Gender Lens on the 2026 Budget

Policy area: Machinery of Government for Gender Equality

Portfolio / agency: Cross portfolio

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Key Portfolio Issues

Since the last Budget, the Government has continued to implement its strong framework for advancing gender equality across government. With the addition of new, welcome, strategic mandates, the Government is well placed to continue its progress towards gender equality.

However, NFAW is concerned that funding for gender equality focussed agencies is reduced in real terms and some important measures are terminating. Further NFAW is concerned that *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality* continues to be under-resourced, hampering the potential achievements.

NFAW is also concerned that this Budget reflects slower progress than we would have liked, overall, in advancing gender responsive budgeting. Key budgetary measures appear to have an adverse effect on gender equality outcomes. NFAW urges the Government to accelerate progress in integrating gender responsive budgeting, including through legislative mandate and adequate resourcing and improving the transparency in reporting.

Budget Measures

Strategic frame for gender equality

The framework for advancing gender equality includes the *Working for Women Strategy*, the updated *Including Gender Guidelines*, *the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, *the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2021-31* *and the Women's Health Strategy 2020-30*.

The Government is to be congratulated on the addition to this suite of strategies of the long-awaited *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036*, released on 10 February 2026.

NFAW notes that reporting intersectional data in a sufficiently nuanced way continues to be a challenge. See Gender Analysis for Particular Groups (below).

Gender impact analysis and gender responsive budgeting

NFAW is pleased to see the strengthened and updated *Including Gender Guidelines* and the inclusion of a section on distributional analysis of large tax expenditures and deductions by gender for the first time in the *2025-26 Tax Expenditures and Insights Statement* (TEIS).

The establishment of the Working for Women Research Partnership, funded in the 2025-26 Budget, is very welcome and will provide government and civil society with gender analysis insights.

Working for Women makes gender analysis a core budget practice, and the *Women's Budget Statement* this year provides an overview of progress of current and past initiatives.

However, this Budget does not demonstrate that the Government has made progress in its approach to Gender Responsive Budgeting, despite gender analysis being required for all Cabinet submissions and new policy proposals. NFAW has previously noted (2024-25) the limitations of the gender responsive budgeting criteria, resulting in the full gender impact assessment process being applied to few initiatives. This concern appears to have been borne out in this year's Budget, with limited evidence of gender analysis of major budget initiatives.

There remains a lack of transparency in the application of gender responsive budgeting across government and gender analysis seems lacking in relation to some key measures in the Budget, in particular in relation to cuts to the NDIS (see Disability and NDIS paper) and tax cuts (see Taxation paper). NFAW is concerned with the apparent deceleration in gender responsive budgeting in practice in this Budget.

Budgets are a political as well as a fiscal process. It is vital, if we are to see real progress towards gender equality, for the *Women's Budget Statement* to provide a clear strategic assessment of the Budget's contribution to gender equality. This year's *Women's Budget Statement*, while asserting a comprehensive and strategic approach to gender equality, relies on past initiatives and past expenditure, at the cost of transparency on new funding and initiatives.

NFAW is concerned that these approaches, will not deliver comprehensive implementation of *Working for Women* or progress towards gender equality.

This suggests that gender responsive budgeting measures need to be strengthened to see continued progress across government. NFAW recommends the Government introduce a legislated mandate to require stronger analysis, greater transparency and reporting on the gender impacts of all budget measures.

The Government should introduce a clear legislative mandate for gender responsive budgeting through amendments to the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and the *Charter of Budget Honesty*.

This will require stronger accountabilities, building capacity and monitoring progress across government. NFAW recommends that all agencies and portfolios be adequately funded for this work, rather than being required to absorb the costs in a context of diminishing departmental allocations.

NFAW also recommends that the Office for Women convene a high level group involving central agencies, with independent external advice, to guide and oversee gender responsive budgeting efforts.

NFAW notes the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into Gender Equality as a National Security and Economic Security Imperative. We would like to see that inquiry recommend, and the Parliament implement, a commitment to gender equality as a priority across all parties and establish institutional arrangements for advancing gender equality across Parliament. The mechanism should include relevant advisory expertise.

Gender analysis for particular groups

This Budget has seen slower progress in applying a gender lens than we would have liked. NFAW was concerned to see limited gender analysis published in the Budget papers around the gendered impacts of the cuts to the NDIS, which will make up over half of the Budget's savings measures (see Disability and NDIS paper). There was no recognition of the gender equality impact on the decision not to continue salary supplementation for Early Childhood Education and Care workers beyond November 2026.

NFAW is very pleased the Government declared it will prioritise intersectionality. Collecting and reporting data on the intersections of different characteristics can be sensitive and difficult without investment in identifying appropriate measures and ensuring the psychological safety and confidentiality of those reporting. NFAW is concerned by notable gaps in data reporting for specific groups, notably women with

disability. Collection of these data is also very dependent on the particular context and cannot be rolled out with a singular overarching approach.

Data sovereignty is particularly important to First Nations people. The recent Call to Action from the Women Deliver conference by Wiyi Yani U Thangani emphasises this. It calls for the development of "...a measurement system grounded in the values and worldview of First Nations women, girls, Sistergirls and gender-diverse people, enabling us to hold data that matters to the making of worlds." It calls for resources for First Nations people to hold systems accountable.

NFAW strongly recommends sustained attention to improving the collection and reporting of gendered data, particularly with an intersectional lens, across government. Co-design, mutual accountability with particular groups, and First Nations data sovereignty are key elements of this work.

Resourcing for gender equality

Overall, NFAW is concerned that progress towards gender equality across the Budget is stalling. There should be a budget line available to each portfolio to enable them to invest in the development of capacity for gender responsive budgeting.

Funding will also be required to develop context specific, safe and respectful processes for collecting and reporting intersectional data.

Relatedly, there is a need to adequately resource the gender machinery required to implement the *Working for Women Strategy*.

NFAW is concerned by the persistent underfunding of the *Working for Women Strategy*. A major uplift will be required across the Strategy to deliver real progress. The *Women's Budget Statement* would benefit from greater transparency in outlining new funding commitments for the *Working for Women Strategy*. NFAW recommends significantly increased funding across the Strategy in coming years and will continue to monitor this closely.

NFAW is concerned by the reductions in funding for agencies and government departments that have responsibilities for implementing gender equality. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission and the Office of the eSafety Commissioner are all facing staffing reductions over the next financial year, which will make it difficult for them to progress gender equality within their mandates.

Core funding for the three main agencies of the national women's machinery – the Office for Women, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency and the Australian Human Rights

Commission, has been largely maintained, if not keeping pace in real terms with current funding over the forward estimates. Yet each organisation, as well as the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, is facing reductions in administered funding as a result of additional measures terminating.

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency, for example, will face a reduction in funding for 2026-27and beyond as a result of termination of a funding allocation to support the expansion of sexual harassment reporting and the extension of gender equality reporting obligations to the Commonwealth public sector. The *Portfolio Budget Statement* of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet claims that increased efficiencies will compensate for this loss of funding. (PBS PMC p. 322).

NFAW recommends funding for the Office for Women should be adequate and maintained over time. The Government should ensure the Australian Human Rights Commission, the Workplace Gender Equality Agency and the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Commission are adequately funded over the forward estimates and beyond.

Civil society

Over consecutive Gender Lens reports, NFAW has called for the Government to build better partnerships with the women's movement and civil society, recognising their vital role in advancing gender equality. We have strongly recommended that the Government better fund Australian civil society working on gender equality, including national peak bodies for domestic, family and sexual violence specialist services (see paper on Reducing Gender-Based Violence).

The Government has recognised the need for improvements in its relationships with civil society. The 2024 Not-for-profit Sector Development Blueprint commits the Commonwealth to:

> **3. Support NFP sector Advocacy**…
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> b. Fund NFP sector peak bodies to support policy research and related advocacy in priority areas as informed by their stakeholders
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> **4. Improve the financial sustainability of the NFP sector**
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> a. Promote benefits of funding the full costs of NFP sector activities, sustainable procurement and pricing to governments, philanthropy and the NFP sector
>
> b. Progress and monitor government actions to deliver full cost funding as sought by the NFP sector, including the application of appropriate indexation, and

minimum term contract and renewal periods in all areas of service provision…(Blueprint 2024).

Similarly, the Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework commits the Commonwealth Government to improve certainty and sufficiency of funding for the sector and enable better forward planning and management of resources through consideration of indexation, longer-term grant agreements and an understanding of the real cost of delivering quality services.

NFAW is disappointed the Budget does not address these ongoing concerns, and reiterates our recommendations for closer partnerships and better funding for civil society working to progress gender equality.

Recommendations

NFAW recommends:

- The Government broaden the scope of gender responsive budgeting to include mandates for gender impact analysis to be integrated in all government work, whether it has budget implications or not.
- The Government introduce a legislated mandate to require stronger analysis, greater transparency and reporting on the gender impacts of all budget measures through amendments to the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) and the *Charter of Budget Honesty*.
- The Office for Women convene a high level group involving central agencies, with independent external advice, to guide and oversee gender responsive budgeting efforts.
- Parliament jointly commit to gender equality as a priority across all parties and establish institutional arrangements for advancing gender across Parliament. The mechanism should include relevant advisory expertise.
- The Government give sustained attention to improving the collection and reporting of gendered data, particularly with an intersectional lens, across government. Codesign, mutual accountability with particular groups, and First Nations data sovereignty are key elements of this work.
- Funding be made available for portfolios and agencies to develop context specific, safe and respectful processes for collecting and reporting intersectional data

- Funding should also be made available for gender equality mechanisms in civil society as well, specifically the National Women's Alliances and national peak bodies for family, domestic and sexual violence specialist services.

References

For an analysis of the strengths and challenges of gender responsive budgeting and Women's Budget Statements in Australia see Costa, Monica and Sharp, Rhonda (2025) *Women Count Australia: A Casebook for Gender-Responsive Budgeting*. Adelaide University, Adelaide.