



Australian Government

Department of Families, Housing,
Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

Women's Statement 2012 – Achievements and Budget Measures



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Women's Statement 2012

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Foreword

This Labor Government believes it is essential for all women to receive social and financial recognition for the work they do and the contribution they make to Australian society. Both women and men also need opportunities to make genuine choices about their participation in the economy, community and at home.

Our Government has introduced and implemented significant reforms to support working Australians and their families, help build a new Australian economy, and strengthen our communities.

These reforms are intrinsically linked: a strong, well-managed economy enables Australian women and men to receive a fair dividend for their contribution and hard work, helps households meet cost of living pressures, and means we can provide support to those who need it most.

Central to a strong economy is improving the economic participation of all parts of Australian society. All Australians deserve to experience the dignity of work, and women's and men's workforce participation is a major contributor to individual and family wellbeing and economic security.

Our broader reform agenda has been pivotal in driving gender equality. Women have benefited from a stronger economy and the support provided to vulnerable Australians.

We have also introduced targeted measures to advance equality between women and men.

We recognise that women participate in the workforce less than men and experience poorer economic outcomes, they remain under-represented in public life and high level decision-making, and women's experience of domestic and family violence and sexual assault is alarmingly high.

We also recognise that groups of women in our society – including Indigenous women, women with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse women – can face a broad set of challenges.

There is a strong economic case for achieving gender equality. It is estimated that closing the gap between women's and men's workforce participation could boost Australia's Gross Domestic Product by up to 13 per cent.¹

Our Government has been proud to continue Labor's long legacy of reform to advance the status of women, building on the infrastructure put in place by previous Labor governments.

Our *Women's Statement 2012* outlines where we are going, and how it will contribute to long term change towards equality and build a stronger and fairer Australia.

It sets out our achievements in supporting working Australians and their families, building a new Australian economy and strengthening our communities – underpinned by key 2012–13 Budget measures.

Importantly, this Statement reaffirms our commitment to equality, with a strong focus on increasing women's participation in the workforce and their economic security.

The benefits of gender equality are far reaching. We are committed to delivering better outcomes for women, their families, and the Australian community and economy more broadly.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julia Gillard".

The Hon Julia Gillard MP
Prime Minister



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Julie Collins".

The Hon Julie Collins MP
Minister for Community Services,
Minister for Indigenous Employment
and Economic Development and
Minister for the Status of Women

Women's Statement 2012

Achievements and Budget Measures – At a Glance

Supporting Working Australians and their Families

We are delivering support for working Australians and their families.

- We have introduced the **Paid Parental Leave scheme** to support new mothers and enable them to maintain an attachment to the workforce and **Dad and Partner Pay**, which facilitates the sharing of paid work and caring between women and men.
- We have improved **family payments** so they are better targeted towards those families most in need. We are increasing the rate of Family Tax Benefit Part A and introducing the Schoolkids Bonus to give families with school aged children a cash payment to help with the costs of their children's education.
- We have invested a record amount to make **quality early childhood education and care** more affordable and accessible.
- Our **National Carer Strategy** will help carers, the majority of whom are women, to participate more fully in work, family and community life.
- The **National Disability Insurance Scheme** will fundamentally change the way disability care and support is provided, positively impacting on women with disability and the many women who are carers.
- **Mental health reforms** will improve the lives of Australian women living with mental illness, including improved support to participate in paid work.
- A better, fairer, more sustainable and more nationally consistent **aged care system** will benefit older women and the many women who work in the sector.

Building a New Australian Economy

We have committed to a sustained, national effort to raise productivity and remove barriers to people participating in the workforce.

- We introduced the **Fair Work Act 2009**, providing fairness and flexibility for women and promoting opportunities and equality in the workplace.
- Around 150,000 of Australia's lowest paid workers in the **social and community sector**, mostly women, will benefit from substantial pay rises following an historic **pay equity decision** this year.
- Reforms to the **Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 and Agency** will drive improved gender equality in Australian workplaces.
- We are making substantial investments in **skills, education and training**, enabling more Australian women to benefit from improved skills and qualifications.
- We are creating new opportunities for Australian women in **non-traditional employment**, including the resources sector and in the Australian Defence Force.
- We have committed to a minimum of **40 per cent representation of women and men** on Australian Government boards.
- Pensioners and low income households, the majority of whom are women, will receive direct financial assistance under the **Clean Energy Future Household Assistance Package**.
- **Tripling of the current tax-free threshold** will improve the rewards for work, particularly for women who work part-time and casual.
- We have made **major reforms in superannuation** to ensure more women are adequately prepared for life after paid work, and we have delivered significant improvements to the **pension system**.

Strengthening our Communities

We are working to create a fairer and more inclusive Australia.

- We have put in place a suite of measures to recognise and support **key groups of women in Australia**, including Indigenous women, women with a disability or mental illness, rural women, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- We have set up six **National Women's Alliances** to ensure the perspectives of women, particularly those from marginalised and disadvantaged groups, are heard in addressing policy issues that affect women.
- The ***National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*** gives effect to our zero tolerance approach on domestic violence and sexual assault.
- We are introducing new legislation to criminalise **forced marriage** and to strengthen provisions relating to **people trafficking**.
- We are making significant investments in **housing**, with a particular focus on assisting vulnerable households to access safe and secure housing.
- Our Government has delivered on its commitment to the development of a new women's health policy, with the launch of the ***National Women's Health Policy*** in 2010 underpinned by targeted investments to improve women's health.
- We are giving priority to gender equality as a critical cross-cutting theme of our **foreign aid program**.
- Recognising the diverse and disproportionate impact that conflict can have on women and girls, we launched the ***Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018***.

- We appointed Australia's first **Global Ambassador for Women and Girls** in 2011 to advocate internationally for gender equality.
- We amended the ***Sex Discrimination Act 1984*** to provide greater protections for women and men against discrimination and sexual harassment.
- We acceded to the **United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Optional Protocol**, and are reviewing our two reservations to CEDAW with a view to removing them.

This statement highlights some of the key achievements of our Government, with a particular focus on women's workforce participation and economic security. More information on Government policies and programs can be found at www.australia.gov.au and on Ministers' and Departmental websites.

Supporting Working Australians and their Families

Our Government is delivering support for working Australians and their families. Even during the most worrying days of the global financial crisis our Government stood up for families and supported their jobs.

Women spend less time doing paid work than men and are also much more likely to work part-time, making up over 70 per cent of the part-time workforce.²

Women undoubtedly carry the majority of responsibility for formal and informal caring. In the workforce women dominate the caring sectors and, at home, women are much more likely to be the primary carers for children and other relatives.

Having children impacts heavily on Australian women's workforce participation. Workforce participation rates for women by age show a marked dip between the ages of 25 and 44, which is not the case for men.³ This has flow on effects for women's experiences in paid work, the amount of pay they receive, and subsequently, for their financial security when they retire.

There are 2.6 million people in Australia who provide informal care for people with disability or older Australians. Just under one million of these people are primary carers and over two in three primary carers are women. Most of these women are caring for a close relative such as a partner, parent or child.⁴

While this very valuable work delivers rewards – personally and to the community – it can also come at a great cost in terms of impeding women's capacities to provide for themselves and their families, and to save for a financially secure retirement.

There is a lot that can be done to support women to achieve improved participation in the workforce. Increased access to child care and flexible working arrangements to help both women and men balance paid work and caring are important.⁵

Supporting men to do a greater share of domestic duties and spend more time with their children is another important piece of the puzzle in providing women with more opportunities to participate in paid work.

Our Government has delivered substantial practical supports, ensuring that the benefits of our strong economy flow to families on low and middle incomes and provide better support to those who need it the most.

Many of these are aimed at enabling more Australian families a better chance at reaping the benefits of work, particularly through providing families with genuine options in how they balance their work and caring responsibilities, and supporting women and men to share paid and unpaid work more equitably.

Paid Parental Leave Scheme

Australia's working mothers need support to stay at home to care for their newborn while still maintaining an attachment to the workforce.

Our Government's historic introduction of the Paid Parental Leave scheme gives eligible working parents up to 18 weeks Parental Leave Pay at the rate of the national minimum wage, currently about \$590 a week before tax.

Through encouraging women to stay connected to the workforce, Paid Parental Leave aims to increase women's workforce participation. For many low-paid, casual and part-time working women, this is the first time they have had access to this sort of support.

More than 160,000 families across the country are already benefiting from our Government's Paid Parental Leave scheme since it started on 1 January 2011.⁶

Dad and Partner Pay

Dad and Partner Pay will support the increasing role that fathers and partners want to play in caring for children – helping families to balance work and caring.

It will give eligible fathers and partners two weeks' pay at the rate of the national minimum wage. It will be available to eligible fathers and partners – including adopting parents and parents in same-sex couples – from 1 January 2013.

This means that from 2013 eligible families welcoming a new child into the world can access up to 20 weeks of combined payments of Paid Parental Leave and Dad and Partner Pay from the Government.

Australian parents are being supported to take paid leave on a comparable footing with their OECD counterparts.

Time spent with a child in the early months after birth or adoption sets lifelong parenting patterns. A dedicated payment for fathers and partners will encourage their involvement, and send a strong signal that taking leave to care for children is part of the normal course of work and family life for both parents.

Parents sharing care enables better sharing of paid work between women and men.⁷

Family Payments

To help families when they need it the most, our Government provides a range of family payments. Over the past five years we have worked hard to improve targeting of payments so that low and middle income women are supported. Payments are aimed at assisting those who are struggling to make ends meet, and also at encouraging workforce participation.

Family payments include help for new mothers and families through the Paid Parental Leave scheme and the Baby Bonus, as well as longer term assistance such as the Family Tax Benefit Parts A and B and child care assistance.

2012–13 Budget highlight: boosting assistance to low and middle income families

This Budget is about spreading the benefits of the mining boom to all corners of our country by delivering much needed new financial relief to families under pressure.

More than 1.5 million families who receive Family Tax Benefit (FTB) Part A will receive a boost from 1 July next year. All families that are eligible for FTB Part A will receive an increase:

- Families receiving the maximum rate or part of the maximum rate of FTB Part A with two or more children will receive an extra \$600 a year, or an extra \$300 a year if they have one child.
- Families receiving the base rate of FTB Part A with two or more children will receive an extra \$200 a year, or an extra \$100 a year if they have one child.

Our Government is also delivering a new cash payment to help 1.3 million families with the costs of their children's education. Eligible families will be guaranteed payments worth \$410 a year for each primary school student and \$820 a year for each high school student.

Early Childhood Education and Care

The quality, affordability and accessibility of early childhood education and care all play an important role in the choices parents and carers, particularly women, make about paid work.

Our Government is investing a record amount to make quality child care more affordable and accessible. We are investing a record \$22.4 billion over four years for early childhood education and child care. This includes \$19.9 billion over four years for the Child Care Rebate and the Child Care Benefit, assisting more than 900,000 Australian families each year with the cost of child care. For families to have more options in choosing their children's care, funding is provided for a wide range of child care services.

In 2008, we increased the Child Care Rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses and increased the Rebate cap from \$4,354 to \$7,500 per child per year. As a result of this measure, the out-of-pocket costs for a family earning \$75,000 a year with one child in long day care have fallen from 13 per cent of disposable income in 2004 to 7.5 per cent in 2011. There are also more than 950,000 children using these services – up 8.2 per cent from the previous year – and the number of child care services continues to grow with almost 500 new services coming on line in one year.⁸

We are also committed to improving child care standards so that parents and carers have confidence in the quality of early childhood education and care services.

The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care commenced at the beginning of this year. The Framework delivers improved staff to child ratios so that children in care get more individual care and attention, and better qualified staff equipped to lead the important activities that help children learn and develop. Quality ratings will also be published so that Australian families have access to information about the quality of services on offer, to help make decisions about the best services for their children.

2012–13 Budget highlight: Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance

In the 2012–13 Budget our Government is committing an extra \$225.1 million over four years in child care assistance to help more parents, particularly single parents, to enter the workforce.

Over four years, 130,000 parents on eligible income support payments will benefit from the increased investment in the Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA) program while they are studying or training to get the skills they need to find a job.

National Carer Strategy

The majority of carers in Australia are women. Our Government wants to ensure that carers have the same opportunities as other Australians to participate fully in work, family and community life.

The National Carer Strategy was launched in August 2011 and is our long term commitment to carers. The Strategy is supported by a \$60.4 million package of measures, including funding of \$1.6 million over two years for a national campaign to raise public awareness of the role of carers, and encourage people with caring responsibilities to seek assistance and support.

Through enacting the *Carer Recognition Act 2010*, we formally recognise and acknowledge the role of carers and are ensuring their needs are incorporated into policy development and program service delivery.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

Women will be significantly assisted by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), both as women with disabilities and as informal carers. If services and supports are not adequate, there is a detrimental impact on the capacity of both carers and individuals with disability to participate in work and in the community.

The NDIS will fundamentally change the way disability care and support is provided. It will provide peace of mind for people with significant and permanent disability and those who care for them.

2012–13 Budget highlight: National Disability Insurance Scheme

We will provide \$1 billion over four years for the first stage of an NDIS in launch locations for 10,000 Australians from 1 July 2013, increasing to 20,000 participants from 1 July 2014. The funding will include:

- \$342.5 million for individualised support for people with disability
- \$240.3 million over four years to build and operate an NDIS information technology system
- \$213.4 million over four years to properly evaluate and assess people's needs and those of their carers. This will also include funding for Local Area Coordinators who will assist individuals in designing and managing a funded support package to meet their specific needs
- \$122.6 million over four years to increase the capacity of the disability services sector to deliver NDIS services and supports
- \$53 million over four years for the NDIS Launch Transition Agency.

Mental Health

Anxiety and depression are the leading burden of disease for Australian women. Mental health conditions are the third leading cause of burden of disease in Australia overall.⁹

To provide better care and support for Australians with a mental illness, our Government is providing \$2.2 billion over five years from 2011–2012 for a package of mental health reforms aimed at improving the lives of thousands of Australians with mental illness.

Less than half of both women and men with mental illness participate in the workforce. Australia also has a lower participation rate for people with a mental illness than comparable OECD countries.

Personal Helpers and Mentors (PHaMS) services provide practical support to people with severe mental illness and help them to set and achieve personal goals. This can include finding suitable housing, looking for work, or improving relationships with family and friends. Almost 60 per cent of PHaMS participants are women, and almost 55 per cent of those women require assistance to obtain and retain paid employment or self employment.¹⁰

From 1 July 2012, we will support more people with mental illness to participate in the workforce by investing \$50 million to expand services to help people on income support who are also working with employment services.

Our Government is also providing \$2 million to improve the capacity of employment services to support employers to successfully recruit and retain employees with a mental illness.

Aged Care

Ensuring a better, fairer, more sustainable and more nationally consistent aged care system has particular benefits for women. Women live longer and have fewer material resources in retirement than men. In 2010, 70 per cent of residents in residential aged care facilities were women.¹¹

Living Longer. Living Better: aged care reforms

The 'Living Longer. Living Better' aged care reform package provides \$3.7 billion over five years. It represents the commencement of a 10 year reform program to create a flexible and seamless system that provides older Australians with more choice, control and easier access to a full range of services, where they want it and when they need it. It also positions Australia to meet the social and economic challenges of the nation's ageing population.

The reforms give priority to providing more support and care in the home, better access to residential care, more support for those with dementia, and more strength to the aged care workforce. They will be progressively implemented from 1 July 2012.

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare is developing comprehensive, publicly available evaluation data which specifically address services to particular groups, including women.

Living Longer. Living Better: aged care workforce reforms

Ninety per cent of workers in the residential and aged care industry are women.¹²

Through the Aged Care Reform package, our Government will provide \$1.2 billion over five years to tackle critical shortages in the aged care workforce, benefiting the many women working in this sector.

Aged care services continue to find it difficult to attract and retain sufficient numbers of skilled and trained workers. A career in aged care needs to be promoted as a career of choice to allow the workforce to grow from 304,000 in 2010 to the estimated 827,100 aged care workers by 2050, the number needed to care for an ageing population.

Our Government is developing and implementing an Aged Care Workforce productivity strategy in collaboration with the sector to ensure a skilled workforce is attracted and retained to meet growing demand.

A new Workforce Compact, between government, unions and aged care providers, will improve the capacity of the aged care sector to attract and retain staff through higher wages, improved career structures, enhanced training and education opportunities, improved career development and workforce planning, and better work practices.

Building a New Australian Economy

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Our Government has continued its disciplined budget management that has underpinned Australia's fiscal strength and enabled investment in Australia's economy and communities. The delivery of a surplus in 2012–13 is good budget management that makes social improvements possible and sustainable.

A central component of building a sustainable economy and community is maximising our productive potential through improving the economic participation of all sectors of society. We have committed to a sustained, national effort to raise productivity and remove barriers to people participating in the workforce.

Over 40 per cent of women aged 25 to 29 had achieved a bachelor degree or above in 2011.¹³ This compares to less than 30 per cent 10 years ago. Today, women in this age bracket in Australia are more likely to have completed a university education than men of the same age.

Worryingly, women remain one of Australia's most under-utilised sources of labour, skills and expertise. In 2010–2011 only 65 per cent of women aged 20 to 74 participated in the workforce, compared with 80 per cent of men the same age.¹⁴

Women in the workforce are rewarded less than men. The gender pay gap is sitting at 17.6 per cent, one of the highest we have seen in the last 25 years.¹⁵ Women university graduates earn on average \$2,000 less than their male counterparts in their first year of work.¹⁶ This is even more alarming for women who have just finished vocational education, earning \$9,000 less in their first year.¹⁷

Closing the gender pay gap has been identified as a strong economic incentive to increase women's workforce participation.¹⁸

It has been estimated that lifting women's workforce participation so that they are on par with men could boost Australian Gross Domestic Product by up to 13 per cent.¹⁹

Parallel to increasing the number of women in paid employment and raising Australia's productivity, we need to make sure that no Australians are left behind. A strong economy means a fairer community.

Australian women are almost twice as likely as men to be in the bottom 20 per cent of income earners. Women are also more vulnerable to poverty in old age, with lower superannuation balances and greater dependence on the single age pension, due to broken work patterns and lower incomes.

Our Government has delivered reforms to strategically and systematically tackle gender inequality in our economy. We are doing this to respond to future skills shortages, to ensure continued economic growth, and to provide protection against poverty for both women and men.

Fair Work Act 2009

Women more often work in vulnerable and low paid jobs, and need the protection of a strong and fair system. Almost 18 per cent of women are paid by award wages alone, compared with 12.6 per cent of men.²⁰

The *Fair Work Act 2009* establishes a framework that provides fairness and flexibility for women and promotes opportunities and equality in the workplace. The 10 National Employment Standards and modern awards provide all employees in the federal system with clear, comprehensive and enforceable minimum protections. This is particularly significant for women who are more reliant on awards and minimum wages than men.

Further, the Fair Work Act:

- facilitates additional periods of unpaid parental leave by providing a right to request an extension of unpaid parental leave, which the employer can only refuse on reasonable business grounds
- provides a right to request flexible working arrangements to employees with twelve months service who have responsibility for a child under school age or a child with disability who is under 18 years of age
- introduces special provisions for Fair Work Australia to facilitate multi-employer bargaining for low paid employees who have not historically had the benefits of collective bargaining. This includes areas where female employment is high, such as child care, aged care, community services and cleaning
- provides employees with enhanced protections from discrimination by adding carer's responsibilities as a ground of discrimination, and by providing remedies for discrimination generally, not just in relation to dismissal.

Our Government is conducting a review of the operation of the Fair Work Act. Among other things, the review will consider whether the legislation has had differential impacts on particular groups of workers including women. The review is also examining the extent to which the Act has facilitated flexible working arrangements to assist employees balance their work and family responsibilities.

Closing the gender pay gap for social and community sector workers

The Fair Work Act provides genuine opportunities to address pay equity concerns including extending the equal remuneration provisions to work of equal or comparable value. In a test case of the new provisions, Fair Work Australia has awarded significant wage increases to certain social and community sector workers in recognition that their work had been undervalued on gender grounds.

Around 150,000 of Australia's lowest paid workers will benefit from substantial pay rises of between 23 and 45 per cent above the minimum rates in the modern award as a result of Fair Work Australia's historic pay equity decision this year.

120,000 of these social and community sector workers are women – working in difficult jobs often described as 'caring' jobs, including:

- working with people with disability
- counselling families in crisis
- running homeless shelters
- working with victims of domestic violence or sexual assault.

These increases will be phased in over eight years from 1 December 2012. Our Government has committed to fund its share of the increases for those Commonwealth funded programs that fall within the scope of Fair Work Australia's decision.

Workplace Gender Equality Act

Genuine and sustained removal of barriers to women's full and equal participation in the workforce is needed.

The *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999*, and its predecessor the *Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986*, have been important components of Australia's approach to removing obstacles to women's employment for over 25 years.

In March 2011, our Government announced significant reforms to the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act* and Agency, to reflect a more contemporary approach to gender equality.

Following extensive consultation with industry, employee organisations and the women's sector, the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill 2012 was introduced into Parliament in March 2012.

This is an important reform aimed at addressing systemic inequalities at the workplace level. The objects of the Act will highlight the expanded coverage to men, particularly in relation to caring responsibilities, as well as the importance of equal remuneration to gender equality.

The Act aims to educate and support businesses to change organisational culture and advance gender equality in their workplaces. Under these reforms we will provide an extra \$11.2 million over four years from 2011–2012 – a doubling of funds to the Agency – with most of this extra funding to provide practical help and advice to employers.

The new Act will cut red tape. Reporting will be standardised and based on gender equality indicators and employers will be able to lodge their reports online, as they have requested.

We will continue to consult with key stakeholders throughout the implementation of the Act.

This legislation is aimed firmly at driving meaningful change in a way that is not burdensome on employers, but which will be beneficial to employers, employees and the economy.

Investing in Skills, Education and Training

A highly skilled workforce ensures that Australian businesses are resilient, innovative and competitive in the global economy, and that individuals can secure a job and earn a good income.

Our Government is focused on investing in the skills, education and training required to see the economy prosper over coming generations. We have doubled the amount spent on schools – nearly \$65 billion over four years – and created an additional 119,000 student places at universities since 2007. With the introduction in 2012 of the demand-driven funding system, an estimated 512,000 undergraduate places are being funded at public universities.

Building on our investment in skills: skills for a prosperous future

Our Government is investing \$15.6 billion in vocational education and training over the next five years.

Around \$9 billion will be provided to the states and territories. This includes a National Partnership Agreement which will deliver \$1.75 billion over five years for skills reform in addition to the \$1.4 billion already provided each year.

These reforms mean that working age Australians will be entitled to a government-subsidised training place to obtain a qualification up to their first Certificate III, including foundation skills or lower qualifications.

Government-subsidised Diploma and Advanced Diploma students will have access to HECS style 'study now pay later' loans to help meet the costs of upfront fees.

These arrangements will enable at least 375,000 additional students to complete qualifications.

We are also providing \$700 million through the National Workforce Development Fund over five years, from 2010–2011. Training support through the fund is directly driven by the workforce development needs of business. With capacity to access financial support from the Government, more businesses will be able to invest in formal training.

Addressing Occupational Segregation

In general, Australian women and men do very different types of paid work. Women work primarily in care and service industries, while men dominate industries such as construction and mining. This is reflected in the nature of the education and training that women and men undertake. In 2011, women represented only 4.7 per cent of construction apprenticeships.²¹

The small percentage of women in high paying industries and the undervaluing of what is traditionally considered to be 'women's work' both contribute to the gender pay gap.

More needs to be done to address occupational segregation, and to open new doors and employment opportunities for women and men, including through skills and training. Not only will this improve women's economic outcomes, it will also address the skills shortage the Australian economy is currently facing and is likely to face into the future.

Our Government is providing more opportunities for women in male-dominated industries.

As part of the National Resource Sector Workforce Strategy, \$534,000 is being provided over three years to help enterprises improve their attraction and retention of women. In 2011, the Australian Mines and Metals Association launched the Australian Women in Resources Alliance to tap into the valuable pool of under-utilised female labour to help meet the demand for skilled workers.

The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency provides a number of supports to businesses and organisations to examine and address gender equality, including occupational segregation and the undervaluation of women's work. In conjunction with Standards Australia and workplace stakeholders, the Agency is developing an Australian Standard on Gender-inclusive Job Evaluation and Grading, so organisations can minimise gender bias in how jobs are described, evaluated and graded.

We are removing gender restrictions on the remaining Australian Defence Force (ADF) combat role employment categories for which women are currently excluded; Navy Clearance Divers and Mine Warfare and Clearance Diving Officers, Army Infantry and Armoured Corps and some Artillery roles, and Air Force Airfield Defence Guards and Ground Defence Officers.

A comprehensive review of the culture within the ADF and Australian Defence Force Academy has been undertaken and is an important step in removing obstacles to women joining and staying in the ADF. Reviews relating specifically to women have been led by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Ms Elizabeth Broderick, and the former Deputy Public Service Commissioner, Ms Carmel McGregor who now leads the People Group in Defence.

2012–13 Budget highlight: mathematics and science

More girls need to engage with mathematics and science if they are to enter some of the male-dominated industries such as engineering. Our Government is providing \$54 million over four years to improve participation in the study of mathematics and science at school and university.

Women on Boards and Corporate Leadership

Women's representation in management positions and on boards is one component of improved participation of women at all levels. Companies with more equal representation of women on their boards outperform those with fewer women, and perform better against every single financial indicator.

In the public sector we are leading by example and have committed to achieving a minimum of 40 per cent representation of women and men on Australian Government boards by 2015. At 30 June 2011, the percentage of women on Australian Government boards was 35.3 per cent – an all-time high for the Australian Government.²²

Clean Energy Future Household Assistance Package

Our Government is building a strong clean economy for the future. This is a significant reform and Australian households need help to transition to a clean energy future.

The Clean Energy Future Household Assistance Package will be permanent and will increase over time. It will support women in a number of ways.

Pensioners and low income households, the majority of whom are women, will receive direct financial assistance under this package. Through increases to Government payments and tax cuts or both, these groups will be provided with direct financial assistance to fully cover their expected average cost increase.

Households will also receive assistance through personal income tax cuts targeted at low and middle income earners, by more than tripling the current tax-free threshold from \$6,000 to \$18,200. The increase in the threshold will be particularly significant for the 70 per cent of part-time workers who are women.²³ These tax cuts improve the rewards for work and encourage more people to join the workforce, particularly women who are part-time and casual workers with an annual income below the new threshold. In combination with the low-income tax offset, the new tax-free threshold means that women who earn up to \$20,542 per year will now pay no tax.

In addition, all taxpayers earning under \$80,000 a year will take home more in their fortnightly cheques from 1 July 2012. Most of these taxpayers will get a tax cut of at least \$300 a year from 1 July 2012. No one will pay more income tax as a result of these changes.

A fairer and more sustainable tax system

Our Government will improve the fairness and sustainability of the tax system by:

- improving support for families with children in full-time school or training, by increasing the Family Tax Benefit Part A rate for 16 to 19 year olds in full-time secondary school
- converting the Education Tax Refund into a simple twice-yearly Schoolkids Bonus, paid through the family payments system
- boosting the retirement incomes of 8.4 million workers by significantly increasing the Superannuation Guarantee rate from 9 to 12 per cent
- making superannuation concessions fairer for 3.6 million low income earners, with the introduction of the Low Income Superannuation Contribution of up to \$500
- reducing the superannuation tax concession for very high income earners, by reducing the concession tax on contributions from 30 to 15 per cent, thereby making it fairer
- working towards a targeted and fairer superannuation concessional cap for people over 50 years of age with low balances
- ensuring the sustainability of the transfer system by increasing incrementally the eligibility age for the Age Pension from 65 in 2016–2017 to 67 in 2023–2024, recognising the retirement plans that people have already made
- ensuring the tax concessions for living-away-from-home allowances and benefits is only available to those legitimately maintaining a home away from their actual home
- better targeting the Employment Termination Payment tax offset to those with genuine redundancies and other hardships, not golden handshakes for high income earners
- considering options which ensure that businesses and individuals can continue using trusts, with confidence that the tax outcomes applying to their circumstances are fair and consistent
- establishing reform processes to deliver the ongoing fairness and sustainability to the tax system, which includes the Superannuation Roundtable and the Not-for-profit Sector Tax Concession Working Group.

Superannuation

Most women have significantly lower superannuation balances than men. Given that women tend to live longer, their financial security in retirement is one of the most important issues facing Australian women today.

Our Government's major reforms in superannuation are key to ensuring more Australian women are adequately prepared for life after paid work.

From 2013–2014, the superannuation guarantee rate will increase to 9.25 per cent from the current 9 per cent and then rise incrementally to 12 per cent by 2019–2020. The maximum age limit on the super guarantee will also be abolished from 2013–2014.

These changes are particularly important for women whose superannuation balances are often affected by significant periods outside the paid workforce. Women's work patterns differ from men's, especially for women with caring responsibilities. When comparing working lives, men are in paid work for an average of 39 years while women average 20 years.²⁴

Under these reforms, a woman aged 30 now on average weekly earnings with a broken work pattern will have an extra \$85,000 upon retirement in real terms.

Our Government is providing a Low Income Superannuation Contribution (LISC) of up to \$500 annually to those earning under \$37,000, in addition to the co-contribution scheme. It is estimated that 2.1 million women of the 3.6 million recipients for this measure will receive the LISC in respect of the 2012–2013 year.²⁵

Recognising that women are also much more likely to be reliant on the age pension – with 70 per cent of single age pensioners being women²⁶ – our Government has delivered significant improvements to the pension system through Secure and Sustainable Pension Reforms in 2009. Since the reforms were implemented the maximum age pension rate has increased by around \$100 a fortnight for singles and around \$74 for couples combined.

These actions taken by our Government are aimed firmly at closing the gap and addressing the current inequity for future generations of women.

Strengthening our Communities

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Our Government is working to create a fairer and more inclusive Australia which helps the most disadvantaged Australians with the resources, opportunities and capabilities they need to learn, work, and take part in community life.

We are investing in more housing services and infrastructure. We are working towards the targets set by COAG to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage. We are working to ensure fairness and respect for those from diverse backgrounds.

Australia should be a place where all women and men are respected and have the opportunity to participate in the nation's economic and social life without discrimination.

Too many women's lives continue to be impacted by violence. Some groups of women struggle to meet their basic needs for survival due to economic inequalities. Women continue to be excluded from decision-making that affects their lives and the lives of their families.

Our Government recognises that some Australian women are excluded from the full range of opportunities that living in Australia can bring. We are working hard to ensure social inclusion for all disadvantaged groups.

We are committed to restoring Australia's reputation internationally in relation to gender equality, and to making sure that our human rights framework gives support to women's voices being heard, both here and abroad.

Indigenous women

In 2011, Indigenous people made up 2.6 per cent of the total Australian population.²⁷ Australia's Indigenous people have lower life expectancy, higher child mortality, less engagement in early childhood education and schooling, and lower employment.

Indigenous women have even lower employment rates than Indigenous men.²⁸

We will continue to work to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians through investing in employment, education, health services, community development, and community safety.

Indigenous women will benefit from the more than \$5.2 billion in funding in this Budget for employment, education, health services, community development and community safety.

We provide grants to organisations across Australia to enhance the leadership skills of Indigenous women to overcome Indigenous disadvantage and we support women and their children escaping violence by funding 16 safe houses in the Northern Territory.²⁹

We acknowledge the strong Indigenous women who are leading their communities and will continue, including through COAG, to build Indigenous women's leadership, and to engage with women in the development of policies and services, including through the National Congress of Australia's First People with its 50 per cent representation by women. We will also work on the ground through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance to bring together the views of women.

Women with disability or mental illness

Four million people in Australia (18.5 per cent) were reported as having a disability in 2009, half of whom are women.³⁰ Many other Australian women are primary carers of people with disability.

Our Government's commitment to the roll-out of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) – a billion dollar investment – will substantially improve the daily lives of these women and girls through greater access to the individualised services they need.

Women with disability will be integrally involved in the ongoing development and implementation of the NDIS. Women with disability are also providing advice to governments on other key issues including how to reduce abuse and violence against women with disability. As part of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* all governments are exploring how best to reduce violence and abuse in both domestic and institutional settings.

Rural women

Our Government's commitment to regional Australia is strong and longstanding. We believe in the power of localism – the knowledge and skills of local communities to decide their priorities and develop their responses to economic, social and environmental challenges.

If we have strong regions we have a strong nation, and rural women have a critical role to play.

Rural women make a very valuable contribution to the social and economic fabric of communities across the nation – through organisations such as the Country Women's Association and the National Rural Women's Coalition and Network, by running businesses and farms, taking on leadership roles, driving sustainability and innovation across primary industry sectors, ensuring the wellbeing of their families and communities, building strong networks, and taking part in everything from disaster response to volunteer work.

Our Government hosted the first National Rural Women's Summit in 2008 to ensure we understood the needs and priorities of rural women across the breadth of government, we participated in global discussions about rural women at the 56th United Nations Commission on the Status of Women in 2012, and we acknowledge the efforts of women leaders through our annual Rural Women of the Year awards.

The contribution of rural women to our economy and community cannot be underestimated and we will continue to support and recognise their ongoing contribution.

Culturally and linguistically diverse women

Australia is a multicultural country. Today over 44 per cent of all Australians were either born overseas or have at least one overseas born parent.³¹

For our migrant communities we will harness the benefits of economic and social diversity under Australia's multicultural policy, *The People of Australia*. Through our humanitarian and settlement programs we will continue to support people to establish themselves within our communities.

The Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance is focused on ensuring that we are aware of the special needs of women, and women are aware of what services are available to them. We will face the tough issues head on – we have increased the level of support to victims under the Support

to Trafficked People Program and are planning to introduce legislation to criminalise forced marriage.

National Women's Alliances

There are thousands of women in hundreds of organisations across Australia working towards gender equality.

Our Government has committed \$3.6 million in core funding for six National Women's Alliances over three years from 2010–2013. The Alliances represent the interests of diverse women's non-government organisations and individuals from across Australia. They work to ensure the perspectives of women, particularly those from marginalised and disadvantaged groups, are heard in addressing policy issues that affect women.

There are six Alliances, each representing a broad sector of the community, and all focussing on key issues where driving gender equality is critical:

- economic Security4Women (eS4W), which focuses on improving women's economic security and financial independence
- Equality Rights Alliance (ERA), which addresses gender equality and leadership issues
- Australian Women Against Violence Alliance (AWAVA), which addresses issues of women's safety and the elimination of violence
- Australian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Alliance (AIRWA), which advocates on behalf of immigrant and refugee women
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA), which gives Indigenous women a voice in Government decision-making
- National Rural Women's Coalition and Network, which provides a voice for more than 250,000 women in rural and regional Australia.

Two of the Alliances – economic Security4Women and Equality Rights Alliance – have a keen focus on women's workforce and economic security issues, and have played an important role, particularly around women's workforce participation, tax reform, child care and superannuation.

Stopping Violence against Women

One in three Australian women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15. Almost one in five has experienced sexual violence. Indigenous women are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence related assaults than other Australian women.³²

The emotional and personal costs of violence against women reach all levels of society. Violence not only affects the victim themselves, but the children who are exposed to it, their extended families, their friends, their work colleagues, and ultimately the broader community. Violence against women also has a significant economic impact. Domestic violence and sexual assault perpetrated against women is estimated to cost the nation \$13.6 billion each year. By 2021, the figure is likely to rise to \$15.6 billion if extra steps are not taken.³³

Economic and social wellbeing is critical for women and their children who have been victims of violence to rebuild their lives, including through paid work and financial independence.

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022

Our Government is committed to a zero tolerance approach to domestic violence and sexual abuse. We have developed the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022* (the National Plan) in partnership with state and territory governments. The National Plan is a 12 year plan which seeks to bring together the efforts of all Australian governments, non-government sector and the community more broadly to ensure women can live free from violence in safe communities.

Since April 2009, we have committed over \$86 million to initiatives under the National Plan, to improve the lives of women who have experienced violence and, most importantly, to stop violence from occurring. This funding supports a number of initiatives, including:

- The Line – a world leading social marketing campaign aimed at encouraging young people to develop healthy, respectful relationships
- 1800RESPECT – the National Sexual Assault and Domestic and Family Violence Telephone and Online Counselling Service

- a National Centre of Excellence for research into sexual assault and family and domestic violence
- increasing our understanding of the prevalence of and attitudes towards violence against women by repeating the Personal Safety Survey and National Community Attitudes Survey
- DValert – training for health, allied health and Indigenous health workers to recognise and respond to domestic violence.

To support victims of violence a multi-disciplinary training package on family violence (AVERT) has been developed targeting lawyers, judicial officers, counsellors and other professionals working in the family law system. The Commonwealth, states and territories are also developing a National Domestic Violence Order Scheme that will involve automatic recognition legislation and a domestic violence order information-sharing capability.

In the 2010–11 Budget, our Government provided an additional \$154 million over four years to enhance access to justice through increased funding for legal aid commissions, community legal centres and Indigenous legal services. In addition, this funding will underpin a new National Partnership Agreement for legal assistance services which will seek to ensure that people who have experienced or are at risk of experiencing family violence are a key priority for legal assistance services.

Our Government has also commissioned the Australian Law Reform Commission to undertake two inquiries into Commonwealth and state and territory domestic violence and family violence legislation. Our Government is currently considering these reports.

Communities are standing up against violence themselves. To date there are over 1,400 White Ribbon Ambassadors.³⁴ The Australian Women Against Violence Alliance also brings together women's groups from across Australia to address issues of women's safety and the elimination of violence.

Governments are engaging with the community, recognising this is something that governments cannot do on their own.

We have created a trilateral National Plan Implementation Panel to help us implement the National Plan. We are providing funding through Respectful Relationships education projects (32 including four Indigenous specific projects) with activities in all states and territories.

We have put in place a grants program to support local community action to reduce violence against women and for national sporting bodies to run projects through local clubs.

The government-funded White Ribbon Workplaces program will encourage and support Australian employers to help create long term change in attitudes towards violence against women, and implement violence prevention strategies through the workplace. The Workplace Rights and Entitlement project promotes ways that employers can support victims of domestic violence through enterprise bargaining.

Forced marriage and support for trafficked people

Forcing anyone into a marriage is a breach of their fundamental human rights.

Our Government is introducing new legislation to criminalise forced marriage and to strengthen existing provisions related to people trafficking. Criminalising forced marriage will send a strong message that the practice is not acceptable and has no place in Australia.

In 2009, we announced improvements to the Anti-People Trafficking Strategy to make support more accessible and compassionate to victims of people trafficking and their families. This resulted in more trafficked people being able to access immediate support regardless of the purpose for which they were trafficked.

Women and Housing

Affordable housing and housing assistance is a major priority for our Government. We have invested in new housing programs to assist first home buyers, build more affordable rental properties, and improve the efficiency of the housing market.

Our Government understands that assisting vulnerable households to access safe and secure housing can contribute to enhancing their economic and social inclusion, and women's needs are a key consideration in all housing programs.

Housing support is targeted to people in high need due to low income and assets, lone parents with primary care of children and people escaping domestic violence, a high proportion of whom are women. Should they be eligible, women can access and benefit from this broad range of assistance to meet various housing needs throughout their different life stages.

In addition to the Commonwealth housing programs – the National Rental Affordability Scheme, the Housing Affordability Fund, and the First Home Owners Grant – the initiatives outlined below provide targeted assistance to vulnerable households at risk of homelessness, living in social housing, or struggling in the private rental market.

Women at risk of homelessness

Research suggests that there are a growing number of older single women who are experiencing homelessness for the first time later in life. Factors contributing to this include the death of a spouse, divorce or separation and the fact that women tend to have less superannuation and life savings. These factors are linked with the tendency for women to be in lower paid jobs, to have poorer health or serious illness which often results directly or indirectly from abuse, and because of time taken out of the workforce due to caring responsibilities.

Older Australians and homelessness

While older women are a group increasingly at risk of homelessness, the ageing of Australia's population more broadly will impact on the profile of Australia's housing needs. It will place considerable pressure on the housing market to provide suitable and desirable accommodation for single and couple households.

Our Government will undertake further analysis to fully understand the dimensions of the issue of older single women and homelessness and the likely impacts of the ageing population. This will inform additional measures that may be put in place to address a rise in homelessness among the ageing population.

The Productivity Commission released its *Final Inquiry Report, Caring for Older Australians*, to Government in June 2011. The range of recommendations made included the provision of block funding to some specialised homelessness services for older Australians when there is a demonstrated need to do so. Our Government is undertaking a stocktake of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness and the National Affordable Housing Agreement, to identify the demonstrated need for this style of funding to be implemented.

Social Housing Initiative

Our Government is investing \$5.6 billion over three-and-a-half years in social housing through the Social Housing Initiative. This investment in social housing is the largest single amount ever committed by an Australian government and is vital to help us meet our target of halving homelessness by 2020. This injection of Commonwealth funding will provide around 31,000 affordable homes to vulnerable Australians.

The Social Housing Initiative supports both the construction of new social housing and the repair and upgrade of existing homes. Around 19,600 new social housing dwellings are being built under the initiative and approximately 80,000 existing social housing dwellings will benefit from repairs and maintenance works. This includes major upgrades to around 12,000 social housing dwellings that were vacant or would have become uninhabitable without this work.

The new homes constructed through the Initiative are rented to high priority people on waiting lists. Tenant data at February 2012 shows 55 per cent of tenants are individuals or families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, 40 per cent are older Australians, 13 per cent are Indigenous Australians, 43 per cent are people with disability, and 6 per cent are those escaping family violence, the majority of whom are women.³⁵ Individual states and territories have used Social Housing Initiative funding to deliver housing projects specifically for women.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance

Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) is a non-taxable income supplement payable to eligible Australian residents who rent accommodation in the private rental market and community housing. Around 1.2 million individuals and couples receive CRA with over 63 per cent of these being women.³⁶

We will continue to consider the specific needs of women in the future review of current housing and homelessness programs and the development of future housing and homelessness initiatives.

Women's Health

Our Government has delivered on its commitment to the development of a new women's health policy, with the launch of the *National Women's Health Policy* in December 2010.

The Policy prioritises preventing chronic disease among women, supporting healthy ageing, and addressing gaps in health outcomes for women of low socio-economic groups which, sadly, still exists. The Policy will guide us through the next 20 years to improve the health and wellbeing of all women in Australia, especially those at greatest risk of poor health.

The Policy also ensures we will have the right information to inform policy which is why we announced an additional \$5.3 million in funding to support the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health.

The Policy is supported by our broader investments in a range of programs directly targeting women such as:

- the *Australian National Breastfeeding Strategy 2010–2015*
- breast and cervical screening, women's health services, and sexual and reproductive health services
- \$120.5 million over four years for a maternity services reform package, from 2009–2010
- \$112 million over four years for *New Directions: An Equal Start in Life for Indigenous Children* in 2008–2012
- \$9.4 million over four years to refocus the National Pregnancy Birth and Baby Helpline from July 2010. The Helpline now provides a broader range of information, advice and referral services for women, their partners and families
- \$7 million over two years for Rural Women's GP Service (RWGPS) from 2011–2012
- \$3.3 million over three years from January 2010 for the Jean Hailes Foundation to promote the health and wellbeing of Australian women from adolescence to mid-life and beyond.³⁷

Helping Women Globally

Making a real difference

Gender equality is central to human and economic development.

Our Government has committed to remaining a firm and persistent advocate of gender equality through practical measures in our aid policies and programs. For our Government, real development gains cannot be achieved without gender equality.

2012–13 Budget highlight: support for global organisations

As part of the 2012–13 Budget measure, *Expanding Australia's development partnerships with the United Nations*, our Government will provide an additional \$16.5 million over four years to UN Women.

This will mean our annual core funding to UN Women will be \$8 million in 2012–2013, increasing to \$20 million by 2015–2016, subject to continued effective performance of this new organisation.

Based on current contributions, Australia will become the second highest donor to UN Women in 2015–2016.

This funding will support UN Women's role in achieving the Millennium Development Goals and strengthening global efforts to promote gender equality and empower women. On the ground this will mean strengthening women's leadership and participation, preventing violence against women, and expanding access to services for survivors of this violence. It will also ensure that Australia's aid enhances women's economic participation.

Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018

Recognising the diverse and disproportionate impact that conflict can have on women and girls, our Government launched the *Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018* in March 2012.

The National Action Plan is Australia's next step in implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and related resolutions under the UN Women, Peace and Security agenda. It consolidates and builds on the broad program of work already underway in Australia to:

- integrate a gender perspective into peace and security efforts
- protect women's and girls' human rights, particularly in relation to gender-based violence
- promote women's and girl's participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution.

Global Ambassador for Women and Girls

In September 2011, our Government announced the appointment of Australia's first Global Ambassador for Women and Girls. The Global Ambassador is responsible for high-level advocacy to promote Australian Government policies and activity regarding gender equality and the social, political and economic empowerment of women and girls, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.

Human Rights

Sex Discrimination Act 1984

On 24 May 2011, the Sex Discrimination Act was amended to provide greater protections for men and women against discrimination and sexual harassment by:

- establishing breastfeeding as a separate grounds for discrimination
- extending protections from discrimination on the grounds of family responsibilities to all areas of employment
- ensuring the Act applies to men and women equally
- providing greater protection from sexual harassment for students and workers.

With the appointment of the Hon Susan Ryan AO as Australia's first stand-alone Age Discrimination Commissioner in July 2011, the Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Ms Elizabeth Broderick, is now focusing her full efforts on discrimination against women and men.

Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women Optional Protocol

In December 2008, Australia strengthened its commitment to addressing discrimination against women by acceding to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) Optional Protocol.

The Optional Protocol allows individuals to bring a complaint directly to the UN CEDAW Committee after all domestic remedies have been exhausted. The Optional Protocol also allows the CEDAW Committee to investigate claims of serious violations of CEDAW in Australia.

CEDAW provides the basis for realising equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access and equal opportunities in political and public life, education, health and, importantly, employment.

Working to remove the two reservations to CEDAW for Australia

When Australia ratified CEDAW, it lodged reservations to the treaty on paid maternity leave and the employment of women in armed conflict. In light of our introduction of the *Paid Parental Leave Act 2010* and our decision to remove gender restrictions in the Australian Defence Force, we are reviewing Australia's reservations to CEDAW with a view to removing them.

Human Rights Education Grants

In 2010, our Government launched Australia's Human Rights Framework which outlines a range of key measures to further protect and promote human rights in Australia. The Framework demonstrates our commitment to positive and practical action in relation to human rights through a number of key commitments, including Human Rights Education Grants.

Our Government funds a small grants program for community organisations to deliver grassroots human rights education projects in Australia. This program is providing \$2 million worth of grants from 2010–2014. Six of the Education Grants already awarded focus specifically on women's issues. The projects include human rights and advocacy training workshops for newly-arrived migrant and refugee women to strengthen their capacity to exercise leadership and facilitate change in their new communities, and human rights education workshops for regional, rural and remote communities focusing on CEDAW.

Consolidation of Commonwealth anti-discrimination laws

Our Government is consolidating anti-discrimination laws into a single Act, to improve the effectiveness of Commonwealth anti-discrimination law. As part of this project, we will introduce new protections against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, benefiting two very marginalised groups of women in the community.

Next Steps

Building on the achievements outlined in this Statement, our Government is committed to continuing to advance equality between women and men.

We will build on the strong evidence base established by the ABS through the *Gender Indicators, Australia* launched last year. The *Gender Indicators, Australia* report card on gender equality identifies priorities for women. This new evidence base is a critical piece of the gender puzzle, providing direct feedback to governments and the community about progress and continuing challenges.

We will work with state and territory governments through the Select Council on Women's Issues to ensure gender equality is a key consideration in COAG decisions.

We will deliver and implement the targeted work already underway including the Workplace Gender Equality Act, the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, and reaching the target of at least 40 per cent women on Australian Government boards. Our Government's commitment to achieve 40 per cent representation of women across Australian Government boards will bring more women into the heart of Government decision-making to ensure government decisions are fully informed by women's perspectives.

There will be a particular focus on our broader reforms – supporting working Australians and their families, building a new Australian economy, and strengthening our communities – that impact on women's economic participation and security.

We will continue to build mental health and aged care reforms, and an NDIS that provides significant benefits to many Australian women. We will strengthen our focus on improving women's participation in the workforce and economic outcomes. We will work together to further identify and respond to gender equality impacts, with a particular focus on skills development, employment opportunities for Indigenous women, superannuation and retirement incomes, housing affordability, and community based mental health.

All Australian Government Ministers and Departments share a responsibility for delivering equality for women, and for considering the needs of different women, particularly those who may face multiple barriers to full participation in work and community life.

Our Office for Women will help build the skills of the Australian Public Service to consider the needs of women and men in the pursuit of gender equality. It will continue to work with Departments across the Australian Public Service to develop practical measures to embed a strong consideration of gender equality across the work we are doing. It will also work to strengthen the capacity of policy makers to incorporate gender equality considerations into policy development and evaluation.

We are committed to working with industry, the non-government sector, the broader community and the women's sector to improve women's workforce participation and economic outcomes and take the next steps towards gender equality.

The benefits of gender equality for Australian women and girls, their families, communities and the broader economy are clear.

Building on the achievements of previous Labor Governments, we are committed to working with all Australians to realise the benefits of gender equality.



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- 36 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, unpublished statistics, 2012.
- 37 Department of Health and Ageing, *National Women's Health Policy 2010*, Department of Health and Ageing Canberra, 2010.



