

## GENDER LENS ON THE 2024 BUDGET

<b>Key policy in discussion</b>	<b>Machinery of government for gender equality</b>
<b>Portfolio and or agency</b>	<b>Office for Women, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the Australian Human Rights Commission, Whole of Government</b>
<b>Date Issued</b>	<b>26 May 2024</b>
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### Key Portfolio Issues

Since the last Budget, the Government has made important strides towards building the machinery of government structures and approach to advancing gender equality across government.

Importantly, the Government released [\*Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessments\*](#), the process for gender responsive budgeting (GRB) and, on 7 March 2024, [\*Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality\*](#), the first national gender equality strategy for several decades. This Budget demonstrates that the Government has made progress in its approach to GRB.

*Working for Women* makes gender analysis a core budget practice. NFAW is very pleased the Government has placed intersectionality at the centre of its work. While there are massive data gaps and challenges relating to some groups in Australia, some of which the Government has provided funding to address in this Budget, NFAW expects to see continued focus on Budget impacts on particular groups and greater sophistication in reporting. The focus on First Nations Australians is particularly welcome and well developed.

The results of this work are beginning to be visible and certainly the gender analysis throughout the Budget Papers is an improvement over any time in the last two decades.

This is a good start, but much more remains to be done. In particular, NFAW is concerned that the *Working for Women* Strategy is not comprehensively funded, and a major uplift will be required across the Strategy to deliver real progress. NFAW will expect to see significantly increased funding across the Strategy in coming years and will be monitoring this closely.

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.

## Gender Responsive Budgeting

Last year, the [NFAW Gender Lens](#) noted that GRB was in a transitional phase. It concluded the Government was grappling with the task, but that “[c]onsiderably more grappling is required...(p. 1)”.

Since then, the Government has released and updated the [Including Gender Guidelines](#). Importantly, the Guidelines note that gender analysis is critical to the policy development process, and they requires a gender analysis and a summary of that analysis for all Cabinet Submissions and New Policy Proposals (NPPs).

These Guidelines build on the 2022 updated [Cabinet Handbook](#), which embeds gender equality as a priority for government, and tasks all Ministers and, in particular, the Cabinet Secretary and the Expenditure Review Committee, with responsibility for “...elevating consideration of gender equality in policy design and decision making”.

Where an NPP or Cabinet Submission meets a number of criteria, a full Gender Impact Assessment is also required. [These criteria are:](#)

- **Gender equality:** The proposal has a significant positive or negative impact on gender equality
- **Cohorts:** The proposal affects people who can be typically disadvantaged
- **Workforce:** The proposal relates to a gender segregated industry
- **Partnership:** The proposal establishes a National Partnership Agreement (or like agreement)
- **Value:** The proposal’s value is \$250 million or more over the forward estimates (p. 3).

These limited criteria will inevitably restrict the full gender impact assessment process to very few initiatives. Clearly government is expecting that these large initiatives, along with the requirement for an analysis and a summary of that analysis to be included in all Cabinet and Budget processes, will drive increased attention to gender analysis in all policies and programs. [Including Gender](#) notes that GRB “... is a key way governments can identify and fund measures that close gender gaps and avoid measures that inadvertently exacerbate gender inequality” (p. 1).

The massive Made in Australia package was clearly subjected to a gender analysis under these criteria, with funding allocated for the Building Women’s Careers Program ([Budget Paper 2 2024-25](#), p. 73). This program was no doubt intended to dilute the massive funding already announced and to be allocated to male dominated industries and male owned organisations. While that demonstrates progress in GRB, it represents a very narrow gender lens. NFAW considers continued structural investment in the care economy in Australia, for example, would be equally important for securing Australia’s future and delivering stronger gender equality outcomes.

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Nevertheless, these processes are the most comprehensive GRB mandates by an Australian Government, at least for several decades, and in addition they have the benefit of building on international and national experience. This tells us that mandating gender analysis without establishing accountabilities, building capacity and monitoring progress is doomed to fail.

These are now the key challenges for government.

### **Strategic frame**

The main vehicle for establishing accountabilities and monitoring progress is the new Gender Equality Strategy, *Working for Women*. This is a strong document and a considerable achievement.

It sets a framework for action over 10 years while focussing on the next five years. It “...will have a mid-point review in 2029 where progress, focus and further action will be considered” recognising that “...further opportunities to drive progress will emerge over the life of the Strategy and may become a focus for future effort” (p. 10).

*Working for Women* draws together the commitments the Government has made on women’s safety and health, “...led through the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032 and the National Women’s Health Strategy 2020–2030” (p. 9).

The Strategy identifies five important priorities: gender-based violence; unpaid and paid care; economic equality and security; health; and leadership, representation and decision-making, and “...names positive gender attitudes and an end to stereotypes as the foundations needed to achieve gender equality” (p. 5).

The attitudes and stereotypes foundation of *Working for Women* is intended to be integrated through the other five priorities. NFAW considers this foundation is essential if we are to shift the dial across the priorities and should not merely be mainstreamed. It requires dedicated funding and should be separately reported and actioned.

*Working for Women* was only released in March this year and has not yet had a chance to turn the ship of government towards gender equality, although we can see the rudder is turning. The Government has raised the expectations of the women’s movement for real and ambitious action. We now wait for the Government to accelerate its response after a good start this year.

### **Performance reporting**

NFAW is pleased to see the Government has put considerable thought into its reporting and performance frameworks. *Working for Women* establishes a performance and reporting framework against the overall outcome, the foundation area of gender attitudes and stereotypes and five priority areas. The Strategy claims it uses measures that, “...taken together, will demonstrate fundamental shifts are happening” (p. 10). Importantly, wherever possible it intends to draw on data relating to particular groups to ensure the Government is taking an intersectional approach. NFAW will continue to monitor the Government’s progress in reporting intersectional data in a sufficiently nuanced way, recognising that this can be

particularly difficult without significant investment in identifying appropriate measures and ensuring the psychological safety of those reporting.

NFAW is pleased to see the Government recognises the importance of integrating gender indicators across government performance monitoring, with the commitment of \$14.8 million over five years to deliver the General Social Survey. This includes funding to increase the sample to ensure the overarching themes of inclusion, fairness and equity” ([Women’s Budget Statement](#), p. 55).

*Working for Women* identifies that the annual [Status of Women Report Card](#), the Women’s Budget Statement and departmental Annual Reports together comprise the reporting framework. The gender attitudes and stereotypes foundation and the five priority areas have each a number of relevant measures that will be used across those reporting areas to monitor progress. This is an essential step for government to hold itself accountable for the *Working for Women* outcomes and NFAW is pleased to see this thoughtful performance framework.

*Working for Women* also includes six principles. Importantly, these include:

- Efforts to drive gender equality must be inclusive and intersectional
- Efforts to drive gender equality for First Nations Australians must be led by First Nations Australians
- Action on gender equality must be evidence-based and informed by lived experience
- Gender equality must be considered from the outset, and must include diverse representation in decision-making, design and implementation of solutions.

NFAW looks forward to monitoring progress with these principles and to seeing transformative changes to the way government works.

### **Women’s Budget Statement**

The [Women’s Budget Statement](#) notes that “[t]he Women’s Budget Statement is now a reporting mechanism for *Working for Women*...The five priorities of *Working for Women*, along with its foundational focus on positive gender attitudes and ending stereotypes, are a touchstone for gender responsive budgeting” (p. 3).

[Working for Women](#) notes that the Women’s Budget Statement will outline the actions and investments being made by the Government in annual budgets to reach ambitions under the Strategy (p. 86).

### **Conclusion**

A perennial concern for GRB and the *Women’s Budget Statement* is that the Budget is a political as well as a fiscal process. Governments inevitably seek to present their initiatives in as positive a light as possible. This means a clear eyed and strategic assessment of the Budget’s contribution to gender equality in the *Women’s Budget Statement* is difficult. Yet it is vital if we are to see real progress towards gender equality. In this Budget, as so often is the case, the

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Government has overclaimed its achievements and asserted a comprehensive and strategic approach to what is essentially a piecemeal sprinkling of funding across a wide range of initiatives. NFAW is concerned that the approach will not deliver comprehensive implementation of *Working for Women* or progress towards gender equality. We realise this is a first step, but we will be monitoring it closely, particularly in the lead up to an election where the temptation to overclaim will increase.

## **Machinery for gender equality across government**

### Office for Women

*Working for Women* notes that the Office for Women (OfW) is responsible for supporting the capability of the public service to embed gender analysis in its work “...through its advice and the guidance it produces, and will focus its efforts on the Strategy’s priority areas” (p. 84).

OfW is now led by a powerful Deputy Secretary, the most senior executive director since the Office was established, in addition to a First Assistant Secretary. This is a long way from its relegation to a Branch level and will increase the profile and leverage of OfW across government. This will be essential for the Government to realise its gender equality ambition, and NFAW applauds this step forward.

The Government tells us it has increased funding for OfW to lead the GRB and gender equality work more broadly across government, but it is difficult to discover how much extra funding might be involved, since the funding is obscured within the broader Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) funding envelope.

Budget Paper 2 2024-25 provides \$60.1 million in additional resourcing for PM&C to support a range of priorities including to implement *Working for Women* and “...to establish a new voluntary Commonwealth supplier registration process within AusTender to identify women-owned and led businesses” (p. 162).

In addition, Budget Paper 2 2024-25 provides \$3.9 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$1.0 million per year ongoing) in additional resourcing for OfW, “... to support whole of government coordination and work with the Department of Social Services to identify further opportunities to respond to gender-based violence and continue to embed a focus on women’s safety across Government” (p. 157).

This funding is, of course, welcome, but NFAW has two concerns. First, the funding tapers off over the forward estimates, meaning OfW will have reduced resources to provide capacity development support, advice and performance monitoring of the Government’s commitments to gender equality. Gender mainstreaming across government cannot be successful without strong central support and efforts to hold all portfolios and agencies accountable for outcomes. Government funding for OfW needs to be adequate and maintained over time.

Second, it is important to have greater visibility of the funding for OfW allocated to capacity development on gender responsive budgeting across government to assess whether the Government will be able to realise its gender equality ambitions. NFAW recommends separate

and comprehensive reporting of funding allocated to OfW. Without this visibility, NFAW is concerned that the funding to gender equality work and GRB remains inadequate.

Agencies

Apart from OfW, several agencies comprise the national machinery for gender equality – most importantly, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA). The Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner (DFSVC) and the eSafety Commissioner also contribute.

Australian Human Rights Commission

The AHRC has been chronically underfunded for many years.

**Australian Human Rights Commission, Attorney-General’s Portfolio Budget Statement**

	2023-24 Estimated actual \$'000	2024-25 Budget \$'000	2025-26 Forward estimate \$'000	2026-27 Forward estimate \$'000	2027-28 Forward estimate \$'000
Revenue from Government					
Ordinary annual services (Appropriation Bill No. 1)	33,129	33,501	30,750	30,895	30,929
Payment from related entities	10,775	13,972	8,433	6,003	3,213

Source: 2024-25 [Portfolio Budget Statement](#) Attorney-General’s Portfolio Table 2.1.1: Budgeted expenses, p. 154.

There are some slight amendments to the funding over the forward estimates, but core funding is diminishing in real terms and the Commission relies on program funding from other government departments and beyond to maintain its functionality. For example, the AHRC derives funding from non-government sources, ranging from \$700,000 to \$400,000 over the forward estimates.

As noted in the [2023 NFAW Gender Lens Report](#), “[i]f the AHRC is not adequately funded for current work, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner’s Office will not be adequately funded either, including for intersectional analysis”. NFAW renews its recommendation that the AHRC funding be placed in a sustainable footing to enable it to continue its important work.

## Workplace Gender Equality Agency

Over many iterations, WGEA has been tasked with accelerating change to achieve gender equality in Australian workplaces. It is particularly focussed, as noted in the [PM&C Portfolio Budget Statement 2024-25](#) (p. 305), on accelerating employer action to close the gender pay gap “...by supporting employers to not only know what they need to do, but to take action to deliver it”, with the passage of the [Workplace Gender Equality Amendment \(Closing the Gender Pay Gap\) Act 2023](#).

	2023-24 Estimated actual \$'000	2024-25 Budget \$'000	2025-26 Forward estimate \$'000	2026-27 Forward estimate \$'000	2027-28 Forward estimate \$'000
<b>Program 1.1: Workplace Gender Equality</b>					
Departmental expenses					
Departmental appropriations	10,843	11,106	10,209	10,429	10,567
74 External Revenue (a)	100	200	150	177	150
Expenses not requiring appropriation in the Budget year (b)	755	960	768	830	938
<b>Departmental total</b>	<b>11,698</b>	<b>12,266</b>	<b>11,127</b>	<b>11,436</b>	<b>11,655</b>
<b>Total expenses for program 1.1</b>	<b>11,698</b>	<b>12,266</b>	<b>11,127</b>	<b>11,436</b>	<b>11,655</b>
	2023-24	2024-25			
<b>Average staffing level (number)</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>59</b>			

Source: [PM&C Portfolio Budget Statement 2024-25](#) WGEA resource statement - Budget estimates for 2024-25 as at May Budget 2024 Table 1.1, p. 310.

As with the AHRC, WGEA funding will reduce in real terms over the forward estimates. WGEA will also be required to find savings from the cross-portfolio reduction in external labour ([PM&C Portfolio Budget Statement 2024-25](#) p. 308). Given the vital importance of maintaining focus on private sector progress towards gender equality if the Government’s ambitions in *Working for Women* are to be realised, NFAW will be closely monitoring the funding adequacy of WGEA.

## Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission

The new Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commissioner and her staff are funded to provide advice and coordination across government and to develop and maintain a supportive and structured approach to victim-survivor engagement. Funding is welcome for these important functions, but NFAW notes the funding is due to reduce by the end of the forward estimates.

**Table 2.1.1: Budgeted expenses for Outcome 1**

	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
	Estimated	Budget	Forward	Forward	Forward
	actual		estimate	estimate	estimate
	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000	\$'000
<b>Program 1.1 – Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission</b>					
Departmental expenses					
Departmental appropriation	5,588	5,723	5,790	6,367	5,403

Source: [DSS Portfolio Budget Statement 2024-25](#) DFSVC resource statement - Budget estimates for 2024-25 as at May Budget 2024 Table 1.1, p. 128.

It is important that these agencies, all performing crucial work to advance gender equality, are properly funded now and into the future, recognising that gender equality is not the work of a few years. NFAW will be watching funding allocations closely and strongly recommends they are all adequately funded over the forward estimates and beyond.

Whole of Government

OfW and these agencies are not able to advance gender equality alone, and it is welcome news that the Government has recognised that all of government needs to work together.

NFAW is pleased to see the Government recognise that gender equality “...is affected by the work of every Government portfolio” and that it will take “...a coordinated, whole-of-government approach to achieve long-term progress” ([Working for Women](#), p. 84).

[Working for Women](#) requires all portfolios to be responsible for “...leadership on gender equality within their policy areas and ensuring staff have the skills, information and resources to deliver high quality gender analysis.” Importantly, the Strategy mandates that departments “... must invest in the uplift required” (p. 84).

There is no specific allocation for this intense uplift visible in the Budget, which makes assessing the efficacy of this work difficult. NFAW would dearly like to see the investment made by government into development of sorely needed gender equality capacity across government made more visible, recognising that gender equality does not happen by magic but requires investment and support.



## Treasury

While last year the Gender Lens reported that the Treasurer has been advised by a Women's Economic Security and Social Services Branch, by 2024, that Branch had been rolled into a [First Nations, Gender Equality and Social Services Branch](#). Certainly, the development of the GRB processes has been completed, but it is disappointing that the Treasury has not maintained the same resourcing to monitor and guide the implementation, along with OfW, of the GRB processes' implementation.

## Advisory Committees

- Women's Economic Equality Taskforce

Since the last Budget, the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce (WEET) has delivered its final report - [A 10-year-plan to unleash the full capacity and contribution of women to the Australian economy 2023 – 2033](#). It made seven recommendations, with some actions for immediate implementation, and some more long term. NFAW is pleased to see many are being addressed. This important work should be used across government as a blueprint for action, along with *Working for Women*.

NFAW considers this important work should be maintained as a standing advisory committee and would like to see its funding continued, as with the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee. At least it should be asked to regularly review its recommendations and advise in their implementation.

- Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee

The Advisory Committee provided its [first report](#) in March 2024 after being established in November 2022. It aims to assist the Government in its ongoing efforts to improve support for vulnerable people in Australia and enable wider economic and social participation. It is tasked to advise on barriers groups of people face to participation in paid work and to advise the impact of economic inclusion policies on gender equality.

NFAW is pleased to see these important functions have been [enshrined in legislation](#).

- Fair Work Commission expert panels

On 6 March 2023 the Government created expert panels at the Fair Work Commission to focus on pay equity and the care and community sector ([Women's Budget Statement](#) p. 39). NFAW is very pleased to see the high quality of the first decision to emerge from the Commission informed by the expert panel on pay equity, the [Stage 3 Aged Care Case](#). This demonstrates the importance of relying on gender equality expertise.

## Civil society advocacy

*Working for Women* notes “[t]he Government will continue to invest in women’s advocacy...” including “...to deliver expert and strategic advice to Government on the solutions required to meet the Strategy’s vision” (p. 83).

NFAW is very disappointed to see the Government has failed to adequately fund the National Women’s Alliances in the forthcoming tender process. These organisations have been chronically under-funded since their inception and NFAW considers a demonstration of good faith in women’s and gender equality organisations would be to adequately fund this important work. This would also implement [Recommendation 7.4 of the WEET Report](#).

NFAW notes the Government has announced it will provide up to \$5 million from March 2025 to June 2030 to fund a research partnership with a research institution to build the evidence base on what works to achieve gender equality. It is aimed at developing a mechanism to hear directly from the Australian community, particularly women, about their experiences, concerns and priorities to better inform and support the development of public policy.

## Recommendations

NFAW calls for the following.

- The Government should commit comprehensive funding to the implementation of *Working for Women*, rather than advancing a piecemeal set of small and inadequate initiatives.
- The Government should continue to build capacity to focus on particular groups and greater sophistication in reporting in Budget documents.
- The attitudes and stereotypes foundation in *Working for Women* underpins progress on all five gender equality priorities. It requires dedicated funding and should be separately reported and actioned.
- Government funding for OfW needs to be adequate and maintained over time.
- There should be separate and comprehensive reporting of funding allocated to OfW. Without this visibility, NFAW is concerned that the funding to gender equality work and GRB remains inadequate.
- Investment into development of sorely needed gender equality capacity across government be made visible.
- That Government review and increase the level of recurrent funding for the SDC and the AHRC more generally over the forward estimates and beyond.
- Funding for WGEA and the DFSVC should be adequate and maintained in real terms over the forward estimates and beyond.
- The WEET should be provided ongoing funding to review and update its recommendations and advise on their implementation.
- A demonstration of good faith in women’s and gender equality organisations would be to adequately fund the important work of the National Women’s Alliances.