

Portfolio Overviews & Recommendations

The National Foundation for Australian Women makes the following observations and recommendations.

Fiscal outlook

The Australian economy is forecast to slow down from 2023-24 with employment growth slowing and the unemployment rate rising slightly. The positive side of this is expectation of slowing inflation and increasing wages growth, culminating in a return to positive growth for real wages in 2023-24 after three consecutive years of decline.

Declines in real wages to-date are estimated to have been larger for women, who are disproportionately impacted by inflation and more likely to work in industries with lower wages growth such as education and health care.

The 2023-24 Budget is forecasting a budget surplus in 2023-24, and while the outlook for net government debt remains substantial, it has been revised down significantly compared to the October 2022 Budget. Some of this revision comes from persistently high commodity prices, but there is also \$74.1 billion in upward revisions of income tax receipts from 2022-23 to 2026-27.

While men on average tend to pay more income tax than women, the rate of growth in income tax paid by women has been faster in recent years than for men. Continued faster rates of growth in the amounts of income tax paid by women are expected to contribute to the government's forecast growth in income tax receipts, which will be funding spending on numerous government services.

Machinery of government for women

Like last year's initiatives, the initiatives outlined in the 2023-24 Women's Budget Statement (WBS) are individually very welcome. In fact, it is fair to say that (Defence aside) the Government has made good on its commitment to focus its Budget initiatives on gender equality. However, a list of measures is not a plan. Major Budget outlays outlined in the WBS are not embedded in systemic reforms and are often less than what is needed. Systemic reform and adequate levels of funding await underpinning structural reform to the tax system.

The Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) analyses in the WBS reflect a public service just beginning to grapple with defining and breaking down the key steps and processes of GRB and then fitting them into formal budget and Cabinet procedures. Considerably more grappling is required, together with the funds to support it. NFAW accepts that both the 2023-24 and the proposed 2024-25 WBS analyses are transitional. However, revenue as well as outlays should be included in the next budget, and thereafter the analysis should be genuinely budget-wide.

NFAW **recommends** that revenue as well as outlays should be included in the next budget, and that thereafter the analysis should be genuinely budget-wide.

NFAW is concerned that OfW may be inadequately funded to address its workload for 2023-24 and outyears and **recommends** that in that case additional should be made available.

We strongly **recommend** that the Government review and increase the level of recurrent funding for the SDC and the AHRC more generally.

Impact on young women

The post-pandemic world is an era of insecurity and financial stress for young women in Australia. There is an urgent need for the experiences and needs of young women to be a focus in policy development, and for policy creation to implement an intersectional gender lens on policies that will disproportionately impact young women.

There was some encouraging focus on young people in the 2023-2024 Budget, particularly in cost-of-living measures for vulnerable people. There is also a notable language shift from trickle-down economics towards community-based support, which is welcomed. However, due to fiscal restraints, there are notable gaps in the provision of short- and long-term measures needed to support young women's economic security, health and safety.

Patterns of intergenerational inequity can be addressed or solidified through policy. Given the challenging economic climate, the cost-of-living crisis, and a tax structure that benefits the already wealthy, there is strong potential in investing in progressive infrastructure. Investing in young women can lay a foundation for our national future.

Many aspects of the Budget have an impact on young women, including housing, cost of living, climate and environment, health, social services, violence against women, taxation and health policies. NFAW's analysis in this section focuses on six key areas: youth policy, employment, social benefits, education and training, health and violence against women.

NFAW **recommends** that the Government:

- Include an intersectional gendered lens within the national Youth Engagement Model to ensure that young women's needs and experiences are addressed.
- Ensure that adequate support and guidance is provided to Youth Advisory Group members to participate.
- Ensure that there are accountability measures and clear measurable goals within the Youth Engagement Model and the Office for Youth. support female-dominated industries to boost wages and living conditions.
- Support men into female dominated industries.
- Develop a long-term plan for youth employment within the Youth Engagement Model, with an ongoing strategy on job creation, including in female-dominated industries, and measures to address workforce gender segregation.
- Further increase the rate of Youth Allowance, Abstudy, Austudy and Jobseeker to support young people to meet their costs of living.

- Apply an intersectional gender lens to vocational education and training and higher education measures to ensure equitable access and participation of young women.
- Support young women into male dominated fields and young men into female dominated fields.
- Ensure healthcare, including mental health and reproductive health care is accessible to all women.
- Continue to implement all 55 recommendations in the *Respect@Work* report.
- Create a universal definition of intimate partner violence in youth and adolescent relationships.

Impact on older women

The 2023-24 Budget, and notably the narrative that underpinned parts of it, can be viewed as a positive step forward for recognition of some important issues confronting older women. It also moderately raises the visibility of older women, in general. The stand-out new measures included in the Budget with the potential to improve the lives of older women – especially those on low incomes – are in aged care (where women predominate), healthcare and income support.

NFAW **recommends** that:

- The Productivity Commission undertake an inquiry into the economic costs of ageism, ensuring that the intersection between ageism and sexism is clearly addressed.
- The Government drive a public and workplace conversation about ageing and ageism, promoting contemporary, positive narratives about ageing, older people in all their diversity and an ageing society.
- There be no further slippage in implementing the aged care reform agenda, based around a comprehensive response to the Royal Commission’s recommendations.
- A new human rights-based Aged Care Act be drafted and consulted as soon as possible, placing older people at the centre of the system.

Impact on migrant and refugee women

Overall, the Budget provided measures towards the inclusion of migrant and refugee communities and especially the safety of migrant and refugee women on temporary visas. It is important to note that some of these measures will come with further changes yet to be seen. Despite acknowledging the specific needs and vulnerabilities that migrant and refugee women on temporary visas experience in Australia, these small-scale changes do not provide long-term security or pathways to escape violence to all.

NFAW recommends the Government:

- Embed a gender lens in the Australian migration system to ensure equity and access.

- Develop data collection and research that reflects diverse experiences and barriers to migrant and refugee women’s safety, health and economic participation.
- Level the current Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot (TVP) payment to the Escaping Violence Payment (EVP).
- Expand the access to family violence provision within the *Migration Regulations 1994* to all women on temporary visas.
- Develop culturally appropriate training to equip and support women’s safety services to assist migrant and refugee women suffering or at risk of DFV.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and the Voice

NFAW endorses the Voice, and we support the call from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to be active participants in decision-making. The Wiyi Yani U Thangani National Summit, held the same week as the Budget was released, has said: “As First Nations women and girls, we sing out, we know we have a right to our voice and to be responded to. We are not invisible or silent—you cannot ignore us.” We support the call for a National Framework for Action and for recognition and investment in the Institute for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality to ensure that all policies that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait women are developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

NFAW **recommends** that the Government commit to supporting the development and implementation of a National Framework for Action and recognise and invest in the Institute for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality, as called for by the Wiyi Yani U Thangani National Summit.

Women with disabilities

Women with disabilities are impacted by measures across all portfolios, and specific measures are discussed in more detail in each portfolio analysis of the Gender Lens. Additional comment highlights employment and the National Disability Insurance Scheme, noting that women with disability in Australia are significantly disadvantaged in employment in relation to access to jobs, in regard to remuneration for the work they perform, and in the types of jobs they gain.

Taxation

The taxation measures are most notable for the absence of reforms to support a more equitable distribution of income in the Australian community. The effects of bracket creep are likely to be felt disproportionately by women, but the stage three tax cuts have not been scaled back, and low to middle income earners will feel the effects of the expiry of the Low Middle Tax Offset when they lodge their next tax returns. There are some gains from corporate taxation and the Petroleum Resource Rent Tax (PRRT), but these reforms should have gone further. There are measures to support energy efficiency and build-to-rent housing through the tax system.

NFAW recommends:

- The stage three tax cuts due to come into effect from 1 July 2024 must be reviewed and restructured to correct bracket creep at lower tax levels, while reining in the excessive tax reduction planned for taxpayers earning more than \$120,000.
- The PRRT measures do not go far enough. In the consultation phase of the PRRT the government must ensure that the final design ensures that the tax payable is commensurate with the benefits that these corporations derive from exploiting Australian natural resources.

Superannuation

The major superannuation measures are the introduction of an additional tax on superannuation holdings over \$3m and the requirement that employers must pay superannuation to funds on a payday cycle instead of quarterly in arrears. Both of these measures improve the equity of the superannuation system. The Government has not introduced any requirement for superannuation to be paid on parental leave, whether paid by the Government or employers. This measure would assist primary carers, the majority of whom are women, and would send a message that parents on parental leave are making a contribution.

NFAW recommends:

- The proposal to impose an additional tax on superannuation balances over \$3m is supported, however a condition of release must be provided to ensure that a person affected by the change can withdraw surplus funds from the superannuation system.
- The Government should mandate payment of superannuation guarantee on parental leave, both Commonwealth funded Parental Pay and for Paid Parental Leave attached to the Parental Leave provisions in the Fair Work Act and Superannuation Guarantee legislation.

Climate change and energy

The 2023-24 Budget is contradictory on climate change and energy, with some welcome steps undermined by ongoing support for fossil fuels and missed opportunities for fair taxation. Energy measures dominate, including a significant bill relief package for people on low incomes that will particularly assist women. The Government is also recognising the importance of home energy efficiency/energy performance, and stepping back into this vital part of the energy transition and cost reduction. On balance, however, climate change was not a centrepiece of this year's budget, particularly from a gender and social equity perspective.

NFAW recommends that the Government:

- Accelerate climate change mitigation funding and policymaking to limit global heating to 1.5 degrees on pre-industrial levels, including committing to no new fossil fuel investments.

- Provide longer-term financial support to women beyond the one-off energy relief package, by further raising JobSeeker and other working age payments.
- Deliver a large-scale home energy upgrades program for low-income households, including expanded upgrades of social housing, and policy and budgetary measures to introduce minimum rental standards across all states and territories.
- Increase recovery-stage funding to help women cope with the financial, housing and safety/wellbeing impacts of disasters.
- Recognise climate change as a family violence risk and develop policy and funding accordingly.
- Ensure women benefit economically from industry transition plans, energy systems change and the wider decarbonising economy.
- Deliver deeper taxation reforms across fossil fuel production/use, superannuation and other areas to fund the measures identified above.

Infrastructure

The announcement of the 90 day review of the [Infrastructure Investment Program](#) meant that modest infrastructure expenditure could be anticipated for the 2023-24 Budget. The Government has indicated publicly it is committed to the \$120b already forecast for investments in the pipeline, and identifies the review as prioritising projects based on their contribution to economic growth and productivity.

Infrastructure investment in this budget consists of replenishing the Major Projects Business Case fund, investing in a new National Urban Policy (no details but perhaps a rehashing of an earlier Labor Government in [2011](#)), and programs for urban planning and road safety.

A contribution of \$3.4b to the costs of infrastructure for the Brisbane Olympic and Paralympic Games is one of the more significant investments for the 2023-24 budget for the portfolio. It is joined by investment in urban infrastructure in Macquarie Point in Hobart, including the controversial development of an AFL stadium, as well as matched funding for a stadium upgrade in Launceston.

NFAW **recommends** that:

- The Infrastructure Investment Program and the Major Projects Business Case should include a gender lens when prioritising infrastructure investment and conducting a cost-benefit analysis.
- The guidelines for the Thriving Suburbs and the Precincts and Partnerships Programs should specifically reference the needs of women. The Cities and Suburbs Unit should ensure that a gender lens is incorporated in the work it will do.
- The terms of reference for the new Ministerial advisory forum for urban policy should include livability for women and at least one appointee to the forum should have experience in urban planning for women.

- A gender lens analysis of the AHL services and housing infrastructure, with a focus on care and women's leadership as outlined in the [Wiyi Yangi U Thani Summit Communique 2023](#) is recommended.
- Disaggregated patronage levels by gender should be included in the AHL annual report.
- A differentiated gender lens analysis (accounting for Indigeneity, age and road use patterns) could better reveal the differential needs for women in road safety and inform road safety investments and grant programs.

Housing

The 2023-24 Budget shows some acknowledgement of the cost-of-living crisis via modest increases to Commonwealth Rent Assistance and changes to some income support payments. While this is a pleasing first step, there is no sign of the structural changes required to address the poverty that many Australian women face as housing costs escalate across the country. A key impression given by this Budget is of a government focused on market responses to housing poverty, despite the failure of these mechanisms in recent decades. Deepened commitment to lift the most disadvantaged households out of poverty via investment in income support and commitment to build social and affordable housing to address the national social housing wait list of nearly 200,000 households is needed moving forward.

NFAW recommends that:

- The universal need for housing and the role of housing as an essential social and care infrastructure are placed at the centre of the forthcoming *National Housing and Homelessness Plan*.
- JobSeeker and Commonwealth Rent Assistance Rates are raised to lift these households out of poverty. Commonwealth Rent Assistance should be indexed to recognize regional variability in housing costs.
- The Government commit to directly funding sufficient social housing units to address the current waitlist and projected need.
- New social and affordable housing and associated communities be designed to withstand climate stresses, including urban heat.
- Taxation settings that stimulate the cost of housing in Australia be removed, including negative gearing and capital gains tax discounts.
- Where housing development attracts a tax benefit, recipients should provide social benefit in the form of social and affordable housing.

Social services

Women make up over half of welfare recipients in Australia. The Government is committed to advancing gender equity as a national priority. This priority is reflected in this year's

Budget. NFAW welcomes the broad range of modest initiatives aimed at the most the most vulnerable, the majority of whom are women.

These measures include support for single parents, the unemployed, energy fee relief, investment in Medicare for those on low-incomes, increased rent assistance, and increased investment in housing. These measures are welcome but do not go far enough. Since the 1980s there have been many attempts at welfare reform and small-scale changes, but the system is still designed to disincentivise people from applying for income support. The net effect has generally been to drive women of all ages on income support to poverty – older unemployed women, homeless women, sole parents and their children, young women in precarious employment, female renters, women leaving domestic violence, and women with disabilities including those who cannot access payments.

A range of investments were made in the NDIS and NDIA: this funding may result in improved administrative systems and participant experience. However, the growth target and mention of work to encourage participants to spend within their plan limits has raised concerns within the disability community and sector around whether NDIS participants will have adequate resources available to them in the future.

NFAW recommends:

- Significant further increases to working-age Centrelink payments, to raise them above poverty rates.
- Annual indexation be applied to social security payments based on wage growth, as per the Age Pension.
- Inclusion of Parenting Payment Single in future payment increases.
- Abolition of the Stage 3 Tax Cuts, and other reductions in revenue that disproportionately benefit high income earners, at the expense of wider social security reform.
- Full implementation of all recommendations in the [Australia's Child Support Scheme](#) report, including the addition of a family violence and financial abuse lens to the child support system.
- Sustained commitment to consultation with disability advocates and organisations before implementing NDIS reform that may limit women's access to the scheme, or reduce the support available to current participants, and an application of a gender lens to all decisions.
- In relation to ParentsNext (and in support of the Brotherhood of St Laurence submission to the ParentsNext Inquiry noted above):
 - reinstate funding for the replacement program
 - resource the translation of key documents – including Participation Plans – for participants not proficient in written English
 - cease using the term jobless to describe the circumstances of those engaged in the full-time care of young children

- reframe the program to respect the choice of mothers to elect to stay home with their children in the earliest years
- reorient the investment in ParentsNext to create an enabling pre-vocational program that assists parents with young children to strengthen their prospects of work and economic security. Key elements to include:
 - vocational guidance (attuned to local labour markets)
 - opportunities for training, education and skill building
 - engagement with local employers to expand family-friendly employment
 - access to early learning and care
 - flexible support and referrals to complementary services where needed
- incentivise providers to reach out to families experiencing disadvantage and sustain their engagement
 - reframe the current one-way notion of mutual obligation as mutual accountability, to foster reciprocity
 - focus on advancing parents' aspirations and strengthening their capabilities and opportunities
 - provide flexibility for providers to respond to the distinctive needs of individual circumstances and of different groups of parents
 - appoint organisations with the expertise and capacity to engage their community
 - preference organisations that co-locate with early learning and care centres or family and community hubs, to enable easy linkages to complementary supports
 - involve parents and providers in co-design of the next iteration
 - establish local and national governance structures to enable parents, and employers, providers, government and local communities to report on their experiences, monitor system performance against goals and identify opportunities for improvements, and
- commission regional communities of practice, supported by continuous improvement mechanisms, where providers share learnings and use data to drive improvement.

Early childhood education and care

Apart from the Australian Government's announcement on 1 May of [an additional \\$18 million](#) to boost the supply of child care places in areas with limited supply, there were no other new measures for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the 2023-24 Budget. Key measures to be implemented from 1 July 2023 were announced in the [October 2022-23 Budget](#), including lifting the 85 per cent child care subsidy to 90 per cent for low income

families, smoothing the subsidy taper for all families and increasing the number of hours of ECEC that First Nations families can access to 36 hours without meeting the activity test.

NFAW supports measures that improve the affordability, accessibility and quality of early childhood education and care. In particular, we advocate for:

- implementation of any integrity measures that do not place women and children under financial duress and maintain standards of natural justice and procedural fairness
- better pay and supply of ECEC educators (including training, recruitment and retention measures)
- better access to ECEC, especially for families living in disadvantaged, regional or remote areas of Australia
- more outside school hours and vacation care places for working families
- children's access to two years of preschool/kindergarten before school
- more affordable ECEC for families, moving to a free, universal ECEC system
- support for early childhood development (including universal health and wellbeing support for parents and children, high quality ECEC, paid parental leave, flexible and supportive workplaces).

In addition to considering moving to a 90 per cent child care subsidy, the Productivity Commission review and/or the ACCC inquiry should consider ways of increasing affordability and accessibility of ECEC, including:

- whether the activity test should be removed (whether it is an incentive/disincentive for families and women, in particular, to work more days/hours)
- whether the activity test is preventing disadvantaged or vulnerable children (not eligible for the additional child care subsidy) from accessing affordable ECEC
- whether the fortnightly limit of 100 hours of subsidised care is adequate or whether it operates as a financial disincentive for women wanting to work more days/hours
- services' fee charging practices, including the length and flexibility of sessions of care
- changes to the Government's hourly fee cap, whether it is sufficient and operating as intended to place downward pressure on child care fees
- whether an hourly fee cap increase or wage subsidy is needed to fund educator wage increases

ECEC workforce requirements to increase access to ECEC (including ways of boosting training, recruitment and retention).

Education - schooling

The Government has clearly set its direction for school funding with its commitment to fully fund every school in Central Australia so that it reaches 100 per cent of Schooling Resource Standards. This sends a clear message to every Australian school. It also points to a

recognition by the Government of a need for more resources to ensure that schools can only operate effectively if they have sufficient resources and appropriate staffing levels.

Budget funding for the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan adds further support to the view that a strong teacher workforce is necessary to meet all students' needs. A workforce that is fully supported and well-resourced is central to the schooling of Australia's children.

NFAW **recommends** that Schooling Resource Standards be implemented across all schools in Australia.

Education – vocational education and training

The Budget contains initiatives aimed at achieving a more equal distribution of women's participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) across areas of study and in apprenticeships and traineeships. The Budget does not include any major initiatives for the training needs of workers in the care economy, that is, the Health, Aged Care and Disability Services Sector. The majority of these workers are women, and the Budget focus for these workers is on increasing wages.

NFAW **recommends** that:

- The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development should set long term objectives for reforming the VET system so that it promotes gender equity at all intersections of disadvantage or difference.
- The allocation of funds to TAFE and VET providers for fee-free places should be conditional on achieving gender equity targets at all intersections of disadvantage or difference.
- Gender impact assessments should be mandatory for all Commonwealth-funded VET programs.
- The reinvigoration of Foundations Skills training for vulnerable Australians should include measures to enhance women's re-entry to the workforce with support tailored to meet the identified needs of women at all intersections of disadvantage – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse women, and LGBTIQ+ groups.

Education – higher education

The 2023-24 Budget contains very little for higher education other than a modest increase in funding to support the creation of 4,000 new places over the next four years and some changes to work limits for international students. This year's budget overlaps the Australian Universities Accord, which is reviewing the higher education system with a view to overhauling university funding. It will deliver its final report in December 2023, possibly leading to a significant impact on the 2024-25 Budget.

NFAW **recommends** that the Government:

- Recognise the pivotal role of higher education in the development of society.

- Acknowledge the role of higher education in the transformation of the Australian economy to carbon neutrality.
- Restore *per capita* funding through the Commonwealth Grants Scheme to enable universities to provide quality teaching and research. Appropriate funding will allow universities to avoid a return to unsustainable funding models based on international student fees. Appropriate funding will also end the universities' dependency on casual staff and encourage them to institute fair employment agreements.
- Increase Austudy payments to all students with the peripheral costs associated with university education such as travel. Create a supplementary payment for childcare costs in recognition of the fact that women bear most of the costs involved. Create additional scholarships/fellowships to support early career researchers.

Employment – the care sector

At long last, government has begun to grapple with both the inequities and the serious labour supply issues in the care economy. It has proposed that this work be guided by a strategic approach, rather than by the one-off incentive payments NFAW has criticised in the past. The October 2022 Budget (Budget Paper No 2, p. 172) provided funding to support the development of a National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy, defined to include aged care, disability care and support, care for veterans and early childhood education and care. The 2023-24 Budget commits further funding for the development of the Strategy.

The work of carers has been repeatedly undervalued by both industrial tribunals and budgets in the past, and new cases are inevitable if the sector is to function in future. The \$515.0 million package for aged carers in this Budget only addresses a part of that historic undervaluation.

Implementing a National Strategy for the Care and Support Economy will depend on implementing broad and strategic tax reform.

Employment – paid parental leave

NFAW welcomed the introduction of the Paid Parental Leave Act 2010 amendments in 2023 as a significant step towards a good practice paid parental leave scheme. However, measures remain outstanding on this decade-long unfinished business.

As expected, this Budget has not taken any further steps forward and is silent on new paid parental leave initiatives. Key outstanding issues include payment of superannuation of parental leave pay, ensuring men are encouraged to share unpaid care work, better integration with the Fair Work Act, and commitment to the International Labour Organization Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (ILO 183).

NFAW will continue to call on the federal Government to pursue the important reforms towards a good practice scheme.

NFAW **recommends** the following:

- As the overall length of paid parental leave periods increase to 2026, fathers and partners should be actively encouraged to access the scheme through effective and targeted campaigns, and in particular by increasing the ‘use it or lose it’ period.
- As the scheme extends to 26 weeks by 2026, concurrent leave should be restricted to two weeks, while the reserved period should extend to six weeks for each parent.
- The Government should increase the rate of pay either to wage replacement or the average weekly ordinary time earnings, whichever is the lesser.
- Superannuation Guarantee payments should be included on parental leave payments. The Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992 should be amended to include Paid Parental Leave as ordinary time earnings.
- The NES should be amended to provide that a person who has been employed for 10 out of the preceding 13 months has the right to return to work at the same or an equivalent position as the position they held before going on leave.
- The Australian Government should formally ratify the ILO Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183).
- The Government should regularly review the legislation to assess progress towards the objects of the Act.

Health

Health was a major focus of the 2023-24 Budget.

The Australian Government will invest \$5.7 billion over 5 years to enhance healthcare accessibility and affordability. This includes tripling bulk billing incentives for consultations with general practitioners for low-income patients and children, expanding the workforce incentive program to employ more nurses and allied health professionals in general practices, and improving access to primary care after hours for homeless individuals and multicultural communities.

Women will benefit from the increased bulk billing incentives as they are more likely to be receipt of Government assistance and to be responsible for the health care of children, however NFAW is concerned that the new incentives will undermine the universality of Medicare and ultimately undermine the health and wellbeing of Australian women.

Australian women are more likely to experience poor mental health than men, with young women aged 20-25 experiencing the highest levels and the Budget failed to substantially increase funding for mental health. Since the 2020 Productivity Commission Report called for a \$2.4 billion annual increase in services, only around \$500 million additional funding per year has been provided by the Commonwealth.

NFAW **recommends** that the Government:

- Maintain its commitment to universal Medicare, and increase rebates for all GP consults.
- Substantially increase funding for mental health care to address significant unmet need for services that disproportionately impacts women.

- Substantially and permanently increase funding for preventative health care.
- Continue its investments in minimising harm from alcohol and drugs and services for new and expecting parents beyond the current two years of funding committed.

Health – reproductive health

The Budget takes some small steps forward on reproductive health and rights. For example, as women tend to have more complex and undiagnosed reproductive health issues, more time with their GP will help to improve their reproductive health (see Health). There is some welcome increased investment in support for the treatment of endometriosis and for Indigenous women’s management of pregnancy.

Yet more remains outstanding, and the Budget is largely silent on reproductive health issues. To some extent, this is understandable since there is an ongoing Senate Committee investigating the next steps, but a down-payment on some of the most urgent concerns should have been included. Funding in the Budget is inadequate to address the needs.

NFAW **recommends** that the Government should:

- Mandate the provision of, or referral to, reasonably accessible abortion services by medical professionals and pharmacists.
- Investigate and provide national leadership on nurse practitioner-led access to medical and surgical abortions and the parameters that might be appropriate to facilitate this.
- Provide leadership for harmonised laws across each State and Territory on legal access to abortion.
- Commit to further investment in the diagnosis and treatment of endometriosis.
- Considerably scale up and maintain the Birthing on Country investment across the forward estimates.

Aged care

Several funding announcements were made in the Aged Care portfolio which will have a net positive impact for women. The aged care measures in the 23-24 Budget continue to support significant ongoing reforms of this sector of the care economy arising from recommendations in the [Final Report of the Aged Care Royal Commission in 2021](#). Expenditure supports a 15 per cent pay increase for the aged care workforce, increased quality of care indicators and regulatory framework measures, and 9,500 additional Home Care Packages to reduce the waiting list. Funding has also been allocated to support improved access to culturally safe aged care on Country for First Nations older people. Notably, the Government will postpone the commencement of the Support at Home Program to 1 July 2025 in response to stakeholder concerns. Increased funding for respite care has not been allocated in the Budget.

NFAW **recommends**:

- Increasing funding for respite care services to ensure they are available and accessible to support unpaid caregivers, who are predominantly women, and play a crucial role in providing care for ageing family members.
- Prompt action to address the concerns that have been raised by stakeholders in the Support at Home Program to ensure the program is effectively developed, involving input from all relevant parties. Delay or postponement could prolong service gaps for older people.
- Wage pressures and training needs in the sector remain to be addressed; and despite positive first steps, there is a need for continued funding allocated to address barriers for First Nations people.

Reducing violence against women

The 2023-24 Budget introduces two new measures expressly aimed at reducing violence against women: the women's safety measure, and the women's safety – First Nations measure. These measures provide modest additional funding to the \$1.7b announced in last year's October budget. Pending the forthcoming release of the new action plan (the first of two to be released under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women 2022-23), as well as the first stand-alone Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, it is difficult to ascertain if the 2023-24 measures are plugging the right gaps. That said, we welcome the acknowledgment that additional new funding will be needed to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan, and are also pleased to see a first vital step in protecting women on temporary visas. Our key concerns are that the new plans be clear and transparent in how funds are being allocated, and that the Commonwealth Government takes a stronger leadership role in ensuring access and equity in service delivery, and in building capacity in the specialist workforce.

NFAW recommends:

- That further urgent investment is made to expand the capacity of specialist women's services to meet the needs of women and children escaping violence. Funding must be adequate and predictable, to enable services to be safely and fairly staffed.
- That the forthcoming action plan and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander action plan under the National Plan make clear how funding is being allocated, and that funding is assured over the course of the action plan, particularly for services.
- The development and implementation of a national approach to funding to ensure equity in accessing services, so that each person can get the same level of response wherever they are. Nationwide mechanisms need to be put in place to enable government recognition of the true cost of service delivery to ensure services can provide salaries that recognise the value of staff and the complexity of working in specialist domestic violence services.
- That national peak representative bodies be better enabled and supported to carry out their roles in domestic, family and sexual violence services across Australia. The absence of federal government support – compared to other sectors – sends a

strong signal to the sector that is inconsistent with a commitment to improving the safety of women and girls.

- The development of a national workforce strategy to ensure cohesive and coordinated approaches to building workforce capacity and capability. Recognised national standards, accreditation and quality assurance mechanisms need to be developed to properly articulate - and modulate - the level of professionalism within the sector and to assist in fair and adequate wage-setting processes.
- A national service and worker census - similar to the Victorian specialist family violence workforce census - should be undertaken at regular intervals.
- Investment in First Nations led programming and services and systemic policy reforms informed by the key priorities put forward by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and peak bodies.
- That the Australian Government adopt the recommendations from the *Blueprint for Reform: Removing Barriers to Safety for Victims/Survivors of Domestic and Family Violence who are on Temporary Visas*.
- The development of sector-driven standards to apply to private security providers working within the DFV sector, with the aim of rewarding and encouraging ethical behaviour to keep women and children safe.
- That funding be allocated, to undertake work to assist the sector with reviewing and monitoring security and other services so that organisations and individuals seeking to purchase services from the private security sector can have independently reviewed information, and a safe space for organisations and individuals to share and report their experiences of using private security services.

International development

International development spending has nominally increased by \$117 million from last year to a total of \$4.768 billion, and the budget papers commit to nominal increases for the next 3 years before [aid will be tied to inflation](#) (estimated at 2.5 per cent) from FY2026-27 for the following decade. Due to an increase in Australia's Gross National Income (GNI), our ratio of GNI to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) has dropped to just 0.19 per cent - far below the globally agreed target of 0.7 per cent. By contrast, the Government will continue to beat their target for Defence spending, which [increased to 2.04 per cent of GDP](#).

The budget papers outline a number of renewed or expanded gender equality programs, a promising investment in building the development capability of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and a previously announced \$3.5 million fund for LGBTIQ+ rights – the first of its kind for DFAT. The papers also confirm DFAT's landmark commitment in the October 2022 budget update that programs over \$3 million would be required to have gender equality as a principal or significant objective against the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Marker. Planning for implementation commenced at the point of announcement, and, if implemented robustly, this structural change has the potential to significantly increase the number of aid programs addressing gender equality, and thereby

also the amount of Australia's international assistance funding to gender equality. This would be transformative for Australia's international development program.

NFAW **recommends** that the Australian Government:

- Commit to ongoing and increased funding in real terms for the international development budget, including gender equality programming, to meet our international commitments and avoid a backsliding in our ratio of Gross National Income to Overseas Development Assistance (ODA/GNI) ratio as Australia's GNI continues to grow.
- Increase funding to constituency-based organisations, such as women's right organisations to 5 per cent of Overseas Development Assistance (ODA), and continue to listen to the priorities of local women in determining development investment.
- Continue to improve the transparency of the aid programs and Development Budget Summary by providing further broken down data on gender, disability and social inclusion spending and reporting at least annually on gender equality commitments (\$3 million and 80 per cent targets) and DAC gender equality policy markers.
- Ensure non-ODA commitments in the Pacific are held to high standards of performance, transparency and safeguarding.
- Ensure new roles established through the allocation of new funding to DFAT capability include a focus on building on intersectional power analysis, First Nations and gender expertise, as well as development program design, procurements and monitoring and evaluation.
- Require feminist analysis of all development finance mechanisms including non-ODA finance to understand the potential flow on impacts on those experiencing inequality and marginalisation.
- Ensure that DFAT takes an intersectional feminist approach to the International Gender Strategy to highlight the centrality of gender equality to all areas of foreign policy, including international development and foreign policy which is grounded in First nations values and worldviews.
- Build on and apply language around systems of power to invest in development programs that collectively drive systemic change towards gender equality.