

<b>Key Policy in discussion</b>	<b>IMPACT ON YOUNG WOMEN</b>
<b>Portfolio and/or agency</b>	<b>Multi-Agency</b>
<b>Date Issued</b>	<b>20 May 2023</b>
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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.

## **Youth Policy**

### **The Youth Policy Budget**

In the October 2022 Budget the Government the Australian Government committed \$10.5 million for a new Youth Engagement Model, to be co-designed with a Youth Steering Committee comprised of 15 young people. The model aimed to ensure young people from diverse and at-risk cohorts would be represented in consultations and engagement with government, including First Nations young people. The funding was intended to help establish the Office for Youth and five Youth Advisory Groups to work directly with government agencies. The Office for Youth was intended as a dedicated unit within government to enable in the contributions from young people to improve and harmonise policies across government.

The Budget measure also provided ongoing funding for Australia’s national peak youth organisation, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition; the establishment of issue-based youth advisory groups to give a direct youth voice in policy and program development across government; and the ongoing the development of a Youth Engagement Strategy.

In March 2023 Minister for Youth Dr Anne Aly announced the appointment of 40 young people, aged 16 to 24, to the proposed [five Youth Advisory Groups](#): People from LGBTIQ+ communities, First Nations people, young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and diverse religious backgrounds, along with young Australians with lived experiences of disability, caring responsibilities and mental ill-health are all represented on the committee. The Groups will focus on: First Nations, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention, Promotion of STEM, COP28 and Safe and Supported. The Groups met with the corresponding agencies in March.

There was no further specific budget allocation for the Youth Engagement Model in the 2023-24 Budget.

### **Impacts of Youth Policy on young women**

The 2023-24 Budget indicated a clear language shift towards community focused responsibility, as the narrative moved towards investment and away from trickle down impacts. The [Women’s Budget Statement](#) recognised that women’s equality is essential for strengthening our economy, our society and our nation.

The 2022 Youth Engagement Model, and the funding from 2022-23 directed towards it, demonstrates the Commonwealth Government’s focus on coordinated government policy for young people, which, along with gender responsive budgeting, is needed to ensure that young women are not left behind. This is particularly crucial given the challenging economic and social climate for young women.

The development of the Youth Engagement Model, the diversity of the youth advisory groups and the initial funding in 2022-23 were net positives for young women, who are often underrepresented in the policy space.

### **Recommendations**

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, and
- ensure that there are accountability measures and clear measurable goals within the Youth Engagement Model and the Office for Youth.

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## Youth Employment

### **The Youth Employment Budget**

The budget had some support for young women in the workforce.

**Women in male-dominated workplaces:** \$8.6 million was earmarked for the Australian Skills Guarantee (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 104), which includes national targets to increase the number of women in apprenticeships, traineeships and cadetships on major government projects -- supporting women into trades and other male-dominated industries. The program aims to double the number of women apprentices and trainees on government construction projects by 2030 and triple the proportion of women in trades apprenticeships by the same time. (See **Education – Vocational Education and Training.**)

**Support for women in the workplace:** The Budget allocated \$5 million over 3 years from 2024-25 for grant funding for organisations with expertise in supporting women in the workplace and women in male-dominated trade apprenticeships (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 109).

**Early childhood educators:** \$72.4 million has been allocated to support the professional development of early childhood educators and provide financial assistance to educators to complete the practicum required for a Bachelor or Master's degree in Early Childhood Education (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 99).

**Pay increase to aged care workers:** The Budget has committed \$11.3 billion over four years to fund a 15 per cent interim pay rise for workers in aged care.

**Economic participation:** \$2.1 million has been allocated over two years from 2023–24 to support women and girls' participation in talent and development programs to increase female representation in coaching, officiating and sports administration (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 137).

### **Impacts on young women's employment**

The increasing casualisation of the workforce, a difficult economic environment and increasing unpaid internships, combined with a cost-of-living crisis create a hostile environment for many young women. It is increasingly difficult for young people to find steady, secure employment with access to paid leave and superannuation. Although labour market conditions for young people have strengthened over the year, stabilising at 7.8 per cent, young workers aged 15-24 are much more likely to be in casual work, and don't have access to leave entitlements or job security. This can set a pattern of lifetime financial distress, as young women are disadvantaged by the gender pay gap from the beginning of their working lives.

In previous Budgets, young women's employment strategies often focused on encouraging young women into male-dominated fields of work, which are typically characterised by higher wages. While we welcome similar measures in the 2023-24 Budget, we do not regard

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them as benefitting large numbers of young women. [Australia has one of the most gender segregated workforces in the world](#). Given about 90 per cent of working women are in feminised industries, a narrow focus on non-traditional work is not really a viable strategy for addressing the gender pay gap. It is more necessary to focus on where women are in the workforce than on where they are not.

Accordingly, we welcome the commitment of [\\$11.3 billion over four years](#) to fund a 15 per cent interim pay rise for workers in aged care, including for nurses, personal care workers, cooks, recreational officers and home care workers, 85 per cent of whom are women, many of whom are young women. The pay rise will benefit about 250,000 workers who are among the lowest paid in the country.

This policy arm must, however, be partnered with interventions in other highly feminised industries. Economic equality has multiple aspects: encouraging women into male dominated sectors, valuing traditionally 'female' work, and encouraging men to enter female dominated industries.

## **Recommendations**

NFAW recommends that the Government:

- support female-dominated industries to boost wages and living conditions
- support men into female dominated industries, and
- 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.

## **Social Benefits**

### **Budget measures affecting young women**

The 2023-24 Budget has provided some support for young women who access social benefits.

**Increase to social benefit payments:** The Budget included an increase to young people who depend on Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy and other income support payments, delivering a small increase for eligible working age people and students.

**Rent Assistance:** The Budget increased the maximum rate of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 15 per cent. This will provide up to \$31 extra a fortnight for people renting in the private market and community housing (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 200).

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## Impacts on young women of social benefit measures

The changes to social benefits are welcome (though modest) and include increases for young people who depend on Jobseeker, Youth Allowance, Austudy, Abstudy and other income support payments, delivering a small increase for eligible working age people and students of \$40 a fortnight (an increase of \$2.85 a day) bringing the total payment to about \$52.85 a day. This falls short of the increase recommended by the [Australian Council of Social Services](#) (\$76 per day) or the [Economic Inclusion Advisory Group](#) (\$67.50 a day). Jobseeker also includes arbitrary and unhelpful access hurdles, which do not encourage meaningful engagement with the workforce.

The increase in rent assistance is also welcome, considering there is a [decrease in home ownership](#) among young people. However, this increase has not kept pace with the increased cost of renting. Rent inflation for apartments with new tenants was [24 per cent over the year to February 2023](#), whereas the overall index increased by 14 per cent. In this context, \$60 will have a limited impact. (See also **Housing**.)

## Recommendations

NFAW recommends that the Government further increase the rate of Youth Allowance, Abstudy, Austudy and Jobseeker to support young people to meet their costs of living. (For further analysis and recommendations see **Social Security**).

## Education and Training

### Budget education and training measures affecting young women

There have been several budget measures relating to education and training that have an impact on young women. For additional detail and analysis on the full range of measures relating to vocational education and training and higher education, see **Education – Vocational Education and Training** and **Education – Tertiary Education**.

**STEM positions:** The Budget allocated \$127.3 million to fund 4,000 additional university places over the next four years, to boost the number of graduates from STEM disciplines and support the AUKUS program (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 94). The Women in STEM Cadetships and Advanced Apprenticeships program will be extended by two years, providing more time for women to participate. The program provides \$25.1 million to support up to 600 employed women to pursue an industry-relevant pre-bachelor higher education STEM qualification, part-time (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 101).

**Disability Support:** There is \$17.7 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$4.7 million per year ongoing) in additional funding for the Higher Education Disability Support Program to better engage and support students with disability to access, participate, and succeed in higher education (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 101).

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## Impacts on young women in education and training

Despite having higher educational attainment than men, women are more likely to be working part-time, below their capacity, and in precarious employment. Despite high rates of participation in tertiary education, young women still experience pay inequality, creating a pattern of lifelong financial disadvantage.

The latest consumer price index figures released last week confirmed HELP loans will increase by a record high of 7.1% when next indexed on 1 June, increasing overall student debt from about \$74bn to just under \$80bn. In practical terms, this means that student loan debt of young people will be increasing by hundreds or even thousands of dollars overnight. For example, a \$10,000 debt will increase by \$710, and a \$50,000 debt will increase by \$3550. Following costs increases for female-dominated degrees like arts and law in 2020 – and increased subsidisation of male-dominated degrees like mathematics and engineering -- the HELP fee loan increases will be heavily felt by young women.

There were welcome education and training initiatives in the Budget, but they still fail to address structural issues which disadvantage women while studying and in pursuing post-education career pathways. A gender lens, including a specific focus on young women, is necessary in education and training funding policy and planning, particularly looking into the gendered impact of the HELP indexation.

For young women working in universities in all capacities including early career researchers, as well as postgraduate students employed in teaching and reaching and/or wanting to pursue an academic career, there are significant concerns about opportunities for secure employment and career progression (See **Education – Higher Education.**)

Encouraging women into male-dominated industries is also an important measure, but it should be developed alongside policies that encourage men to enter female-dominated industries and by further development of retention strategies. These should include measures to address discrimination in the workplace, which is also a significant issue for young women wanting to complete apprenticeships in male-dominated trades.

## Recommendations

NFAW recommends that the Government:

- apply an intersectional gender lens to vocational education and training and higher education measures to ensure equitable access and participation of young women, and
- support young women into male dominated fields and young men into female dominated fields. (For further recommendations, see **Education—VET** and **Education – Tertiary Education.**)

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## Health

### **Budget Health measures affecting young women**

The Budget had some significant support for the health of young women. For further detail and analysis on budget measures see the sections on **Health**. Some measures that will impact young women particularly are:

**Body Image:** \$6.2 million has been allocated in 2023-24 to support children to build and maintain a positive body image and reduce body dissatisfaction and appearance pressures (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 140).

**Eating disorder support:** \$2.8 million has been allocated in 2023-24 to extend mental health supports for Australians living with eating disorders and their families (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 140).

**Anti-vaping Campaigns:** \$63.4m has been allocated for the advertising campaign, and \$29.5m for support services to help stamp out the addiction. To support the Government's campaign against vaping, new anti-vaping campaigns will roll out over the next four years, paid for by higher taxes on tobacco and alongside the Government's ban on recreational vaping (2023-24 Budget Paper No 2, p. 154).

**Medicare changes:** The Budget allocated \$3.5 billion, tripling bulk billing incentives for GPs, to encourage GPs to not charge vulnerable patients. This change will apply to about 11.6 million children, concession cardholders and pensioners. (See discussion in **Health**.)

**Data collection:** \$26.4 million has been allocated to continue research and data collection activities for women's health (2023-24 Women's Budget Statement, p. 67).

**Mental health:** \$91.3 million to boost the mental health care workforce through additional psychology placements, including an additional 500 psychology postgraduate placements and other training programs (2023-24 Women's Budget Statement, p. 74).

### **Impact on young women's health**

Young women aged 16-24 had the highest prevalence of mental disorders [before the pandemic](#), reporting double the rate of anxiety disorders compared to their male counterparts and significantly more than older women. Rates of suicide in young Australian women are also on the rise. [The National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing](#) found that 2 in 5 people aged 16-24 had a mental disorder in 2020-2021 and for women specifically, it was 1 in four. Women also experienced higher rates of anxiety disorders than men, 21 per cent compared to 12.4 per cent.

Young women also disproportionately suffer from eating disorders: [new research](#) found that disordered eating was significantly higher among girls (30.03 per cent) compared to boys (16.98 per cent) and that rates increased with age and body mass index. The pandemic also contributed to increasing rates of disordered eating, and things like diet and influencer culture are having an impact on how young people see their bodies and unhealthy dietary behaviours.

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The Budget allocated no specific funding for access to abortion and reproductive services (apart from some assistance to egg storage), which will deeply affect young women, particularly those living in rural areas who face significant issues in accessing reproductive health services.

Vaping also has significant impacts on young women: the [NSW Population Health Survey](#) found that in 2020–21, the use of e-cigarettes was highest among persons aged 16-24 years. While men were more likely than women to have ever used e-cigarettes (37.4 per cent compared to 27.7 per cent), the largest increases were among those aged under 30, particularly women aged 18-24 years (2.8 per cent to 15.2 per cent). But vaping is starting among children in high school, with about 37 per cent of 12-to-15-year-old users and 27 per cent of 16-and-17-year-old users reported vaping at least once during the past month.

To support the mental health and physical well-being of young women, it is vital that health initiatives target and engage them in ways that work for this group. There have been many positive measures for young women in this Budget, but there are also significant gaps, notably reproductive health.

The Women’s Budget Statement focused on the importance of the gender lens and gender responsive budgeting. An intersectional gender lens should be applied to planning of health measures in the Budget. A continued focus is needed on further developing the Government’s gender responsive budgeting capacity and developing intersectional, gender sensitive approaches to ensure that health measures meet the needs of young women.

## **Recommendations**

NFAW recommends that the Government ensure healthcare, including mental health and reproductive health care is accessible to all women. For further recommendations, see **Health** and **Health-Reproductive Health**.

## **Violence against young women**

### **The Budget**

The Budget provided new funding in the 2023-24 Budget to address violence against women. See the **Reducing Violence Against Women** section for more detail.

### **Impacts on young women**

Young women are particularly vulnerable to violence with ANROWS finding that 51 per cent of women in their 20s have experienced sexual violence, and national policy data showing that young women aged 15-19 are more likely than any other age group of women to experience sexual assault. The true experience of young women is hard to gauge because there is no national data which focuses on the experience of intimate partner violence for young people. The [National Secondary school health surveys](#) found the 61 per cent of young women aged 14-18 report unwanted sex due to partner pressure. Young women also have

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the [highest rate of assistance](#) from Specialist Homelessness Services, with domestic, family and sexual violence cited as the main reasons for needing help.

How women are experiencing violence is also changing as the internet becomes more prevalent in our everyday lives. The [Office of the eSafety Commissioner](#) found 3 in 10 women had experienced online abuse or harassment, of that 41 per cent of women felt that their safety was physically threatened and 27 per cent stopped posting content that expressed their opinion on certain issues. This is not even accounting for the impact of technology facilitated abuse in domestic violence situations. [Research](#) has shown that 24 per cent of young women aged 18-24 have had a nude or sexual photo/video posted online or sent on without their consent.

Workplace sexual harassment is also a significant issue for young women: 53 per cent of women aged 18-29 reported experiencing [workplace sexual harassment](#). A national inquiry into sexual harassment in Australian workplaces found women aged between 18-29 were more likely than other age groups, or men in the same age group, to have experienced workplace sexual harassment. This experience, compounded by workplace power imbalances, the increased casualisation of the workforce and the difficult economic environment, has deepened workplace inequity for young women.

Violence against women remains a significant concern of Australian women, and causes significant physical, mental, emotional, cultural and financial harm. The focus of the Budget on the experiences of women is significant, and there are many positive initiatives, particularly additional funding for the First Nations Action Plan, the implementation of the *Respect@Work* report and more funding for the Office of the E-Safety Commissioner, whose role is to improve safety outcomes for Australians online, including women's safety online. A key area of focus for the eSafety Commissioner includes addressing technology-facilitated abuse and supporting victim-survivors - a form of abuse and violence that disproportionately impacts young women.

However, the funding falls short of what peak bodies in the domestic violence space have indicated would be needed to fully address violence against women in Australia, which is estimated to be \$1billion a year. Demand for services continues to be unmet.

## Recommendations

NFAW recommends that the Government:

- continue to implement all 55 recommendations in the *Respect@Work* report, and
- create a universal definition of intimate partner violence in youth and adolescent relationships. (For further analysis and recommendations, see **Reducing Violence Against Women.**)

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