



National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

(*Note 800 word limit imposed by the consultation portal)

WESNET is Australia's national peak body for specialist women's domestic and family violence services, representing organisations and individuals including women's refuges, shelters, safe houses, and information/referral services.

As a signature policy statement, the Gender Equality Strategy could represent a nationally and historically important turning point in how we perceive and address gender inequality. In doing so, it must acknowledge, and commit to eliminating, the inherent and often unconscious biases that are present across Australian society, in all its institutions and systems. Modern Australia was built on a patriarchal and colonial model that must be re-envisioned from the ground up to embrace and reflect the realities of all Australians.

WESNET's key concern is that the Strategy serves as an active capstone to the other initiatives identified in the discussion paper including, in particular, the National Strategy to End Violence Against Women and Children. The identification by governments of gender inequality as a key driver of gendered violence signified significant progress towards understanding and addressing violence against women.

The Gender Equality Strategy provides the vehicle to draw together the multiple and complex strands contributing to gender equality, and to compel progress towards it. The Strategy must be, in itself, action oriented and not rely on the subsidiary strategies; the 'heavy lifting' occurs both in individual actions and in coordinating actions across multiple portfolios and sectors. It must present and communicate the vision, as well as drive measurable outcomes. To these ends:

- All portfolios must be held accountable against the Strategy, including in relation to budgets and spending, policies, programs, grants and corporate activity. Gender responsive budgeting must be core to the strategy, and reporting against the strategy must be transparent, regular and made publicly available.
- The Strategy must speak to the 'big issues' such as climate change, the economy, the welfare system, childcare, education and housing - not just women-centred issues such as women on boards or small-scale localised grants.

- The Strategy must be underpinned by Australia's international obligations and should be considered as a means of reinstating Australia's reputation as a leader in promoting and protecting human rights. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women is central, but it is also important to recognise other covenants and treaties relating to rights, race, disability, children and torture.
- Intersectionality must be a cornerstone. The Strategy must take an intersectional approach that acknowledges that systemic discrimination occurs due to sexual orientation and identity, gender and gender identity, race, economic status, immigration status, national origin, and ability, among other aspects of one's identity, and that these forms of systemic discrimination intersect with each other and present unique challenges for affected individuals and communities. Discrete and measurable outcomes must be developed with all women in mind, including transwomen.
- The Strategy should apply a gender lens across the community and the institutions that support the community and ask, for example, whether there are gender biases in how non-government entities are constructed and supported by governments. This would include peak bodies, service providers and grant recipients. Women's specialist services - so essential to addressing the consequences of gender inequality - are chronically underfunded and under-recognised compared to those entities founded mostly on male privilege such as churches, for-profit service providers and male-dominated industry bodies.
- In taking the Strategy forward, digital inclusion must be included. It is a significant indicator of social inclusion and the gender gap remains profound ([Australian Digital Inclusion Index 2021](#)). The digital divide is not only important in terms of women's economic security and their ability to participate fully in society, but is increasingly significant in terms of women's safety. Technology abuse is a pervasive and growing form of gendered violence and abuse - in part facilitated by the digital divide - and is particularly implicated in domestic and family violence, using mobile, online and other technologies.
- In developing the Strategy, ways to engender community buy-in and enhance dialogue should be examined. While the Alliances are one very valued mechanism, their effectiveness and inclusiveness vary depending on sector and Alliance. Not all organisations or individuals working towards gender equality feel well-represented by the Alliances, and nor are the Alliances sufficiently funded to represent all. It would be beneficial to have additional and alternative mechanisms, such as, for example, broader reaching roundtables, a consultation portal, and improved recognition of other peak and representative bodies.
- Lastly, the Strategy should acknowledge there are no quick fixes and that an object of this magnitude will not be achieved within the lifespan of one term of government. The

Strategy does not represent a culmination, but is rather a roadmap forwards. Ways to embed mechanisms aimed at progress should be considered with durability and longevity at front of mind. As has been witnessed in the recent past, progress can be fragile and short-lived.