



**Pre-Budget Submission of the Equality Rights Alliance**  
**24 August 2020**

# Equality Rights Alliance

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) is Australia's largest network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. We bring together 64 non-government organisations and social enterprises with a focus on the impact of policy or service delivery on women. We are one of the six National Women's Alliances, funded by the Commonwealth Office for Women.

This submission is endorsed in whole or in part by the following members of Equality Rights Alliance:

- 2020Women
- Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement
- Alevi Federation of Australia
- Australasian Council of Women and Policing
- Australian Baha'i Community – Office of Equality
- Australian Centre for Leadership for Women
- Australian Graduate Women
- Australian Federation of Medical Women
- Australian Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement
- Australian National Committee for UN Women
- Australian Women's Health Network
- CARE Australia
- Children by Choice
- COTA Australia
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- Fitted for Work
- Gender Equity Community of Practice
- Girl Guides Australia
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- Justice Connect
- Maternity Choices Australia
- Marie Stopes Australia
- Migrant Women's Lobby Group of South Australia
- Multicultural Women's Advocacy ACT
- National Association of Services Against Sexual Violence
- National Council of Churches of Australia Gender Commission
- National Council of Jewish Women of Australia
- National Council of Single Mothers and Their Children
- National Foundation for Australian Women
- NSW Council of Social Services
- National Union of Students (Women's Department)
- Older Women's Network NSW Inc
- Project Respect
- Public Health Association of Australia (Women's Special Interest Group)
- Reproductive Choice Australia
- Safe Motherhood For All Inc
- Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia
- Soroptimist International
- Sisters Inside
- Union of Australian Women
- United Nations Association of Australia Status of Women Network
- Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition
- VIEW Clubs of Australia
- Women in Adult and Vocational Education
- Women in Engineering Australia
- Women on Boards
- Women with Disabilities Australia
- Women's Equity Think Tank
- Women's Electoral Lobby
- Women's Environment Network Australia
- Women's Housing Ltd
- Women's Information Referral Exchange
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Women's Legal Services Australia
- Women's Property Initiatives
- Women Sport Australia
- Working Against Sexual Harassment
- YWCA Australia
- Zonta International Districts 22, 23 and 24

## Gender equality and economic recovery

The COVID-19 pandemic is both a public health and an economic crisis, with long-term economic impacts to the Australian population. Women, and particularly young women, are one demographic group impacted in specific ways. This is not unexpected: disasters such as the pandemic have been shown to deepen gender inequality and amplify traditional gender roles, with negative effects for women, girls and gender diverse people.

Economic recession arising from the pandemic has worsened and is worsening gender inequalities. To date, COVID-19 has increased the disproportionate of unpaid care done by women in cis-heteronormative partnerships,<sup>i</sup> and has set back women's economic equality by one year for every month of the crisis.<sup>ii</sup> Women's (particularly young women's) disproportionate loss of work and hours,<sup>iii</sup> alongside the increase in unpaid care work, create a significant risk that women impacted by the downturn will become detached from the labour market permanently or long-term. Women will also experience greater future disadvantage from measures enabling early access to superannuation,<sup>iv</sup> as they already accumulate less superannuation by retirement.<sup>v</sup> It is concerning that people under 30 are the largest group wanting early access,<sup>vi</sup> as negative impacts will be compounded for young women and non-binary people who experience multiple forms of disadvantage. Over time, these factors may lead to an exacerbation of the gender gap in retirement savings and a further increase to older women's risk of homelessness.

Gender equality and women's economic participation is crucial to the GDP, economic recovery and Australia's future resilience. Women's economic participation is crucial to the GDP and to economic recovery. Women's contribution to the economy is estimated to have added 22% to GDP in 35 years since 1974.<sup>vii</sup> Addressing the risk to women's employment from COVID-19 is critical to gender equality and economic recovery of all Australia.

It is imperative that Australia's Federal Budget is responsive to the gendered nature of the COVID-19 crisis and is designed to optimize the role gender equality can play in Australia's economy recovery.

Our submission is framed in acknowledgement that at present, and in light of developments in Victoria, crisis measures remain important and that for the next several years, economic stimulus should be a priority for Australia's recovery.<sup>viii</sup> Richard Denniss, chief economist of The Australia Institute has stated, "In this climate, debt is not a sign of recklessness, it's a sign that governments understand the depth of the hole our economy is now in."<sup>ix</sup> Our recommendations are therefore split into three categories:

1. Extension of emergency measures;
2. Temporary stimulus measures;
3. Permanent investments;

We consider these recommendations to be critical to enabling a gender equitable recovery from the COVID-19 crisis.

In the longer-term, implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB)<sup>x</sup> tools would allow for these measures to be tracked and monitored across the policy development cycle. GRB tools can be adapted to understand the budget implications for different population groups, including people of different genders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culturally and linguistically diverse people, people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, people of different ages, and others, where these factors are a more relevant starting point for analyzing budgetary impacts, and can be cross-cut with one another for inclusive analysis.

### Recommendations:

#### *Extension of emergency measures:*

1. **Extend the Coronavirus Supplement, and expand eligibility to include Disability Support Pension, Carers Payment, Carers Allowance and people on temporary visas;**
2. **Retain JobKeeper payments,** and expand to include people on temporary visas, universities and other excluded industries;
3. **Reinstate emergency relief for ECEC including JobKeeper eligibility;**
4. **Implement 2 weeks of paid pandemic leave for all workers without access to sick leave;**

*Temporary stimulus measures:*

5. **Invest in the construction of social housing as economic stimulus**, based on the successful 2009 Social Housing Initiative (SHI);
6. **Invest in social infrastructure (including early childhood education and care, and aged care)**, supported by a review into the structure, funding and provision of care services to inform a coordinated strategy that will maximise investment for quality, fit for purpose client-centred services based on qualifications linked career pathways to decent, secure employment in care related occupations and industries;
7. **Additional funding for the JobTrainer scheme to support VET providers and employers to run advertising and recruitment campaigns which challenge gender and racial stereotypes and norms underpinning enrolments**, to address gender and other biases in enrolment and graduate outcomes.

*Permanent investments:*

8. **Permanently increase JobSeeker and related payments in line with costs of living, and link rate to wage growth, and boost Commonwealth Rent Assistance;**
9. **Reform the Child Care Subsidy, including investigating an increase in the subsidy and taper to address the Workforce Disincentive Rate;**
10. **Increase resourcing to women's specialist sexual, domestic and family violence services, including women's and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled legal services**, to respond to increased rates of gender-based violence during the pandemic;
11. **Make sexual and reproductive health Medicare Benefits Schedule item numbers permanently available to all telehealth providers;**
12. **Fund a national women's health peak body to provide critical, timely and evidence-based advice on health, by returning resourcing to the Australian Women's Health Network;**
13. **Renew funding for the six National Women's Alliances for a period of four years (July 2021 to June 2025) to permit multi-year engagement with the Federal Government which bring women's voices to the COVID-19 recovery.** A women's alliance for women with disability, auspiced by Women with Disabilities Australia, should also be established.

## **Extension of emergency measures**

*Extend and expand eligibility for the \$550 Coronavirus Supplement*

According to the Australia Institute, the announcement to cut the JobSeeker Coronavirus Supplement by \$150 per work would push 370,000 Australians into poverty. ERA supports the calls of the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children to extend the Coronavirus Supplement at the \$550 rate, until the crisis has stabilized and the income support payment can be built which supports a quality of life above the poverty line, women experiencing violence and is indexed to wages.

Maintaining the Coronavirus Supplement rate is critical given increasing rates of gender-based violence during COVID-19.<sup>xi</sup> It is estimated to cost \$18,000 for a victim/survivor to leave a violent relationship and establish safety.<sup>xii</sup> Access to capital therefore provides serves as a significant barrier to escaping violence. PwC estimates that violence against women costs \$21.7 billion a year (including to the Federal, State and Territory governments), including \$2.1 billion per year in lost costs of productivity to the Australian economy.<sup>xiii</sup> Eligibility for the supplement should be expanded to include the Disability Support Pension, Carers Payment, and Carers Allowance. Using ABS data, 17.7% of people in Australia are with disability. People with disability are experiencing additional and unforeseen costs as a result of COVID-19.<sup>xiv</sup> It is worth noting that women with disability experience higher rates of gender-based violence, compared to women with no disability. We also acknowledge that Government pensions are the main source of personal income for 42% of people with disability of working age; the median gross weekly personal income of people with disability is half that of people without disability; and more than 45% of people with a disability live in poverty.

The Grattan Institute estimates that extending JobSeeker supplement to December, with a phase down phase to March 2021 would cost between \$10-\$15 billion, and that for every dollar of cash payments made to low-income households, GDP is boosted between 60c and one dollar.<sup>xv</sup>

### *JobKeeper*

The current situation in Victoria is evidence of the importance of making it possible for everyone to stay home and quarantine when necessary. JobKeeper payments must be extended to people on temporary visas. Despite advice, people on temporary visas faced a range of barriers to returning to their country of citizenship,<sup>xvi</sup> and as the Grattan Institute has noted, many countries have extended financial support to people on temporary visas during the pandemic. Moreover, excluding people on temporary visas from accessing JobKeeper has unintended consequences as it means the scheme provides less generous and inequitable support to industries and businesses who employ workers on temporary visas. According to Grattan, extending the scheme to people on temporary visas for six months would cost \$10.6 billion. JobKeeper payment should also be extended to universities. Tertiary Education is also an important employer of women, with 57.9% of the workforce, particularly among part-time (75.8%) and casual workers (58.8%).<sup>xvii</sup> Extending JobKeeper to universities would support women, as well as the diversity and innovation of research and knowledge produced in universities. Savings made from changes to JobKeeper which reduce the rate available for workers who work less than 20 hours a week should be repurposed toward extending the scheme to people on temporary visas and university workers.

### *Provide a wage guarantee to the child care sector*

Quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) has significant benefits for the social, emotional and cognitive development of Australian children, and research shows the early years to be critical in setting children up for life. Economic analysis shows the benefits from access to quality ECEC have positive flow on impacts for the economy.<sup>xviii</sup> ECEC is also a critical driver of economic recovery and women's workforce participation. Women's economic participation is crucial to the economic recovery. Women's contribution to the economy is estimated to have added 22% to GDP in 35 years since 1974.<sup>xix</sup> Addressing the risk to women's employment from COVID-19 is therefore crucial to both gender equality and economic recovery. Finally, ECEC is an important employer for women. Safeguarding the ECEC system is crucial for Australia's recovery. Additional support measures for the sector are needed until the economy is more stable and a review of ECEC is possible. Early indications suggest that the withdrawal of JobKeeper payment and shift to transition support measures may return the sector to the brink of collapse.<sup>xx</sup> The early withdrawal of support indicates a failure in recognising the value of care work, and in particular the lifeline it provides to working families as a frontline service during the nationwide lockdown restrictions. A wage guarantee should be provided to ECEC to support the employment of early educators (the majority of whom are women at 95.6% of the Child Care Services<sup>xxi</sup> and 86.7% of the Preschool Education<sup>xxii</sup> workforce) and prevent further gendered employment losses, as well as protect the viability of an essential service.

### *Paid Pandemic Leave*

The Australian government health advice directs people to isolate and be tested if they exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 or if they have been in contact with a close case, and individuals may be required to isolate for up to 14 days. However, according to the ACTU, 44% of workers have no paid leave entitlements and therefore no access to sick leave.<sup>xxiii</sup> Without paid sick leave, individuals are left in the impossible position of being required to stay home from work and the financial imperative of earning income. There is evidence supporting the importance of paid pandemic leave for reducing the spread of COVID-19. Evidence from previous pandemics indicates that the economic cost of providing paid pandemic leave is minor in comparison to the potential cost of uncontained spread.<sup>xxiv</sup> The ACTU is calling for paid pandemic leave that is comprehensive (covering two weeks needed for self-isolation), universal (covering all workers), and paid at 100% of employee's pay to ensure that employees accessing leave are not financially penalized.<sup>xxv</sup> Prior to the pandemic, the incidence of casual work was higher among women (55.9% of casual workers are women).<sup>xxvi</sup> The majority of workplace outbreaks in Victoria are linked to aged care and education, both of which are highly feminized sectors.<sup>xxvii</sup> Lack of universal paid pandemic leave undermines the Australian government objectives of reducing the spread of COVID-19 and Australia's economic recovery, and is particularly critical to safeguarding women's economic security, their health, and the health of the wider Australian population.

## **Temporary stimulus measures**

### *Investment in social housing construction*

Women, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, are overrepresented as users of housing support systems including social housing, of which there is a significant shortfall. Before COVID-19, single, older women were

the fastest growing cohort at risk of homelessness.<sup>xxviii</sup> 4.6% of clients accessing homelessness services in 2018-19 were women aged 55 and over,<sup>xxix</sup> and recent research estimates that as many as 405,000 women aged 45 and over are at risk of homelessness.<sup>xxx</sup> Older women's homelessness is driven by lifetime accumulation of economic insecurity which may be compounded by experiences of violence. There is a risk that the factors which have led to older women's risk of homelessness in the present, are being recreated for the current cohort of young women. During COVID-19 women, in particular young women, losing employment at a higher rate than men (men's employment down 6.2% and women down by 8.1% between 14 March and 18 April).<sup>xxxi</sup> Women will also experience greater future disadvantage from measures enabling early access to superannuation, who accumulate less super over their lifetimes.<sup>xxxii</sup> It is concerning that people under 30 are the largest group wanting early access,<sup>xxxiii</sup> as negative impacts will be compounded for young women and people experiencing multiple forms of disadvantage.

The construction of social housing should be considered as a temporary stimulus measure. The \$5.6m 2008 Social Housing Initiative (SHI) has been credited for adding \$1.1 billion per annum to the GDP over the 4 years of the initiative, and for increasing employment in the construction sector by an estimated 14,000 FTE during its duration.<sup>xxxiv</sup> The SHI had positive benefits for the social housing system including the addition of almost 20,000 dwellings. Almost 100% of dwellings achieved 6 star- energy rating and adaptability, constituting additional savings and poverty alleviation for social housing users. Investment in social housing stock now will therefore be critical for gender equitable access to affordable and appropriate housing in the longer term. A proposal put forward by the Community Housing Industry Association and National Shelter called the Social Housing Acceleration and Regeneration Program (SHARP) calls for \$7.7 billion allocated to build or upgrade 30,000 social housing dwellings over four years, and will generate 18,000 FTE jobs in each year.<sup>xxxv</sup> New housing stock must also be appropriate to the needs of all women, including universal design as a standard and considering adaptable designs which would permit repurposing or re-sizing where appropriate.

### *Investment in social infrastructure*

Investment in the care sector has more positive implications for GDP and women's employment than investment in physical infrastructure. The 2016 *Investing in the Care Economy* report by the Women's Budget Group estimated that a 2% investment of GDP (\$17.9 billion), in conditions of high unemployment, would lead to the creation of 600,000 jobs in Australia and a 2.3% growth in employment, in comparison with 0.5% growth in employment from a similar investment in construction, which importantly, would *increase rather than decrease the gender gap in employment*. Similarly, The Australia Institute<sup>xxxvi</sup> estimates that for every \$1 million investment in Education and Training, and Health Care and Social Assistance sectors, 14.9 and 10.2 jobs would be created respectively.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, most of these jobs would benefit women (The Australia Institute estimates 10.6 and 7.9 respectively)<sup>xxxvii, xxxviii</sup> who have been harder hit by the economic downturn, and would substantially progress the Government's commitment to women's economic security. Quality and resilient social infrastructure, including aged care and ECEC, are critical to Australia's capacity to cope with the impacts of COVID-19, and provides an opportunity to build a more resilient Australia. Both ECEC and aged care have emerged as essential services, yet workers are highly casualised and paid relatively low wages, resulting in their needing to work across multiple sites to make ends meet. There is a clear requirement for further investment to maintain and provide quality services to meet need safely, effectively and efficiently. To enhance the capacity and quality of investment in social infrastructure in these critical sectors and maximise outcomes, there is a need for a comprehensive review into the structure, provision and funding of care services and their relationship with gender equality. Findings of this review would provide the evidence base for development of a coherent national strategy to maximize investment for quality, fit for purpose client-centered services based on qualifications and career pathways to decent, secure employment in care related occupations and industries.

### *Gender equitable VET reform*

JobTrainer is a welcome investment in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and retraining Australians for new employment opportunities. However, although women have experienced greater negative employment impacts from the pandemic, the benefits of the stimulus will primarily flow through to men. Part of the issue is that Australia has a highly gender-segregated workforce, which is reflected in VET. VET has both gendered enrolment trends and graduate employment gaps. Men have higher VET enrolment rates than women<sup>xxxix</sup> and are also more likely to report improved employment status after training.<sup>xl</sup> Men who complete a VET qualification will earn just \$700 less a year than if they complete university, but women earn almost \$10,000 less.<sup>xli</sup> This difference in graduate outcomes is particularly pronounced for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Gender-disaggregated data also shows that

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<sup>1</sup> The difference between these figures is accounted for by the fact that the *Investing in Care* report estimates both direct and indirect employment, while The Australia Institute report only considers direct employment effects. When focusing on direct employment effects only, Investing in Care estimates would equate to roughly 15 jobs generated per \$1 million of investment.

men are also more than twice as likely to be apprentices and trainees linked to a VET program.<sup>xiii</sup> Further, the courses tipped for free and low-cost course places under JobTrainer will primarily benefit men. Out of the six industries identified, only health care and social assistance (which are some of the lowest paid jobs in the country) is women-dominated,<sup>xliii</sup> and retail trade is relatively gender equitable, (although women are overrepresented in lower paid roles).<sup>xliii</sup> Wholesale trade, transport, postal and warehousing, construction, and manufacturing are all industries which disproportionately employ men in comparison to women.

Transforming how we view gender roles and work is key to delivering gender and socially equitable outcomes from JobTrainer that address the fall in women's employment. Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE), Gender Equity Victoria, and the Gender Equity Accredited Training Project (Women's Health Victoria) have called for a specific gender equity framework for the VET sector that aims to drive more equitable uptake of VET and outcomes for graduates, not unlike the Advancing Women in STEM strategy, and which could be additional to the JobTrainer program.<sup>xlv</sup> Such a framework would include strategies to address gender, racial and other stereotypes in student and graduate recruitment and person-centered career counselling for those who have lost their jobs and need to retrain as a result of COVID-19. Improvements to pedagogy and teaching practices to support and include alternative styles of learning are also needed, alongside access to fee free courses in foundation skills including literacy, numeracy and digital literacies to ensure that VET-enrolled students receive quality education and training. By way of comparison, the Federal government provided \$4.5 million over four years to encourage more women to pursue STEM education and career in the 2018-2019 budget,<sup>xlvi</sup> including the appointment of Women in STEM Ambassador Lisa Harvey-Smith whose role is to advocate for gender equity in STEM. The initial funding has been extended by 3.4 million in the 2019-2020,<sup>xlvii</sup> out of which \$1.5 million was committed to a digital awareness campaign led by the Ambassador.<sup>xlviii</sup>

## **Permanent investments**

### *Permanently increase the rate of JobSeeker and related payments and boost Commonwealth Rent Assistance*

ERA supports calls for a permanent increase to the rate of JobSeeker and a boost to Commonwealth Rent Assistance. A liveable JobSeeker payment is critical to both the ability to contain spread of COVID-19, by enabling secure income and housing, and to Australia's economic recovery. As noted by ACOSS, "Instead of cutting JobSeeker Payments by \$300 per fortnight, the Government must permanently secure the basics, including incomes and housing; create jobs and restore employment, avoiding another recession. This requires the certainty of a permanent, adequate increase to the JobSeeker payment...". According to the Grattan Institute, permanently increasing the rate of JobSeeker would help the economic recovery, as people would be able to search for a job and be equipped to commence employment. We recall the submission made by Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, which showed how the low rate of JobSeeker (then Newstart) payment acted as a barrier to women's employment, because of the financial outlay required to seek and successfully find employment.<sup>xlix</sup> We further echo the calls of ERA member NCSMC for considering gender-based violence when rebuilding the income support system out of the COVID-19 crisis, and the inadequacies of the pre-existing rate and waiting times for meeting the needs of women escaping violence. This is particularly critical in light of findings from the Australian Institute of Criminology that sexual, domestic and family violence has increased during the pandemic.<sup>l</sup> The 550 Reasons to Smile campaign has highlighted the stories and benefits of the \$550 Coronavirus Supplement to single parents, including victims/survivors of violence. ERA recommends permanently increasing the rate of JobSeeker in line with a living wage, and boosting Commonwealth Rent Assistance for the economic recovery and social outcomes it would achieve.

### *Reform the Child Care Subsidy*

Currently, the cost of ECEC can be a significant barrier to the ability of women and secondary earners to take on additional work.<sup>li</sup> Recent research has identified that the interaction of ECEC costs with Australia's tax and benefit systems commonly results in Workforce Disincentive Rates (WDR) of 75-120%, where a WDR of 100% means there is no economic benefit is gained from working additional days. Even among low income earners, there is a WDR of more than 100% for a fifth work day.<sup>lii</sup> In a context in which the Prime Minister has stressed that: "if there is a job to be taken and a job that is being offered, then it is an obligation... to take those jobs where they're on offer"<sup>liii</sup> to rebuild the economy, there is a clear economic case for reducing disincentives arising from the cost of ECEC. One option put forward for addressing the WDR is a combination of increasing the percentage of the Child Care Subsidy available to all families, and replace the Child Care Subsidy cliffs with a taper.<sup>liv</sup> The Grattan Institute has estimated that increasing the CCS to 95% with a gradual taper, would cost \$5 billion and deliver a boost to GDP of \$11 billion a year.<sup>lv</sup>

### *Increase resourcing to women's specialist sexual, domestic and family services, including specialist legal services*

A recent Australian Institute of Criminology study<sup>lvi</sup> highlights the number of women experiencing Sexual, Domestic and Family Violence (SDFV) for the first time has increased during COVID as has the frequency and severity of such

violence where previous violence had been perpetrated prior to COVID. Further, more than one third of those who have experienced SDFV during COVID on at least one occasion have not sought help due to safety concerns. Services are already responding to an increase in complexity of issues relating to SDFV and need to be ready to respond to expected surge in numbers of victims-survivors seeking help when they feel it is safe to do so and so the urgent need for increased funding, for specialist services including specialist women's legal services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled legal services. Prior to COVID-19, the 2014 Productivity Commission report<sup>lvii</sup> recommended an immediate investment of \$200 million (\$120 million from the Federal government) a year for legal assistance services providing civil, including family law services, as well as a proper assessment of further additional funding requirements for legal assistance services. The Federal Government has announced \$63.3 million additional funding for the legal assistance sector to address additional legal needs caused by COVID-19. This includes \$49.8 million for legal assistance services, 40% of which must be used in matters relating to domestic violence. This is welcomed, but the Productivity Commission recommendations must also be implemented. Further, as noted by our sister alliance AWAVA,<sup>lviii</sup> the Federal government has provided a \$150 million package to address increased gender-based violence arising from the pandemic in response to advocacy by the sector, with \$20 million allocated directly by Federal government, and \$130 million between the States/Territories. We echo concerns of AWAVA that this funding must be expanded to support the sector, which was in funding crisis prior to COVID-19, to respond to the evolving and increased need as the pandemic continues and lockdown restrictions are eased.

#### *Make sexual and reproductive health MBS item numbers permanently available to telehealth providers*

Temporary Medicare Benefits Schedule item numbers issued during the pandemic enabled improved access to health services via telehealth, including access to a range of sexual and reproductive health services, at a total cost of \$669 million.<sup>lix</sup> Many of these services were delivered by specialist doctors with specific sexual and reproductive health training and qualifications. Telehealth reforms announced on 10 July rolled back temporary MBS item numbers to General Practitioners (GPs) only, which further hindered access to time-sensitive sexual and reproductive health services,<sup>lx</sup> including medical termination of pregnancy, STI testing, and PREP and PEP for HIV prevention, for women across Australia. In order to achieve our national commitments to sexual and reproductive healthcare access, sexual and reproductive health MBS item numbers should be made permanently available to all telehealth providers. Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) item numbers should be issued for all services related to sexual and reproductive telehealth. This would assist in timely delivery of the Australian Women's Health Strategy (2020-2030).

#### *Refund the Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN)*

This pandemic has enhanced existing gender inequalities for women across communities in Australia. For example, the health sector is at the epicentre of COVID-19: women are disproportionately impacted as front line staff and health settings are one of the only places women can safely go under restrictions. It is vital the decisions made relating to health in both these areas has a gendered analysis. A funded Australian women's health alliance would be in a much better position to provide timely, evidence-based advice to government representing the experience of women across the country. AWHN was established in 1986 as a peak body, representative of the Australian women's health sector. Since being defunded in 2014, it has operated in a voluntary capacity with no secretary or office. Despite this, AWHN is the only women led, representative national peak body for women's health in Australia. Given the current health and hospital systems strain and gendered implications of COVID-19, it is more important than ever to fund a national women's health peak body. Base level funding of \$300,000 per annum<sup>lxi</sup> would enable AWHN to provide critical evidence-based advice on women's health.

#### *Renew funding for the National Women's Alliances*

The National Women's Alliances (NWAs) collectively have significant experience in providing support and commentary to government on the effects of policy on women across the country. They also have links to thousands of women across Australia, including those experiencing exacerbated marginalization as a result of the COVID-19 crisis including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women on temporary visas. The voices and expertise of these women is critical to the effective and efficient targeting of COVID-19 recovery measures. The NWAs are a key element of the Federal Government's infrastructure for promoting gender equality and are therefore an essential tool for assisting the Federal Government to effectively target COVID-19 recovery measures to the needs of women. At present, the NWAs are funded until 31 March 2021 under the Women's Leadership and Development program. We recommend that the refunding of the existing six NWAs for a period of four years (July 2021 to June 2025) to permit multi-year engagement with the Federal Government on a gender aware COVID-19 recovery. ERA estimates this would cost \$7,088,010 over four years, allowing for an annual CPI increase of 2%. ERA further recommends funding for a women's alliance for women with disability, auspiced by Women with Disabilities Australia, at a cost of \$1,181,335 over four years for the same period, to permit whole-of-government engagement and which is critical considering the significant implications of COVID-19 for women with disability.



- <sup>i</sup> ABS (2020), Table 6.1 and 7.1, 49400DO002\_2020 Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, Monday 6 July - Friday 10 July 2020, Australia, 4940.0 - Household Impacts of COVID-19 Survey, 6-10 July 2020, available from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/4940.0Main%20Features206-10%20July%202020?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4940.0&issue=6-10%20July%202020&num=&view=>, 18 August 2020
- <sup>ii</sup> Financy (2020). Women's Index: The pandemic impacts progress & timeframe to economic equality, April – June 2020, available from: [https://financy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FWX\\_JUN20\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://financy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/FWX_JUN20_Report_Final.pdf), 18 August 2020.
- <sup>iii</sup> Jericho, G. (2020). 'Past recessions have mostly smashed male-dominated industries. But not this time', *The Guardian Australia*, 18 August 2020, available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/business/grogonomics/2020/aug/18/past-recessions-have-mostly-smashed-male-dominated-industries-but-not-this-time>, 18 August 2020.
- <sup>iv</sup> Hodgson, Helen. 'Superannuation and Covid-19: What does early access mean for women?', *Women's Policy Action Tank*, 20 April 2020, available: <http://www.powertopersuade.org.au/blog/superannuation-and-covid-19-what-does-early-access-mean-for-women/17/4/2020>, 27 May 2020.
- <sup>v</sup> ABS (2019). 'Data Cube 2. Economic security - Earnings, income and economic situation', 4125.0 - Gender Indicators, Australia, Nov 2019, available: <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4125.0Nov%202019?OpenDocument>, 27 May 2020.
- <sup>vi</sup> Borys, Stephanie. 'Coronavirus financial concerns have young people accessing their superannuation', *ABC News*, 26 May 2020, available: <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-05-25/coronavirus-early-access-superannuation-young-people/12282546>, 27 May 2020.
- <sup>vii</sup> Goldman Sachs JBWere (2009). *Australia's Hidden Resource: The Economic Case for Increasing Female Participation*, Melbourne: Goldman Sachs JBWere, available: [https://www.asx.com.au/documents/about/qsibw\\_economic\\_case\\_for\\_increasing\\_female\\_participation.pdf](https://www.asx.com.au/documents/about/qsibw_economic_case_for_increasing_female_participation.pdf) 7 May 2020.
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