from the workforce to care for children will be even more disadvantaged. Even if they have access to paid maternity leave, they may still face lower superannuation balances if their employer does not make superannuation contributions during this period. A gap in the accumulation of superannuation at this point in a woman's lifecycle has significant lifetime consequences because the maximum benefits from superannuation flow from the maturation of contributions made early in working life.<sup>55</sup>

It is frequently assumed that women will rely on their partner's superannuation during retirement and so lower superannuation balances aren't always seen as a serious problem, but this doesn't account for the unpredictability of divorce and separation, which has a significant negative impact on older women's financial security. Good financial literacy skills – in addition to excellent legal and financial advice – is especially important at the time of divorce or separation to ensure a woman's financial security is protected and to give her the best chance of avoiding poverty in later life. The number of divorced women entering retirement is projected to rise substantially over the next two decades meaning that more women will find themselves in a precarious financial position in the coming years.<sup>56</sup> The risk of large numbers of women facing poverty in retirement must be arrested.

## Conclusion

Women and girls are consistently valued less than boys and men. This gender inequity results in economic inequity, which further entrenches women's disadvantage. We know that women's economic disadvantage accumulates and is compounded across their life cycle, placing them at increased risk of experiencing poverty as they age and impacting their health, wellbeing and safety across their lives. While this is a global problem, cutting across national and cultural borders, it is NSW that we know best, so this is where we need to start. But we mustn't forget the women beyond our state borders as we move forward. What we need is a comprehensive, strategic plan to end the economic inequality women face and to empower women and girls to achieve their full potential. What we need is *A New Year For Women* and an *Action for Women Plan*. So let's take the knowledge we have and create this together.

---

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p.10.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p.21.



## What we heard

### What would it mean for women and girls to be economically empowered?

*"It's the ability for women to make change in their own lives"*

*"It's women having real choices about how they spend their work, life and motherhood"*

*"Partnership rather than dependence; control over your life..."*

*"Women would have full inclusion in society"*

## Action that would make a difference

### Financial Literacy

*"A bank came in to talk about financial literacy in our school but the talk was not given to the top maths class. I know how to calculate a parabola – but nothing about choosing a credit card or super."*

*"Women in poverty are not saving – they don't believe it is something they can achieve – it is out of reach so why should I bother planning?"*

*"When you go to juvenile detention centres the majority of people are Aboriginal. Girls can be in there for over a year and range in age from 12-18. Those girls - when they get out - are not going back to school, they won't have the opportunity. But they do want to improve their lives. Unfortunately there are so many barriers around employment because of their criminal record – without even thinking about the opportunity to be educated about super and other things."*



- Promote the robust involvement and active coordination among relevant stakeholders, including government, business and the community services sector, in addressing the issue of women and girls' financial literacy. As the *Australian National Financial Literacy Strategy 2014–17: Action plan* notes, "Improving financial literacy is a shared responsibility across the Australian government, business, community and education sectors".
- Address, through training and education, the systemic and structural barriers to women's greater financial wellbeing including lower levels of financial knowledge and literacy.
- Develop a financial literacy program with a gendered lens that ensures young women are taught about superannuation, financial abuse, planning for the future and the importance of investing early in superannuation and retirement income. This program should be implemented in schools as a first touch point and also in community services, such as shelters, young mothers groups and juvenile justice centres to ensure women do not fall through the cracks. The program should ensure a targeted approach for Aboriginal women, CALD women, women with disability and women in rural and remote areas.
- Address the specific needs of particularly marginalised groups of women, including Aboriginal women, CALD women, women with disability and women in remote communities, by targeting and improving the design and accessibility of products through industry regulations and enabling legislation, and building the capacity of community services to provide targeted advice, information, education and training that better meets specific needs.
- Improve women's strategies in dealing with financial matters, in particular through improving women's financial inclusion and use of formal saving products, preventing over-indebtedness, helping women plan for retirement, and supporting female entrepreneurship.
- Identify and capitalise on specific teachable moments and learning contexts throughout women and girls' life stages including schools, the workplace, women's networks, communities, and self-help groups. Develop and promote 'Financial Health Checks' and run them at events on International Women's Day and at other women's events.

*As young women we see a small glimpse of finance but it's so little, such basic education... we need to be taught about super in school, especially about the benefits of super later in life.*



- Empower community services to use their service entry points to assess a woman's financial situation – develop a framework that could be rolled out across the sector to ask a set of questions and identify financial risk, disempowerment, and knowledge gap.
- Develop targeted financial literacy programs which are accessible for women living on or below the poverty line. These women are often not saving because that is out of reach and not a reality when living week to week. There needs to be a targeted approach that connects to their experience.
- Develop resources for teachers and students with a key focus on the Australian Curriculum for Economics and Business, thereby increasing the use of free, impartial information, tools and resources.
- Convene a summit of Principals across NSW to educate them on the importance of women's economic empowerment and financial literacy for young women. This should focus on getting across the board commitment to progress and being involved in implementing financial literacy initiatives in schools.
- Continue to augment and enhance ASIC's MoneySmart as a core resource for the Australian population with a particular focus on the financial literacy needs of women and girls.
- Work with business to designing better products that are tailored to women experiencing financial hardship, for example superannuation accounts, energy bills and credit cards.
- Develop an awareness campaign to build the economic empowerment of young women and girls, including having public Champions and gathering stories about influential women to support aspiration.
- Expand No Interest Loan Scheme models of delivery that are working well and could be rolled out further, for example through community services that women access.

### Employment

*"I'm from Moree - there's nothing out where I was living but cotton. So my parents moved us away to Lismore so we could go to Uni and have opportunities. But it was moving us away from our family, from our support networks, it was really hard. If I had to make that choice again? I don't know what I would choose. Family connections are really important."*

*"There are huge disparities in job opportunities between larger centres and smaller towns. In smaller places the jobs always seem to be given to men and women are expected to go find work elsewhere."*

- Ensure affordable early childhood education and care to encourage women's ongoing workforce participation.
- Encourage employers to become a Workplace Gender Equality Agency Employer of Choice for Gender Equality and develop a pay equity strategy in line with the Agency's principles.

- Explore opportunities to create a portable personal leave scheme to support women in fixed and short-term contracts.
- Ensure access to flexible working arrangements for all employees.
- Identify and build on effective mentoring and women in leadership programs within industry and the community sector.
- Explore the feasibility of an equity office or role in HR departments.
- Commit to improving percentages of women in leadership roles whether by adopting the principle of gender balance representation 40% male, 40% female, 20% unallocated as a minimum or adopting a target of 50% female representation.
- Explore the creation of enabling legislation to ensure equal pay.
- Enhance Paid Parental Leave, including sufficient weeks and superannuation contributions.
- Improve transport options for women to enable them to access jobs, education and training, especially in socio-economically disadvantaged, regional and remote areas.
- Ensure all women have access to digital communication tools and the skills to use them.
- Promote the valuing of caring roles and encourage more men to take on these responsibilities.
- Ensure women and girls in regional, rural and remote communities have access to employment opportunities in their community and on country and work with business to create these opportunities.

*Gender differences in the workplace are colouring how I imagine my future.*

### Housing

- Recognise the importance of housing, including rental housing as a mainstream and national policy objective and place gendered housing issues at the forefront of government policy across Australia.
- Address the key issues in relation to housing including affordability, access, appropriateness (including location and suitability – size, condition, and standards) and availability (long term and crisis accommodation) through innovative partnerships and sector collaboration.
- Explore opportunities, linkages and strategic partnerships to radically increase housing stock. This includes fostering cooperation in solving housing issues utilising a ‘whole-of-system’ housing policy framework.

*We encounter multiple disadvantages that limit our choices – gender and race, gender and disability... People see my skin before they see my gender.*



## 7 Guiding Principles. 4 Starting Actions. Creating a Movement.

- Identify innovative approaches to address housing supply issues including options that support or enable superannuation funds to invest in affordable housing.
- Develop legislative standards and regulation around the key issues in relation to housing, particularly appropriateness and accessibility of all accommodation. These include minimum standards for 'temporary accommodation' during crises; minimum standards for the maintenance of public housing properties; and minimum standards for all tenancies.



- Involve all levels of government in addressing the housing crisis and explore Federal policy levers which shape the market, including tax settings, negative gearing and capital gains tax exemptions.
- Develop training and education opportunities for business and real estate providers on housing issues for women to provide stronger social awareness and better understanding of need.
- Promote good practices and exemplary existing services by distributing information throughout the community services sector on regional options and ensuring services work collaboratively together. This could be partnered with a legal centre to develop shared housing legal agreements; tenant checks to assist older women or women with children to feel comfortable entering shared housing.
- Ensure appropriate and affordable housing for a diverse group of women, including Aboriginal women and CALD and refugee women.
- Amend current planning legislation to mandate inclusionary zoning in all new developments.

### Superannuation

- Recognise in policy and programs the central importance of superannuation equity to women's wellbeing as they age.
- Address the lack of knowledge around superannuation entitlements at the time of relationship breakdowns and require financial advice be given to both parties in divorce proceedings.
- Legislate for superannuation contributions to be included in Paid Parental Leave schemes.
- Explore options to recognise and value caring responsibilities through superannuation contributions for carers based on models such as caring credits systems that have been effective in other jurisdictions.
- Develop targeted, gendered education programs around superannuation for young women delivered via schools, tertiary education, justice centres, mothers and women's groups, and ensure these programs cater to Aboriginal women, CALD women and women with disability.
- Train managers to provide superannuation information to new employees with a gendered lens.
- Remove the minimum income threshold before superannuation begins to accrue.
- Require superannuation be accrued on Centrelink benefits.
- Create a Financial Ombudsman, funded by financial institutions, to act as an independent advocate.



### Who we heard from

To shape this important work, NCOSS heard from over 100 organisations and key leaders and thinkers across government, business, industry bodies, trade unions, academia and the community sector. We also heard directly from people about their own experience.

- 10 ThousandGirl
- ACON NSW
- AbSec
- Address Housing
- Asian Women at Work
- Australian Human Rights Commission
- Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman
- Australian Women's Health Network
- Blue Mountains Women's Health Centre
- Central Coast Community Council
- Coast Shelter
- Community Legal Centres NSW
- Consult Australia
- Corrective Services NSW
- Council on the Ageing
- Country Women's Association of NSW
- Domestic Violence NSW
- Domestic Violence NSW Service Management
- Dressed for Success Sydney
- Dubbo Interagency
- Energy & Water Ombudsman
- Family Law Pathways Network
- Family Planning NSW
- Far West Community Legal Centre
- Gender Matters
- Girl Guides Australia
- Good Shepherd Microfinance
- HESTA
- Interrelate
- Illawarra Forum
- Illawarra Management Taskforce
- Illawarra Women's Health Centre
- Immigrant Women's Speakout of NSW
- Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology
- Justice Connect
- LEEP
- Lismore Women's Health & Resource Centre
- Macquarie University
- Mercy Foundation
- Mid Coast Communities
- Mission Australia
- Moreton Consulting
- Mudgin-Gal Aboriginal Corporation for Women
- Multicultural Advocacy Association of NSW
- Multicultural Youth Advocacy Network
- Muslim Women's Association
- National Women's Alliances
- Australian Women Against Violence Alliance
- Economic Security 4 Women
- Equality Rights Alliance
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance
- National Rural Women's Alliance
- NCOSS Young Women's Roundtable



- Newcastle Women's Alliance
- Northern Rivers Social Development Council
- Northern Rivers Women and Children's Services
- Nova for Women and Children
- Noverak
- NSW Jewish Board of Deputies
- NSW Teachers Federation
- NSW Women's Alliance
- Older Women's Network
- PAYCE
- People With Disability Australia
- Playgroup NSW
- Salvation Army
- Sector Connect
- Seniors Rights Service
- Settlement Services International
- Shelter NSW
- Shop Distributive and Allied Employees' Association
- St Benedicts Centre, Queanbeyan
- St Vincent de Paul NSW
- Staying Home Leaving Violence Broken Hill
- The Family Centre, Tweed
- The Women's Centre for Health and Wellbeing, Albury
- Tenants Union NSW
- UN Women National Committee Australia
- United Voice
- Uniting
- Uniting Orana Far West
- University of Sydney Business School
- University of Technology
- University of Western Sydney
- Urban Growth NSW
- VibeWire
- Western Sydney Community Forum
- Western Sydney Women
- Wilcannia Safehouse
- Women & Family Policy Roundtable
- Women Chiefs of Enterprise International
- Women in Prison Advocacy Network
- Women in Super
- Women NSW
- Women's Health Centre Central Coast
- Women's Health NSW
- Women's Housing Company
- Women's Electoral Lobby
- Women's Leadership Institute Australia
- Workplace Gender Equality Agency
- World Federation of Engineering Organisations
- YES Youth & Family Services, Albury
- Youth Advisory Council
- Youth Action
- YWCA
- YWCA Northern Rivers
- Zonta Club of Central Coast

**7 Guiding Principles. 4 Starting Actions. Creating a Movement.**