



Federal Election 2019 Top Priorities

1. Eliminating violence against women
2. Women's health
3. An equitable taxation system
4. Social services
5. Vocational education and training
6. Affordable housing
7. Rights and protections for women living with disability
8. Adequate retirement income for women
9. Job security, flexibility, and working time
10. Gender pay equity
11. Childcare
12. Strengthening women's representation at decision-making levels



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Preamble

For the 2019 election, Women's Electoral Lobby of Australia (WEL) has a number of priorities to reduce the disadvantages women experience in Australia today.

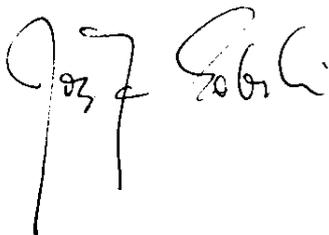
WEL acknowledges and pays respect to the past, present and future traditional owners of this land, and supports the Uluru Statement from the Heart call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice in the Australian Constitution. WEL also acknowledges the crisis and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples including the many challenges faced by ATSI women. WEL supports the call by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Women's Alliance for Australian Federal Government and State Governments to work more collectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities and address, implement and adopt policies, legislation and programs to have a cultural, holistic and right-based approach for the empowerment and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (<http://natsiwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/United-Nation-Special-Rapporteur-on-the-rights-of-Indigenous-Peoples-2017.pdf>).

There is a widening "fairness gap" between Australian women's rights to equal opportunities and equal treatment (as set out in Australian legislation and international conventions Australia has signed) and women's daily and lifetime experiences. Girls increasingly are encouraged to believe they will experience equality and are all too often disappointed. Economic and social policies and systems that advantage men and disadvantage women are widespread. There is an inadequate understanding of how women and men are affected by existing and proposed or announced policies and initiatives of the major parties with the exception of those specifically directed to women.

Australia is a wealthy country, heading in the wrong direction towards increasing inequality and failing to meet the needs of its poorest people for a decent standard of living.

WEL's Priorities do not cover every issue, nor every aspect of the issues. They do include significant and worthwhile steps forward. They take account of the diverse experiences and needs of various groups of women.

Women's votes count in the election, and WEL's Priorities seek to influence political parties' policies.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jozefa Sobski'.

Jozefa Sobski AM
Convenor WEL Australia
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1. ELIMINATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Priorities

1. The Commonwealth Government should commit \$1 billion over 5 years matched dollar for dollar by state and territory governments for a long term and securely funded Commonwealth/State national program for 24-hour accessible women's refuges, frontline outreach services and transitional accommodation – a **Women and Children Safety Program**.

2. There should be ear-marked funds for services which work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, LGBTQI services and women who live in regional, rural and remote areas.

Why

The cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy, according to Our Watch (2016), is calculated to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2022 without the right preventive action. Australia's domestic violence homicide rate and police response rates to domestic violence incidents are at an all-time high.

There is a range of funded programs at a state and federal level that are designed to meet the needs of women and children who are experiencing or needing to escape domestic and family violence. WEL supports the Fourth National Action Plan 2019-2022 and the detailed measures outlined in AWAVA's response on each priority area. These priorities should be adequately funded, by all governments.

Since the abolition (2012) of the Supported Assistance Accommodation Act (SAAP), some states have moved away from the funding and provision of specialist domestic and family violence services such as women's refuges to a generalist homeless approach in service modelling. Continuously for forty years the Commonwealth Government has co-funded (with the states) women's refuges and other frontline domestic violence services. This funding came to an end on 30 June 2018. This has resulted in fewer specialist services for domestic violence victims. The new National Housing and Homelessness Agreement came into force from July, 2018. There is no new money allocated for its implementation.

Prevention measures are essential to reduce domestic violence in the long-term but, with the current rate of domestic violence in Australia, adequate crisis services are essential to saving lives. These services are needed for the nearly 121,100 adults and children seeking help from specialist homelessness service agencies for domestic and family violence (AIHW Annual Report on Specialist Homelessness Services 2017-18).

WEL, strongly supported by the National Foundation for Australian Women, and over 30 women's and community organisations representing thousands of supporters, campaigned for long term funding of a Commonwealth/state national program (**Women and Children's Safety Program**) for 24-hour accessible women's refuges, frontline outreach services and transitional accommodation.

WEL's proposal focused on reinstating a nationally consistent and adequately funded program that has bipartisan support and is enshrined in legislation. The program would be separated from the current homelessness programs which do not in some states adequately serve the specific needs of women and children escaping violence. Escaping domestic violence is vastly different in character from general homelessness and requires specialised programs. It is a crisis situation, which, with the specialist help provided by refuges, may eventually see women and their children returning to their home and community.

2. WOMEN'S HEALTH

Priorities

- 1. Develop a National Women's Health Policy and a staged and funded implementation plan for each of the priority areas of the National Women's Health Strategy 2019-2030 and revise the Strategy to better reflect women's needs and recent research.**
- 2. Reinstate funding for the Australian Women's Health Network and fund implementation of the Australian Women's Health Charter.**
- 3. Restore funding to family planning and reproductive health programs in Australia's international aid program and maintain our commitment to international treaties and agreements supporting women's equality and reproductive rights.**

Why

National Women's Health Strategy

The National Women's Health Strategy was launched in April 2018.

The five priority areas for the National Women's Health Strategy are:

Maternal, Sexual and Reproductive Health; Healthy Ageing; Chronic Conditions and Preventive Health; Mental Health and Health Impacts of Violence against Women and Girls.

The Government made a \$52.3 million funding commitment to underpin the strategy, largely distributed across ovarian cancer and endometriosis research and treatments, a drug and alcohol rehabilitation service for Aboriginal women and health promotions. Only \$7million is committed for Family Planning services, along with ante-natal and pre-natal services and health promotions.

Much of the Strategy remains unfunded in the short and longer term, with no announced implementation and linked funding plans.

Sections of the current Strategy omit or underplay important recent research, including:

- the impacts of sexual assault and harassment on women's health;
- the contribution of the cultural silencing of women's experiences of menstruation and menopause to low confidence and other poor health outcomes;
- reproductive coercion as a factor in women's reproductive decisions;
- the impacts of Australia's patchwork systems of abortion laws and regulations on termination services;
- the need for impartial and easily accessible information on contraception and reproductive health options;
- limited and inadequate GP and pharmacist training restricting availability of contraceptive and termination services; the prohibitive cost of terminations; the cost of contraceptives and the prohibitive cost of terminations, especially in rural and regional Australia; and
- the critical role of access to crisis and long-term housing for women suffering family violence and elder abuse.

Australian Women's Health Network

The current Government withdrew funding from the Australian Women's Health Network in 2016.

Since its establishment in 2009, the network has played a vital role in working with women's medical and health services to identify emerging issues and research areas in women's health. Development of a new National Women's Health Policy and revised Strategy and Implementation Plan will require expert support through the peak women's health organisations represented through the Network and should be based on the Network's Australian Women's Health Charter.

Maintain and extend family planning and reproductive health programs in Australia's international aid program and our commitment to international treaties and agreements supporting women's equality and reproductive rights.

Providing services to women in developing countries is a "key plank" for tackling both gender equality and poverty in the world. Australia has recently reiterated strong endorsement of the outcome statement for the 52ⁿ UN Commission on Population and Development, stating that *'Australia remains strongly committed to advancing universal access to quality sexual and reproductive health and rights as a vital cornerstone of achieving broader sustainable, inclusive development.*

On the other hand our international representatives recently refused to endorse an International Women's Day statement at the United Nations, which called for access to safe abortions, comprehensive sexuality education and sexual reproductive health.

Australia's foreign aid funding for reproductive, maternal and sexual health has halved from \$46 million to \$23 million since 2012.

Cuts to family planning services take away the power women and girls have to decide when and how many children they give birth to. It will restrict their access to crucial maternal services.

3. AN EQUITABLE TAXATION SYSTEM

Priorities

- 1. Progressive and individual elements of the tax system should be enhanced and high effective tax rates on partnered mothers be eliminated.**
- 2. The unfair high marginal tax rate experienced by second income earners and, in particular, women returning to work, should be reversed.**
- 3. Continuing emphasis on personal tax cuts should be replaced with a fairer tax system that provides adequate revenue to fund Australia's needs for care infrastructure**
- 4. Negative gearing and capital gains tax discounting should be limited**
- 5. Tax avoidance and tax evasion should be eliminated**
- 6. Efforts should be increased to ensure multinational corporations pay taxes on the income they derive in Australia**
- 7. Government should work towards an equitable funding of the fiscal deficit through both revenue and expenditure measures that do not disproportionately and negatively impact on women.**

Why

Over the last ten to fifteen years the Australian taxation system has become favourably skewed towards high-income earners at the expense of middle-income earners, particularly women who are second income earners. Women returning to work are particularly impacted by the current taxation system. Inequality has significantly increased. The replacement of the universal family allowance with current joint income targeted payments has led to second earners in household experiencing marginal tax rates that are well above the top taxation rate. As a result, a second earner in a family with a low average primary income, who goes to work for a similar income can face an average tax rate of around 50%. This has led to women making decisions not to re-enter the workforce, nor to move from part-time to full time work.

Raising the third tax threshold to \$87,000 will benefit only 20% of women taxpayers, and two thirds of men, while incurring a fiscal cost of \$4 billion. The lapsing of the budget repair levy benefits many more men than women as women make up only 25% of those in the top tax bracket. Negative gearing provides much greater benefits to men than to women, as men are more concentrated in higher earning professions.

The overall progressivity of the rate scale has declined significantly. As a consequence, current and retirement savings of the second income earner, the primary source of household savings, are foregone and women may also find they cannot afford to work.

Meanwhile foregone income from tax avoidance and tax evasion is heavily impacting on the Government's ability to build an adequate tax base for essential public services like schools and hospitals.

4. SOCIAL SERVICES

Priorities

- 1. *Newstart* payments should be substantially increased to reflect increases in costs of living over the last 25 years and to help people search for jobs. WEL supports the *ACOSS Raise the Rate* campaign. *Newstart*, Youth Allowance and related payments should be increased by a minimum of \$75 a week.**
- 2. Family Tax Benefit and Parenting Payments should be indexed to wage movements as well as CPI.**
- 3. The *ParentsNext* program should be abolished in line with the findings of the Senate Inquiry into *ParentsNext*.**
- 4. WEL opposes any further expansions to new regions of the Cashless Debit Card and Income Management until a comprehensive review and evidence gathering of its efficacy, costs benefits and any adverse effects.**
- 5. WEL opposes the provisions of the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Encouraging Self-Sufficiency for Newly-Arrived Migrants) Bill, 2018.**

Why

In a wealthy country like Australia it is reasonable to expect that all families should have an adequate standard of living. The Government's role is to ensure a system of welfare payments that protect the most vulnerable families through the redistribution of national income. Social services are critical for addressing poverty and reducing growing income inequality.

Nearly 60% of social services recipients are women, and 40% of people on social security payments, including 55% of Newstart and 47% of Parenting Payment recipients are below the poverty line. Over 60% of Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients are women. Women are over-represented at the lowest income levels and, more of them than men rely on 21 of 27 payments made by Government to assist with basic living costs.

Newstart payments have not been increased for 25 years. The extremely low rate of *Newstart* creates housing stress and a high risk of homelessness. Transferring sole parents to *Newstart* and tightening work activity testing have significantly further disadvantaged already disadvantaged sole parents. *Essential Research* polling in April, 2019 revealed that of its 1000 respondents, 72% agreed that *Newstart* should be increased.

The ParentsNext program was introduced in July, 2018 to encourage parents to return to work. But the program has incurred criticism from single mothers and welfare organisations resulting in a Senate Inquiry which has recommended a significant reshaping in collaboration with parents and experts so that it is a more supportive pre-employment program. Critics have exposed its unfair targeting of single mothers and Indigenous people leading to a suspension of their payments. Most welfare organisations have urged the abolition of the program.

Income Management: The most comprehensive evaluation of income management through the Cashless Debit Card (2016 Review of Income Management Programs. UNSW) found no evidence of changes in spending patterns, financial well-being or improvement in community well-being, including children. The review instead found evidence of unintended negative consequences of income management leading to increased welfare dependency. The program is paternalistic and disproportionately targets Indigenous communities. WEL believes the funds would be better spent on skills training and support for job creation and improved infrastructure for targeted communities.

The Social Services Amendment Bill increases the existing waiting period for migrants to claim social security payments and obtain concession cards from two to three years. It introduces a new waiting period of three years for Family Tax Benefit, Parenting Payment, Carer Allowance, Bereavement Allowance and Widow Allowance as well as Parental Leave Pay. This has a disproportionate impact on women as they are most often the claimants for these payments. Newly arrived migrants should be treated with respect and accorded dignity.

5. VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Priorities

- 1. TAFE should receive secure and stable funding into the future and must be restored as the national yardstick for quality vocational education and training.**
- 2. Any new National Partnership Agreement must recognise the role of the major public provider, that is TAFE, as critical to industry, small business, regions and local communities in providing high level training, workforce development as well as foundation skills for disadvantaged learners in all equity groups entering or re-entering the workforce.**
- 3. Government should address concerns about the inequitable and discriminatory approach to industry skills training which has the unintended consequence of excluding women because the training priorities are industry driven and the sex segregation is entrenched in many of the industries accorded priority.**

Why

TAFE training offers a vital pathway into work for women re-entering the workforce following parenting, for migrant women and women from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Of the 3.9 million vocational education and training (VET) students enrolled across Australia in 2014, 47% were female.

Before the introduction of the National Partnership Agreement on Skills Reform (NPA) in 2012, TAFE institutes offered a comprehensive suite of courses, particularly special programs and outreach courses, which targeted and catered for women learners, providing a critical stepping stone into the workforce. These institutes are now struggling to compete against private training providers who have no commitment to gender equitable outcomes. The sector is awash with Registered Training Organisations (RTOs), some 4600 of them in Australia, of whom some 2577 are private RTOs (NCVER, 2016, p.19).

The marketization of the VET sector (2012 reforms) has had considerable impact on women and girls, as a result of cuts to funding of programs and educational support in TAFE, increased costs of VET programs and women being targeted by unscrupulous VET providers and signed up to costly VET FEE-HELP loans.

The reforms have hollowed out a once strong and highly reputable TAFE system, have led to a blowout in costs, without any tangible evidence that the nation's people were benefitting with new skills and competencies for the transforming economy.

6. AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Priorities

- 1. A gender-responsive national housing policy that addresses the factors affecting women's housing outcomes and includes actions and measurable targets.**
- 2. An end to negative gearing to prevent taxes being used to help property investors outbid home buyers.**
- 3. Additional social and affordable housing including additional housing configured and targeted to women in housing need in each State/Territory including women and children fleeing domestic violence, single women, single older women, single mothers and women with disabilities. Affordable housing should be in close proximity to concentrations of employment opportunity for women. WEL supports the 'Everybody's Home Campaign' target of 500,000 new social and affordable homes.**
- 4. Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 30% or \$20 a week.**
- 5. Adequate and sustainable funding to meet demand for homelessness services while ensuring that that funding goes to services that are appropriately specialised, competent, accessible culturally appropriate and safe for the full range of diverse groups of women and children who need them.**
- 6. A program of \$1 billion over 5 years matched dollar for dollar by state and territory governments that ensures the continuation and enhancement of Commonwealth/State funding of specialist women's refuges and other front-line services dealing with violence against women as set out in Priority 1.**
- 7. Measures to address housing adequacy for older women including for programs based on delivering care to women in their own homes, and for women currently at retirement age who have not had the opportunity to accumulate superannuation due to lower lifetime earnings, and caring duties with the imposition this placed on superannuation contributions.**

Why

Women's economic and other inequality creates disadvantage in accessing housing, including housing insecurity and homelessness. Women's economic disadvantage and poverty result from multiple lifetime factors, including gaps in pay, wealth and superannuation and women's greater responsibility for caring for children and other family members. In addition, women's experiences of domestic and other gendered violence including the impacts of trauma, injury, dislocation, financial abuse and disproportionate loss of wealth upon separation cause immediate and long-term economic and other disadvantage.

Women's disadvantage occurs in the context of an Australian and NSW housing market characterised by a lack of affordable rental housing, together with tightly targeted social housing with long waiting lists. This has led to the emergence of a cohort of people on low incomes who are in precarious housing situations, for whom an adverse event may trigger homelessness. This context impacts on both women whose needs other than housing are low, and on women with more complex needs.

Domestic violence is a major reason for women's homelessness, as many women experiencing violence make the momentous decision to leave their homes, often with children, for their safety. In recent years some programs have been developed for women to stay at home where it is possible and safe to do so. While some women are able to stay at home with support and protection, many are unable to do so because of reasons including risk, fear, financial issues and problems with enforcement of protection orders.

Other women at particular risk of housing instability and homelessness include women in a range of situations who are on low incomes and/or experience other disadvantage, such as older single women, single mothers and their children, women with disabilities, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander women and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women. There is a need to ensure that suitable housing is available for the full range of diverse groups of women and children and that if women do experience domestic violence and/or homelessness, that services are appropriately specialised, competent, accessible, culturally appropriate and safe.

7. RIGHTS AND PROTECTIONS FOR WOMEN LIVING WITH DISABILITY

Priorities

- 1. Fix the NDIS by providing adequate resources and increasing involvement of people with disability.**
- 2. Implement a national jobs plan to increase access by people with disability to mainstream employment.**
- 3. Provide sufficient funding for the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, with people with disability at the centre of the inquiry, including appointment of appropriate Commissioners.**

Why

People have experienced delays in access, plans and reviews under the NDIS, or receiving inadequate plans. Some vulnerable groups are under-represented in the NDIS, including women who are only 38% of participants. Many people with disability still live in inappropriate accommodation.

Women with disability are disadvantaged in employment. Labour force participation for women with disability is only 49% compared to men with disability (56.6%) and people without disability (76% for women and 88.5% for men) (ABS 4433.0.55.006). Women with disability are also disadvantaged in the areas of access to employment, pay and job type. They are half as likely to find full-time employment (20%) as men with disability (42%); twice as likely to be in part-time employment (24%) as men with disability (12%); and more likely to be in jobs with lower pay than men with disability. (Refer to - http://wwda.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/12/WWDA_DES_Report_Final.pdf).

There are high levels of violence and abuse against people with disability in Australia compared with the general population. Women and girls with disability experience levels of violence, abuse, neglect and exploitation that are particularly high, including in domestic, medical, institutional, residential, support and prison settings (see <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/violence-against-women-violence-against-women-and-girls-disability>).

8. ADEQUATE RETIREMENT INCOME FOR WOMEN

Priorities

1. That Government identify and commit to removing the aspects of superannuation that operate disproportionately to support wealth accumulation mainly to the benefit of high wealth men rather than providing retirement income (including superannuation tax concessions).
2. That the Low Income Superannuation Tax Offset be credited to the superannuation account of the person on whose behalf the payment was made.
3. That the recommendations of the Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry into Economic Security for Women in Retirement (2016) be adopted by Government, in particular:
 - implement policies to address the gender pay gap, which is a fundamental cause of the gender gap in retirement;
 - guarantee adequate levels of income and housing support for older Australians who do not have adequate superannuation or housing;
 - abandon the proposal to increase the age pension age to 70;
 - provide superannuation guarantee payments for people on paid parental leave and carer's payments;
 - remove the superannuation exemption for employees earning less than \$450 per month; and
 - provide a gender analysis of all proposals in relation to retirement income.
4. That there be further and ongoing increases to superannuation provision by Government to low income earners.
5. That the Government give high priority to investigating how to provide carer credits.
6. That Government develop and implement a system for defining and publishing acceptable gender equitable 'accumulation pathways' for all levels of earnings; and for tracking all superannuation balances in order to trigger interventions for those who are falling behind. Such interventions could include government top-ups, tax relief, superannuation account fee discounts and the inclusion of a superannuation component to Family Tax Benefit B.
7. That the Federal Government provide a universal age pension that provides an adequate income, and that Government develop robust standards for adequacy of pensions and benefits.

Why

Generally, Australians depend on the aged pension and superannuation for their retirement incomes. The current Australian superannuation system is not designed for women to succeed. It is a system that was designed for full time working men – and that is who it rewards. According to the latest figures, women are retiring with around half as much superannuation as men. Women are more likely to work in lower paid roles and lower paid fields, are more likely to work part-time or casually, and are more likely to take breaks from paid employment to provide unpaid care for others. Over their lifetimes, they will earn significantly less than men.

Australia's retirement income system structurally favours higher income earners who work full-time, without breaks, for the entirety of their working life. It is a system that doesn't value women's financial sacrifices for families and broader community. In fact, the biggest factor in the gender imbalance in super is motherhood. Superannuation should be a universal retirement income for all Australians as they age, rather than a tax haven and a mechanism for the intergenerational transfer of wealth.

Economic security for women in retirement requires policies that ensure adequate incomes not only in retirement but across the entire life cycle. Patricia Apps notes that given both the gender gap in both pay and labour supply, women as a group cannot gain from tax advantaged superannuation. (Professor of Public Economics, Faculty of Law, University of Sydney submission to the Senate Economics References Committee Inquiry into Economic Security for Women in Retirement hearing, 12/2/2016). WEL endorses the recommendations regarding family payments reforms on page 44 of the ACOSS Budget priorities statement 2016-18.

While women's employment participation rates have risen significantly, most women are working part time or have blocks of time out of the workforce. Interrupted workforce participation combined with the gender pay gap means women are highly likely to have low super savings which on retirement is inadequate income for covering basic living expenses. The increasing number of lone women households puts more women at risk of financial insecurity in their retirement years. The level of pensions does not meet the OECD benchmark for poverty (50% of median income).

WEL notes that the fundamental gender problem about superannuation is unfixable because the system design links retirement income to participation in paid work without crediting time out of the workforce for caring (unlike in some other countries).

9. JOB SECURITY, FLEXIBILITY AND WORKING TIME

Priorities

- 1. The duration of Parental Leave Pay available to primary carers immediately be extended to 26 weeks and partner pay extended to 4 weeks; and consideration be given to extending further both forms of leave paying them at wage replacement levels;**
- 2. Superannuation be included in Parental Leave Pay and partner leave payments;**
- 3. Casual employees be provided access to *paid* personal and carers leave;**
- 4. Domestic violence leave be *paid* leave in the National Employment Standards;**
- 5. Paid end-of-life/palliative care leave be provided for a period of 12 weeks; and**
- 6. Access to replacement care for carers of a person with a disability, chronic illness, or frailty due to old age be improved.**
- 7. Firm working time minima be provided in the National Employment Standards and in *all* modern awards. These include:
 - a. Restricting maximum weekly hours of work to 38 hours except by mutual agreement;**
 - b. A minimum engagement of 4 hours for casual and part-time workers; and**
 - c. Requiring written agreement to a regular pattern of hours as well as written agreement to, and adequate notice of, changes to hours for part-time workers;****
- 8. Government enforce these minima and run an energetic campaign promoting innovative strategies for employers to limit excessive hours and provide predictable carer friendly hours;**
- 9. Working time regulation provides predictability and facilitate mutually agreed flexibility;**
- 10. Casual status be restricted to genuinely irregular and occasional on-call employment so that paid leave is much more widely available;**

- 11. Adequate penalty rates be provided for antisocial hours (weekends, evenings, nights) and for overtime including for part-time employees working beyond their minimum contracted hours, to deter poor rostering practices and properly compensate for the work/life interference associated with unsocial and overtime hours; and**
- 12. The right to request flexible working be extended to *all* employees upon starting a job, with employees able to appeal on the merits of the employer's refusal to the Fair Work Commission where this request is unreasonably refused; and that Government provide information on, and promote the use of, the right to request as an entitlement for *all* employees.**
- 13. Job security be increased by enabling casual workers to move to an ongoing contract after 12 months.**
- 14. The Australian Bureau of Statistics *Time Use Survey* be reinstated.**

Why

More than one in eight workers have significant responsibilities for providing care to older people, people with a disability, and people with a health problem (apart from childcare responsibilities). More than half are women, and around one in five are 55-64. (ABS 4430 2016). The Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey has in the past provided very useful measurements of time spent providing care but the Survey has not been conducted since 2006.

Current leave provisions are inadequate to support caring responsibilities. Casuals (around a quarter of workers) do not have access to any paid leave. There is no provision for leave for end-of-life care, unlike countries such as Canada, Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden, which have at least three months paid/unpaid leave (see [https://www.jpsmjournal.com/article/S0885-3924\(17\)30285-3/fulltext](https://www.jpsmjournal.com/article/S0885-3924(17)30285-3/fulltext)). Current paid parental leave of 18 weeks at minimum wage falls short of the 26 weeks recommended by the World Health Organisation. Only about a quarter of fathers or partners take the two weeks Dad and Partner Pay. For gender equal care-giving, job-protected parental leave at wage replacement levels and equally shared between parents or other primary carers is needed.

Providing care has a significant impact on carers' workforce participation, particularly for women who are more likely to assume the primary care role. Currently men still work longer hours with the related pay and career advantages. Women often have little choice but part time work, often casual. (ABS 6333 2017). Women carers lose career progression, job security, remuneration, and adequate retirement incomes. Employee-driven flexibility, leave entitlements that recognise caring responsibilities, employment security and clear minimum and maximum working hours are all essential for enabling women and men to share paid and unpaid work more fairly. Many workers do not enjoy effective access to flexible working arrangements.

10. GENDER PAY EQUITY

Priorities

1. The Pay Equity Unit in Fair Work Australia should be re-established and resourced to provide effective assistance to Government, employees, employers and unions in undertaking research, mounting cases, and facilitating engagement.
2. The requirement to report on the equal remuneration gender equality indicator should be extended to the whole of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) coverage.
3. The Fair Work Act should be amended to provide a stronger focus and clearer guidance on equal remuneration by:
 - including an equal remuneration objective consistent with Australia's commitments under international conventions;
 - providing for hearing equal remuneration applications based on establishing gender-related undervaluation, and for remedies to the gender-related undervaluation irrespective of the remuneration component form or bases in which it occurs;
 - requiring that the four-yearly reviews of modern awards include review of how award provisions (including definitions of ordinary hours, penalty rates, and classification structures, among others) affect equal remuneration, in each award and at a systemic level, looking across male dominated and female dominated awards and industries; and
 - requiring that the approval process for certified agreements include consideration of the implications of the agreement for equal remuneration.
4. Government should make a commitment to investigate, address and report on equal remuneration within and across public sector agencies. Strategies should include adoption by agencies of the Australian Standard on Gender-inclusive Job Evaluation and Grading (5376-2012).
5. Non-government organisations which receive public funding should be required to investigate and report to Government on equal remuneration.
6. The Fair Work Commission should actively investigate the nature and extent of gender-related undervaluation and underpayment in wholly or significantly Government funded areas of female-dominated low paid work (including aged care, disability services, and early childhood education, and recommend remedies for implementation by Government and other parties.

Why

In Australia, men continue to out earn women, 47 years after the historic 1972 equal pay decision. This gender pay gap has fluctuated over the past 20 years from between around 18% to the current 14.2%, reflecting changes in the economy (for example, the passing of the mining boom) and in the wages round. The gap is wider for total full time earnings and wider again for total earnings of full and part time workers. Men earn more than 150% of women's earnings (ABS Cat.6302 May 2018).

The gender wage gap has widened despite significant improvements in women's levels of education, job types and job levels, and workforce participation. Women simply do not benefit as much from their experience or qualifications as men.

Changes in the industrial system, including deregulation and decentralised bargaining, have contributed to greater gender inequality and made seeking redress more difficult. Gender pay equity is much higher in award-related remuneration than in remuneration under certified agreements or over-award payments, while non-award remuneration accounts for an increasing proportion of pay. Non-award related pay systems are often lacking in transparency and frequently involve high levels of management discretion, which often involves gendered decision-making.

Social and community workers won substantial pay increases in 2012 (albeit phased in over an unusually long 8 years), on the basis of gender-related undervaluation. The Fair Work Commission's decision in the early childhood education and children's services case in 2015 (FWCFB 8200) narrowed the scope for equal remuneration applications and reintroduced the requirement for feminised work to be compared directly to male work. Equal remuneration claims could not be based on establishing gender-related undervaluation. The requirement for direct comparators is very difficult to meet, because the characteristics of female dominated jobs are different from male dominated jobs and differences in remuneration tend to be attributed to differences in job characteristics, although those differences may not actually legitimately reflect differences in value. The mechanisms for claiming equal pay for men and women workers for work that is not similar but is of equal value – a right thought to have been won in 1972 - have been significantly weakened. Equal pay cases are far too onerous, expensive, technical and protracted – it is obvious that equal pay cannot be won one case at a time.

Equal remuneration in many areas depends fundamentally on Government action regarding Government employees and Government funded services. The pay gap in the public sector is 10.5% (the gap in the private sector is 18.4%) (Workplace Gender Equality Agency Australia's gender pay gap statistics August 2018: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/gender-pay-gap-statistic.pdf>). Government needs to actively investigate and address the gender pay gap for its own employees. There are no current requirements to do so. Many female-dominated low paid jobs are in wholly or significantly Government funded services, including in aged care, disability services, and early childhood education. The characteristics of occupations/industries that are undervalued on a gender basis are already well-known and repeatedly established.

11. CHILDCARE

Priorities

There are six important conditions Government needs to ensure in order to ensure that access to early childhood education and care is simple, affordable, accessible and flexible. They are listed below.

- 1. A seamless transition from parental leave to childcare.**
- 2. Guaranteed free access to at least two days free high quality childcare per week for all pre-school children.**
- 3. Capped fees.**
- 4. Planned provision to ensure availability of services.**
- 5. Improved pay and conditions for early childhood educators, with appropriate incentives and rewards and requirements for minimum qualifications (at least Certificate III). This is a critical condition for workforce retention and quality.**
- 6. A range of providers, to meet the need for variable, non-standard and unpredictable hours of care.**

Why

Childcare needs to be simple, affordable, accessible and flexible. Reliable, affordable, high quality childcare is critically important for children's development, parents' social and economic participation, and broader social and economic well-being. There are some major difficulties in the new childcare package that commenced on July 1 2018.

Simplicity is important in controlling costs for providers, and in making it possible for parents to understand and to access the services. The three-tiered activity test makes it difficult for parents to know their entitlement to subsidy from week to week. There are 17 types of activity used for assessing eligibility under the activity test. Complex activity testing across work, study and voluntary activities imposes a heavy burden on providers. The rules for assessing children "at risk" are burdensome for providers.

Affordability is important in providing access to services to all children including those whose parents are on low and middle incomes. It is also important that the government subsidies do not have an inflationary effect. Benchmarking fees is a means of controlling costs. It is important that benchmarks reflect the actual costs of delivering high quality services to different age groups (including infants), in various locations. Affordability of childcare is a critical factor in the threshold for workforce participation, and unaffordable fees are a disincentive to women's workforce participation in particular, with all the implications reduced workforce participation has for lifelong earnings and retirement incomes, among other disadvantages.

Accessible childcare means services are available to all children irrespective of parents' income, location, workforce participation, cultural or ethnic background. Activity tests can mean that parents with lower workforce involvement have less access to childcare. Activity tests that favour regular and predictable hours of work disadvantage parents with insecure, unpredictable or variable hours of work. That is an increasing group of parents, where work is increasingly casual or on variable "zero hours" contracts, and working at weekends or on shift work is common.

Flexible services are needed to meet the needs of parents with a wide range of levels of workforce participation. Where parents do not meet the activity test, the subsidised period of care is 12 hours. Since most long day care centres charge a full day rate, this effectively amounts to one day a week, which is insufficient for children to form bonds with educators and peers. While nanny services can provide flexibility, the maximum subsidy \$7 an hour means it is not an option for most families.

Some of the major problems in the provision of childcare arise from the operation of the "private market", with its incentives for profit maximisation and pressures to reduce quality. The "private market" is actually heavily dependent on the public purse, through the childcare rebate. In reality, childcare would be better provided like free public education. Consideration of how childcare could be provided without all the perverse incentives in the current system is overdue.

12. STRENGTHENING WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION AT DECISION-MAKING LEVELS

Priorities

- 1. That Australian Government Boards have 50% women within three years.**
- 2. A minimum gender equality target should be set in the Senior Executive Service in the Australian Public Service, publicly announced and reported on annually.**
- 3. A minimum of 50% representation of each sex on all publicly listed Boards in Australia should be promoted as a goal to be achieved over five years. If this is not achieved, the Australian Government should legislate to require publicly listed companies and other large employers to achieve a mandatory minimum of 40% of each sex within a specified timeframe, failing which penalties will be imposed.**
- 4. National political parties should alternate male and female candidates below the line on the Senate ballot paper to achieve a goal of 50% representation of women in federal parliament.**

Why

In virtually all sectors of the paid workforce, women are underrepresented in leadership positions. For example in 2017-18, women comprised 59% of all Commonwealth Public Service employees (State of the Service Report 2017-18) but according to the Gender Balance on Australian Government Boards 2017-18 report, 45.8% of all board positions relating to federal government portfolios are filled by women, still short of the announced 50% target announced in 2016.

The statistics in corporate Australia are even more concerning. The Australian Institute of Company Directors reports that the percentage of women on ASX 200 boards is 29.5% (31 March 2019). The percentage of women on boards of ASX 200 companies and the proportion of women comprising new appointments increased significantly from a low base of 8.3% in 2009. A total of 28 boards in the ASX 300 still do not have any women.

The disparity between men and women in leadership roles perpetuates existing stereotypes about the role of women, both at work and in wider society, and exacerbates disadvantages for women.

The Australian Parliamentary Library *Composition of the 45th Parliament* report shows that in 2019, the number of women in the House of Representatives has risen to 45 (30%). Women make up 30 (39.5%) of the members of the Senate. Overall the number of women in Parliament has risen to 75 (33.2%).

Australian women are active participants in all areas of public life. Our political decision making bodies should reflect this by women being at least 50% of members of parliament. One practical strategy is parties supporting and nominating an equal number of male and female candidates at elections and alternating Senate candidates by sex below the line on the Senate ballot paper.