

NFAW BUDGET 2024-25 OVERVIEW

The Government has an ambitious plan for gender equality through its 10 year commitment [Working for Women: A Strategy for Equality](#) which sets out the issues affecting Australian women. This year's budget contains a number of initiatives that progress the strategy.

However the plan outlined in *Working for Women* is only partially reflected in the initiatives in the Budget. NFAW believes the Budget lacks ambition, particularly from a government that prioritises gender equality. There are some measures where the [requirement to include a gender analysis](#) has resulted in the inclusion of gender focussed programs, notably in Future Made in Australia, but Gender Impact Analysis is not yet baked in across the budget process.

There were no real surprises in the Budget as many of the measures had been preannounced. The key highlights in the Budget are the additional support for women in the care economy, including payment of superannuation in the Commonwealth government's paid parental leave scheme, and tax cuts extending to low and middle-income taxpayers, which have been legislated to commence on 1 July 2024.

NFAW applauds the investment of almost \$1 billion in the Leaving Violence Program, extending the trial of the Escaping Violence Payment that was due to expire in 2025, but remains disappointed in the lack of investment in front line services and the lack of national consistency in service provision and standards. We are calling for additional investment in legal help for women separating from violent partners and dealing with the Family Court, specialist domestic and family violence services, health justice partnerships and sexual violence services and trauma informed integrated services.

The national crisis of violence against women requires investment in specialist services that understand diversity. Women with a disability, Indigenous women, women who are culturally and linguistically diverse and LGBTIQ+ people often do not report to police or seek help from a domestic or family violence service because they are culturally inappropriate or inaccessible. The narrow focus of Escaping Violence Payment rendered many women invisible.

The Government's commitment to addressing undervaluation of unpaid care and better recognising its substantial contribution to society were recognised by the inclusion of superannuation in paid parental leave and changes to Carer Payment and Carer Allowance. It is, however, disappointing that the Child Care Activity Test was not relaxed for women not in paid work. This would improve outcomes for many disadvantaged children, while the Parenthood estimate around 40,000 women, negatively affected by the test, would participate in the workforce.

The National Foundation for Australian Women is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations. NFAW is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres.

Women are significantly overrepresented in the care sector. The Budget continues to address the undervaluation of their work, with funding for Aged Care workers and a commitment to fund the outcome of the wage case for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) workers. This goes some way to improving economic security for women and will help attract more people to address skill shortages in these critical areas. While this approach to valuing women's work is welcome it needs to be extended to the community sector, including workers in domestic violence, homeless, and legal services. The lack of recognition of the value of the work done in this sector continues to limit outcomes for victim-survivors escaping family violence.

NFAW is disappointed that the Government's third budget fails to systematically address tackling poverty for the most vulnerable, the majority of whom are women. The energy rebate, changes to bulk billing, the increase in Commonwealth Rent Assistance and an increase in JobSeeker for those on partial capacity to work, are welcome but don't address the need for reform of the social security safety net. Despite calls to increase the payment, fewer than 5000 of the over 1 million people on Job Seeker and related payments will receive an increase. The payment is inadequate to support people with no or limited employment and entrenches disadvantage in the community. Rent assistance is only paid once rent reaches a certain threshold, not everyone will be eligible. Cost pressures for vulnerable families, where one in six children live in poverty, continue. The lack of priority on the adequacy of social security payments exacerbates growing income inequality. With unemployment forecast to increase, their circumstances remain negative.

There are important initiatives in the Budget that address the bias against women in healthcare and acknowledge the need for better qualitative data on women's health issues, including menopause, fertility and pregnancy loss. However women's health extends beyond these issues to include mental health and drug research, where women respond differently to medical interventions than men. The Women's Health Advisory Council research found that two thirds of women have experienced gender bias or discrimination in health care. Dementia is noted in the last two Women's Budget Statements as the leading cause of death for women in Australia but no funding for research was identified. More is needed to remove gender bias in the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and address gaps in access to abortion care.

The Government's commitment to improved gender analysis is reflected in the budget process including requiring all project proposals of \$250 million spending contain gender impact assessments. More is needed in funding to implement the gender responsive budgeting commitments, including funding for capacity development across government and for monitoring and accountability. NFAW welcomes the ongoing investment in the network of National Women's Alliances, although they continue to be chronically under resourced, and the establishment of research partnerships.

The growing use of gender analysis has allowed the government to correctly identify structural issues affecting women. The Government has raised the expectations of women for real and ambitious action. Much of the work identified in *Working for Women* will need to be realised in forthcoming budgets.