

# A *new year* FOR WOMEN

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## **A New Year for Women:**

Economic Empowerment Discussion Paper

## 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.

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## 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 women, women with disability and women living in regional and 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
- Representation of women in work
- 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>1</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>2</sup> Low levels of financial literacy are more common in groups where disadvantage and financial exclusion is prevalent, and this includes women.<sup>3</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>4</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>5</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.

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<sup>1</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>2</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>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p.338.

<sup>4</sup> OECD and INFE, 'OECD/INFE Policy Guidance on Addressing Women's and Girls' Needs for Financial Awareness and Education', 2013, p.3.

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

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>6</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>7</sup>

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>8</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>9</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>10</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.



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

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

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp.1 and 7.

<sup>10</sup> Australian Securities and Investment Commission, 'National Financial Literacy Strategy 2014-2017', August 2014.

## Questions to think about:

- **What are the three most important issues relating to women's financial literacy?**
- **What can government, business, and our sector do to address women's financial literacy?**
- **What three actions would be the most effective at improving women's financial literacy?**

## Representation at Work

The issue of representation at work 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>11</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>12</sup>

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>13</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>14</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>15</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>16</sup> And NSW has the third highest gender pay gap of all the states and territories at 17.9%,<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> NSW Government, 'Women in NSW 2015: Annual Report on Women's Progress Towards Equality in NSW', 2015, p.37.

<sup>12</sup> Goldman Sachs JBWere, 'Australia's Hidden Resource: The Economic Case for Increasing Female Participation', November 2009, p.2.

<sup>13</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, pp.8-10.

<sup>14</sup> Christian Gonzales et al, 'Catalyst for Change: Empowering Women and Tackling Income Inequality', IMF Staff Discussion Note, October 2015, p.7.

<sup>15</sup> ABS, 'Average Weekly Earnings, Australia', Cat. No. 6302.0, November 2015.

<sup>16</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Gender Pay Gap Statistics', March 2016, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> ABS, 'Average Weekly Earnings, Australia', Cat. No. 6302.0, November 2015.

which is especially problematic given Sydney ranks as Australia's most expensive city and the fifth most expensive city in the world.<sup>18</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>19</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>20</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>21</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>22</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.



## Leadership Roles

Although women comprise 46% of the Australian workforce, they occupy a small fraction of senior roles.<sup>23</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>24</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

<sup>18</sup> The Economist Intelligence Unit, 'Worldwide Cost of Living Report', 2015.

<sup>19</sup> ANZ, 'ANZ Women's Report: Barriers to Achieving Financial Gender Equity', July 2015, pp.28-29.

<sup>20</sup> NATSEM, 'The Impact of a Sustained Gender Wage Gap on the Australian Economy', November 2009, p.v.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</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>

<sup>23</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Different Genders, Different Lives', Perspective Paper, February 2016.

<sup>24</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.

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>25</sup> In addition to being fair, diversity in leadership simply makes good business and economic sense.<sup>26</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>27</sup> Similarly, sponsorship is often key to advancement into senior roles and women are less likely to have sponsors.<sup>28</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>29</sup> Half of all mothers experience workplace discrimination at some point during pregnancy, parental leave, or on their return to work.<sup>30</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>31</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 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>32</sup>

Workplace inflexibility and long work hours are major reasons for mothers not returning to full-time work after having children.<sup>33</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>34</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>35</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

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<sup>25</sup> NSW Government, 'Women in NSW 2015: Annual Report on Women's Progress Towards Equality in NSW', 2015, p.56.

<sup>26</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>27</sup> Male Champions of Change, 'Accelerating the Advancement of Women in Leadership: Listening, Learning, Leading', 2013, p.25.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p.26.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.12.

<sup>30</sup> ACTU, 'The Gender Pay Gap Over the Life Cycle', March 2016, p.6.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.12.

<sup>32</sup> ACTU, 'The Gender Pay Gap Over the Life Cycle', March 2016, p.6.

<sup>33</sup> ANZ, 'ANZ Women's Report: Barriers to Achieving Financial Gender Equity', July 2015, p.24.

<sup>34</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.14.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*



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>36</sup> Aboriginal women are also more likely to be carers than non-Aboriginal women, which further compounds their disadvantaged position in the paid workforce.

#### Questions to think about:

- **What are the three most important issues or concerns relating to women's representation at work?**
- **What can government, business, and our sector do to address women's representation at work?**
- **What three actions would be the most effective at improving women's representation at work?**

## 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>37</sup> Domestic and family violence and sexual assault are the main reasons for young women experiencing homelessness.<sup>38</sup> But overall, the main reason women experience homelessness is gender-based economic and financial inequality.<sup>39</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>40</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 related to earlier life experiences such as educational opportunities

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<sup>36</sup> ABS, 'Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers', 2012.

<sup>37</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>38</sup> Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness and Young People', January 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Homelessness Australia, 'Homelessness and Women', April 2013.

<sup>40</sup> ACOSS, 'Poverty in Australia', 2014, pp.10-11.

and work history.<sup>41</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>42</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>43</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>44</sup>

#### Questions to think about:

- **What are the three most important issues relating to women's housing?**
- **What can government, business, and our sector do to address women's housing?**
- **What three actions would be the most effective at improving women's housing?**

## 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>45</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>46</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>47</sup>

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<sup>41</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>42</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>43</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>44</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>45</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Superannuation and Gender Pay Gaps by Age Group', February 2016, p.1.

<sup>46</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, 'Accumulating Poverty? Women's Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle', 2009, p.22.

<sup>47</sup> Ross Clare, 'Equity and Superannuation: The Real Issues', The Association of Superannuation Funds of Australia, 2012, p.3.

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>48</sup> In fact, a third of single retired women on the Age Pension experience poverty.<sup>49</sup> More broadly, 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>50</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>51</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



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<sup>48</sup> Department of Social Services, ‘Pension Review Report’, 2009

<sup>49</sup> Australian Human Rights Commission, ‘Accumulating Poverty? Women’s Experiences of Inequality Over the Life Cycle’, 2009, p.23.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.23.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p.10.

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>52</sup> The risk of large numbers of women facing poverty in retirement must be arrested.

**Questions to think about:**

- **What are the three most important issues relating to women’s superannuation?**
- **What can government, business, and our sector do to address women’s superannuation?**
- **What three actions would be the most effective at improving women’s superannuation?**

## 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.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.21.