

### **Submission on the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality**

The National Strategy must recognise that economic inequality is a driver of gendered violence and a barrier to women's safety. Relationship breakdown and separation can have a significant impact on women's economic security, particularly where they are the primary caregivers for children. Women often carry the brunt of financial and emotional costs of separation, and the resulting economic disadvantage can have long-lasting effects on their wellbeing and that of their children.

Family law issues, such as property settlements and child support, can have a significant impact on a women's financial stability after separation. However, navigating the family law system can be complex and challenging, particularly for those who are experiencing trauma or financial stress. Women experiencing family law issues and family violence may also face additional challenges in accessing employment and maintaining financial independence, particularly women facing multiple, intersecting forms of discrimination and disadvantage.

The Strategy should recognise the important role of women's legal services in supporting women's economic wellbeing, enabling women to escape and recover from violence, and empowering women to overcome systemic barriers to gender equality.

### **Recommendations to address the economic impact of relationship breakdown and separation on women, and to improve women's safety:**

1. Ensure adequate financial support and meet the needs of financially disadvantaged women.
  - Provide financial assistance to women and children experiencing economic hardship, including through increased social security payments and emergency relief.
  - Provide income support and access to government services that enable women and children to escape and recover from violence, including women on Temporary Visas.
  - Invest in safe and secure housing, including affordable housing, to enable women and children to escape and recover from violence.
2. Address economic abuse.
  - Recognise economic abuse as a form of family violence and provide support for women who are experiencing it, including through access to specialist women's legal assistance and financial counselling.
  - Strengthen laws and policies that protect women's financial rights, including implementing the recommendations of women's legal services for improving decision-making for property matters in family law, and improvements to spousal maintenance.
  - Introduce a family violence visa that provides women who have migrated to Australia with rights and entitlements consistent with other women in the community.
3. Support women's employment and address women's disproportionate share of unpaid work.
  - Address the gender pay gap and the undervaluation of women's work, including unpaid work, which limit women's economic participation and opportunities for leadership.

- Paid parental leave that is accessible to both parents based on a shareable amount.
  - High-quality, affordable early childhood education and care, irrespective of visa status.
  - Reform the superannuation system to better reflect women's full contributions (both paid and unpaid), repair the significant gender gap in retirement incomes, and pay superannuation during parental leave.
  - Encourage flexible work arrangements.
  - Funding for training opportunities for women, including women who may have spent time outside the workforce due to sexual, domestic and family violence and/or carer responsibilities and First Nations women.
  - supported pathways to obtaining safe and secure paid work following such training, with wages reflecting the value of the work.
  - Create jobs for women, with investment targeted at improving employment and earnings in women-dominated professions and industries.
4. Increase access to specialist women's legal assistance.
- Increase access to specialist women's legal assistance for family law, migration law, employment law and discrimination law matters.

**Recommendations for the Strategy overall:**

5. Strengthen laws that impact women's lives.
- Adopt an intersectional gender lens approach to addressing gender inequalities and structural barriers embedded in federal legislation, including family law, migration law, social security law, and employment and discrimination law.
  - Strengthening laws and policies that impact women's economic wellbeing.
  - Ensuring the justice system is responsive to the needs and experiences of women, including by promoting gender-sensitive approaches to policing, prosecution and sentencing.
  - Strengthen laws and policies that protect women's rights, including those related to discrimination, violence and sexual harassment.
6. Take an intersectional approach.
- Encourage the development of intersectional policies and programs that recognise and address the multiple forms of discrimination and disadvantage that some women experience, including First Nations women, women with disabilities, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women on Temporary Visas, girls and women of different ages, and LGBTIQ+ communities.
  - Recognise the unique experiences and target the specific needs of women experiencing financial disadvantage.
7. Independently monitor and evaluate progress.

- Collect and analyse data on the status of gender equality in Australia, including on key indicators such as violence against women, women's participation in decision-making, and the gender pay gap.
- Track progress towards achieving the goals and objectives of the strategy, including through regular reporting and evaluation.
- Engage women's organisations, including women's legal services, and affected communities, in independent monitoring and evaluation processes to ensure the Strategy is responsive to their needs and experiences.