Gender Lens on the 2026 Budget

Policy area: AI, Technology and the Digital World
Portfolio / agency: Finance

Key Portfolio Issues

The 2026 Budget is strikingly thin on artificial intelligence (AI), technology and digital policy. Its principal technology measure is the continued rollout of Australia's Digital ID system – a voluntary framework intended to provide Australians with a more secure and streamlined way to verify their identity. Beyond this, the Budget is notable for what it does not contain: no dedicated investment in AI governance, no measures to address algorithmic bias in government decision-making, no meaningful AI and digital literacy agenda, and no response to the accelerating use of AI-generated content that targets and harms women. This absence is difficult to reconcile with the reality that the rapid expansion of AI represents one of the most consequential policy challenges Australia now faces.

Budget Measures

Boosting Productivity – Digital ID
Payments ($m)

	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30
Australian Taxation Office	-	88.4	87.8	89.2	92.0
Services Australia	-	29.9	34.8	35.4	35.2
Australian Competition and Consumer Commission	-	21.5	25.4	25.5	25.5
Department of Finance	-	9.9	9.7	5.5	5.6
Office of the Australian Information Commissioner	-	5.4	5.5	5.6	5.7
Department of the Treasury	-	2.1	2.1	1.9	2.0
Australian Security Intelligence Organisation	-	0.7	0.7	0.7	0.7
Total – Payments	-	157.9	166.0	163.9	166.6

The Government will provide $654.3 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $166.7 million per year ongoing) to meet its legislative commitments under the *Digital ID Act 2024* and maintain the security and reliability of the Australian Government's Digital ID System. Funding includes:

$357.4 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $92.0 million per year ongoing) to the Australian Taxation Office to maintain operation of myID and the Relationship Authorisation Manager, including implementation of additional security controls and functionality

$135.2 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $35.2 million per year ongoing) to Services Australia to continue its role as the Australian Government Digital ID System Administrator and maintain the operation of the Digital ID Exchange and myGov LinkID

$98.0 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $25.5 million per year ongoing) to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to continue Digital ID regulatory functions

$30.8 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $5.7 million per year ongoing) to the Department of Finance to continue policy leadership and governance of the Digital ID program

$22.2 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $5.7 million per year ongoing) to the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner to continue to provide privacy oversight under the Digital ID legislation and Identity Verification Service programs

$8.0 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $2.0 million per year ongoing) to the Department of the Treasury to continue to support the Digital ID Data Standards Chair to develop and maintain data standards

$2.7 million over four years from 2026–27 (and $0.7 million per year ongoing) to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation to provide security assessments of entities seeking accreditation or participation in the Australian Government Digital ID System.

This measure builds on the 2024–25 Budget measure titled *Digital ID*.

Source: Budget Paper No. 2, page 86.

The absence of AI measures

Beyond a single reference to the use of artificial intelligence to modernise environmental approvals (Budget Paper No. 2, p. 58), the Budget contains no dedicated measures addressing AI governance, the gender impacts of AI systems, or Australia's obligations under the international frameworks it has endorsed. There is no investment in AI safety and accountability frameworks, monitoring or redress mechanisms for algorithmic bias in government decision-making, or AI and digital literacy programs (including programs targeting women). While existing provisions under the *Online Safety Act 2021* address

some forms of non-consensual intimate imagery, the framework was not designed for AI-generated synthetic content, and platform accountability obligations, enforcement resourcing and victim support mechanisms remain inadequate to the scale and pace of harm.

The Women's Budget Statement does foreshadow one relevant policy commitment: the Government has committed to legislating a Digital Duty of Care, which would require platforms to take reasonable steps to prevent foreseeable online harms including harms arising from AI and algorithms. The Statement also notes new bespoke powers for the eSafety Commission to issue notices targeting nudify apps and websites, a direct response to one of the most rapidly escalating forms of AI-facilitated gender-based harm. These are welcome commitments, however, the Budget provides no new resourcing for the eSafety Commission to exercise these functions. A Digital Duty of Care framework that expands the Commissioner's remit without expanding its capacity risks becoming a compliance exercise rather than an enforcement regime.

Gender implications of this budget measure

In 2023, Australia committed to the Agreed Conclusions of the 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW67), the priority theme of which was 'Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls'. The Agreed Conclusions call on member states to combat discrimination arising from AI and predictive algorithms; embed gender perspectives into digital and AI governance frameworks; and expand digital access and literacy for women facing compounding barriers, including older women, women in rural and remote communities, and First Nations women. None of these priorities are substantively reflected in the 2026-27 Budget.

Digital ID

The Government has committed $654.3 million over four years to the Digital ID System. Despite being framed as a universal measure, the Australian Digital ID System has meaningful potential to benefit women. Reducing friction in government service delivery is disproportionately valuable to women, who are more likely to be primary carers, time-poor, and reliant on government services, including as the majority of Services Australian customers. For women experiencing family and domestic violence, particularly those who may lack identity documents, or have had documents withheld or destroyed, a secure digital identity system could reduce a concrete structural barrier to accessing services and re-establishing financial independence.

However, the Government has not released gender-disaggregated data on Digital ID uptake. Without this data, it is difficult to assess whether women — particularly older

women, women in rural and remote communities and First Nations women, and women with lower digital literacy — are accessing the system on equal terms. There is a risk that, as Digital ID becomes an increasingly standard pathway for accessing government services, some populations are left behind. Further, women who cannot establish or use a Digital ID may face practical barriers to services on which they disproportionately rely, including Centrelink, Medicare, the NDIS, family payments and crisis supports. The measure also contains little investment in the supporting infrastructure — digital literacy, assisted access, non-digital alternatives — that would mitigate this risk.

The most significant structural risk arises from the interaction between Digital ID and coercive control. Economic abuse and identity-based abuse are well-documented features of family and domestic violence. A system that consolidates identity verification and service access may create new opportunities for surveillance, monitoring and control if safeguards are not sufficiently robust. While the *Digital ID Act 2024* includes privacy and security protections, there has been limited public discussion on how the system will operate in the context of coercive control, compromised devices, shared accounts or technology-facilitated abuse.

The absence of AI measures

The absence of any substantive AI policy or dedicated AI measures in this Budget has clear and material gender implications across key domains of the economy and public administration. AI and automated decision making systems are already embedded in welfare, financial services, employment systems, healthcare and digital platforms. In the absence of governance, transparency, accountability and population-wide digital literacy initiatives, these systems risk reproducing and amplifying existing gender inequalities.

In government and financial decision making, algorithmic systems used for eligibility assessment, debt detection, credit scoring and insurance underwriting can embed historical bias into automated outcomes. These systems often inherit skewed datasets and institutional assumptions that can disproportionately affect women, particularly those interacting with income support systems. The Robodebt experience remains the clearest domestic example of the consequences of deploying large-scale automated decision systems without adequate safeguards, review rights or accountability.

Labour market effects are also uneven. Occupations with high female participation are among the most exposed to automation and task substitution as a result of AI. However, the Budget contains no gender-responsive adjustment strategy to support affected workers through re-skilling, transition pathways, or targeted labour market interventions.

In health and digital safety, risks from AI are intensifying. AI-enabled diagnostic tools and clinical decision-support systems can reproduce bias where training data is not

representative, with documented risks for women in areas such as cardiovascular health. At the same time, AI-generated non-consensual intimate imagery is rapidly expanding, outpacing existing regulatory, platform and victim support responses.

Digital literacy deficits compound these risks, and women in particular are less likely to have the skills and confidence to navigate AI systems, identify when automated decisions affecting them may be flawed, or access redress mechanisms. Without improved digital literacy, women are less equipped to participate in the digital economy, less able to protect themselves from harm, and less visible to the systems that are supposed to serve them.

Recommendations

NFAW calls on the Government to:

- publish a gender impact assessment of the Digital ID System, including regularly publishing gender-disaggregated Digital ID uptake data.
- honour its CSW67 commitments by mainstreaming gender in national AI and digital policies and budgets, and by developing cohesive, gender responsive strategies to address the risks and opportunities of technological change for women and girls.
- develop a national Digital and AI Literacy Strategy with targeted programs for women facing compounding barriers, including older women, women living in rural and remote communities and First Nations women.