

Budget 2021 – Older Women

Older women overview

This year's federal Budget contains some measures of direct benefit to older women, with a net positive impact in some policy and service areas (especially aged care), but no improvement in other urgent priority domains (especially housing and mature age employment).

The measures of most interest and value to older women contained in the Budget include: an additional \$17.7b funding to respond to some of the findings of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, including an increase of 80,000 home care packages, increased dementia support, expansion of the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) into home and community care and funding targeted at making aged care inclusive of diversity groups; increased support for carers of older people; and some small but positive changes for women in superannuation.

Overall, however, once again the 2021 Budget is a missed opportunity to improve the lives of older women who face the greatest difficulties: single, older renters totally reliant on JobSeeker or pension payments; those who are homeless; those experiencing elder abuse in the family or community; and those locked out of employment.

Despite an attempt to focus more on women's economic security in this year's Budget, it is also another missed opportunity to significantly reset policy to disrupt the structural accumulation of poverty across the life course that reaches its peak with disastrous consequences for so many women in later life.

What are the priority issues for older women?

Poverty alleviation and economic security

- Poverty accumulates over a lifetime for many women, resulting in overall poorer economic security compared to men in later working life and in retirement. This is an outcome of combined factors across the life course including:
 - the persistent gender wage gap;
 - breaks from the workforce or part time work for family care;
 - the compounding effect of lower wages and career breaks reflected in significant gender differentials in retirement savings such as superannuation;

- combined sexism and ageism resulting in insecure employment for many in later working life; and
- women's greater longevity than men's.
- In 2011, 34 per cent of single women over 60 were in permanent income poverty, compared to 27 per cent of single older men and 24 per cent of couples. More recent HILDA data found similar outcomes for single women over 60.
- In all age groups, except 15-19 years, the labour force participation rate for women is lower than that for men. The age groups with the largest difference included those in the 60-64 years bracket, with a 13.1 per cent difference (51.7 per cent of women compared to 64.8 per cent of men).
- In February 2021, women's full time adult average weekly ordinary time earnings were 86.6 per cent of that of men. This represents a gender pay gap (GPG) of 13.4 per cent. The average gender pay gap increases to its highest point at 17.7 per cent for the 55 years and over age group.
- JobSeeker recipients are increasingly older women. The share of recipients aged 45 years and older increased from 44 to 56 per cent among females and from 34 to 45 per cent among males between 2007 and 2019. The share of recipients aged 60 and older also increased for both genders, with a larger rise among females. By June 2019, 33 per cent of women and 29 per cent of men on JobSeeker aged 55 and above had been on the payment for five or more years.
- As at 29 June 2018, among those aged 65 and over, women were slightly more likely to receive income support payments than men—1.4 million (69 per cent of women in this age group) compared with 1.2 million (64 per cent) of men.
- At retirement, single older women are more likely to rely on the age pension than single older men. In 2011, 71.8 per cent of single age pension recipients were women. Government pensions and allowances are the main source of income for 69.4 per cent of women over 65 not in the labour force, compared with 63 per cent of men. Women are less likely than men to have a superannuation pension or annuity as the main source of income over 65.
- More people are retiring with superannuation as a source of income than in the past, but the increase was greater for men than women. In 2018 – 2019, 36 per cent of retired women relied on their partner's income to meet their living costs at retirement (compared to 7 per cent of retired men).
- Another contributing factor to women's economic status is the incidence of older women stepping out of paid employment or reducing their working hours to become carers for grandchildren, parents, spouses/partners or other family members.

Housing affordability and eradication of homelessness

- In April 2021 the percentage of private rental listings on the national market affordable by a single person on the Age Pension was 0.5 per cent; and by a single person on JobSeeker payment was 0 per cent.
- Older renters are especially vulnerable, with 21% paying more than 60% of their income, including CRA, towards rent.
- Between the 2011 and 2016 Census, the numbers of women aged 55+ experiencing homelessness rose by over 30 per cent.
- 245,000 women aged 55 and over, and 430,000 women aged 45 years and over are at risk of homelessness. Women aged 45-55 have nearly double the risk of homelessness compared to men.

Aged care affordability, availability, quality, safety and choice

- As at June 2020, around 65 per cent of people accessing aged care services were women with more women than men using: permanent residential aged care (67 per cent women); home care (66 per cent women); and Commonwealth Home Support Program, (65 per cent women).
- Women also tend to receive aged services for a longer duration than men.
- Women make up 59% of those accessing respite in residential aged care.
- Within a rationed system of care, the limited availability of Home Care Packages has been a continual problem. As at 30 June 2020, 61,337 people were seeking a home care package at their approved level and 40,744 people had been offered an interim home care package while they waited for a package at their approved level. For people approved at a level 2, 3 or 4 package there was a 12 month, or longer, waiting time for their approved level package. The 2021 Budget has taken steps to finally address this problem.

Respite and support for carers

- Primary carers provide the most assistance to a person with disability with one or more activities of mobility, self-care or communication. Overall, seven out of 10 primary carers are women and there are 148,900 female primary carers aged 55-64 years, more than twice the number of male primary carers of the same age group (57,000).
- Approximately 46.7 per cent of older people receive informal care from a partner. The rate of caring generally increases with age with 20.3 percent of women providing care aged 65 – 74 years (this does drop to 12.1 percent for women aged 75 years and older).
- In 2018 there were 2.65 million carers in Australia. The contribution of carers providing unpaid care in Australia is enormous. The replacement value of unpaid care across the total carer population in 2020 has been estimated to be nearly \$80 billion.

Health Care

- Three in 10 people over the age of 85 and almost one in 10 people over 65 have dementia; dementia is the leading cause of death of Australian women since 2016; and women account for 64.5 per cent of all dementia related deaths. Support for responding to the needs of those with dementia is required in aged care, primary health care, tertiary and acute health care, carer support, community outreach and medical research.
- Dental and oral health care is a major issue for all low-income Australians given that it sits outside Medicare. It is particularly a major issue for the health, wellbeing and quality of life of older Australians, in and outside residential aged care, contributing to the significant problem of malnutrition among older people.
- The COVID-19 pandemic remains a significant threat to the lives of older Australians. Effective public health, public safety and vaccination programs are crucial.

Elder abuse eradication – in the home, community and aged care

- In the recently released Aged Care Royal Commission Report, Care Dignity and Respect, the Commission noted that “The overuse of restrictive practices in aged care is a major quality and safety issue. Urgent reforms remain necessary to protect older people from unnecessary and potentially harmful restraint.”
- A “2018 study of 12,157 residents in 150 aged care facilities in Australia found that 22 percent were taking antipsychotics every day”. In some areas of Australia this was found to be even higher including finding that there were “57,130 prescriptions of antipsychotics prescribed for every 100,000 people over 65 years of age in Yarra, Victoria in 2013-14”.
- In 2014 – 2015, there were 426 allegations of sexual assault reported to the Australian Department of Health, which increased to 790 in 2018-19. Over the same period other alleged assaults on older people in residential aged care also doubled.
- In its report, Prevalence Study for a Serious Incident Response Scheme, KPMG estimated that there were 38,898 resident on resident alleged assaults in 2018–19 and 1,730 incidents of resident on resident unlawful sexual contact. However “the likely number of alleged assaults in residential aged care was between 32,193 and 44,131. The estimated number of incidents of unlawful sexual contact in 2018–19 was 2,520 or 50 per week”.
- Women are more likely than men to be victims of family, domestic and sexual violence. On average, one woman is killed every nine days. Rates of violence are higher for groups that face multiple forms of discrimination, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, older women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds including women on temporary visas, and those in the LGBTIQ+ communities.
- Data collected by elder abuse helplines indicates that approximately 70 per cent of elder abuse victims are women. For example, data collected over 7 years by one helpline shows

that older women have consistently accounted for 72 per cent of calls.¹ The existence of family conflict (43.94 per cent) was the most common risk factor followed by co-habitation (34.64 per cent) with the perpetrator.² In almost 29 per cent of cases the older person was frail or in poor physical health.³ Psychological and Financial abuse were the most common forms of abuse reported.⁴

Budget measures

The following table sets out NFAW priorities for older women against relevant 2021 Budget measures.

Housing	In 2021 Budget?	Analysis (see Housing and Homelessness')
Increase to Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA)	No	Older women are one of the fastest growing groups of homeless people. Those facing homelessness cannot afford private rents without a significant increase to the CRA, as just one part of the systemic response required. Older single women who manage to acquire and maintain rental accommodation are very often experiencing deep financial strain and stress.
Funding increases in affordably, social or community housing	No	In addition to the growing danger of homeless for many low income, non-home owning older women, the availability of affordable, stable, appropriate housing is crucial in order to access home-based aged care.
Aged Care	In 2021 Budget?	Analysis (see Aged Care)
Significant funding required for aged care transformation	Partial, but net positive impact	<p>The Government has agreed to implement most of the Royal Commission's 148 recommendations, with additional funding in this Budget to kick off the implementation.</p> <p>While most of the age care sector and some significant age care advocacy groups have welcomed the funding and news on the Royal Commission recommendations, there has also been a mixed reception to the funding envelope. There are those who continue to be concerned that there will not be transparency and accountability for use of the additional funds. In particular, there is concern that the older person using aged care may not benefit from the funding in their day-to-day care and quality of life, despite the inclusion of an increase in average care minutes for each resident to 200 minutes a day, including 40 minutes of time with a registered nurse.</p> <p>There is also significant criticism that the quantum required to fix aged care based on the Royal Commission recommendations</p>

¹ Joosten, M., Pragma, G., Feldman, P., Brijnath, B., and Dow, B., (2020), Seven Years of Elder Abuse Data in Victoria, August 2020.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

		<p><u>is in the order of \$10b per year</u>, and the Budget measure falls far short of that.</p> <p>The Royal Commission has recommended the creation of a new rights-based Age Care Act. However, it is worrying that the Budget Papers are now referring to ‘values and principles-based Act’ rather than a rights-based Act. This approach is unlikely to guarantee a system free of neglect and abuse.</p> <p>Aged care provides the most powerful example of the intersection between ageism and sexism in our society. It has taken decades to bring governments to acknowledgement of the denial of rights, respect and dignity and the level of neglect and abuse that has permeated the female dominated aged care industry.</p>
Funding to meet the shortfall in Home Care Packages	Yes	<u>80,000 new packages that are predicted to clear waitlists.</u>
Carer support	In 2021 Budget?	Analysis (see Aged Care)
Improved access to respite services	Partial, but net positive impact.	Older women are the majority users of respite services but they are also the majority of carers that need respite services. Respite plays an important role in enabling older women to maintain their health and wellbeing and social connections.
Care Industries support	In 2021 Budget?	Analysis (see Social Infrastructure)
Industry assistance packages targeted to the care industries	Yes	Older women are both significant users of care services and a significant component of the care workforce. The emphasis on ‘Essential Services’ in the Budget is welcome, even if there is much more to be done.
Economic Security	In 2021 Budget?	Analysis (see Social Infrastructure, Social Services and Superannuation)
Innovative measures to assist older women to regain and retain employment in the current economic crisis and beyond	No	<p>There are no additional targeted Budget measures to assist older women into employment, despite the impact of the pandemic on the sectors where older women tend to be mostly employed and the pre-pandemic high and growing levels of unemployment experienced by older women.</p> <p>There are no measures to shift community and employer attitudes and discriminatory practices towards older workers and older women in particular.</p>
Permanent increase in JobSeeker payment rates	Partial, but net positive impact	The \$50 weekly increase to JobSeeker is a welcome move. However, it is not enough to lift unemployed people out of poverty and is missing the crucial component of appropriate indexation arrangements to maintain its value. Older women are living on JobSeeker for longer periods than other groups and are struggling to survive.

Changes to superannuation arrangements that support women	Partial, but net positive impact	There are three welcome changes likely to assist women across the earning and age spectrum to accumulate more superannuation for retirement. These are: the expansion of superannuation payments to workers earning less than \$450 a month with a single employer; the reduction in age to 60 years old for eligibility to make 'downsizer' contributions to superannuation; and the abolition of the Work Test which will improve outcomes for self-funded retirees. Other essential changes were overlooked however, such as payment of superannuation contributions linked to paid parental leave
Expansion of the Pension Loans Scheme	Yes	Low income, home owning older women often struggle to maintain their homes or make necessary adjustments to accommodate factors such as changing mobility needs. This is just one example of how the new arrangement enabling a small lump sum loan against the security of the home might assist older women to realise the equity in their homes without losing housing security.
Health Care	In 2021 Budget?	Analysis (see Health and Aged Care)
Protection from communicable disease, especially COVID-19	Yes	The additional funding announced for the vaccine roll out and COVID-related health services is an important inclusion in the Budget for older women.
Improved dementia services	Yes	\$229m allocated to dementia care was welcomed by dementia advocates. It addresses significant needs in aged care, but also provides for important funding in healthcare, carer support, system navigation and a nationally consistent worker screening register and code-of-conduct for all care sector workers including aged care workers.
Improved access to dental and oral health care for older people	No	Improved access to dental and oral health care in the community and within residential aged care remains a crucial missing link in health care for older people. Given the poor access not only to dental care, but dental and oral hygiene in parts of the residential care sector this remains an egregious denial of the Right to Health.
Elder Abuse	In 2021 Budget?	Analysis (see Housing and Homelessness, and Violence Against Women and Children)
Funding to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • expand the SIRS to home and community care • increase speed and impact of government initiatives under the National Plan of Action to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians, in particular the release of findings 	Yes, partial but net positive	An initial \$14 million will be allocated to expand the Serious Incident Response Scheme (SIRS) from residential care into home and community care from 1 July 2022. This will provide greater protections to more than 1 million consumers receiving home and community aged care services. It is disappointing though that work under the National Plan to Respond to the Abuse of Older Australians [Elder Abuse] 2019-2023 was not fast tracked. Improving community awareness and furthering safeguards against elder abuse have become more urgent in the current pandemic and accompanying economic crisis.

<p>on a National Elder Abuse Prevalence Study</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve legal, community and health services to older women experiencing elder abuse • raise community awareness about this issue and the rights of older people to be safe from abuse. 		
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Recommendations

For recommendations, see relevant sections of this Gender Lens on the Budget 2021-2022.