



**National Women's
Safety Alliance**

Submission to the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

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Submitted by
Katherine Burney
Director
National Women's Safety Alliance
www.nwsa.org.au

The National Women's Safety Alliance acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and live. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future.

About NWSA

The **National Women's Safety Alliance (NWSA)** brings together a diversity of voices, expertise, and experience to inform and guide national policy on women's safety. The NWSA, established in August 2021, connects the sector, experts, government, and victim-survivors with a shared vision to end violence against women. This will be achieved through consultation, research, and the collaborative development of expert policy advice to government.

More information about NWSA is available on our website.

Overarching Considerations

The NWSA acknowledges that the Federal Government's National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality (hereafter referred to as the National Strategy) aims to guide whole-of-community action to make Australia one of the best countries in the world for a gender-equal society. It is intended that this National Strategy will be an important mechanism to elevate and prioritise dialogue as well as tangible actions to achieve gender equality. We understand that the intention is for the strategy to support and reinforce similar policy and legislative reforms being undertaken at the state and commonwealth level including the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children and the wide-ranging *Respect@Work* reforms. We urge that to avoid siloing of the significant reform areas of the Australian Government and to ensure alignment between strategic and comprehensive aims of women's policy areas, that the forthcoming National Strategy centre directly around the aims of the National Plan to Eliminate Violence.

Iceland has had a Gender Equality Act for more than 40 years. The current 2008 act includes commitments to gender-based analyses of policy and appropriation; gender equality education in early childhood, school, and tertiary settings, quotas, pay discrimination, violence, and sexual harassment. **Iceland remains the only economy to have closed more than 90% of its gender gap (World Economic Forum 2022).**

A National Strategy must also reflect what we know about gender inequality – that it is not simply confined to the home or the workplace or even a distinct period in a person's life; it affects both men and women, it permeates the media landscape, it impacts children, teenagers, adults, and the elderly (see appendix A). It affects appropriation and budgeting priorities as well as procurement

choices, funding and sponsorship deals across a suite of areas. For this reason, the National Strategy cannot simply be about legislative reform or methods to achieve pay parity. Rather, it must also look beyond the influence of government, and consider the active role of community organisations, media groups, sporting codes,

the judiciary, private enterprise and other viable touch points in the Australian economy and social fabric.

We consider the following to be essential components in a National Strategy:

- Embedding Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in the Commonwealth budget process
- Implementing a *Gender Equality Act* that would codify various elements of the National Strategy
- The Australian Government and Australian parliaments have status as model employers and workplaces, subject to regular gender focused audits of the workforce including discrimination and harassment, cabinet submissions and new policy proposals.
- An intersectional framework
- The core objectives of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children must guide the objectives and outcomes of the proposed National Strategy
- The adoption of measurable targets and outcomes
- The inclusion of both short to medium term goals as well as generational reform items
- All levers of the Australian Government footprint be accessed as part of the National Strategy including legislative reform, policy development, appropriation and purchasing as well as public service employment and reporting.
- An inventory of the contemporary relevance and gender disaggregated value of the core data sets that inform national policy design across Government.
- The leverage and future scope of the National Community Attitudes Survey, the Personal Safety Survey and the Time Use Survey be reviewed to ensure relevancy, intersectional considerations, and accessibility into the future.

Most of recorded human history is one big data gap. Starting with the theory of Man the Hunter, the chroniclers of the past have left little space for women's role in the evolution of humanity, whether cultural or biological. Instead, the lives of men have been taken to represent those of humans overall, when it comes to the lives of the other half of humanity, there is often nothing but silence - Caroline Criado Perez

The State of Play

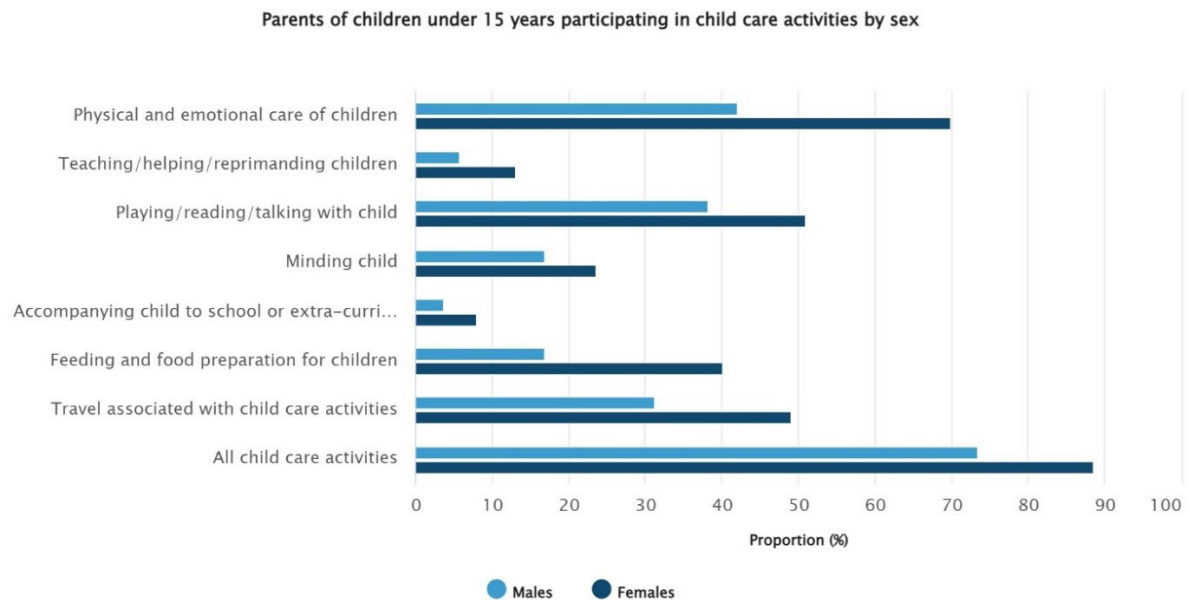
While it is fair to acknowledge the strides made in narrowing the gender gap in Australia, *true gender equality* remains elusive. Any number of national data sets continue to tell the story of inequality. The 2020-2021 Time Use Survey reveals the stubborn gender divide in household labour and unpaid care. For men, the data indicates they spend more time on average in their day either in paid labour or in personal recreation activities. While for women, they spend on average more time in unpaid

household labour including food preparation or reading to or talking with a child.¹

In fact, for every metric of the Time Use Survey, the sex divide of parenting activities for participants with children, women consistently and across every activity did more than their male counterparts (graph 1). Comparatively however, there are OECD based examples where time allocated against caring for family or educating young children was more evenly balanced.²

Evidence of gender inequality is noted beyond the Time Use Survey, however. For those women with social and public profiles, the spectre of gender inequality in Australia means they continue to be subjected to online abuse that frequently implies the threat of sexualised violence.³ Any number of common indicators can similarly be drawn upon to demonstrate the embedded nature of gender inequality: violence, poverty among single parent households, sexual violence or harassment over the lifespan, and the gender makeup of new homeless persons.

Graph 1:



Parents of children under 15 years
Proportion who participated in activity
Source: Table 11.1

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, How Australians Use Their Time 2020-21 financial year

¹ [How Australians Use Their Time, 2020-21 financial year | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](https://abs.gov.au/australian-bureau-of-statistics-reports/feature/how-australians-use-their-time-2020-21)

² <https://eige.europa.eu/gender-equality-index/2022/domain/time/SE>

³ Plan International (2019) found that sexualised comments are only aimed at sportswomen – 14% of all negative comments towards sportswomen were sexualised, compared to 0% for male athletes <https://www.plan.org.au/news/gender/snapshot-analysis-social-media-commentary-of-sportswomen-and-sportsmen/>

Inception Point

How we come to define '*true gender equality*' will be critical to the success of a National Strategy. In practice, this will mean effectively, putting the cart before the horse and defining the answer before establishing the parameters of the question. Paradoxically, the absence of this outcome-focused approach in the policy legacy helped facilitate some of Australia's most entrenched forms of inequality: The meagre superannuation funds of today's retired women, the workforce disincentive rate for women with children in early education, single-parent poverty, the 'tampon tax', or institutional responses to violence emerge from the policy history where gender was not an active consideration. The impact of this omission cannot be overstated as women's unique place in the social economy and the household unit, and therefore their unique vulnerabilities to deleterious outcomes, went unexplored.

In our view, the future National Strategy to address gender inequality, must therefore begin by defining and measuring the desired social and economic outcomes for women and girls and working backwards to implement the reform agenda. We consider the following elements fundamental in a gender equal society:

- The elimination of all forms of violence against women and children
- A measurable reduction in poverty, homelessness, and financial insecurity among single parent households
- Achieving pay-parity
- Closing the gender gap of occupational segregation in the labour force
- Achieving gender parity in unpaid household labour and recreation time
- Progressively closing the gender gap in retirement incomes towards parity
- A gender equal approach to government procurement, sponsorship and investment in sport and the arts as well as other portfolio levers available to government.
- A gender equal approach to sponsorship and investment in sports and the arts as well as other investment areas available to corporate Australia
- Equal adoption of Paid Parenting Leave entitlements between parents

The value of Gender Responsive Budgeting

Gender informed budgeting processes are intrinsic to governments delivering on their gender equality strategies. Australia has a 30-year history of gender responsive budgeting and was the first state to launch such a policy device in 1985. The model has since been picked up and adopted elsewhere in the federation and internationally, with varying degrees of success and continuity.

A truly embedded GRB process would apply to all components of the Budget development and allocation processes, identify potential drivers of gender inequality, and mitigate against them at the early stages. The early application of a gender lens would, in theory, mitigate against the potential for disproportionate and unintended outcomes such as poverty, unequal parenting or unequal labour force participation. As advocates of gender informed policy design, both NWSA and our members have seen a suite of policy measures implemented without consideration to the overt gender impacts, including the Parents Next mutual obligation model which almost exclusively impacted single mothers.

The ABS has found that young women engage in significantly less physical activity than young men. While the reasons for this are complex, it has been linked to traditional gender stereotypes around girls' and women's behaviour and appearance, such as that they must not appear 'too masculine' or 'unattractive'. It has also been suggested that traditional school uniform policies which force girls to wear dresses and skirts discourage physical activity – Plan International (2019)

While gender informed budgeting processes have returned at the Commonwealth level, it remains to be seen the extent to which the new government will undertake a sweeping gender analysis of appropriation and policy development processes across all portfolio areas. In this regard, we urge the Australian Government to adopt a long-

GRB is most effective in supporting change when it is elevated above a "tick the box" exercise. Achieving this is principally down to the culture of the administration that is making decisions based on the GRB information – that is, there should be a genuine intent that the budgeting process should be gender-responsive in order that it can contribute to achievement of a gender equity strategy that the government has articulated – KPMG 2022

term, root and branch approach to gender informed budgeting, including an appraisal of existing gender disaggregated data gaps and spending. Further, rather than being a once a budget-cycle process, we also call on the Australian Government to begin with an audit of those policy areas with a discernibly unique gender impact such as

welfare, employment, health, and sport.⁴ This audit would not only apply to portfolio appropriation, but relevant data sets used by Departments to inform policy development and emergent policy proposals.

⁴ KPMG (2022) <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2022/kpmg-australia-budgeting-for-gender-equity.pdf>

Appendix A: Gender inequality over the lifetime

The NWSA uses the narrative below to illustrate the entrenched nature of gender inequality over the life cycle.

Let's begin with a preschool aged girl.

Imagine the scenario, where she tells her friends that she wants to play 'footy' and drive trucks, just like her dad, when she grows up.

The other children tell her that's what boys do.

Her educator tells her she would make a great teacher instead.

Rather than being nurtured and encouraged to explore creatively, she is being instructed on what is expected of girls.

This narrative is reinforced each time someone takes the toy trucks off her and hands her a doll instead or reflects on her 'prettiness'.

Now, fast forward some years and she is a young person maybe 11 or 12 years old.

She plays footy, just as she always wanted but she doesn't like it how the boys make fun of her and how when they line up before a game, they make jokes about how it'll be an easy win because girls can't play footy anyway.

She also hates how her team doesn't have a coach because there aren't enough volunteers, and no one wants to coach the girls anyway.

Her team becomes easy to beat, maybe having a coach would change that.

Sensing the disinterest of both her parents and the club in her team and her skill, she eventually quits footy.

Maybe it is just a boys' game anyway.

By the time she's at university, she has had a few boyfriends but finds that they routinely ignore her boundaries about not messaging her during class or at her job.

Sometimes they badger her with repeated voicemails late at night where they are aggressive and call her names.

She doesn't like that they do this but figures it must be normal because her other friends say their boyfriends are a bit like that too. They agree that it's annoying but not harmful.

Several years later, she has started a career and eventually gets married.

When her and her husband have a baby, she takes time off work to look after the newborn.

It's hard work and can be isolating. So, she asks her partner to take time off to help, but he replies, "it's my job to pay the bills not be a babysitter".

By the time she's ready to go back to work, she can only work part-time, and all her former peers have been promoted in the years since.

She finds it hard to adjust to returning to work, to balance the 9am meetings with the school drop off.

Her husband isn't much help.

His career took off when he became a father, so he works long hours and doesn't have much time for nappies or bedtime stories.

She abandons plans to try and get promoted and her family relies increasingly on her husband's income to pay the bills and her unpaid work to keep them fed and make sure the house is clean.

They have one more child together, where the division in labour between her husband and her becomes more pronounced. She never returns to full-time work.

When she's close to retirement age, her two adult children have moved interstate and her husband and her eventually get divorced.

Unlike her ex-husband however, she doesn't have much saving power as her salary remained quite modest over her working life.

It was always the household's 'second' income anyway.

But now it's what she must live on.

She tries to rent while her ex-husband and her try to sell their property which might take some time.

But her part-time income simply doesn't allow her to compete in the rental market.

After dozens of applications compounded by stress and anxiety about what her future holds, and feelings of shame following the divorce, she gives up.

The property will sell soon enough and that will help her.

She sleeps in cheap motels on the nights she needs to be rested and showered to present at work the next day. The rest of the week and on weekends she just sleeps in the car.

She's too exhausted, broke, and stressed to give too much effort to the divorce proceedings, she knows her husband always paid the bills and chooses instead to pin her hopes on a reasonable outcome without too much cost or hassle.

When the divorce is finalised and the property finally sells, she finds her settlement is enough to buy a small one-bedroom flat. There isn't much left over at the end.

Looking at what's left and her meagre super balance she knows it'll be hard for her at retirement and that she'll probably have to apply for the part pension to make ends meet.

This is a fictional story, but at every point there is a real person and a real story and the real consequences of gender inequality either in policy, law, or social values. The social values of rigid gender stereotypes permeate through her footy club and her parents' interest in her games. The rigid confirmation to gender roles by boyfriends and her own friends' means disrespect and tech facilitated abuse is brushed off and latently accepted as normal.

Her husband's perceptions of parenting roles, and the division of household labour mean her path is set for her and there's little point trying to change it. Her acquiescence to whatever comes her way, perhaps driven by a lack of confidence and a latent power imbalance in her marriage, mean she never really rocks the boat either to regain control over her career, her workplace expectations, or her divorce settlement.

Conformity.

Ridicule.

Violence.

Unpaid labour.

Poverty.

This is the lived reality of gender inequality when it reflects embedded and stubborn social values.