

Sydney Roundtables

Tuesday 29 and 30 March 2016

What would NSW look like if all women were economically empowered?



Housing

Women experience particular disadvantage when it comes to housing. The following issues were identified as significantly impacting women in the housing space:

- Access to affordable housing that is also near employment, education, transport and services.
- Appropriate and enough emergency housing that caters to all women, including lesbian and transgender women; older women; Aboriginal women; and young women.
- Affordable housing, including rental, deposits, bonds and the cost of owning a home; particularly for women on retirement incomes, for migrant women and for young women.
- Appropriate and affordable housing for women with larger families, especially women from refugee and CALD backgrounds.
- Fair legislation governing rental properties so that tenants are respected and their needs are recognised.
- Access to information about tenants' rights and responsibilities in multiple languages.

- Accessible housing for women with disability.
- Affordable housing for single women who often have lower incomes and find it more difficult to access rental properties when families are seen as more stable tenants.
- Protections and allowances for women experiencing DV so that they can be safe in their home or move to a safer home more easily.
- Social housing that meets the needs of current demographics as existing stock doesn't match contemporary family sizes or configurations.
- Adequately maintained social housing
- Flexibility of options to cater to different needs and family changes
- Safe housing in which women are not isolated

The following solutions to housing issues were identified:

- A cross sector approach and advocacy for a shared housing, shared equity model

Business

- Cooperative ownership of properties.
- Investment in housing specifically for women.
- Social investment in housing.
- More women in property development and construction.
- Rent to buy schemes.

Government

- Amend current planning legislation to mandate inclusionary zoning in all new developments.
- Amend current legislation to incorporate stronger protections for tenants.
- An analysis of current and future housing needs so that appropriate planning can commence.
- Stronger planning regulations for local and state governments so that developments meet the needs of the community and corruption is prevented.
- Better infrastructure planning so that services, employment and education are easily accessible and housing is located nearby.
- Support people to access deposits, mortgages and property.
- Rental assistance paid direct to owners to reduce and encourage rent.
- Increase public housing stock and crisis housing, including creating a climate for institutional investors.
- [Macarthur Real Estate Project](#) – a working party of both government agencies and community organisations – is a successful project working with real estate agents to support new and existing tenants to maintain their tenancies.

Sector

- Creation of a financial lending intermediary.
- Tailored support for women needing access to emergency housing and rental properties.

- Investigate options for local projects.
- Develop tools to better assess tenants to match them with properties that consider their needs.
- Look at new ways of approaching solutions to lack of housing – for example NDIS, sharing, CO-Ops.
- Adopt a cooperative approach combining housing and support, there is a good example of this working in Queanbeyan.

Women and Work

Women continue to experience disadvantage and discrimination at work, when looking for work, and when acquiring the skills necessary to participate in work. The most important issues facing women in relation to work are:

- The lack of organisational leadership that encourages and normalises flexible working conditions for both women and men.
- The need for education, training and promotion pathways for women into quality jobs that allow them to continue to meet their carer responsibilities.
- Affordable, accessible and high quality childcare is essential for women to participate in work and training opportunities
- Women need mentoring to improve their confidence levels so that they are able to take advantage of the opportunities available to them.
- Unconscious bias in recruitment and promotion panels needs to be addressed as this stops women being chosen for jobs and promotions.
- Women can often experience double disadvantage due to race, sexuality or youth.
- Women still experience structural discrimination and systems that are shaped around a male archetype.
- Women need access to good quality jobs, job security and stable work, not just casual or fixed-term appointments.
- Carer responsibilities impact women's choice and opportunities and this needs to be accounted for. There needs to be better accommodation of this and cultural change to ensure better sharing of caring responsibilities across both men and women.
- Recognition of women's skills, in particular overseas skills and qualifications.
- Gender stereotyping continues to be a barrier to the full participation of women in the workforce.
- Pay equity needs to be tackled, through improved valuing and remuneration of highly feminised industries, through better progression mechanisms and through the recognition of caring skills.

The key solutions to the above issues were identified as:

- All jobs should be flexible and government should champion this, including implementing legislative reform.
- Implement better leave entitlements, including compulsory use it or lose it paid parental leave that incentivises both partners taking leave.

- Women need to be encouraged and enabled to take on leadership roles and this needs to be facilitated by mentoring at key career points.
- Affordable, accessible and high quality childcare would enable more women to fully participate in work and education.
- Legislated quotas should be introduced that address all aspects of diversity including: CALD; disability; Aboriginal; and rural and regional.
- Gender equity officers should be introduced in HR departments.
- Portable leave schemes should be encouraged across workplaces.
- Paid parental leave pay needs to be more adequate.
- Transparency around pay should be encouraged across all industries.
- Programs and campaigns should be introduced to see cultural change in our communities, with a view to properly valuing caring roles – no matter who is taking them on.
- Gender equity accreditation for organisations that takes into consideration multiple disadvantage.

Financial Literacy

There is a particular need to address women's financial literacy as poor financial literacy skills compound women's disadvantage across their lifetime. The issues identified in this area included:

- Women are often conditioned to be afraid of finance but need to clearly understand their financial situation to plan for the present and future.
- A lack of awareness, and sometimes a lack of interest, about money matters and lack of confidence in making financial decisions affects women across their lifetime, making them increasingly vulnerable.
- There is a need for more financial literacy education in schools and post-school options for skill building.
- Financial literacy education needs to encompass simple skills as well as more high level knowledge, i.e. women need to be taught how to read bills, e.g. utility and phone bills, as well as how to access and make decisions around more complex financial services such as life insurance and mutual funds.
- Women need to know their financial rights and responsibilities, including that they have the right to access their own money and to make choices around how they use that money. The link between finances and legal accountability needs to be clear, women need to be aware of their rights and responsibilities, particularly in situations of relationship breakdown.
- We need to change the assumption that women don't handle the finances in a relationship – we need cultural change.
- There is an under engagement of women in decision-making around fiscal matters.
- Women can suffer from financial abuse – financial control can be used as an instrument of violence in relationships

Potential solutions to the problem of women having low levels of financial literacy include:

- Designing better products that are tailored to women experiencing financial hardship (e.g. super accounts, energy bills, credit cards).
- Improving the design and accessibility of products, potentially through better industry regulations.
- Building the capacity of the community and social services sector to offer better financial literacy education and information.
- Develop an awareness campaign and targeted programs to build the economic empowerment of girls.
- Create access to more female financial advisors.
- Education in schools to raise awareness, promoting information, making it accessible, learning basic skills and also more complex and gender lens financial literacy
- Develop a program to improve women's digital literacy
- Brighton and Hove City Council in the UK developed a [Financial Inclusion Strategy](#) to ensure people in its community are supported when they are vulnerable.
- There are particularly vulnerable groups of women who need targeted programs and solutions, including women experiencing domestic and family violence, older women, women with disabilities, CALD and refugee women, Aboriginal women, rural and remote women

Superannuation

Women accumulate much less superannuation than men and this places them at particular risk of poverty as they age. The issues surrounding women and superannuation were identified as:

- Understanding how much superannuation women will need to sustain them in retirement so they don't need to rely on the aged pension.
- Being able to earn enough money so that sufficient superannuation can be accumulated, i.e. continuity in paid employment isn't always possible due to breaks required to attend to carer responsibilities.
- The gender pay gap also results in the superannuation gap.
- Women are frequently in casual or part-time work meaning they earn less across their lifetime and consequently accumulate less superannuation.
- Women who are self-employed or sole-traders are also accumulating less superannuation.
- Women experiencing DV can have patchy employment records and thus less superannuation.
- Barriers to accessing employment will also limit the accumulation of superannuation.
- Barriers to women progressing into leadership positions within an industry or workplace also limit their earning capacity and thus superannuation accumulation.
- The situation for women experiencing multiple disadvantage is even worse e.g. women from CALD backgrounds, young women, women with disability – the multiple disadvantages accumulate to further limit superannuation growth.
- Women can receive transmitted debt from a partner and then be unable to retire.
- Often women are in low paid work, contract or cash payment work and are not earning enough to accrue super.

- Women are not always aware of their rights in a separation to access a partner's super.
- Some women, such as Aboriginal women, have a shorter life expectancy and should be able to access the aged pension earlier. Currently the early access criteria is too strict.
- Women, for the greater part, spend more time outside the workforce taking on caring responsibilities and so are disadvantaged in their retirement income.
- Young women and girls need to be educated about the importance of superannuation and retirement savings at school, particularly in regards to importance and benefits of consolidation and voluntary payments.

Potential solutions to these issues are as follows:

Government

- Having a dedicated Minister for Women advocating on this issue.
- Paid Parental Leave to include superannuation contributions.
- Financial literacy education to include super – at school, for the older and CALD women, to include consolidation, voluntary payments, rights and division of assets.
- Adopt a Caring Credits system similar to other jurisdictions where super is contributed for those taking time out from the workforce for caring responsibilities
- Achieving equal pay for women will help ensure they are achieving equal access to superannuation.
- Remove the threshold to accrue super.
- Lower the retirement age.
- Allow earlier access to early release super and pension for Aboriginal women.
- Increase pension payments to provide a better safety net.
- Introduce legislation to allow pooled super and contributions for couples.

Business

- Encourage men to take on caring roles so that it is not just assumed women will do that – in this way it becomes normalised.
- Include superannuation contributions in paid parental leave.
- Encourage employers to provide education on super when employees start work.
- Encourage employers to support a caring credit scheme and better flexible working arrangements.
- Allow a pooled super system.
- Develop family friendly workplace policies and clauses in EBAs.
- Close awareness gaps with contractors and others around their super obligations.
- Ensure business takes an ethical approach to superannuation options, allowing flexibility and choice.

Sector

- Lobby the government to change legislation mandating superannuation be included in paid parental leave.
- Lobby for fair and effective superannuation in all workplaces.