

# Recommendations

The National Foundation for Australian Women makes the following recommendations:

## Gender-responsive Budgeting

- That a Women's Ministerial Forum be established to guide the spending of the new National Federation Reform Council (including the National Cabinet) on employment, social services, education, taxation and other issues. We also recommend that Expenditure Review Committee (ERC) routinely co-opt expertise on gender responsive budgeting to inform its decision-making and that submissions to ERC be required to incorporate a gender lens.

## Impact on Young Women

- The Government should commit and take action to implement all of the remaining recommendations from the *Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces*.

## Impact on Older Women

That the government place priority on:

- Funding for improving safety of residents and staff in residential aged care during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Funding to meet the shortfall in Home Care Packages.
- Industry assistance packages targeted to the care industries.
- Innovative measures to assist older women to regain and retain employment in the current economic crisis and beyond.
- A permanent increase in JobSeeker rates.
- Funding to increase speed and impact of government initiatives to reduce elder abuse in COVID-19 context.

## Impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women

- Government should constructively engage with the Coalition of Peaks to determine COVID-19 recovery responses and funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Government should reorient funding away from mainstream services that are unable to demonstrate culturally-responsive evaluations and evidence for effectiveness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and allocate it to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations who can demonstrate effectiveness.

## Impact on Migrant and Refugee Women

- Migrant women should be included in economic support and recovery packages in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, regardless of their visa status.

- Access to ongoing income support, crisis payments, healthcare (including mental health), crisis accommodation and safe housing, should be made available to all women experiencing family and domestic violence regardless of their visa status.

### Impact on Women with Disabilities

That the government:

- work with children and young people with disability and their representative organisations to develop a plan to support young people with disability into employment and to overcome the barriers young people with disability face in securing and maintaining employment, and
- commit to investment in a National Inclusive Education Plan to support participation on an equal basis.

### Taxation: Business

- The asset full expensing measure should be better targeted by reducing the \$5 billion income limit for eligibility and capping the value of the assets eligible for the measure.
- The asset full expensing measure should not apply to imported assets over a specified value unless a specific case can be made for the job creation capacity of that asset.
- The funds saved through limiting the measures, as recommended above, should be redirected to increased capacity and quality in the care sector.

### Taxation: Individuals

- Tax offsets for low- and middle-income earners should be converted to a transfer payment available in conjunction with other payments, instead of being delivered through the tax system.
- If delivered through the tax system, the tax offset component of tax relief should be delivered to wage earners in their take home pay through an adjustment to tax withholding rates.
- The benefit currently delivered as the Low and Middle Income Tax Offset must be continued past 30 June 2021, either as real tax cuts or as a transfer payment.

### Superannuation

- The Government should encourage people who have accessed their superannuation early through the COVID early access arrangements to restore their superannuation by:
  - Relaxing contribution caps for people who have accessed their superannuation early
  - Increasing the Government Co-contribution payable on voluntary non-concessional contributions to superannuation.
- The Government should release the report of the Review into Superannuation and Retirement Income.
- NFAW reiterates our recommendations to the Retirement Income Review that superannuation should be payable on paid parental leave, and in respect of employment where the income is less than \$450 per month.
- The threshold for the Low Income Superannuation Tax Offset should be raised to \$45,000, consistent with the new income tax thresholds.

## Climate Change and Energy

- The governments should target a 'green recovery' and diverts investments from fossil fuels and the resources industry to developing and incentivising an increased uptake of renewable energy technologies.
- Budget stimulus measures should target solutions that provide win-win opportunities for abating climate change and reducing gender inequality. This requires more alternatives to fossil fuels (beyond hydrogen), investments in the renewable energy sector, and support for female apprenticeships and jobs in the energy sector.
- Being faced with a gendered climate crisis, the government should take serious actions on climate change by committing to net-zero emissions by 2050, phasing-out coal, and supporting carbon-free technologies to produce steel, cement, and ammonia.

## Housing

- The government should increase direct investment in social housing to support the growing numbers of women in need of secure, affordable housing. Investment in social housing has broader economic benefits, supporting employment and income growth. Every dollar invested in social housing is estimated to boost GDP by \$1.30.
- Commonwealth Rent Assistance rates should be raised to immediately support very low-income households to access the private rental sector. Single older women who are not homeowners and single mothers and their children will be supported through this measure.
- National funding to address the housing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women should flow through programs that support self-determination and address the known housing gap, in all housing sectors.

## Social Services

### *Income Support*

- The \$550 per fortnight supplement should remain in place, at least for women who are not in a position to seek permanent, full-time employment. For women who have unique constraints and barriers to entering the workforce, lifting them above the poverty line will continue to mitigate the rate of poverty and its effects, including on children, in Australia.
- The Targeted Compliance Framework and mutual obligation requirements should be amended to ensure that breaches do not result in a payment suspension. Additionally, obligations should not be onerous, as creating stress reduces capacity for productivity.

### *Indexing*

- Income support payments should be calibrated to keep households out of poverty.
- The PBLCI, as designed by the ABS, should be utilized to better reflect true cost of living increases for all income support payments.
- The JobSeeker coronavirus supplement should be retained for JobSeeker, Parenting Payment and Youth Allowance recipients.

### *Extra payments to pensioners*

- Economic support payments should be retained until the indexation returns to a positive.

### *jobactive*

- Jobactive provider's provision of 'quality services' should be measured based on client experience, rather than employer experience.

- Savings from the online facility should be directed to greater tailored assistance for the most disadvantaged.
- Participants should have an opt-out option from online services.
- The Targeted Compliance Framework should remove the automated function that immediately marks an individual as out of compliance, as it appears to be too hasty and leads to an unacceptably high number of no-fault suspensions.
- Responsibility for the Targeted Compliance Framework framework should be transferred from contracted service providers to Centrelink, with discretion introduced over the imposition of penalties and suspensions.
- Targeted Compliance Framework data should be published more quickly and should be disaggregated by gender and program.
- Given the large number of older women with no recent work experience due to caring or long-term unemployment, career counselling and support services should be boosted for this group.
- Women who have left the labour force should be provided access to jobactive services.

#### *Parenting Payments*

- The Coronavirus Supplement should be retained to stave off poverty for some of the poorest households in Australia.

#### *ParentsNext*

If the ParentsNext program is not scrapped entirely, the following changes should be implemented immediately:

- Make ParentsNext voluntary. This will help to ensure a quality program while also returning agency and autonomy to the people who are enrolled.
- De-couple participation from receiving income support payments, thereby eliminating the punitive aspects of ParentsNext and enhancing the economic security of participants.
- Increase the Participation Fund to provide meaningful support for job readiness, such as paying for classes.
- Ensure the Participation Fund is spent in its entirety on participants.

### **Early Childhood Education and Care**

- The Government extends easing of the activity request requirements until at least June 2021.
- Better remuneration for women employed in the sector through an increase above the Consumer Price Index in the Child Care Subsidy hourly rate paid by the Australian Government for different Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) service types.
- An increase in the percentage of subsidy received by low income families, from 85 to 95% of the hourly rate cap and a more gradual taper for all families, up to a combined annual family income between \$69,690 and \$353,680 (indexed annually).
- Broader Additional Child Care Subsidy eligibility (with a simplified application process), waiving of gap fees and/or no activity test requirements for lower income vulnerable families and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, to boost children's participation in quality ECEC programs.
- Flexible child care arrangements with access to shorter sessions of care to assist part-time, casual or shift workers with the cost of ECEC and flexible wrap-around care for families using standalone or government preschools (15 hours per week), to facilitate greater workforce participation.

- Commitment of sufficient ongoing funding for the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education beyond the 2021 calendar year to increase participation in early childhood education by three and four year olds, in particular vulnerable children.

### Schools

- That the STEM skills of all Australians can only be enhanced by a national policy which is fully funded and supported by the government.
- Young women should be included in the work of the Clontarf Foundation or some similar Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation to enhance their educational opportunities.
- All classroom teachers should have an opportunity to enhance their knowledge of digital technologies to enhance the quality of their teaching.

### Vocational Education and Training (VET)

- The brief of the National Skills Commission should be expanded to include the identification of occupational areas into which women may be attracted to diversify their occupational choices aiming for more economic security and closing the gender pay gap.
- Women should be added to the list of Equity Groups in the Australian Apprenticeship Incentives Program (AAIP) Guidelines.
- The National Skill Needs List and the Occupational Skill Shortage Information should be kept under constant review and the responsibility for the compilation of these two lists brought under one jurisdiction. There should be data accompanying the lists showing numbers of males and females employed in the occupations as a guide to employers and potential trainees and apprentices as well as VET providers planning courses provision and establishing priorities.
- Revitalising TAFE campuses across Australia program should be adequately funded so that the public VET provider can fulfil its community service obligations and provide the targeted programs for women of diverse backgrounds with appropriate specialist student support.
- Women and girls needs should be explicit in all VET funding policy, with all VET-related legislation and programs being accompanied by a requirement for women's impact statement to ensure that programs are equitable and inclusive. The data should be annually published in the Women's Economic Security Statement.
- VET Student Loans Statistical report should include gender disaggregated data.

### Higher Education

That the government:

- rescind the Higher Education Support Amendment (Job-Ready Graduates and Supporting Regional and Remote Students) Bill 2020;
- provide sufficient funding for transition and enabling programs to meet the needs of all students, not just students in rural and regional areas;
- restore per capita funding through the Commonwealth Grants Scheme to a level that enables universities to provide quality teaching and end their dependency on casual staff; and
- fund research and research development to end reliance on international student fees.

## JobKeeper

- Given the removal of stimulus payments made to low paid women through JobKeeper, the Government should provide alternative support for workplace participation by significantly reducing the costs of childcare.
- Given that the nearly three quarters of a million casuals lost their jobs as a result of the JobKeeper casual exclusion, the should Government redesign the JobMaker Hiring Credit to ensure that unemployed women in that group are not also excluded from that program. This includes addressing age cutoffs, minimum hours requirements and childcare costs.
- A national paid pandemic leave scheme is required. NFAW endorses the call from both unions and business for the Federal Government, together with relevant States, to provide for and fund a national Paid Pandemic Leave Scheme by amending the Fair Work Act to incorporate a leave entitlement consistent with the decision of the Fair Work Commission in relation to the Aged Care Awards and providing for reimbursement to business to facilitate the leave entitlement.

## JobMaker

- That the JobMaker Hiring Credit be changed to remove the tiering of funding and to permit women on paid parental leave to access the program without first having to will have to apply for and spend a month on one of the specified income support programs.
- The costs of childcare continue to restrict women's access to paid employment. We have made a number of recommendations to address this issue (see Child Care).
- That Government provide additional stimulus funding targeting social infrastructure to provide accessible, quality care, to encourage employment and to enable employers to provide ongoing, professionalised jobs (see Machinery of Government paper).

## Pay Equity – Equal Remuneration Order (ERO)

- NFAW congratulates Minister Rushton for delivering this essential support to the sector and to the practice of providing equal remuneration for women. We recommend that the Government act quickly to ensure the remaining services whose ERO supplementation is due to expire receive supplementation.

## Paid Parental Leave

- The Government should address outstanding issues around the Paid Parental Leave Scheme, including to implement outstanding NFAW recommendations to:
  - ensure all employees are eligible for 26 weeks leave at least at the minimum wage;
  - increase the duration of Dads' and Partners' Pay to at least four weeks;
  - include Superannuation Guarantee payments in parental leave and DAPP;
  - amend the National Employment Standards to address mismatch in the eligibility requirements for unpaid and paid parental leave;
  - model other changes that could be built onto these fundamental changes to the scheme; and
  - ensure the scheme encourages more equal sharing of paid and unpaid work between women and men.

## Work and Family

- Government should ensure that the ABS Time Use Survey proceeds as planned to provide data and information on women and men's work and caring patterns.

- Government should develop an overarching work and family strategy with additional funding to help working parents, especially mothers, better able to balance their work and family obligations.

### Working From Home

- The Government should monitor the take up of tax deductibility for working from home arrangements by gender and the deductions accessed by women and men.
- The Government should support Australian families to better manage their paid work and family responsibilities, with working from home as a key element, through support for employers to assess and implement ongoing arrangements and campaigns aimed at households to encourage better sharing of unpaid caring and domestic obligations. Equity issues should be considered and support provided to ensure that this key paid work and family option is widely available.
- The Government should lead the way in supporting Australian families to better balance their paid work and family obligations by developing equitable and supportive policies for Working from Home as a key part of workplace flexibility for federal public servants.

### Women in STEM

- That Government consider raising the funding amount for women in STEM programs to ensure that more women can take up STEM-related job opportunities in the future.
- That program design and outcomes of the new Women in STEM program are carefully measured through an evaluation strategy, which includes women's salary data.

### Health

- The Government should provide further funding for the implementation of the 2020-2030 Women's Health Strategy in the 2021-22 Budget, to ensure that it drives improvements in the health of Australia women.
- NFAW supports ongoing provision of Medicare tele-health services after COVID-19 pandemic, to ensure ongoing equitable access to health, mental health and reproductive health services.
- The ongoing high out of pocket costs for mental health are of concern, and the NFAW notes that given the higher use of these services it is disproportionately impacting women.
- Meeting the Closing the Gap targets will require additional investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health programs, and the NFAW calls on these to be funded in the 2021-22 Budget.

### Aged Care

- *Aged Care funding:* Aged care in Australia is chronically underfunded and the residential care sector is in need of major reform. Funding should be increased to a sustainable level based on need and quality outcomes rather than eligibility. Further funding needs to be provided to reduce the waiting list for home care packages and to assist providers to support staff and provide quality care through the pandemic.
- *Paid care workers:* Care workers must be paid well in recognition of the important work they do, and have job security and access to sick leave. NFAW has addressed the scope for government to invest in sufficient and adequately compensated workforce to complement and support the role of informal carers (see the Overview section).

- *Informal carers:* NFAW recommends that the two \$250 support payments for carers be increased to compensate for the increased household expenditure associated with additional support provided to care recipients.

### Reducing Violence Against Women and their Children

- If the Government remains committed to its current economic stimulus strategy, NFAW requests the Government work with community leaders and experts in gender equality and violence against women to reduce and manage the negative impacts of increasing gender inequality, including increased rates of violence against women.
- The Government should reconsider its decision to apply the family sponsorship framework to Partner visas in consultation with organisations with expertise in the experience of migrant women who have experienced violence.
- That the Government increase funding in best practice respectful relationship education.

### Community Legal Centres

- The government provide increased funding to assist Community Legal Centres to address their existing high demand and to provide further ongoing funding to address the specific additional needs arising from COVID-19.
- The government increase funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services to ensure access to legal and financial advice services to address the higher levels of unemployment and underemployment experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 'escalating utility bills, housing and an insecure economy', all while police powers are increasing due to the pandemic.
- Health justice partnerships and Domestic Violence Units are most in need of increased funding to ensure that women at risk are identified and able to access vital legal advice in times of crisis.

### Infrastructure

- Government should systematically consider gender budgeting when preparing infrastructure budgets, which means giving balanced attention to the policy role of social infrastructure investment.
- The government should use its procurement power to derive benefits for all Australians from infrastructure investment, for example, by setting quotas for women's employment in individual construction projects.
- Infrastructure investments should include a mix of road building with social housing and public transport to maximise social benefits.
- Not for publication equity injections should be strictly limited to national security and strict commercial in confidence rules.

### International Development

That the Government:

- Commit to ongoing and increased funding for the international development budget, including gender equality programming, to lay the foundation for COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Continue to increase the amount of gender equality funds supporting gender-specific activities.

- Consult with women's rights groups on the allocation of new funding for COVID-19 response and recovery.
- Ensure that any new funding is accessible to local women's rights organisations.
- Release the 2nd National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security.
- Recommit to aid transparency, by returning the Orange Book and releasing the Performance of Australian Aid report for 2020.

### Disaster, Risk Reduction Management and Recovery

- Increase funding to gender aware disaster risk reduction initiatives that involve communities and marginalised groups, including women, in disaster planning and preparedness, including funding to support the implementation of the [Gender and Emergency Guidelines](#);
- Increase overall funding to care services such as aged care and child care, to ensure greater capacity in community infrastructure and less reliance on women's unpaid care during disasters;
- Support disaster recovery measures which are informed by intersectional gender analysis and consultation across portfolios, and which promote women's economic security and gender equality; and
- Increase funding to domestic and family services as a preparedness measure.