



ASU Submission

National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality Discussion Paper

Submitter: Emeline Gaske, Assistant National Secretary

Organisation: Australian Services Union

Address: 116 Queensberry Street
Carlton South, Victoria, 3053

Phone: 03 9342 1400

Fax: 03 9342 1499

Email: egaske@asu.asn.au

Date: 19 April 2023

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The ASU

The Australian Services Union ('ASU') is one of Australia's largest unions, representing approximately 135,000 members. ASU members work in a wide variety of industries and occupations in both the private and public sector.

More than half of all ASU members are women. The ASU has a long history of advocating for gender equality for women, including the historic Equal Pay Case which delivered wage increases of up to 45 % to ASU members working in heavily female dominated community and disability services sectors as well as the most recent 10 days paid family and domestic violence leave legislated in the National Employment Standards.

Executive summary and recommendations

The federal government must adopt proactive measures to combat the factors that contribute to gender equality in Australia. A recent report by Per Capita¹ found "Australia is one of few developed nations that does not actively set targets for gender equality and measure progress towards nationally agreed goals. As a result, we are falling behind".² The Discussion Paper notes the limitations of current research and data collection. We must as a matter of urgency agree on a set of targets that can be measured if we are serious about gender equality. We must conduct extensive research and learn from overseas best practice.

The government must adopt a gender lens prior to the introduction of policy, government programs and budget decisions. Gender is an important consideration in all decision making and the government should reflect and respond to the different ways that women are impacted to produce equitable outcomes for all. A gender lens should also intersect with other demographics impacted by systemic issues such as migrant women, indigenous women and gender-diverse people. We need to ensure we get it right from the outset, rather than addressing inequities further down the track.

It is important to ASU members that unpaid care is addressed as it is a driving factor of gender inequality in Australia, with approximately 70% of women providing some form of unpaid care.³ Valuing unpaid care work requires a fundamental shift in not only the way we count work, but also how we pay for it. The Discussion paper recognises that "unpaid care can lead to 'occupational downgrading', where women choose roles below their skill levels and accept poorer conditions".⁴

Initiatives to increase women's participation in the workforce must address women's unpaid care obligations. Solutions must ensure quality of employment opportunities which are secure, flexible and well-paid. Governments must also avoid policies that reinforce negative stereotypes about caring as women's work.

Government funded paid parental leave should be increased to 52 weeks and government must immediately meet its commitment to pay superannuation on paid parental leave. To ensure gender equality in retirement superannuation must be paid at the same time as wages, insert a right to superannuation in the National Employment Standards and the government should fund "care

¹ https://percapita.org.au/our_work/measure-for-measure-gender-equality-in-australia/

² Ibid.

³ ACTU, Delivering Respect for Women at Work [online] Accessed at: <https://www.actu.org.au/actu-media/media-releases/2022/investing-in-women-could-generate-111-billion-annually>

⁴ https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resource/download/national-strategy-gender-equality-discussion-paper_0.pdf

credits” to compensate predominately women, who take unpaid time out of the workforce to care for others. Government should consider adopting a superannuation accumulation pathway concept with the objective of identifying people (particularly women) with low balances for their age and then look for contribution top-ups from the Government to bring them back on track.

Other initiatives such as rostering rights, the right to disconnect and the introduction of a 4-day working week at 100% pay will go some way to addressing gender inequality for Australian women.

Our members work in the highly feminised community services sector, including the disability workforce with terms and conditions in almost all cases only at the minimum standards set by the SCHADS award, and rates of pay and conditions are not enhanced by enterprise bargaining agreements or over-award contractual entitlements.

Many community services are provided by community-based organisations, which rely entirely or almost entirely upon government grants. They are all captive to a constant cycle of competitive tendering, which results in a race to the bottom on wages and conditions for the people employed to deliver services. Subsequently, they are chronically underfunded.

Investment in the community and disability workforce that ensures secure direct permanent employment, training and professional development, fair pay and rewarding careers is essential. The Government must close gender pay differences by supporting a priority application to the FWC for award wage increases to low-paid Award reliant women, such as those working in the community and disability workforce.

Recommendations:

1. The federal government as a matter of urgency must implement the following recommendations from the Senate Select Committee on Work and Care inquiry:
 - **Recommendations: 1, 5 (Interim Report), 15, 16, 21, 23, 24, 28, 31, 32**
2. The Government should introduce a government funded superannuation co-contribution top-up of 2.5% of income, paid annually, for account holders more than 5% below an acceptable accumulation pathway.
3. NDIS pricing assumptions should be reformed so that the NDIS pricing arrangements:
 - a) encourages permanent employment, including full-time employment;
 - b) ensures disability support workers are not misclassified as home care employees;
 - c) ensures disability support workers are not under classified at Level 1 of the SCHADS Award;
 - d) reflects the true cost of disability support work (including appropriate classifications for the work performed, the intensity of support, adequate time allocated for tasks, administration, supervision, training etc.);
 - e) can meet minimum Award entitlements and the National Employment Standards;
 - f) supports training and professional development of workers, including the establishment of A Portable Training Entitlement System for the Disability Support Services Sector as outlined in The Australian Institute's report.⁵
4. The community services sector should be reformed to ensure:

⁵ https://futurework.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/11/ASU_Training_Report_Formatted.pdf

- a. All tenders, regardless of the government funding source, should be underpinned by a minimum 'floor price' designed to ensure the sustainability of the community services sector.
- b. Grant funding should include funding specifically for portable accrued entitlements, including long service leave, annual leave, and redundancy entitlements for all employees, regardless of the nature of their engagement.
- c. Government procurement & grant policy should be used to ensure secure work arrangements in community sector tendering processes.
- d. Sustainable funding cycles of at least 6-year service agreements should be introduced.