

# NSW Budget 2022-23

Women's Opportunity Statement



Supporting families,  
building a brighter *future*



# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the oldest continuing culture in human history.

We pay respect to Elders past and present and commit to respecting the lands we walk on, and the communities we walk with.

We celebrate the deep and enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country and acknowledge their continuing custodianship of the land, seas and sky.

We acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the important contribution they make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies and practices, and recognise our responsibility to work together with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities, towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes.

Artwork:  
*Regeneration* by Josie Rose



# Contents

<b>1. Treasurer's and Minister's message</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Executive summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>3. Vision and highlights of reforms and benefits</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>4. Background</b>	<b>14</b>
4.1 Women's workforce participation	14
4.2 Equity at work	24
4.3 Women in small business and entrepreneurship	29
4.4 Economic participation by diverse communities	30
4.5 Women's health and wellbeing	33
4.6 Women's safety	36
<b>5. Benefits of improving women's economic opportunities</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>6. NSW Government progress to date</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>7. Guiding principles for reform</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>8. Priority areas for reform</b>	<b>51</b>
Priority 1: Increase women's workforce participation	52
Priority 2: Improve the experience of women in the workforce	57
Priority 3: Support women in small business and entrepreneurs	61
Priority 4: Support and raise awareness of women's health needs	63
Priority 5: Respect for women and women's financial security	66
<b>9. Projections and measurements</b>	<b>68</b>
<b>10. Implementation</b>	<b>74</b>
<b>11. Background to the Women's Economic Opportunity Review</b>	<b>77</b>
<b>12. References</b>	<b>80</b>

# Treasurer's message



I am proud to introduce the inaugural Women's Opportunity Statement in this year's Budget, which will now be repeated in every future NSW Budget.

Its timing is apt, if decades overdue. Last year, we saw an outpouring of frustration from women across the country, following the courageous advocacy of Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame.

In the public discussion they sparked, I heard stories of women who, when they leave work after dark, take the long way home to avoid dimly lit streets. Those women often calling a friend as they walk so that someone is listening if something goes wrong. I heard stories of women who raise an idea at work, to see it ignored, and then for the same idea to be embraced when suggested by a man. I heard stories of women being paid less than male colleagues – in one case a female manager got paid less than a male colleague who reported to her.

And when women told these stories in our newspapers, dining rooms and cafes, I saw other women listening intently and nodding in agreement.

These stories are backed up by the statistics: four in 10 women have been sexually harassed at work in the past five years; that the rate of women's participation in the workforce is nine per cent lower than men's; and that women retire with about half the superannuation savings of men.

The promise of our country is to afford every person the freedom and opportunity to pursue the path they choose. That promise is grounded in a belief that each person is endowed with equal human dignity.

Honouring that promise is why the NSW Government is committed to enhancing economic opportunity for all women across our State. Through the reforms set out in this Statement, the NSW Government will invest \$16.5 billion over the next decade to help empower women to pursue their dreams and aspirations and build a better future for themselves and their families. These investments are informed by the work of the Women's Economic Opportunity Review, led by Sam Mostyn AO, and I want to sincerely thank everyone who has worked on the Review.

The centrepiece of our investment is a historic commitment of up to \$5 billion over the next decade to expand access to affordable childcare, targeting areas of the State with the least access to affordable childcare.

These reforms will not just help women, they will help underwrite our State's prosperity for decades to come. New South Wales has some of the most highly educated women in the world and unleashing their creative and professional capacity will help drive economic growth across our nation.

But ultimately, these reforms are not just about individuals or the economy. They are about the type of country that we choose to build, a country where a person's life is governed not by expectations from the past, but by their hopes for their future. A country where a baby girl born today has the same opportunities and liberties as the baby boy born in the hospital room next door.

The story of our country is one of continual and pragmatic progress towards a freer, fairer and more prosperous future. We realise its full promise through the everyday decisions each of us makes, because those decisions send small ripples across the surface of our society. And together, as individuals, government and business, we can turn those ripples into a wave that reaches the height of what our country promises to be and in so doing, hear and honour the stories so many Australian women have had the courage to share.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matt Kean'.

**The Hon. Matt Kean MP**  
NSW Treasurer,  
Minister for Energy



# Minister's message



In my role as the Minister for Women in NSW, it's my job every day to advocate for the rights, the hopes and dreams of women and girls in this State how they want to live, work and contribute to their communities.

The NSW Government's Women's Opportunity Statement is the first in an ongoing commitment to ensuring there are real choices for women to play an equal role in our workplaces and economy. Choices that don't require them to make impossible decisions about their health and wellbeing, their safety or their role as a parent or carer.

Throughout the Women's Economic Opportunity Review, we heard from many women across NSW through focus groups, targeted consultations, surveys, and through a wide range of existing and emerging research and evidence.

We talked to women of all ages and from different backgrounds. First Nations women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women living with disability, women who are carers, LGBTQIA+, live in regional and remote areas of

NSW, and are parents, carers, and business owners. We also heard from many organisations that work with or provide support to these women.

The diverse perspectives captured provided us with a greater understanding of the barriers to improving the economic opportunities of women in NSW. Consistently, women told us that:

- There is an imbalance between how men and women are treated in society which is exacerbated in the workplace
- There is a need for affordable and accessible childcare, good jobs, and high quality flexible work and workplaces that match the realities of work and family life
- Gender segregation of the roles men and women work in remains and there are discrepancies across every stage of the employment life cycle from recruitment and selection, performance and career development, and the pathways to leadership
- COVID-19 has had a negative impact on women's work and finances through loss of employment, income and the pressure to manage families, home schooling and work from home, which has affected workforce productivity and women's mental health.

We also heard many stories of amazing courage and perseverance to overcome some of these obstacles and evidence of a groundswell of support for change.

The Women's Opportunity Statement is a massive leap towards addressing these

barriers which are entrenched in our society and encompasses a \$16.5 billion investment over the next 10 years including up to \$5 billion to improve access and the affordability of childcare.

In my role as Minister for Women I will continue to work with my Parliamentary colleagues to continue to break down these barriers and commit to detailing the pathway through the publication of a Women's Opportunity Statement every year. The NSW Women's Strategy will stand alongside these Statements which looks to address additional barriers that hold back their achievements and develop further opportunities for women to realise their goals.

I would sincerely like to thank every woman who has generously shared their experiences, ideas and aspirations with us throughout this process. I would also like to extend my deep gratitude to the amazing women who provided their knowledge, expertise and wisdom through the Expert Reference Panel led by Sam Mostyn AO. It has been an honour to work alongside the panel.

I look forward to playing a part in creating a NSW where women have full access to opportunity and choice, live freely and safely and are valued for their diverse experiences.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "B. Taylor".

**The Hon. Bronwyn Taylor MLC**

Minister for Women,  
Minister for Regional Health,  
Minister for Mental Health

# Executive summary



**60.4%**

of university graduates are women

Women in Australia are highly educated, with some of the highest education rates anywhere in the world.<sup>1</sup> There is increasing alignment of career expectations between young women and men; women want jobs with opportunities for progression and not to have to choose between having a career and having a family.<sup>2,3</sup>



**8%**

increase to the NSW economy by 2061 if women participated at the same rate as men

Despite this, women continue to have lower levels of economic participation and security compared to men. In 2021, working-age women in New South Wales (aged 15–64) In 2021, the average workforce participation rate for working-age women in New South Wales was 74 per cent, compared to 82 per cent for men.<sup>4</sup> Women are also more likely to be employed in part-time or casual work compared to men.<sup>5</sup> Women typically earn less compared to men over their lifetimes, which results in women retiring with significantly less superannuation than men.<sup>6</sup>



**\$16.5 billion**

over 10 years to improve women's opportunities and child development

The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted women's education and employment opportunities, exacerbating the impact of these pre-existing inequalities. Women were more likely to lose their jobs and hours of work compared to men, while the workloads of predominantly-women frontline health and education roles intensified.<sup>7</sup> Many women also became responsible for more unpaid work during this period, including supporting remote learning.<sup>8</sup> Women in Western Sydney were particularly affected by the pandemic, with the labour force participation gap between women in South-West Sydney and Greater Sydney almost tripling between February 2020 and May 2021.<sup>9</sup>



**210,000**

extra workers if women participated at the same rate as men

Increasing women's economic opportunities not only benefits women, but also their families and the NSW economy. Lifting the rate of women's paid workforce participation to equal men's over the next 20 years would increase employment growth and lead to an NSW economy that is 8 per cent larger by 2061; the equivalent of increasing household income by \$22,000 (in 2019–20 dollars).<sup>10</sup> In 2018, KPMG estimated that if the labour force participation gap were halved between men and women, Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) would increase by \$60 billion over the next 20 years.<sup>11</sup>



Supporting women's engagement in the workforce is also critical to address labour shortages across many industries, helping to ease supply constraints. This will also lift the State's economic productivity by ensuring we do not lose the benefit of women's education, skills, creativity and enterprise. The number of jobs vacancies reported in New South Wales rose by 63.9 per cent in the past two years, from 79,300 in February 2020 to more than 130,000 in February 2022.<sup>12</sup>

The combination of these factors means that there is no better opportunity than now to take action to improve women's economic opportunities throughout their lifetime.

This Statement sets out the NSW Government's plans to make New South Wales the best place in Australia for women to live, work and raise a family. It draws on the findings of the Women's Economic Opportunities Review (the Review), which was established by the

NSW Government in February 2022 to consider how to improve women's economic security through increased economic participation over the next five to 10 years. The Review was supported by an Expert Reference Panel chaired by Sam Mostyn AO, President of Chief Executive Women. The Expert Reference Panel provided subject matter expertise and advice that informed the Review, including a letter to the NSW Government that can be found on NSW Treasury's website.

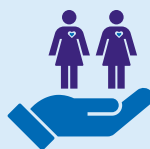
In line with the NSW Government's Women's Strategy, which identifies economic opportunity and advancement, health and wellbeing, and participation and empowerment as priority areas for action, this Statement sets out the following five strategic priority areas for reforms that the NSW Government plans to undertake, which are fundamental to increasing women's economic opportunities and lifelong economic security.

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## Priority areas for reform



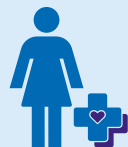
**1. Increase women's workforce participation:** supporting more women to enter and stay in the workforce and take on more full-time roles, including by improving access to affordable early childhood education and care.



**2. Improve the experience of women in the workforce:** closing the gender pay gap, reducing industry segregation and supporting more women to progress into leadership positions.



**3. Support women in small business and entrepreneurs:** increasing the number and success rates of women-led small businesses and start-ups.



**4. Support and raise awareness of women's health needs:** investing in specific health needs of women over their working lives.



**5. Respect for women and women's financial security:** preventing harassment and violence against women in the home and workplace, and supporting victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

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The Statement also addresses barriers faced by diverse groups of women with lower levels of workforce participation. It is important to harness the strengths of diverse cohorts of women, including First Nations women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disability, women with low socio-economic status and women from regional areas. These strengths enable them to make valuable contributions to their families, communities and workplaces.

Together, the reforms set out in this Statement seek to address some of the largest barriers that have long limited women's economic opportunities, from affordable childcare to stopping sexual harassment in the workplace. The Statement covers a wide range of issues that affect women from many walks of life, and lays the foundations for ongoing investment by the NSW Government in women's economic opportunity into the future.

# Vision

NSW is the best place in Australia for women to live, work and raise a family

## Guiding principles



### Remove barriers to working

Remove barriers faced by women looking to enter, re-enter, and remain in the workforce.



### Promote shared care

Actively promote more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women.



### Champion women in business

Address the specific challenges faced by women looking to start and run a small-business or start-up.



### Foster women's health

Boost support and raise awareness of health challenges faced by women throughout their working lives.



### Recognise diversity as a strength

Recognise the strengths of diverse groups of women, while responding to specific challenges they face in the workforce.



### Women's safety is essential

Take action to prevent harassment and violence against women and support women who experience domestic and family violence.



### Lead the way

The NSW Government should act as a leader and promote best practice across the public service and its suppliers.



## Priority areas for reform



### 1. Increase women's workforce participation

Supporting more women to enter and stay in the workforce and take on more full-time roles, including by improving access to early childhood education and care.



### 2. Improve the experience of women in the workforce

Closing the gender pay gap, reducing industry segregation and supporting more women to progress into leadership positions.



### 3. Support women in small-business and entrepreneurship

Increasing the number and success rates of women-led small-businesses and start-ups.



### 4. Support and raise awareness of women's health needs

Investing in some of the specific health needs of women over their working lives.



### 5. Respect for women and women's financial security

Preventing harassment and violence against women in the home, on the street and in the workplace and supporting victim-survivors of domestic violence.

# Highlights

## Reforms

This Statement seeks to address some of the biggest barriers that have long limited women's opportunity, from affordable childcare to stopping sexual harassment in the workplace.

The Statement covers a wide range of issues that affect women from many walks of life, and lays the foundations for ongoing investment in women's opportunity in future NSW Budgets.

### Increasing women's workforce participation

### Improving experiences of women in the workforce



#### Improving access to early childhood education and care

- \$1.7 billion towards introducing universal pre-kindergarten
- \$1.3 billion fee relief for preschool
- \$775.0 million towards boosting accessibility and affordability of childcare



#### Women in construction

\$20.2 million towards achieving 15 per cent women in construction by 2030



#### Safe workplaces

\$9.7 million SafeWork taskforce to reduce sexual harassment in the workplace



#### Supporting women to return to the workforce

\$32.0 million in grants and wraparound support for women to return to work



#### Promoting greater sharing of caring responsibilities

Enhancements to public sector paid parental leave arrangements



#### Boosting access to before and after-school care for all families

\$37.9 million of targeted support in regional and rural locations

## Respect for women and women's financial security



#### Safer cities

\$30.0 million for lighting, CCTV and foot traffic upgrades and an anti-street harassment campaign



#### No wrong door

\$43.6 million for wraparound support for DV victims



#### AV links for DV complainants

\$18.0 million for expanding AV links to allow remote evidence



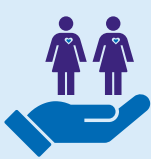
# NSW investment over 10 years

# \$16.5 billion

to improve women's opportunities and child development

## Support women in small business and entrepreneurs

## Increasing women's health and wellbeing



### Supporting women in business

\$11.5 million to provide tailored support to help women build and grow their businesses



### Affordable fertility treatments

\$80.0 million support for families with the high cost of fertility treatments



### Improving women's access to venture capital funding

\$12.0 million towards the Carla Zampatti venture capital fund for start-ups led by women



### Support for menopause

\$40.3 million for menopause hubs to care for women experiencing or who have experienced menopause



### Government procurement

\$3.7 million to monitor the proportion of women-led businesses in government procurement and promote equitable practices in businesses



### Female-friendly sport facilities

\$25.0 million upgrading lighting and building female change rooms at sporting grounds



### Financial literacy

\$3.5 million for women to build their financial literacy and business start-up skills.



### Post-natal mental health

\$5.2 million to extend support for postnatal mental health services delivered by NGOs



### Support for DV complainants

\$8.0 million for court-appointed questioners for cross-examinations of DV complainants



### Shared-equity scheme

For low-income single parents and older singles

Figures in tables, charts and text may have been rounded and are presented over four years unless otherwise disclosed.

# Highlights

## Expected benefits

Fostering cultural change to embed equality amongst men and women in all settings, will produce benefits for the NSW economy and community.

### Affordable childcare



#### Affordable places

Affordable childcare supply boosted by about 47,000 places



#### Cost of living – Western Sydney

Middle-income family with one child who benefit from the State's investment are expected to save up to \$3,900 a year on childcare costs



#### Cost of living – regional NSW

Middle-income family with two children who benefit from the State's investment are expected to save up to \$7,800 a year on childcare costs

### Economic growth



#### Women in the workforce

Up to 47,000 more women added to the workforce within 10 years

Up to 48,000 women switching from part-time to full-time work within 10 years



#### Growth in economic activity

NSW economic activity increased by up to \$17.1 billion within 10 years



#### Household GSP

Household income increased by up to \$4,400 for a year within 10 years

The increase in places and economic growth benefits are projected to be achieved from the early childhood education and care reforms in this package together with the proposed changes to the Child Care Subsidy committed to by the Commonwealth Government at the 2022 Federal Election. Further detail on the modelling projections is included at page 68.

The cost of living estimates are dependent upon the final design of the Affordable and Accessible Childcare and Economic Participation Fund, market dynamics, and interactions with Commonwealth assistance.





# 4

The number of NSW women in the workforce has increased significantly. Despite this progress, there are still barriers that limit women's opportunities.



51%

proportion of women aged 15-64 participating in the NSW workforce in 1981



74%

proportion of women aged 15-64 participating in the NSW workforce in 2021

# Background

The opportunities presented to women have grown dramatically over the past 50 years, from the major decisions in the 1970s to introduce subsidised childcare and grant women equal pay for work of equal value, through to the landmark investments in women's safety and security in the 2021-22 Commonwealth Budget.

New South Wales has pioneered many reforms to improve the lives of women, including taking a leadership role in the development of affirmative consent laws and being the first state to provide paid miscarriage leave for public service employees.

Despite this progress, there are still ongoing barriers that limit women's opportunities throughout their lifetimes. This part of the Statement sets out the background to a number of these barriers.

## 4.1 Women's workforce participation

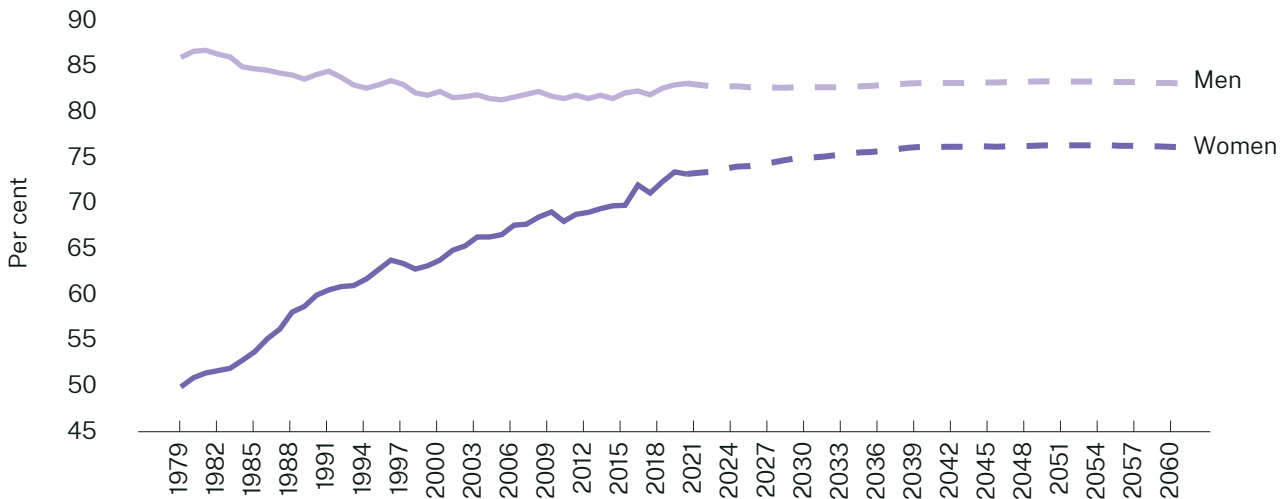
Over the past 40 years, the number of women in the NSW workforce has increased significantly, rising from 51 per cent of working-age women (aged 15-64) in 1981 to 74 per cent in 2021.<sup>13</sup> This increase is attributable to significant improvements in women's access to education, policies to address gender discrimination, improved access to paid parental leave and childcare, society's evolving attitudes, strong growth in services industries that have traditionally employed a greater share of women, and the greater availability of part-time and flexible work.

### Women's participation remains lower than men's

Despite this increase, women's workforce participation continues to lag well behind that of men. In 2021, working-age women in New South Wales (aged 15-64) had a labour force participation rate of 74 per cent, compared to 82 per cent for men.<sup>14</sup> This equates to about 210,000 fewer working-age women in the workforce than if they participated at the same rate as men. Under current policy settings, the participation rate for working-age women is projected to increase only slightly to 76 per cent by 2061, compared to the projection of 83 per cent participation by working-age men.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 1: Actual and projected NSW participation rates for men and women aged 15-64 under current policy settings**



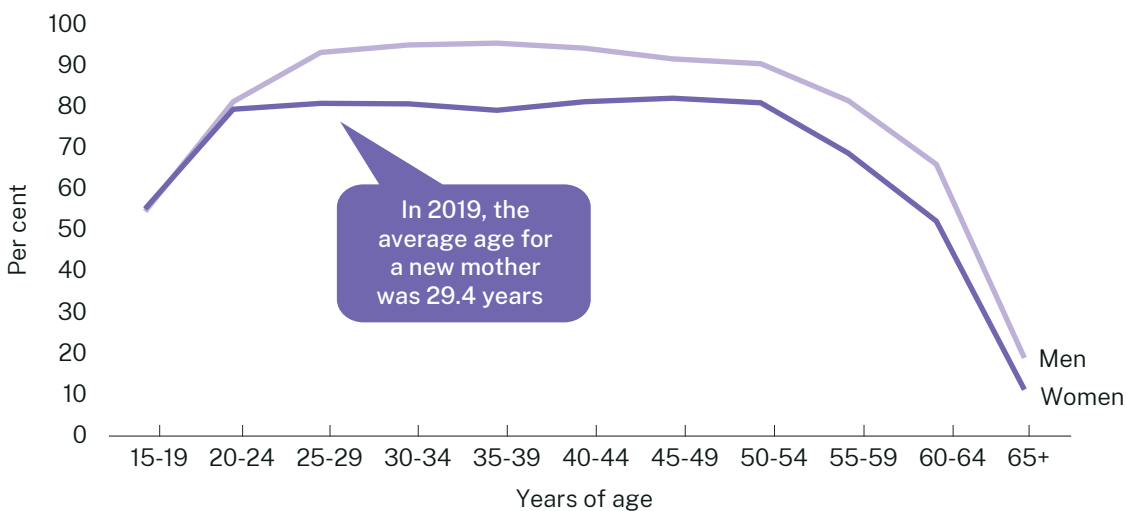
Source: 2021-22 NSW Intergenerational Report

**Women’s participation starts to lag behind men’s from their late twenties**

While the number of men and women joining the workforce in their late teenage years and early twenties is similar, women’s participation rates

drop below men’s from their late twenties. As shown in Figure 2, female participation rates stabilise at about 80 per cent between the ages of 25 and 54 years, while male participation rates continue to climb to more than 90 per cent and remain high until retirement.

**Figure 2: Workforce participation rates for NSW men and women by age in 2019**



Source: ABS Labour Force Detailed; Australian. Institute of Health and Welfare (<https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mothers-babies/australias-mothers-babies-data-visualisations/contents/demographics-of-mothers-and-babies/maternal-age>)

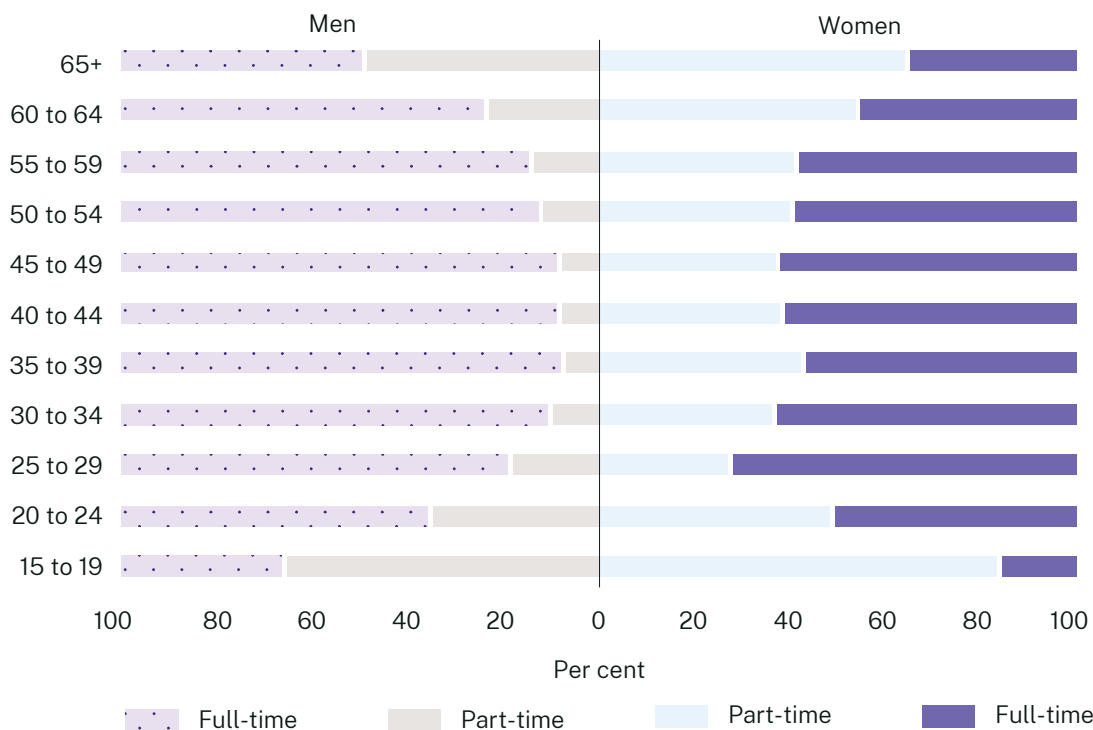


### Women are more likely to work fewer hours than men

Women who are employed are more likely to work in part-time or casual roles. In 2021, 39.4 per cent of employed women in New South Wales were working part-time compared to 18.2 per cent of men.<sup>16</sup> In the same time period, 22.6 per cent of women employed in New South Wales were in casual work, compared to 19.3 per cent of men.<sup>17</sup>

The rates of part-time work also change according to age. Figure 3 shows that the proportion of women working part-time increases by 15 percentage points between the age ranges of 25–29 years and 35–39 years, whereas the percentage of men working part-time falls 11 percentage points over the same period.

**Figure 3: Proportion of NSW women and men in part-time and full-time work**

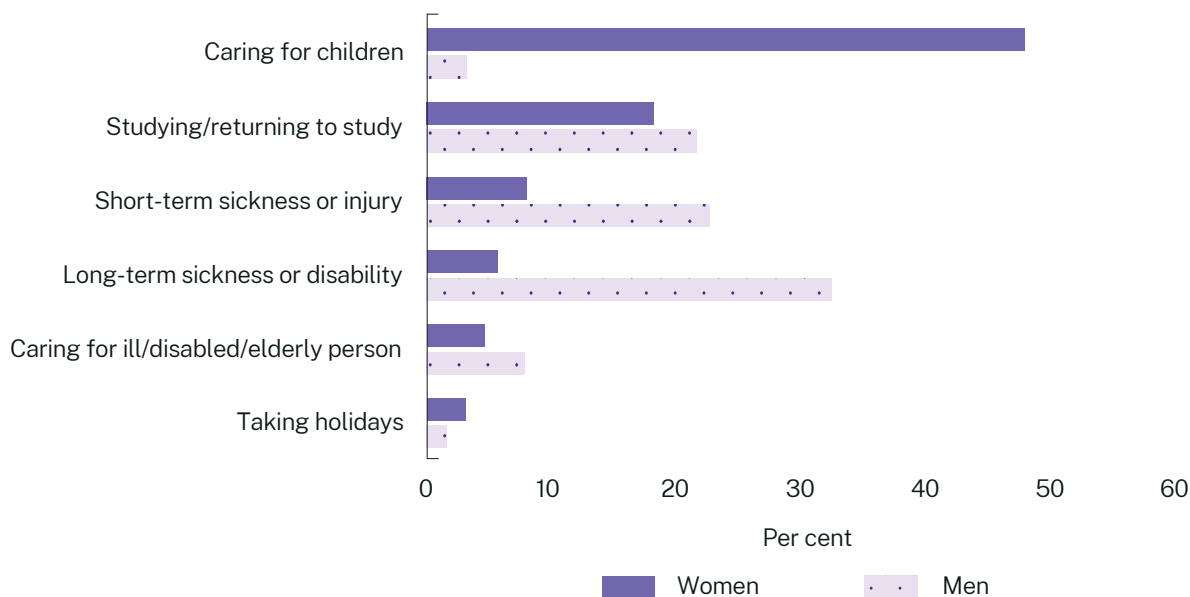


Source: ABS Detailed Labour Force Survey Detailed April 2021 (2019)

Women are also more likely to be underemployed. This term refers to people who are employed full-time but have worked part-time hours for economic reasons (such as being stood down, or because there was insufficient work available),

as well as people who are available and would prefer to work more hours.<sup>18</sup> In 2019, 10.2 per cent of women in the labour force of New South Wales were underemployed, compared to 6.5 per cent of men.<sup>19</sup>

**Figure 4: Main reason Australians who wanted to work or take on more hours were unable to start a job or work more hours in FY2018-19**



Source: ABS Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/barriers-and-incentives-labour-force-participation-australia/latest-release#data-download>)

### Caring for children is a key reason why women work less

As shown in Figure 4, the main reason Australian women want to work or take on more hours but are not available to start is because they are caring for children. Caring for children is far more likely to impact women’s employment opportunities than men’s. Almost half of Australian women (47.9 per cent) who are willing to work or take on more hours report that caring for children is the main reason they are unable to start a job or work more hours, compared to 3.2 per cent of men.

### The longer women remain out of the workforce, the less likely they are to return to work

When women spend longer periods of time out of the workforce to care for children, they are less likely to return to work. With each year a woman spends out of the workforce, their professional skills, knowledge and networks can fall further behind the latest standards. This means that women returning to the workforce after a long break face a greater barrier in updating their skills than women that take a shorter break.

Women are also more likely to lack confidence in their abilities after lengthy periods without paid employment. One study found the probability of women not returning to work after a short period away for non-child-related reasons is 10 per cent, while the probability of women who take longer, child-related career breaks never returning to the workforce is 30 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

### Caring responsibilities are not evenly split between parents

On average, women continue to perform a far larger share of caring work at home than men. Consequently, women take more time out of the workforce to manage competing responsibilities.<sup>21</sup>



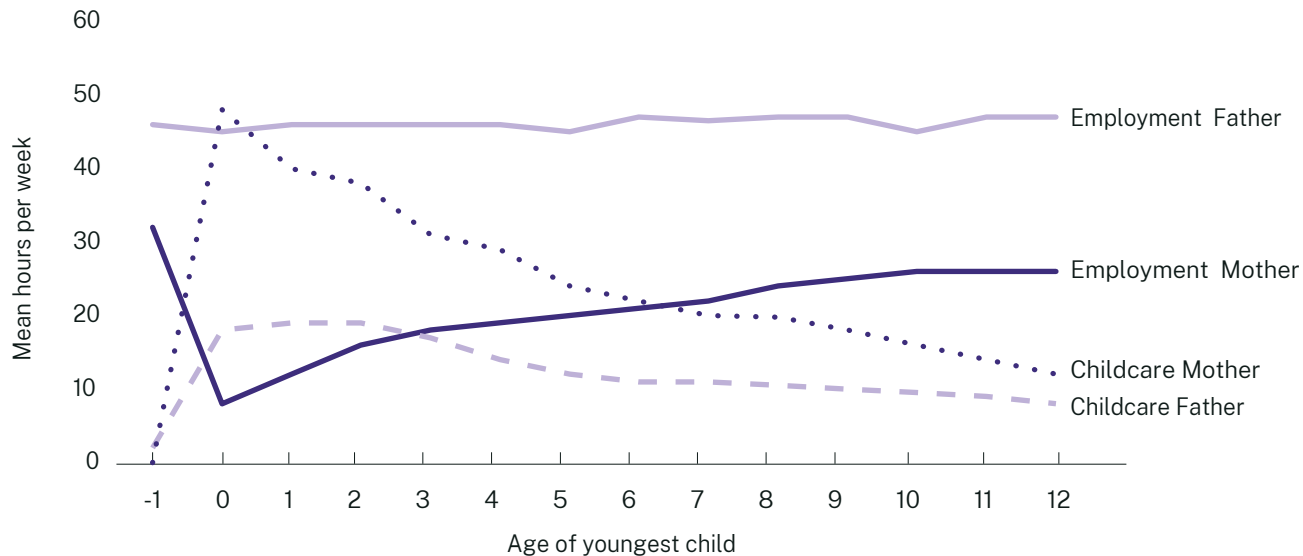
**47.9%**

of Australian women who were unavailable workers or job seekers report that caring for children is the main reason they are unable to work

This is reflected in the average time-use of mothers and fathers before and after having children as set out in Figure 5. The amount of time spent by fathers in employment remains virtually unchanged after having a child, whereas mothers' time-use patterns change significantly. Conversely, after having a child,

the number of hours mothers spend on childcare increases dramatically. Mothers have low levels of employment when their youngest child is less than one year of age, and while this does increase over time, it does not recover to the level before they had children.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 5: Average time-use of parents before and after having children**



Source: NSW Treasury





## For many parents, early childhood education and care remains expensive and hard to find

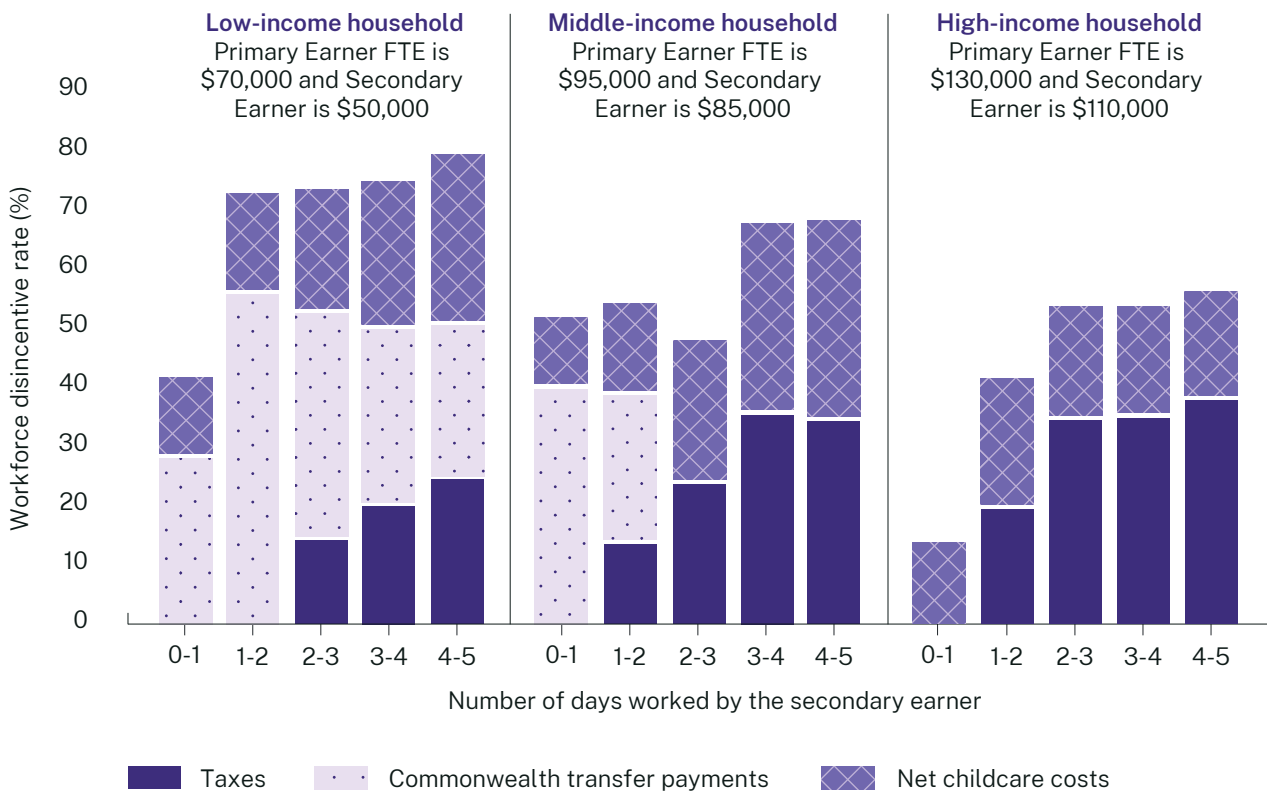
Subsidised childcare was introduced in the 1970s by the Commonwealth Government and has played a significant role in supporting parents to return to work after having children. Over the past 50 years, the subsidy has steadily increased, alongside increases in female workforce participation.

Currently, the Commonwealth Government provides a subsidy to providers to help reduce fees for parents. This subsidy currently covers up to 85 per cent for the first child and up to 95 per cent for other children, with the amount tapering off as household income rises to \$354,305.

Despite the current subsidy levels, some women face very difficult decisions regarding whether to return to work or to continue to care for their children at home. Figure 6 below sets out the workforce disincentive rate, which is an indicator of the amount of take-home pay a parent receives for each additional day of work after income tax, the withdrawal of family tax benefits, and costs.

Workforce disincentive rates vary depending on mothers' incomes. For a family with a combined income of \$120,000 a year with two children, where the father earns \$70,000 and the mother earns \$50,000, the mother only takes home around 25 cents of each additional dollar earned when she works more than one day a week.

**Figure 6: Workforce disincentive rates faced by secondary income earners with two children at current Child Care Subsidy levels**



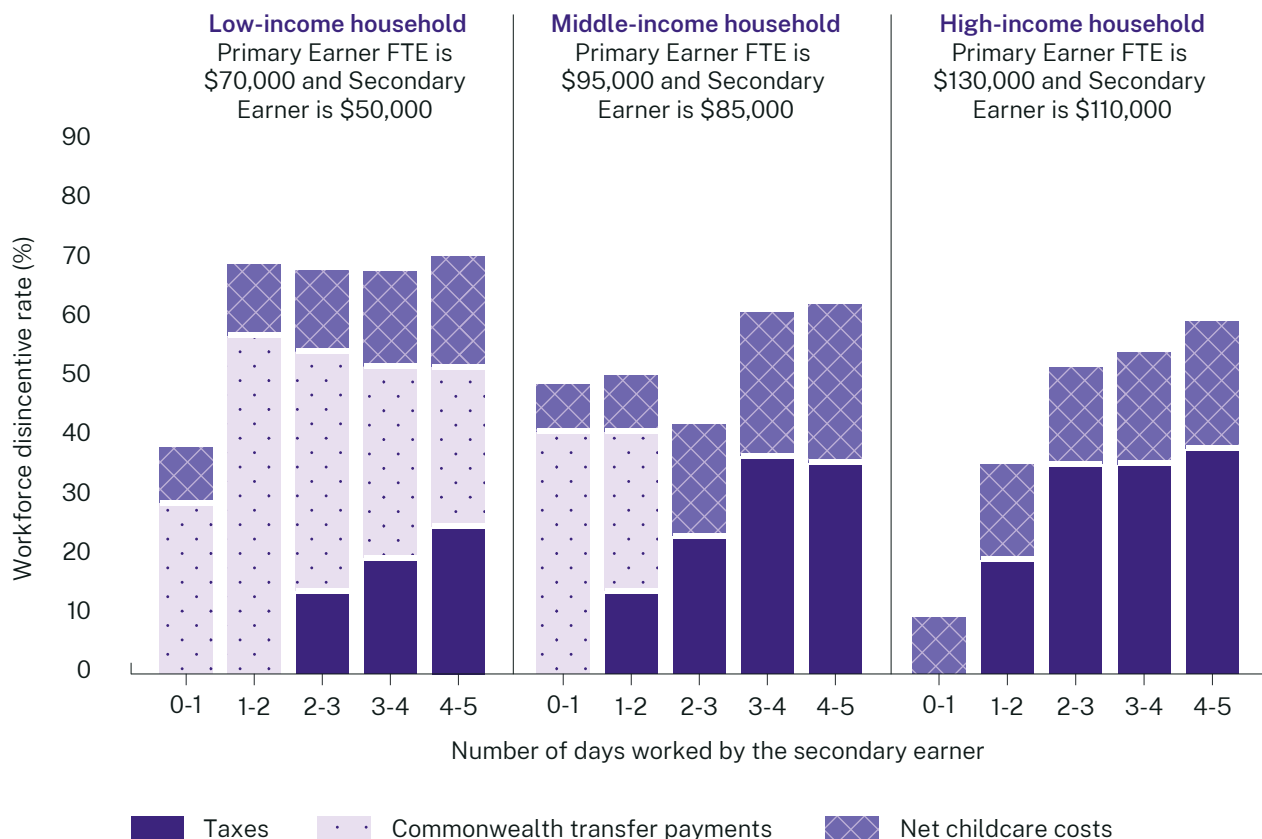
Source: NSW Treasury

This analysis shows how the cost of early childhood education and care, combined with income tax and withdrawn family benefits, erodes mothers' earnings and removes much of the financial incentive to return to the workforce.

The newly elected Commonwealth Government has announced its intention to lower the cost of childcare for households, primarily through increasing the Child Care Subsidy to up to 90 per cent for the first child, with the subsidy tapering as household income

rises and reaching zero for households with incomes over \$530,000.<sup>23</sup> Though this reform will lower the cost of childcare for many families, Figure 7 shows that many families will still face high workforce disincentive rates under the proposed Commonwealth Government arrangements. For the same family described above with a combined income of \$120,000 and two children, they will take home between 32 and 34 cents for each additional dollar earned when she works more than one day.

**Figure 7: Workforce disincentive rates of secondary income earners with two children at different incomes at Child Care Subsidy levels proposed by the incoming Commonwealth Government**



Source: NSW Treasury

Another challenge parents face when seeking to enrol their child in childcare is accessibility. This is because of a number of barriers that prevent increased demand-side childcare subsidies from stimulating the delivery of increased supply. These include:

**1. Workforce shortages:** there are entrenched and worsening shortages of early childhood teachers and educators across Australia, including in New South Wales. These shortages have been significantly exacerbated by COVID-19, but even before the pandemic, staff turnover rates were as high as 30 per cent and it was predicted that 39,000 additional educators would be needed nationally by 2023.<sup>24 25</sup> For New South Wales, this equates to as many as 10,500 educators and 3,150 degree-qualified early childhood teachers.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the workforce, as frontline staff, were hard hit with many peak organisations and employers reporting staff leaving the sector. Anecdotal evidence as of May 2022 is suggesting services continue to close rooms due to staffing shortages – meaning fewer children can attend on a given day.

**2. Thin markets:** many communities across New South Wales, particularly in regional areas, do not have a sufficiently deep childcare market to stimulate competition amongst providers. Because there is a higher marginal cost in providing education and care on a small scale, many providers will not enter rural markets even if there is unmet demand.

**3. Information asymmetry:** childcare providers often face a lack of transparency surrounding the level of demand in local markets. Detailed knowledge of a community’s needs can be difficult to develop, and there is a shortage of quality formal data on the appetite for childcare in different geographical areas. This means it is difficult for supply to be marshalled to meet demand.<sup>26</sup>

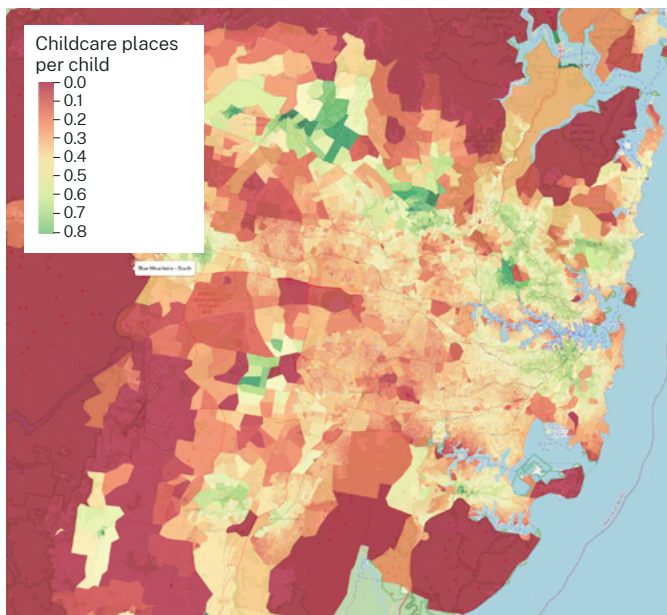
The Mitchell Institute research shows that the current system has resulted in many places being offered in areas where families can pay higher fees, and a relative scarcity of places in lower socio-economic parts of New South Wales, particularly in regional New South Wales, south-west Sydney and Western Sydney. The Mitchell Institute found that 35.2 per cent of the Australian population live in ‘childcare deserts’, which refer to populated areas with less than 0.33 childcare places per child (excluding community preschools and family day care providers).<sup>27</sup>

Research of Australian, US and the Netherlands demand-side support systems also suggest that demand side subsidies also result in supply shifting to higher income areas, and away from regional areas and areas with underserved communities.<sup>28</sup>

While the Mitchell Institute maps do not include family day care or community preschool, Figures 8 and 9 illustrate the relative childcare accessibility issues faced by parents living in parts of New South Wales.

**Figure 8: Map of ‘childcare deserts’ in Greater Sydney**

Orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts

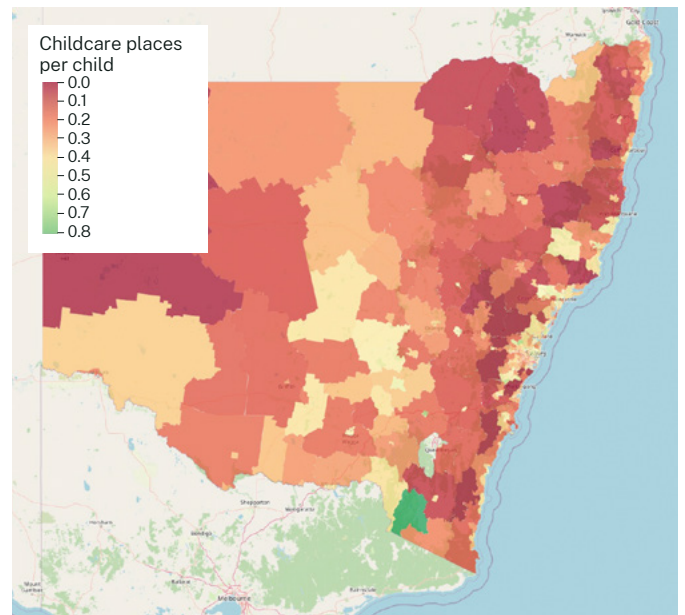


Source: Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare in Australia?

These issues are highly complex. The childcare sector comprises private, not-for-profit and government providers, and is characterised by significant disparities in pricing, accessibility and quality. In addition, the Commonwealth and NSW Governments have overlapping roles and responsibilities. The result of these points is fragmentation in most areas of the sector, such as Commonwealth subsidies and lack of transparent data impeding good decision-making and planning. The NSW Government has the opportunity to further support improvements in the provision of high quality and accessible childcare.

**Figure 9: Map of ‘childcare deserts’ in NSW**

Orange and red areas indicate childcare deserts



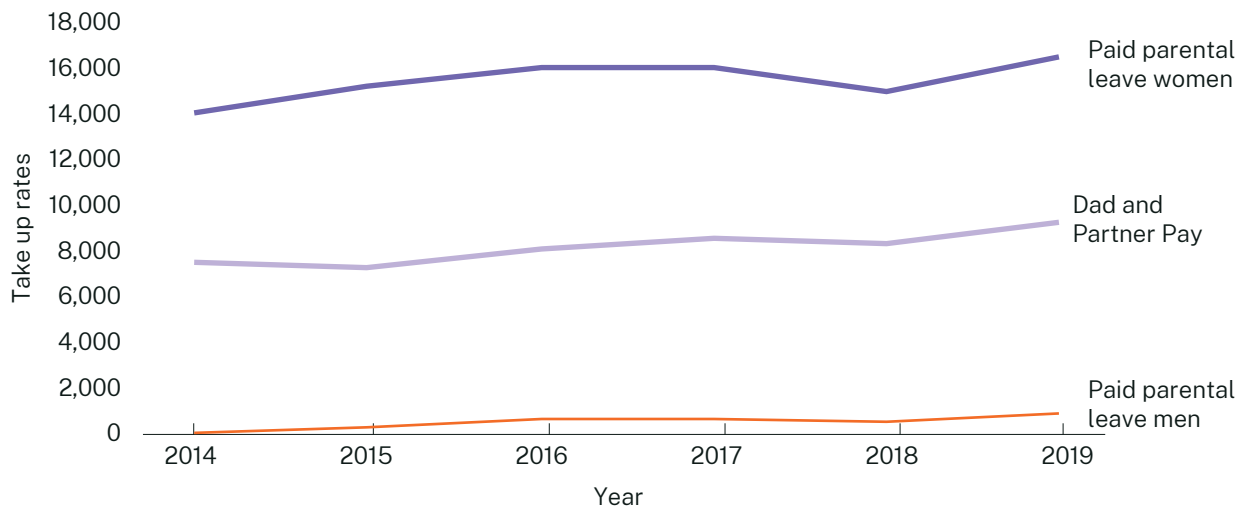
Source: Mitchell Institute, Victoria University, Deserts and oases: How accessible is childcare in Australia?

### Unequal sharing of paid parental leave contributes to the participation gap

Paid parental leave is an important part of supporting parents in the workforce. The first national paid parental leave scheme was introduced in 2011 under the *Paid Parental Leave Act 2010* (Cth). Under the national scheme and following recent announcements by the Commonwealth Government, by March 2023 eligible families across the country will be able to access up to 20 weeks’ leave paid at the minimum wage, which can be shared between parents. Many major employers across Australia, including the NSW Government, provide parental leave at full pay.

Introducing paid parental leave has supported many women to keep a connection to their workforce while taking important time to spend with their newborn children. This is reflected in the strong uptake of the Commonwealth Government’s paid parental leave by mothers, shown in Figure 10. Uptake of paid parental leave by fathers, however, has remained low. Indeed, when the Commonwealth Government’s paid parental leave scheme was reviewed in 2014, more than 99 per cent of all primary carers were women.<sup>29</sup> For every 10 women claiming primary paid parental leave, only four men claim Dad and Partner Pay, which under the existing scheme is two weeks at minimum wage.<sup>30</sup>

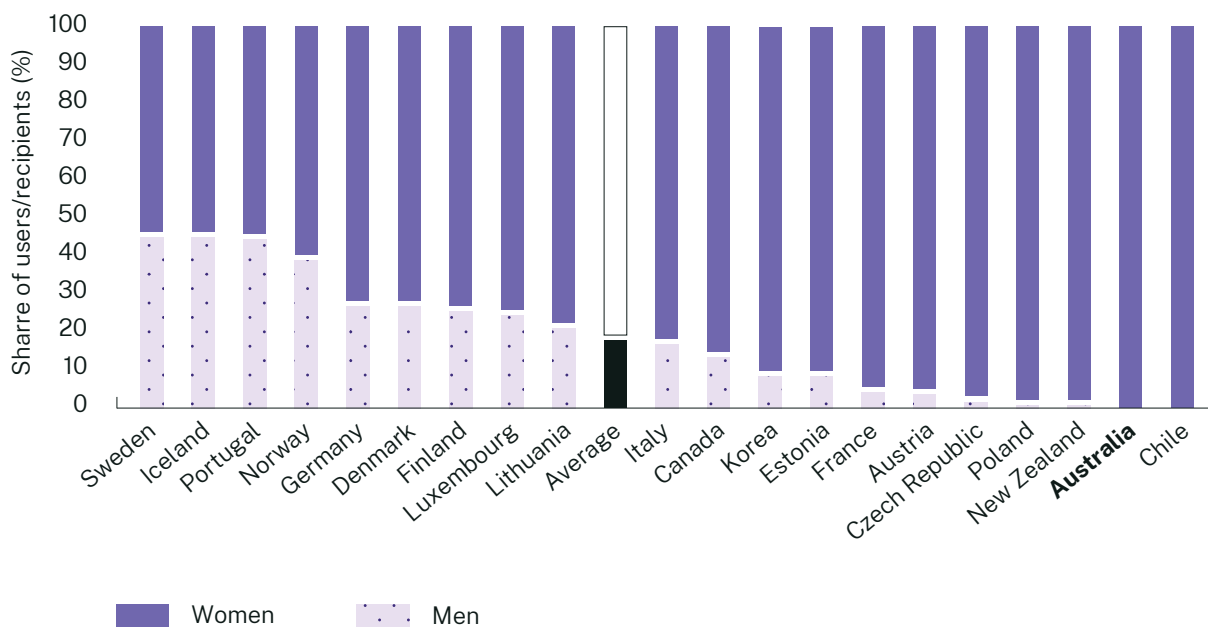
**Figure 10: Take up rates of the Commonwealth Government's paid parental leave scheme (2011–2022)**



Source: Department of Social Services Annual Reports and ABS Gender Indicators Reports for 2016-2019

The rates of fathers using parental leave in Australia are extremely low compared to global standards. Male parents are far more likely to be secondary carers and to take a much shorter period away from work.<sup>31</sup>

**Figure 11: Comparison of take up rates of paid parental leave by fathers**



Source: OECD, Parents' use of childbirth-related leave (2019), <https://www.oecd.org/els/family/PF2-2-Use-childbirth-leave.pdf>

### Women are more likely to care for elderly parents and other vulnerable members of the community

There are 854,300 carers in New South Wales.<sup>32</sup> A carer is anyone who provides ongoing unpaid support to people who need it because of their disability, chronic illness, mental illness or frail age.<sup>33</sup> Carers reduce the need for formal care and supplement the care provided by government services, thereby making significant social and economic contributions.<sup>34</sup>

Women are more likely to be carers than men, comprising 57.9 per cent of carers in New South Wales.<sup>35 36</sup> This is even more significant for women in the midst of their careers, where women aged 45-54 accounted for almost three times the number of male primary carers across Australia.<sup>37</sup>





Both the Commonwealth and state and territory governments have responsibilities in relation to carers. The Commonwealth Government provides payments to eligible carers, including the Carer Payment and Carer Allowance. The NSW Government has a responsibility to carers in New South Wales through the *Carers (Recognition) Act 2010*, which recognises the right of carers to participate in economic, social and community life, that they should be supported to achieve greater economic wellbeing and sustainability and, where appropriate, should have opportunities to participate in employment and education.<sup>38</sup>

However, there is evidence that being a carer limits women's opportunities to participate in the paid workforce, with many carers leaving paid employment or reducing their working hours to balance their caring responsibilities.<sup>39 40</sup> Carers are less likely to be employed than non-carers, with 66.6 per cent of carers employed in 2018 compared to 77.4 per cent of non-carers.<sup>41</sup>

Primary carers who provide more hours of care per week are less likely to be employed. In 2018, 52.8 per cent of primary carers who provided fewer than 20 hours of care per week were employed, compared to 28.6 per cent of primary carers who provided more than 40 hours of care.<sup>42</sup> Of the primary carers not in workforce, 25 per cent have indicated they would like to be employed, with the majority (85.7 per cent) wanting to work part-time.<sup>43</sup>

Carers also commonly face financial difficulties.<sup>44</sup> In 2018, the median weekly income of primary carers was \$621, compared to \$997 for non-carers, making it harder for carers to pay for living expenses, save money or build superannuation.<sup>45</sup> Carers also often have low levels of physical and mental health and wellbeing, and they struggle to balance paid work and their caring responsibilities.<sup>46</sup>

### **Not all women have equal access to flexible working arrangements, which may limit some women's economic participation**

While flexible working arrangements can benefit all employees, such arrangements are a particularly important enabler of women's workforce participation. Access to flexible working can allow workers to remain in or re-enter the workforce while balancing their personal commitments, such as caring responsibilities.

Under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth), many employees have a right to request flexible working arrangements. Employees are entitled to make a flexible working request if they have worked for the same employer for at least 12 months and are a parent of young or school-aged children, a carer, a person with a disability, aged 55 or older, or experiencing family violence.<sup>47</sup>

However, there have been challenges in translating this right to request flexible work from policy to practice.<sup>48</sup> Employees who do not meet the criteria outlined above are not entitled to request flexible working arrangements under the National Employment Standards. Furthermore, employers may refuse flexible working requests on reasonable business grounds.<sup>49</sup> Reasonable grounds include if the requested arrangements would be too expensive, it would be impractical to change other employees' working arrangements or to recruit new staff to accommodate the request, or if it would have a significant detrimental impact on customer service.

The inability to access flexible working arrangements can be an impediment to both workforce participation and career progression for women, particularly in certain sectors. Women who have difficulty accessing suitable flexible work opportunities in their chosen field may end up accepting jobs below their skill level or in another field that are lower paid and less secure, thereby inhibiting their career development.<sup>50</sup>

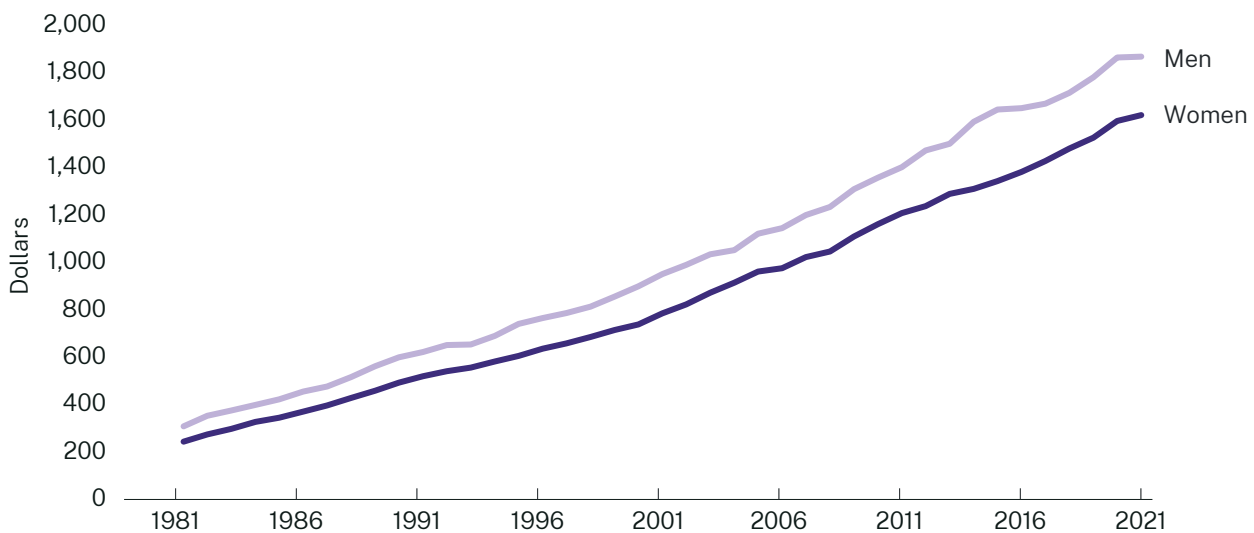
## 4.2 Equity at work

Women's economic opportunity goes beyond participation. Equity and respect in the workplace provide the foundation for women to not only participate in the workforce, but also to succeed in their chosen career path. This means that all employees should be treated respectfully and have equal opportunities for career development and progression to leadership roles.

### Women in NSW are paid 12 per cent less on average than men

The gender pay gap refers to the difference between women's and men's average weekly full-time earnings. The gender pay gap in New South Wales declined in the early 1980s, but since then has hovered between 12 and 19 per cent, meaning on average women were earning between 12 and 19 per cent less than men a week. In November 2021, the gender pay gap in New South Wales was 12 per cent, the equivalent of around \$11,500 a year. This was smaller than the gender gap for Australia overall (14 per cent), but larger than Tasmania (9 per cent), Australian Capital Territory (8 per cent) and South Australia (7 per cent).<sup>51</sup>

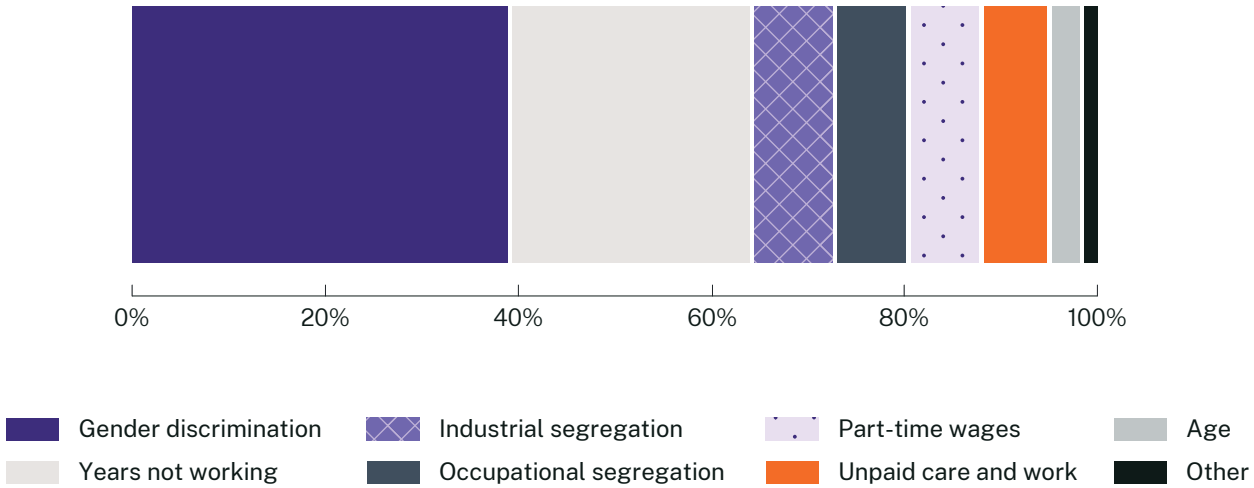
**Figure 12: Average weekly full-time earnings by gender, NSW (1981-2021)**



Source: ABS Average Weekly Earnings; NSW Treasury

Several factors contribute to the gender pay gap. Figure 13 sets out research undertaken by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the Diversity Council Australia and KPMG on the main drivers of the gender pay gap.

**Figure 13: Components of the gender pay gap**



Source: KPMG, She’s Price(d)less: The economics of the gender pay gap, 2019

### Gender discrimination is the primary driver of pay inequality

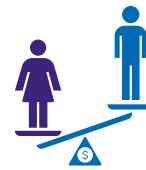
As shown in Figure 13, gender discrimination accounted for 39 per cent of the gender pay gap in Australia in 2017. Gender discrimination refers to cultural biases where women’s work is perceived to be of lesser value than men’s. This can take a variety of forms, including gender discrimination in workplace culture, recruitment practices, promotions and training opportunities.<sup>52</sup>

### Less time in the workforce also leads to lower pay

Time spent not working is also a significant driver, accounting for 25 per cent of the gender pay gap in Australia in 2017. People may experience career interruptions for many reasons, including unemployment, study or career breaks. It is particularly common for women with young children or who are carers to take time out of the workforce.

Time out of the workforce can contribute to the gender pay gap in several ways. Women who have spent less time in the workforce may have fewer opportunities to gain experience and participate in training and other skill development opportunities.<sup>53</sup> Consequently, some women who have career disruptions may end up re-entering the workforce in lower paid roles.

As shown in Figure 14, the gender pay gap is smallest for workers in the earlier stages of their career and then grows steadily before peaking at 18 per cent for workers aged 45–54.



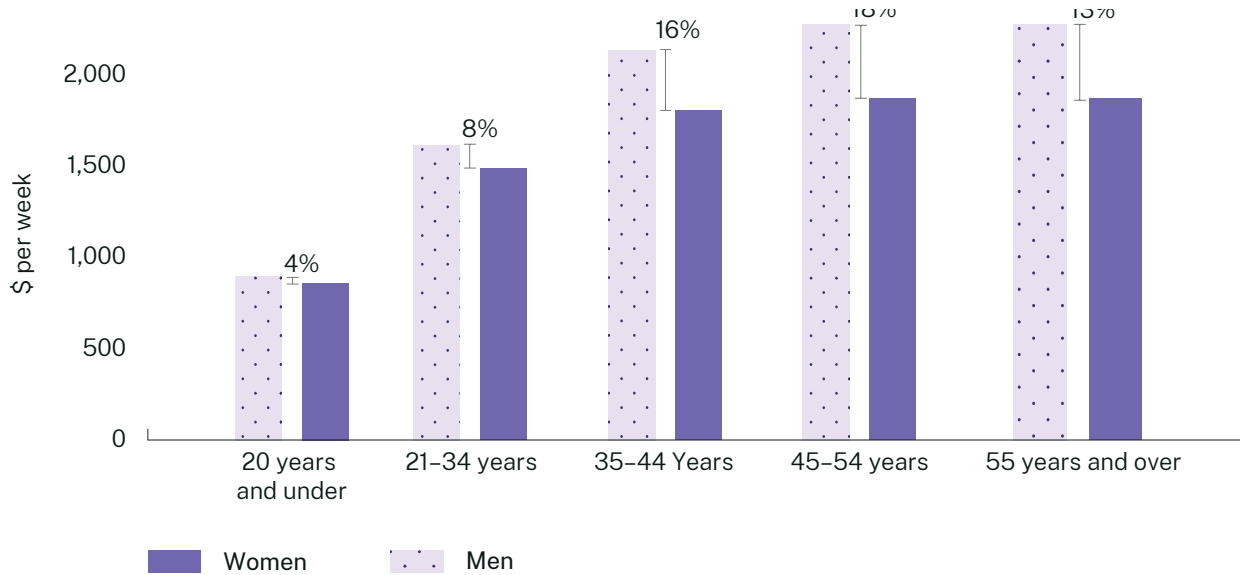
**39%**  
of the pay gap is due to gender discrimination



**25%**  
of the gender pay gap is due to time out of work



**Figure 14: Average weekly full-time earnings for men and women in Australia**



Source: ABS Employee Earnings and Hours (2021)

Working part-time also contributes to differences in take-home pay. Women are significantly more likely to work part-time compared to men, with twice as many employed women in New South Wales working part-time compared to men (39.4 per cent of women compared to 18.2 per cent of men).<sup>54</sup>

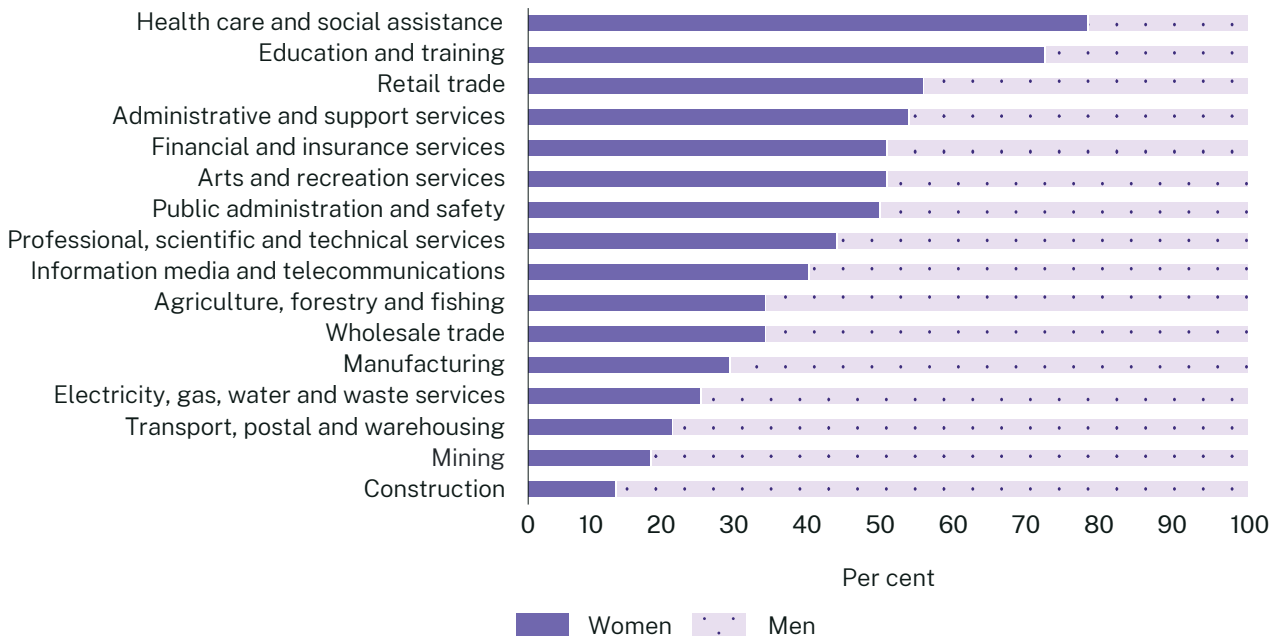
### Occupational and industry segregation contributes to pay inequality

Gender segregation refers to particular industries or occupations being dominated by a particular gender. The NSW labour market is heavily gender-segregated, with one-third of employed women working in the education and health related industries.<sup>55</sup> By contrast, women make up a very small percentage of workers in the mining and construction industries.<sup>56</sup>





**Figure 15: Female and male proportion of workforce by industry**



Source: Adapted from Infrastructure Australia, 2021 Infrastructure Market Capacity report

Gender segregation in occupations and industries is a significant driver of the gender pay gap. KPMG estimates that gender segregation accounted for up to 17 per cent of the gender pay gap in Australia in 2017.<sup>57</sup>

On average, jobs in male-dominated occupations are higher-paid than jobs in female-dominated occupations. For example, analysis by Impact Economic and Policy found that employees with a bachelor’s degree or higher working in female-dominated industries earn 30 per cent less per hour than equivalently qualified employees in male-dominated industries.<sup>58</sup> Similarly, employees with a Certificate III/IV working in female-dominated industries earn 36 per cent less per hour than equivalently qualified employees in male-dominated industries.<sup>59</sup>

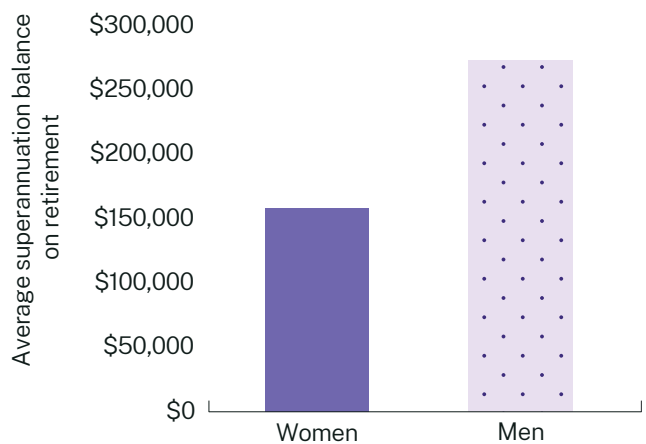
There are many reasons why women may be reluctant to work in male-dominated industries despite higher average pay and security.<sup>60</sup> Long and rigid working hours are commonplace in some male-dominated industries like construction, which may deter women from entry.<sup>61</sup> Cultures of very long hours, presenteeism and hyperavailability also stigmatise taking career breaks, which can clash with employees’ care commitments, especially parents of young children.<sup>62</sup> Women working in such industries are also at greater risk of experiencing sexual or gender harassment than those working in gender-balanced or female-dominated industries.<sup>63</sup>

**Women retire with significantly less superannuation than men**

Across a lifetime, differences in labour market outcomes including the combination of the gender pay gap, participation in the workforce and number

of hours worked create a substantial financial disadvantage for women. As shown in Figure 16, lower participation, average hours worked and pay contribute to the lower superannuation balances accrued by women over their working lives compared to men, with women retiring with 42 per cent less superannuation on average compared to men.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, 23 per cent of women retire with no superannuation at all.<sup>65</sup>

**Figure 16: Average superannuation balances of Australian men and women on retirement**



Source: Australian Super, The gender super gap: How gender inequality affects superannuation, <https://www.australiansuper.com/superannuation/superannuation-articles/2020/02/gender-equality-and-your-super>

The Commonwealth Government’s 2021 Intergenerational Report forecasts the gender superannuation gap will persist for at least the next 40 years unless action is taken.<sup>66</sup>

## Women are under-represented in leadership positions and miss out on opportunities for promotion

Despite significant progress over the past decades, men still comprise a large majority of the leadership positions across the private and public sectors. Only 17 per cent of chief executive officer roles were held by women in 2018, and women represented just 29 per cent of board members for ASX 500 companies in November 2021.<sup>67 68</sup> Although women are more likely to hold leadership roles in female-dominated industries, they are still under-represented. In 2018, women held 38 per cent of Chief Executive Officer roles in female-dominated industries.<sup>69</sup>

Women continue to face barriers to career development, with only 86 women promoted to the manager level for every 100 men.<sup>70</sup> As men significantly outnumber women at this first step, the pipeline of women for senior leadership roles narrows. Business and community groups (such as the Business Council of Australia), have also expressed concern that the increase in hybrid and remote working arrangements during the COVID-19 pandemic may mean women choosing to work from home could miss out on career opportunities leading to advancement.<sup>71</sup>

Gender bias in performance assessments and fewer development opportunities can also limit women's career development.<sup>72</sup> While male employees often receive specific, outcome-oriented feedback, studies

show that the feedback and career advice women receive can be comparatively vague.<sup>73</sup> Despite evidence that both men and women want challenging projects and interesting jobs, other studies show that women tend to receive less demanding projects compared to men.<sup>74 75</sup> This can be due to managers attempting to prevent women from becoming overworked or due to a perception that men have greater motivation to work on such projects.<sup>76</sup>

For women who work flexibly, including part-time hours, the path to promotion and career advancement may be slower. Most research indicates that part-time workers have slower career progression and promotion than full-time workers. There are several reasons for this, including different treatment by employers in relation to training (compared to full-time workers), being unnecessarily prevented from undertaking certain types of work due to working part-time, and fewer hours in employment, which impacts work experience.<sup>77 78</sup>

Gender stereotypes and unconscious or implicit bias may also contribute to women's lower level of representation in leadership roles. Traits which are stereotypically associated with women (such as gentleness and collaboration) are undervalued in leaders, compared to stereotypical male traits (such as directness).<sup>79</sup>



## 4.3 Women in small business and entrepreneurship

Small businesses are an important part of the NSW economy. They create employment opportunities, encourage innovation, provide critical goods and services, and help to create vibrant communities people want to live in and visit.<sup>80</sup> In 2017-18, there were 765,387 small businesses in New South Wales, which accounted for more than 95 per cent of businesses in the State.<sup>81</sup>

### Women are under-represented as small-business owners

Despite the prevalence of small businesses in New South Wales, only one-third of these businesses are owned by women.<sup>82</sup> Some of the key challenges faced by women in small business and entrepreneurial roles are outlined below.

### Women business owners and entrepreneurs have fewer formal networks

While women are more likely to have informal support networks, they are less likely to have formal business growth networks.<sup>83</sup> This is considered an intergenerational issue and a consequence of differences in confidence between men and women. Women are less likely than men to know other women business owners or entrepreneurs, or to have access to sponsors, mentors or professional support networks.<sup>84</sup>

Networks and mentors benefit entrepreneurs in setting higher aspirations, developing and executing better long-term growth plans, acquiring new or improved business skills, getting greater access to funding, and receiving emotional support.<sup>85</sup> Strong networks and mentors can play an even bigger role for women in building awareness and confidence to overcome initial challenges in starting and developing their businesses.<sup>86</sup>

### Women have less access to capital to start a business

Studies show that women often find it harder to raise finance to start and grow their business through equity options such as venture capital.

In 2019, just 3 per cent of global venture capital went to women-led start-ups. While this rate had previously been increasing, COVID-19 led to a downward trend, with only 2.3 per cent of global venture capital going to women-led start-ups in 2020.

Financing of women-led start-ups is better in Australia, with start-ups co-founded by a woman in 2021 receiving 27 per cent of venture capital. Wholly women-led start-ups, however, received just 5.3 per cent of venture capital.<sup>87</sup> This trend is despite evidence that women-led start-ups generate more than twice as much revenue per dollar invested than those companies founded by men.<sup>88</sup>

Women also tend to have fewer networks to access and secure funding, as high-net investors rely on existing contacts in their network to consider investment options.<sup>89</sup> As existing entrepreneurial networks have a significantly smaller proportion of women, fewer entry points exist for women to access equity options such as venture capital.<sup>90</sup>



Strong networks and mentors can play an even bigger role for women in building awareness and confidence to overcome initial challenges in starting and developing their businesses.



## 4.4 Economic participation by diverse communities

Women in New South Wales come from many different walks of life, with a diverse range of skills and attributes. These attributes may include their race, ethnicity, age, disability, LGBTQIA+ status, socio-economic status or whether they are a parent.

While diverse cohorts of women have a range of strengths to make valuable contributions to their families, communities and workplaces, many experience additional barriers to economic participation. Several cohorts of women in New South Wales continue to have lower levels of workforce participation due to a range of barriers.<sup>91</sup> These include:

- Women with low socio-economic status
- Women with disability<sup>92</sup>
- First Nations women
- Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

### Women with low socio-economic status

Women with low socio-economic status have among the lowest absolute rates of labour force participation of women in New South Wales.

Just 54 per cent of NSW women aged 15–64 with low socio-economic status were part of the labour force in 2019, compared to 63 per cent of men of the same age and socio-economic status.<sup>93</sup> Educational attainment of Year 11 or below was also accompanied by very low labour force participation for women; just 57 per cent compared with 67 per cent for men who had achieved Year 11 or below.<sup>94</sup>

### Women with disability

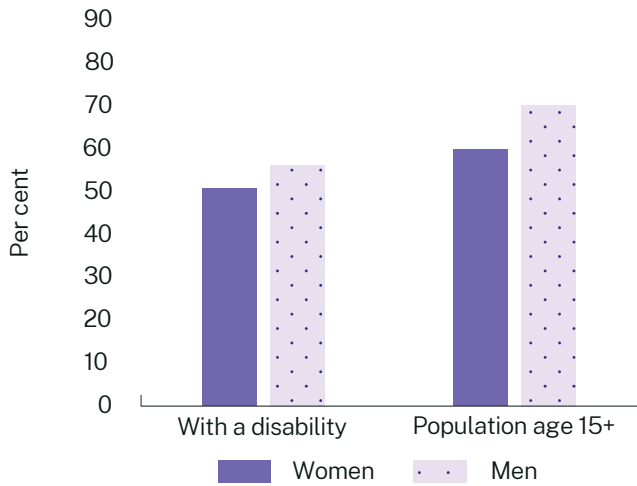
Employees with disability make a valuable contribution to businesses due to their diverse skills, talents and qualifications. Research shows employees with disability have higher retention and attendance rates compared to those without disability.<sup>95</sup> However, women aged 15–64 with disability in Australia had a lower rate of workforce participation (51 per cent) compared to both men with disability (56 per cent) and all women in Australia (71.6 per cent) in 2018.<sup>96</sup>

While many women with disability express a strong desire to participate in the workforce, few believe there are many workplaces that could offer the flexibility required to meet their needs (for example, working hours and support workers).<sup>97</sup>





**Figure 17: Participation rates for people with a disability**



Employees with disability make a valuable contribution to businesses due to their diverse skills, talents and qualifications.

Source: ABS, Disability and the labour force (<https://www.abs.gov.au/articles/disability-and-labour-force>) and ABS Labour Force (2018)

**First Nations women**

Although there have been improvements in education outcomes nationally for First Nations women across primary, secondary and tertiary education, significant progress is still needed for parity to be achieved.<sup>98</sup> First Nations women have a considerably lower workforce participation rate compared to all women. The average workforce participation rate for First Nations women in New South Wales aged 15–64 was 62 per cent, compared to 73 per cent for all women in New South Wales in 2019.<sup>99</sup> First Nations women are more likely to be in part-time employment (23 per cent) than First Nations men (14 per cent). Generally, incomes are comparatively lower, and jobs for First Nations women are concentrated in the health, social assistance and manual labour sectors.<sup>100</sup>

First Nations women are impacted by many disadvantages due to the ongoing impacts of colonisation. First Nations women continue to experience intergenerational trauma, lack of intergenerational wealth, lower home-ownership rates and opportunities, workplace discrimination, and racism. First Nations women are also more likely to be carers and to provide care to multiple people, meaning the challenges experienced by carers are amplified for many First Nations women.<sup>101</sup> First Nations people in New South Wales are less likely to be small-business owners compared to non-Indigenous people, with First Nations women more likely to experience barriers in accessing capital to start and grow businesses than non-Indigenous businesses.<sup>102</sup>

**Figure 18: Participation rates for First Nations people**



Source: Accenture analysis of HILDA (2019)

“As Aboriginal women, we’re expected to support all our family, not just our kids. It can be tough sometimes.”

Focus group participant, commissioned research (March/April 2022)



### Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

The average level of labour force participation for women aged 15–64 who speak a language other than English at home (66 per cent in 2019) is below the average for all NSW women aged 15–64 (73 per cent) and considerably below the 83 per cent rate for men who speak a language other than English at home.<sup>103</sup>

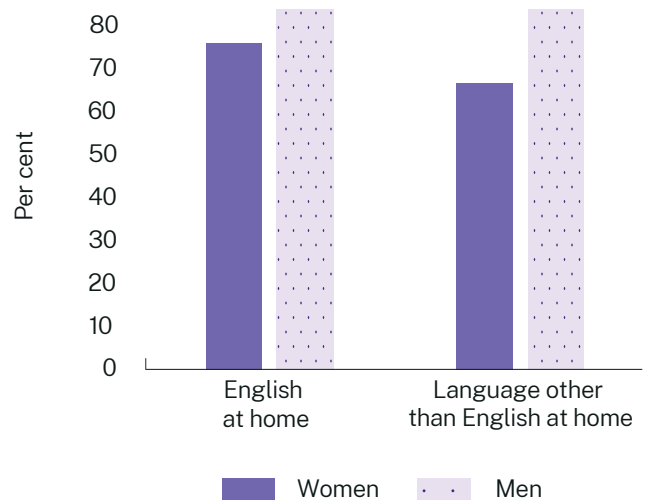
Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds experience many of the same issues that affect women from the broader population. However, they may also experience particular challenges, especially when entering the workforce, including:

- being discouraged from entering the workforce by their families due to cultural expectations and gender norms
- discrimination
- language difficulties and
- lack of recognition of qualifications and prior experience in other countries.

In 2016, one-quarter of NSW female small-business owners were from a non-English speaking background.<sup>104</sup>

Women’s motivations to start up an enterprise have been found to be quite different to men’s. Women have been frequently found to engage in entrepreneurship out of necessity, rather than being driven to pursue a new market opportunity or novel business idea. The necessity driver often stems from a desire to achieve a better work-family balance.<sup>105</sup>

**Figure 19: Participation rates by language spoken at home**



Source: Accenture analysis of HILDA (2019)

**In 2016, one-quarter of NSW female small-business owners were from a non-English speaking background.**

## 4.5 Women’s health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing are fundamental to being able to participate fully in the workforce and take advantage of lifetime economic opportunities. Women have many different health needs and experiences to men, in particular those associated with fertility and sexual health which occur throughout a woman’s working life.

Women’s health outcomes have improved dramatically over recent decades thanks to medical advances, public health provision and major health awareness campaigns. Life expectancy for women has risen from 84 years in 2006 to 85.2 years in 2016. More than 83 per cent of girls aged over 15 years are fully immunised against human papillomavirus.

However, many challenges remain. This section sets out some of those challenges which particularly affect women’s ability to participate in the workforce and maintain the right to choose to have a family, a career or both.

### In vitro fertilisation (IVF) treatment and fertility preservation services are not affordable for all

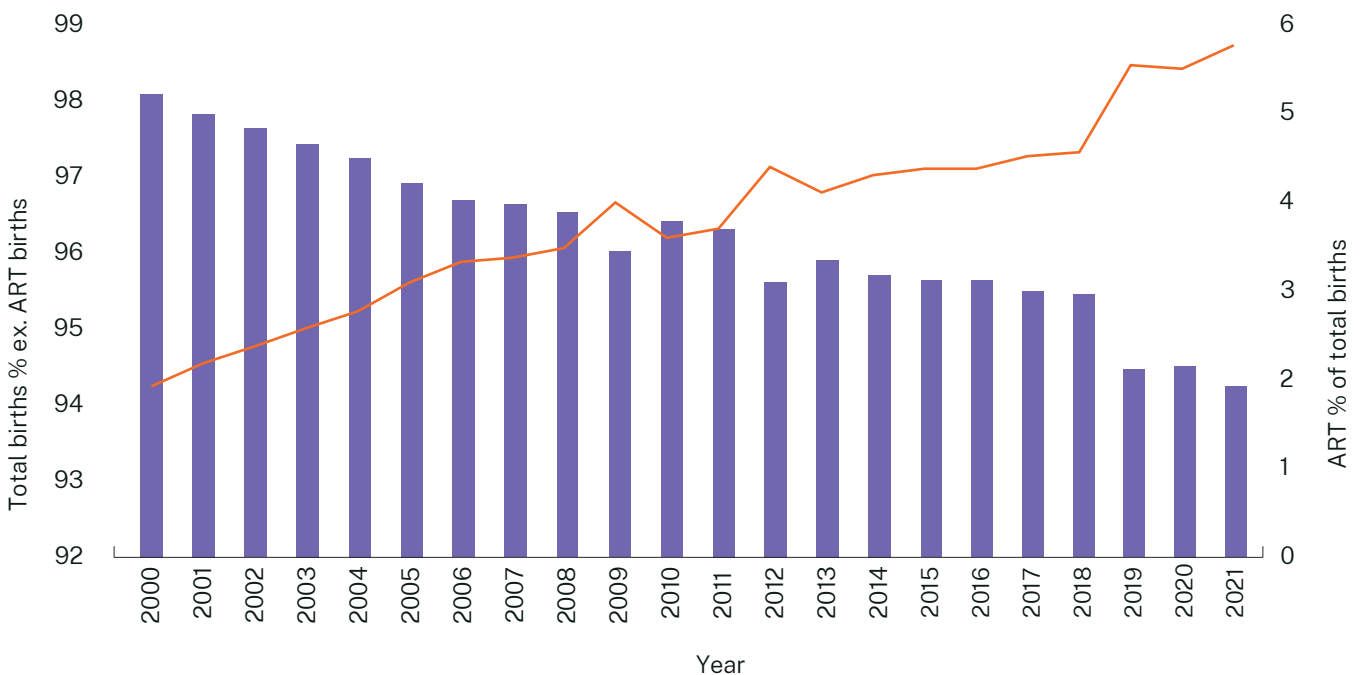
Currently, one in six families will experience fertility issues throughout their lifetimes. The University of New South Wales found that assisted reproductive technologies have become increasingly common among Australian families, with more than 81,000 treatment cycles in 2019 alone. This is an increase of about 6 per cent on the previous year.<sup>106</sup> This means that an increasing number of children are born in Australia because of assisted reproductive technologies, representing more than 18,300 of the almost 306,000 babies born in 2019.

Figure 20 shows how birth rates without assisted reproductive technology (ART) has declined by almost 4 per cent over the past 20 years in Australia, with a corresponding increase in the number of births from assisted reproductive technologies.

“I delayed having kids to set up my business. I’m in my 40s now and going through IVF. It’s emotionally and financially draining.”

Focus group participant, commissioned research (March/April 2022)

**Figure 20: Birth rates in Australia with and without assisted reproductive technology**



Source: IVF Directors Group<sup>107</sup>

Despite medical advances, IVF treatment and fertility preservation can be emotionally and financially difficult for women and their partners.<sup>108</sup> While Medicare covers some related costs, the financial burden of IVF treatment and fertility preservation is often prohibitive for some women, preventing them from accessing services which would give them the best chance of conceiving.

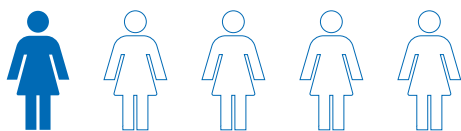
The estimated out-of-pocket cost is up to \$5,500 for an IVF cycle and up to \$2,400 for a frozen embryo transfer cycle. Some women require subsequent cycles which may be provided at a slightly lower cost if undertaken in the same year. These costs may differ depending on individual circumstances, insurance cover and the service that is used.

Costs also remain high for fertility preservation treatments, with egg-freezing costs sitting around \$4,500 for the first cycle and \$4,000 for subsequent cycles. Ongoing storage is around \$50 per month and medications from \$1,500 per cycle.

### **Women can have to take time off work to seek reproductive health support**

The reproductive health needs of women can often result in women having to take time off work, not just in the postnatal period. For example, women who undergo assisted reproduction treatments may require time off work to rest after the procedures. Equally, women who experience a miscarriage may also require a period away from the workplace to rest and recover.

Under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth), women generally have to rely on their personal or annual leave for periods away from work relating to fertility and reproductive health. While compassionate leave provisions have been extended for some of these reasons, there remains gaps in entitlements. Some larger employers are now offering paid leave to employees undergoing IVF treatments, as well as leave for miscarriage and pre-term births.<sup>109 110</sup>



**One in five**  
mothers of children aged  
24 months or younger  
diagnosed with depression

### **Women are at risk of developing mental health conditions during the postnatal period**

Some women develop mental health conditions (such as postnatal anxiety or depression) after having a baby and adjusting to motherhood. Some women may be at particularly high risk, including women with a personal or family history of mental health conditions and who lack social or emotional support and have increased life stresses.

Mental health disorders can affect women at any time in their life, but there is an increased chance of mental ill-health during pregnancy and the year following the birth. Data from the 2010 Australian National Infant Feeding Survey showed that in 2010–11, one in five mothers of children aged 24 months or younger had been diagnosed with depression, and more than half of these mothers reported that the depression was diagnosed from pregnancy until the child's first birthday.<sup>111</sup>

The increased life stresses caused by COVID-19, including uncertainty, financial stress and social isolation, have led to increased demand for postnatal mental health support. Accessing mental health support early is important for the wellbeing of both mothers and their children.

### **Menopause can have a significant impact on women's quality of life**

Women may experience a range of symptoms during menopause. It is estimated around 85 per cent of women will experience at least one symptom of menopause, which can include hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction, mood disorders, weight gain and cognitive decline.<sup>112</sup> While some women may only experience mild symptoms during menopause, around 20 per cent of women experience more severe or prolonged symptoms which may significantly affect their quality of life and impact on their ability to work.<sup>113</sup> In addition to the common side effects, menopausal women also face increased risk of osteoporosis and declining bone health, cardiovascular disease and stroke, weight gain, urinary continence problems, and heavy or uncontrolled bleeding.

When women experience menopausal symptoms, it impacts on their ability to enjoy a fulfilling social life or pursue activities that enhance their financial security. Women suffering from ill health are also less likely to seek a promotion or actively engage with their work, and more likely to take extended leave or leave their job.<sup>114</sup>



Research indicates that women may not want to draw attention to the health impacts of their perimenopause or menopause. A social taboo exists around menopause that makes it less likely women will discuss their symptoms or seek professional medical assistance.

There are a range of treatments available to manage symptoms of menopause, including eating well, regular physical activity, menopausal hormone therapy, non-hormonal prescription medications and complementary therapies. Beyond direct medical treatment of symptoms, it is also essential to break down social stigmas around discussing menopause and seeking treatment. It is vital to foster recognition that menopause can have profound effects on women's health and wellbeing and, by extension, significant impacts on their social and economic lives.

### **Tailored, culturally safe support services are needed to improve the health and wellbeing of First Nations women and their families**

While some progress has been made towards closing the gap, there continue to be significant disparities between the health and educational outcomes of First Nations children and adults compared to the non-Indigenous population. For example, First Nations people have lower life expectancies and higher suicide rates.<sup>115</sup> First Nations children have lower rates of participation in preschool, and only 35.2 per cent of First Nations children are assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census, compared to 56.6 per cent of non-Indigenous children.<sup>116</sup>

This suggests that existing services for the general population are not meeting the needs of many First Nations women and their families, and that tailored approaches to service delivery are required. Research suggests that integrated, holistic and culturally safe services may better meet the needs of First Nations women and their families; for example, co-locating multiple services such as early childhood education and care, parent and family support, maternal and child health, and adult education opportunities.

### **Many community sporting facilities were originally built without female amenities**

Although having the ability to participate in sport is a critical part of maintaining women's physical and mental health, women have lower levels of participation on average compared to men. Rates and patterns of participation in sport not only differ between genders, but also fluctuate over the life course.<sup>117</sup> Only 21 per cent of girls in New South Wales aged 0–14 play an organised sport and physical activity outside school hours three times a week, and their rates plateau when they reach adolescence.<sup>118</sup> By contrast, boys participate in organised sport and physical activity at consistently higher rates, and their participation increases with age.<sup>119</sup> Evidence also shows girls and women from disadvantaged areas have lower rates of participation compared to those in more advantaged areas.<sup>120</sup>

The NSW Government has made significant investments to upgrade sporting facilities across the State to include female change rooms and safer lighting. However, there is further demand for upgrades, with many community sporting grounds still lacking the infrastructure needed to support women's participation in sports.



## About 85%

of women will experience at least one symptom of menopause<sup>125</sup>

“For First Nations women, economic prosperity starts with strength in culture. If we don't have culture, we don't have anything. Culture is family, it's connection to country and community.”

Consultation participant,  
Expert Reference Panel  
(March 2022)

## 4.6 Women’s safety

Preventing harassment and violence against women is paramount for women to be able to find and stay in work. Safety issues confronted by women over their lifetimes are wide-ranging and include the ongoing scourge of domestic, family and sexual violence, including sexual harassment in the workplace. Street harassment also continues to affect many women who commute to work.

### Domestic and family violence is one of the biggest risks to women’s safety

Domestic and family violence can have a significant impact on women’s economic participation. Research shows that domestic and family violence is likely to have a detrimental impact on women’s health, increase absenteeism, and decrease staff performance and productivity.<sup>121</sup> Women who experience domestic and family violence are also more likely to have lower incomes, fragmented work history, and to be employed in part-time or casual work.<sup>122</sup> Domestic and family violence costs the Australian economy \$22 billion per year.<sup>123</sup>

While the Commonwealth and NSW Governments have made significant investments in domestic, family and sexual violence prevention and support programs, one in every six women in Australia continues to experience physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner.<sup>124</sup> Several Australian surveys have shown that demand for domestic and family violence services surged during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>125</sup>

For example, in one study, 62 per cent of service providers reported an increase in the number of clients seeking assistance.<sup>126</sup>

Many large employers (including the NSW Government) provide additional support for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence by providing paid leave to take time away from work to start to rebuild their lives. In addition, around 250,000 NSW employees have access to paid domestic and family violence leave through workplace agreements.<sup>127</sup> Although a final decision is yet to be made, in May 2022 the Fair Work Commission issued a provisional decision to include 10 days paid domestic and family violence leave in awards for permanent employees.<sup>128</sup>

### Sexual harassment remains prevalent in the workplace

Women’s economic participation can also be impacted by sexual harassment and safety at work. While all employees have a right to safety at work, surveys conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission show that almost 40 per cent of women have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace in the past five years (compared to 26 per cent of men).<sup>129</sup>

Figure 21 shows that women employed in roles in male-dominated environments like mining, construction and transport are at greater risk of experiencing sexual and gender harassment compared to the national average.<sup>130</sup>

**Figure 21: Sexual harassment rates of men and women in different industries and the national rate**



Source: Adapted from Australian Human Rights Commission, Respect@Work: National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020>

There is also a significantly higher incidence of workplace sexual harassment for culturally and linguistically diverse women, women with disability, and those who identify as LGBTQIA+.<sup>131</sup> Consultation with focus groups for the Women's Economic Opportunities Review revealed that 'women report a low-level anxiety about personal safety that is always present, lurking just below the surface'.<sup>132</sup>

Sexual harassment has a negative economic impact on both the victim and their co-workers, reducing productivity, employee morale and staff retention rates.<sup>133</sup> It is estimated that sexual harassment costs the Australian economy \$3.5 billion per year.<sup>134</sup>

The *Respect@Work: Sexual Harassment National Inquiry Report* made 55 recommendations to address sexual harassment, including primary prevention initiatives, resources on workplace rights for young people, establishment of a Workplace Sexual Harassment Council and enhanced psychosocial support.<sup>135</sup> The Report noted the duty on employers subject to the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)* to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of their workers, a duty which extends to providing a workplace that is safe from sexual harassment.

### **Women often feel unsafe in public spaces, especially after dark**

Studies have shown that 30 per cent of women feel unsafe in Sydney during the day, increasing to 90 per cent of women at night.<sup>136</sup> Making sure women feel safe commuting to and from work is critical to allowing women to pursue job opportunities where they want to, free from street harassment.

Street harassment can take many forms, including unwelcome comments and gestures, whistling, and (in the worst cases) physical or sexual assault. All forms of street harassment are unacceptable and can have adverse impacts on women's health and confidence. Young girls who have experienced street harassment are more likely to avoid walking or traveling alone. According to a 2018 study by Plan International Australia, 60 per cent of girls who first experienced harassment at 15 years or younger avoid walking or travelling alone; 52 per cent experience ongoing distrust of men; and 28 per cent experience ongoing anxiety and depression.<sup>137</sup>

Lowering the rates of street harassment and improving women's safety in public requires significant cultural changes to ensure lifelong respect for women. Other opportunities to improve women's safety include lighting and CCTV upgrades in key commuter locations, as well as initiatives to boost foot traffic.

### **Some older single women face housing related financial stress**

Access to adequate housing is one of the most important determinants of an individual's economic security. However, for some women, in particular older single women, secure and affordable housing is out of reach. This not only compromises their health and safety, but also undermines their ability to earn an income, care for their loved ones or pursue their own interests and aspirations.

The number of women over the age of 55 who are homeless in Australia has grown by 31 per cent, and older women are now among the fastest-growing cohort of homeless people in the nation.<sup>138</sup> Many older women fall into housing-related financial distress because they are too wealthy to qualify for social housing but lack the financial resources to buy a house. This is particularly true of women who separate from their partner and lose the family home, with only 34 per cent of these women managing to purchase another home within five years, and only 44 per cent able to do so within 10 years.<sup>139</sup>

The number of women over the age of 55 who are homeless in Australia has grown by 31 per cent, and older women are now among the fastest-growing cohort of homeless people in the nation.

# Benefits of improving women's economic opportunities

05





## **Increasing female participation will grow the NSW economy**

Increasing women's economic opportunities benefits not only women, but their families and society as a whole. As the 2021-22 NSW Intergenerational Report indicates, lifting the rate of women's participation in paid work to equal men's over the next 20 years would increase employment growth and lead to an NSW economy that is 8 per cent larger by 2060-61 (the equivalent of \$22,000 more household income in today's dollars).<sup>140</sup> In 2018, KPMG modelled that if the labour force participation gap were halved between men and women, Australia's GDP would increase by \$60 billion in 20 years.<sup>141 142</sup>

## **Shared caring responsibilities benefit both families and the economy**

Studies show that after paid parental leave, fathers are more likely to participate in ongoing caring responsibilities and other unpaid work, creating more space for women to participate in the workforce, leading to long-term behaviour change.<sup>143</sup> There is also compelling evidence that when parents share parental leave, family wellbeing improves, and organisations and families benefit.<sup>144</sup>

The economy also benefits from a more equal sharing of unpaid work. A study of parents in New Zealand found that evenly sharing household responsibilities resulted in a three-hour net increase in the amount of paid labour supplied to the economy per couple per week.<sup>145</sup> Reducing the amount of paid work by the higher earner in a couple by 1.3 hours enables them to spend 3.8 more hours on unpaid work, which in turn enables the lower earner to spend 4.3 more hours in paid work.<sup>146</sup> These results are likely to be similar in New South Wales.

## **Boosting female leadership improves business performance**

Increasing the share of female key management personnel and increasing female representation on boards or governing bodies can lead to substantial improvements in financial performance.<sup>147</sup> For example, there is evidence it can increase an organisation's market value by between \$52 million and \$70 million per year.<sup>148</sup> Women in governing board roles can also lead to an average of a 6.3 percentage point reduction in the gender pay gap for full-time managers.<sup>149</sup>

Women in visible leadership positions provide positive role models for other women and help dismantle prejudices about women in leadership. Examples of women who have obtained and succeeded in such roles may make other women more likely to aspire to leadership roles and to feel that reaching them is achievable.

## **Increasing the number of female entrepreneurs and women in small business can boost the economy**

Business ownership can contribute to better economic outcomes for women, while successful entrepreneurship can also result in higher savings and greater job satisfaction for women.<sup>150</sup> Some women are also motivated to become business owners to give them greater flexibility to balance work and family commitments.<sup>151</sup>

Research indicates that gender and culturally diverse businesses have a range of advantages. They can be better-placed to understand customers and respond to their needs, have better access to talent, have greater employee satisfaction and have better decision-making, all of which can lead to increased returns.<sup>152</sup> Furthermore, research shows businesses at the highest quartile of executive-level gender diversity are 21 per cent more likely to financially outperform the national industry average compared to businesses with the lowest executive-level gender diversity.<sup>153</sup>

Many women-led start-ups are also significantly better financial investments than male-led start-ups, and there are significant economic gains to be made when more women enter business.<sup>154</sup> Boston Consulting Group research shows that if women and men participated equally as entrepreneurs, global GDP could rise by approximately 3–6 per cent, boosting the global economy by US\$2.5–5.0 trillion.<sup>155</sup>

Increased entrepreneurship by women can also support social progress. Women are 1.17 times more likely than men to create social ventures rather than purely economic ventures, and 1.23 times more likely to pursue environmental ventures than profit-centred ventures.<sup>156</sup>

# NSW Government progress to date

## 06





The NSW Government has implemented a wide range of initiatives in recent years aimed at improving women's economic opportunities, wellbeing and safety, as outlined below.

Many of these initiatives are included in the 2018-2022 NSW Women's Strategy (the Strategy), a whole-of-government framework to improve the economic, social and physical wellbeing of women and girls across New South Wales.<sup>157</sup> The Strategy identified three priority areas for action, including economic opportunity and advancement, health and wellbeing, and participation and empowerment. Women NSW is currently developing the next iteration of the Strategy.



## Women's economic opportunity

### Fee-free community preschool

In 2020, as part of the COVID-19 response to address gaps in the Commonwealth Government's childcare support package, the NSW Government increased its funding for preschool to ease cost-of-living pressures for families. Under the program, eligible families received 15 hours of preschool per week at no cost to them. Services which receive this funding are required to provide at least 600 hours of fee-free preschool per year for families, which is equivalent to approximately 15 hours (or two days per week).

### Before and after-school care

The NSW Government has a range of grant programs to support before and after-school care providers, address demand, and provide access to every NSW primary school child who needs it. These include a Transport Grant which funds solutions to improve access, particularly for students in small, regional and rural schools, out-of-school hours care hubs to deliver services on school sites, and an Establishment Grant to encourage the creation of new services.

In February 2022, the NSW Government announced a voucher scheme to assist families with the cost of before and after-school care until June 2023. Under the scheme, families with children aged 4-13 are eligible for a \$500 before and after-school care voucher for each child.

### Flexible school hours pilot

Eight schools will participate in an NSW Government research pilot exploring ways to better meet the needs of students and their families through a longer school day.<sup>158</sup> Participating schools will be partnering with community organisations, local businesses and sports clubs to offer a range of activities to students outside of standard school hours. The pilot is supported by research into effective extended hours programs in Australia and overseas and will run in Terms 3 and 4 of 2022.

### Return to Work Program

In 2020, the NSW Government announced a \$10 million Return to Work Program (the Program) to help women get back into the workforce. Under the Program, women who had been out of work for at least one month could apply to receive support from a Return to Work Coordinator to map out a pathway back to employment, including referrals to a range of support services, employment programs and access to a grant of up to \$5,000. Women used these funds to overcome barriers that were preventing them from working. These barriers included not having essential equipment like laptops, office supplies and suitable clothing, costs associated with childcare, a lack of up-to-date training and skills, and access to enabling services like internet connection or transport.

The NSW Women's Strategy identified three priority areas for action: economic opportunity and advancement, health and wellbeing, and participation and empowerment.

## Social impact investment

In 2021-22 the NSW Government established a \$30 million Social Impact Outcomes Fund to pilot a range of social impact investments, with an initial focus on advancing the social and economic wellbeing of women experiencing disadvantage and improving educational and job readiness outcomes for First Nations young people.

## Multicultural Women's Hubs

The NSW Government supports the Multicultural Women's Hub program, a series of community hubs across Western Sydney focused on helping multicultural women. The hubs support women to develop social enterprises and obtain employment through creative-based learning, training, technology and employment opportunities.

## Women in construction

The Infrastructure Skills Legacy Program (ISLP) aims to address skills shortages and increase diversity in the construction sector. The ISLP was co-designed by the NSW Government and industry and is managed by Training Services NSW. The ISLP is mandatory for all NSW Government infrastructure projects.

Under this program, ambitious skills, training and diversity targets have been set, including a requirement that 2 per cent of the trades workforce are women for contracts valued at over \$100 million.

The ISLP projects are exceeding many of the program targets. For example, on average women now account for 4 per cent of the trades workforce across key ISLP projects.<sup>159</sup>

## Supporting regional women

The NSW Government currently has a range of programs that support women to secure work in a diverse range of industries; in particular, the agricultural sector. Currently, only 31 per cent of workers in the NSW agricultural industry are women.

The Department of Regional NSW has a range of programs (such as the Generating Regionally Outstanding Women and Ladies of the Land programs) that provide professional development, leadership training and practical hands-on experience for regional women wanting to enter the agricultural sector.

Rural Youth Ambassadors in regional towns across the State coordinate out-of-school-hours programs in their towns through organising extra-curricular activities, pooled transport to and from off-campus childcare providers, and other approaches to caring for children outside of school hours.

## Supporting carers

In 2020, the NSW Government announced the NSW Carers Strategy for 2020-30, which supports people in New South Wales who provide ongoing unpaid support to people living with disability, chronic illness, mental illness or frail age. In New South Wales, women make up 57.9 per cent of these carers.

This strategy outlined four key priorities to support carers. The priorities aim to help carers have better access to information, services and supports, ensure carers are recognised, respected and empowered, have improved financial wellbeing and economic opportunities, and better health and wellbeing.

Action plans are published every two years, outlining initiatives to drive better outcomes for carers across these priorities. Highlights of the 2020-22 Action Plan include awareness campaigns for culturally and linguistically diverse and First Nations carers to help spread awareness of the assistance and services that are available to carers, the creation of educational material to help carers navigate complaints and appeals pathways, and a financial literacy project to help carers build their financial capability and confidence.



## Public service leadership

The NSW Government is committed to making the State's public service a best-practice employer of women. This will both improve the economic opportunities of the more than 283,000 women that work in the NSW public service and lead the private sector in adopting policies and programs that help female employees.

In 2016, the NSW Government committed to making all roles flexible on an 'if not, why not?' basis, in a way that maintains or improves service delivery, to support women to balance work with other responsibilities and priorities. In July 2021, the Government adopted gender-neutral paid parental leave, offering primary carers of all genders 14 weeks of paid leave within 12 months of birth, adoption or surrogacy. The secondary carer is currently entitled to two weeks, and an additional 12 weeks if they assume

primary caring responsibility. Paid domestic and family violence leave is also available to employees for 10 days per year.

The NSW Government is also committed to achieving gender parity in senior leadership roles in the public service. In 2014, only 33.4 per cent of senior leadership positions in the NSW Government were held by women. In seven years, this number has risen by almost 10 percentage points, with women holding 42.7 per cent of senior leadership roles in 2021.<sup>160</sup>

In April 2022 the NSW Government also introduced gender diversity targets for State Owned Corporation and Public Financial Corporation boards, aiming for women to sit in no less than 40 per cent of positions on each individual board, and 50 per cent of board positions overall.





## Women's health and wellbeing

The NSW Government has made significant investments in a range of initiatives aimed at holistically supporting women's health and wellbeing.

### Women's health

Funding and initiatives include:

- **\$42 million** over four years to improve access to IVF services across New South Wales.
- **\$17 million** over two years to pilot in-home care for pregnant women with hyperemesis gravidarum (severe morning sickness).
- **\$12.2 million** boost for new parents in rural and regional New South Wales, including six new Regional Family Care Centres and five Tresillian mobile vans.
- More than **\$11 million** in funding for 20 Women's Health Centres across New South Wales (which provide a woman-centred approach to primary health care) and Women's Health NSW (which supports the Women's Health Centres) to effectively support women's health and wellbeing.
- **\$10.2 million** over four years to fund Tresillian and Karitane to extend access to virtual residential parenting services, and more than \$1.4 million to enable Tresillian to provide free access to its SleepWellBaby app during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- **\$3.2 million** for the Mums and Kids Matter program to provide services for mothers with mental health problems and their children aged 0–5.
- **\$1.1 million** for the Get Healthy in Pregnancy phone coaching service to promote healthy behaviour changes in pregnant women.
- Jointly funding and managing BreastScreen NSW, which offers free mammogram screening to women aged 50–74 in order to improve survival rates of women with breast cancer.

### Affordable IVF

Since November 2019, under the NSW Government's Affordable IVF Initiative:

- more than 10,000 women have received the \$500 Pre-IVF fertility testing rebate to support their fertility treatment<sup>161</sup>
- more than 3,000 women have received IVF treatment at one of the three publicly supported fertility clinics, including the provision of more than 6,000 IVF treatment cycles
- more than 200 patients have received fertility preservation treatment at the Royal Hospital for Women, providing young cancer patients the choice to have biological children in the future.



## \$42 million

to improve access to IVF services across New South Wales over four years



## \$17 million

to pilot in-home care for pregnant women with hyperemesis gravidarum over two years



## More than 10,000

women have received the \$500 Pre-IVF fertility testing rebate since 2019



## More than 3,000

women have received IVF treatment at a publicly supported clinic since 2019

## Miscarriage and pre-term birth leave

In 2021, the NSW Government was the first state to introduce paid miscarriage and pre-term birth leave for public sector employees. Under the policy, public sector workers are entitled to five days paid miscarriage leave per occasion as well as additional paid parental leave entitlements where an employee gives birth to a pre-term child.

## Women in sport

The NSW Government provided more than \$2.5 million over four years for the Her Sport Her Way Grants Program aimed at increasing girls and women's participation in the sport sector. The program has supported 29 initiatives to boost participation as players, leaders and coaches, improve facilities, and attract more investment and recognition for women's sport.

In January 2021, the NSW Government also announced that up to \$50 million from the Stronger Country Communities Fund would be used to deliver and improve women's sports facilities to boost female participation in sports across regional New South Wales.<sup>162</sup> Several projects aimed at improving women's participation have also received funding under the Greater Cities Sport Facility Fund and the Regional Sport Facility Fund. For example, Blacktown City Football Club has received funding to develop female-friendly change rooms, while the Upper Lachlan Shire Council has received funding to upgrade amenities at Lin Cooper Field to make them more inclusive and to improve women's participation in sport.<sup>163</sup>

## Aboriginal Child and Family Centres

In 2014, the NSW Government established the Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFC) program to provide holistic, culturally safe services for First Nations families. These purpose-built, place-based centres offer a range of services for First Nations children and their families, including early childhood education, parent and family support, maternal and child health, and adult education. Services are tailored to the local needs of families and offer a mix of activities, purpose-built for co-located childhood and family support.

In 2021, an evaluation of the program found that ACFCs are providing high-quality and cost-effective early childhood education to First Nations children in a safe, trusted and culturally safe environment. The ACFCs are community-controlled organisations and operate as a community hub through referrals to deliver and coordinate integrated, culturally appropriate and needs-based services. This is improving outcomes for First Nations families across the Human Services Outcome Framework, particularly in education, health, social and community empowerment.







## Women's safety

### Domestic and family violence

In the 2021-22 Budget, the NSW Government committed to investing \$204.9 million over the 2021-22 budget year in specialist domestic and family violence services.<sup>164</sup> New funding was concentrated on initiatives that support victim-survivor safety, with the expansion of Staying Home Leaving Violence and joint investment in the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence with the Commonwealth Government.

The NSW Government also invested in several support packages to help address the challenges experienced by domestic and family violence victim-survivors during the COVID-19 pandemic. These include:

- **\$484.3 million** to ensure victim-survivors have timely access to safe, affordable and appropriate supports and housing assistance by nearly doubling the number of women's refuges across the State.
- **\$10.0 million** to support private rental assistance packages, with a focus on individuals and families escaping domestic and family violence and young people aged 16–24.
- **\$2.0 million** over two years to enable a temporary expansion of the Rent Choice Start Safely, a program which provides short to medium-term financial support for people escaping domestic and family violence.

In 2019, the NSW Government also introduced up to 10 days' paid domestic violence leave for public sector workers and has advocated for national reform to extend this entitlement to private sector workers.

### Sexual assault

In 2018, the NSW Government developed a whole-of-government framework, the NSW Sexual Assault Strategy 2018-2021 (the Strategy), to improve prevention and response to sexual assault in New South Wales. It included activities under five key priority areas, including prevention and early intervention, education, supporting victims and survivors, holding perpetrators to account, and reshaping the service system.<sup>165</sup> The NSW Government is reviewing the Strategy's implementation, including assessing progress on and outcomes achieved through the delivery of activities under the Strategy.<sup>166</sup>

### Affirmative consent laws

In October 2021, the NSW Government introduced the *Crimes Legislation Amendment (Sexual Consent Reforms) Bill 2021* to Parliament. The Bill proposed significant consent law reform, introducing a requirement that consent to sexual activity must be communicated by words or actions, and clarifying that consent cannot be assumed. The Bill passed NSW Parliament in November 2021 and the new laws commenced on 1 June 2022.



**\$484.3 million**

to ensure victim-survivors have timely access to appropriate support



**\$10 million**

to support private rental assistance packages



**\$2 million**

for a temporary expansion of the Rent Choice Start Safely Program over two years



# Guiding principles for reform

07



The NSW Government is committed to making New South Wales the best place in Australia to live, work and raise a family. To achieve this goal, the NSW Government has designed this Statement in accordance with the following principles.



### **Remove barriers faced by women looking to enter, re-enter and remain in the workforce.**

As set out in Part 4 of this Statement, women face many barriers when looking to return to the workforce after having children or taking another period of extended leave.

One of the most acute barriers is the cost and lack of access to early childhood education and care. Every day, parents across New South Wales are making hard decisions whether to return to work and pay for childcare or to avoid these costs and stay at home to care for their children. After factoring in childcare costs, income tax and the loss of family tax benefits, some parents returning to work are taking home less than 25 cents for each dollar they earn. The proportion of a parent's income that is lost to work-related expenses is known as the workforce disincentive rate.

Equally, there are many women who are looking to enter or re-enter the workforce but struggle to secure essential items or skills needed to take that step, such as computers, work clothes, short training courses or even essential vehicle repairs to drive to work.

Action is needed to remove the financial disincentives and other barriers women face when looking to enter or re-enter the workforce. The reforms in this Statement are intended to give women the genuine option to pursue a career while raising a family, without having to make unnecessary trade-offs.



### **Actively promote more equal sharing of caring responsibilities between men and women.**

Women often take more time out of the workforce than men to look after their children and provide care to others, which can have lifelong impacts on a women's pay, promotion, leadership opportunities and retirement savings.

It also means that many men are missing out on the social and family benefits of spending more time with their children in their early years. Children can also miss out on opportunities to bond with their fathers. Society's attitudes towards shared parental leave and care are evolving quickly, with many fathers increasingly looking for and valuing support provided by their workplaces to spend more time with their children in their early years.

The reforms in this Statement are intended to proactively encourage more equal caring responsibilities between men and women and promote the social and economic benefits in doing so, while recognising that ultimately these are matters of choice for families.



One of the most acute barriers to return to the workforce after having children is the cost and lack of access to early childhood education and care.



## Address the specific challenges faced by women looking to start and run a small business or start-up.

Women are currently under-represented in small business and entrepreneurship in New South Wales. Some of the key reasons for this include lack of access to finance and formal networks compared to men. Increasing the proportion of small businesses owned by women and supporting female entrepreneurs may not only lead to more women having rewarding and flexible jobs, but also support economic growth and social progress.

The reforms in this Statement are intended to provide women with the support needed to overcome these barriers so that more women can successfully establish and run small businesses or start-ups.



## Recognise the strengths of diverse groups of women, while responding to the specific challenges that particular groups of women face in the workforce.

Women in New South Wales come from diverse backgrounds and make valuable contributions to their families, communities and workplaces. However, some groups of women who are vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage face additional barriers to entering the workforce and challenges in the workplace which may limit their economic participation.

The reforms in this Statement are intended to increase economic opportunities for women who are vulnerable or experiencing disadvantage by providing tailored support to address the challenges experienced by these groups. Diversity in the workforce has a range of benefits, and therefore it is important that appropriate support is available to ensure that all women have opportunities to participate in the workforce.

Women in New South Wales come from diverse backgrounds and make valuable contributions to their families, communities and workplaces.







## Boost support and raise awareness of health challenges faced by women throughout their working lives.

Supporting women's health is fundamental to supporting women in the workforce. Throughout their working lives, women face several health needs that are different to those of men; in particular, needs relating to fertility and reproductive health. Though some of these challenges act as a barrier to women in the workforce, improvements in medicine provide more opportunity to help women remain healthy and balance their work and wellbeing.

The reforms in this Statement are intended to support women with their particular health and wellbeing requirements and give women more choice when it comes to making decisions about having a family, pursuing a career or doing both. In doing so, the Government seeks to raise awareness of these issues and remove entrenched stigmas associated with women's health.



## Take action to prevent harassment and violence against women and support women who experience domestic and family violence.

Women are disproportionately affected by sexual harassment in the workplace and domestic and family violence, all of which can have significant impact on their health and wellbeing as well as affect their ability to work or make positive career choices.

The reforms in this Statement are intended to ensure women are safe, and feel safe, in public spaces, and that workplaces are free from harassment for all employees. Women who experience domestic and family violence should have access to the support services needed to look after their safety, physical and mental wellbeing, as well as to enable them to continue to participate in the workforce.



## The NSW Government should act as a leader and promote best practice across the public service and its suppliers.

The economic and societal benefits of increasing women's prosperity flow not only to individual families and the community, but also to the State's economy. Indeed, increasing the number of women participating in the economy and supporting families to raise children will deliver economy-wide productivity benefits for the State.

Government should embody the ideals and values of the society that it represents. Providing women with equal opportunities across our economy and society is a fundamental tenet of modern liberal democracies which must be reflected in the actions of their governments.

With this in mind, the NSW Government will ensure that it adopts best-practice policies to support women in its own workforce and promote those policies across its supply chains.



Supporting women with their particular health and wellbeing requirements and giving women more choice when it comes to making decisions about having a family is fundamental to supporting women in the workforce.



# Priority areas for reform

08





## Priority 1: Increase women's workforce participation

Reducing the disparity in labour market outcomes between men and women will take concerted efforts by government, the private sector and the community to address both structural and cultural barriers that prevent women from entering, re-entering and staying in the workforce.

To improve women's economic opportunities in the labour market, the NSW Government will undertake major reforms to transform the State's early childhood education and care system, and to create pathways for women from regional New South Wales and diverse backgrounds to translate their skills into secure employment. These reforms will unlock major opportunities for women to be able to genuinely choose to work, care for loved ones or do both.

### 1.1 Affordable early childhood education and care for every child in New South Wales

Universal affordable and accessible early childhood education and care is the biggest lever available to make sure women do not have to choose between having a family and a career. It is also one of the most important ways to give children the best start to life and open lifelong opportunities for people from their earliest years.

The newly elected Commonwealth Government has signalled its intention to significantly increase its support for the early childhood education and care sector. New South Wales has an opportunity to maximise the federal demand-side investment with complementary supply-side responses, and to work together to realise the benefits of early childhood education and care system reform. The NSW Government will work with the Commonwealth Government to ensure that the fee relief outlined in this section will be in addition to Child Care Subsidy payments.

As the Commonwealth Government makes these game changing new investments, NSW Government is also investing in our early childhood education workforce. Early childhood educators and teachers are there for families every day. Most are women, all are highly skilled and too many are not rewarded well enough for the vital work they do. NSW Government wants to make early childhood education a career of choice for a whole new generation of teachers and educators.

### Affordable and accessible childcare

To deliver on this vision, the NSW Government will make a landmark investment of up to \$5 billion over 10 years to boost access and affordability of childcare.

Childcare providers will be able to bid for funding through a competitive process to help them deliver more accessible and affordable childcare. Funding guidelines will be determined following extensive consultation with early childhood education and care sector and the Commonwealth Government. However, funding is intended to be used to expand infrastructure in overcrowded centres, establish new centres in childcare deserts, employ staff or reduce the fees passed on to parents facing some of the highest disincentives to return to the workforce because of childcare costs. Support will be targeted at areas with low levels of childcare accessibility and where households face the highest financial barriers to working as a result of childcare costs.

To provide industry and families confidence, the State's investment will be made through the Affordable and Accessible Childcare and Economic Participation Fund (the Fund), which provides long term funding arrangements. This will mean that NSW families and childcare service providers can plan and invest with confidence.

Investment from the Fund will be guided by expert independent reports and Department of Education data, which will underpin a long-term plan for the expansion of the childcare system in New South Wales.

It is expected that this funding, together with proposed Commonwealth Government reforms, will support the delivery of about 47,000 additional ongoing and affordable childcare places, ramping up over several years.

In addition, it is estimated that the State's investment in childcare could potentially save a middle-income Western Sydney family currently living in a childcare desert with one child in childcare that benefits from the investment up to \$3,900 a year in childcare costs. An equivalent middle-income family living in regional New South Wales in a childcare desert with two children in care that benefits from the Fund could potentially save up to \$7,800 a year in childcare costs. These estimates are dependent upon the final design of the Fund, market dynamics, and interactions with Commonwealth assistance.





The Fund is designed to provide flexibility on funding, so that it can complement the Commonwealth Government's childcare policy framework. The Commonwealth Government's current demand-side subsidy mechanism provides an important part of the policy architecture, improving affordability while supporting competition and parental choice. However, as demonstrated by the accessibility challenges of childcare services in parts of New South Wales and the high workforce disincentive rates faced by secondary income earners, it does not address all issues. Research suggests this is likely driven by workforce issues, difficulty in suppliers responding to demand because of the structure of the industry, and the short-term nature of demand.<sup>167</sup> These issues can be addressed through financial support programs targeting providers, which is what the Fund is designed to do.

Further, because the Commonwealth Government's Child Care Subsidy arrangements can change, the Fund is designed to evolve over time to meet contemporary challenges and address gaps that may arise as Commonwealth Government policy evolves. To that end, the NSW Government will invest \$775 million over the next four years. From 2026-27 onwards, and following a comprehensive evaluation, the NSW Government will invest an amount recommended by an independent expert to ensure NSW families have adequate access to childcare at affordable prices to maximise workforce participation, capped at \$650 million a year indexed to Consumer Price Index (CPI).

### **Affordable preschool for children aged 3–5**

Quality preschool helps set a child up for the rest of their education and beyond. Starting in 2023, the NSW Government will deliver nearly \$1.3 billion over four years in fee relief for families with children in preschool.

The NSW Government will continue fee relief for children in community and mobile preschools, with up to \$4,000 available for children aged 3–5. It will also continue to provide the equivalent of five days a fortnight of affordable preschool for all children in Department of Education preschools.

New South Wales will extend preschool fee relief to children aged 4–5 in long day-care, with up to \$2,000 available per child.

The NSW Government will also invest in a two-year trial from 2023 to support long day care services to enable more 3-year-old children to participate in a preschool program.

These investments are in addition to the already-announced new funding to deliver the Preschool Reform Agreement's goals of increasing preschool access attendance and quality in the year before school.

### **Universal pre-kindergarten in the year before school**

The NSW Government will set aside \$5.8 billion over the next 10 years as an investment towards the establishment of a universal pre-kindergarten year for all children across the State. This will build on and transform our current preschool system to ensure all children, families and communities in New South Wales experience pre-kindergarten as a shared, life-changing start to their education journey. The NSW Government is committed to introducing up to five days a week low or no-cost pre-kindergarten available for all children in the year before school by 2030.

This reform will give families access to affordable early learning for their children in the year before school starts. It will support children to be successful, competent and capable lifelong learners, and its increased accessibility and affordability will support parents in returning to work.



Pre-kindergarten will form a critically important part of the State's education system. The reform will ensure all children in New South Wales start primary school on a solid foundation of early learning, regardless of their family's wealth or circumstances. This will help set students up to achieve greater outcomes throughout their school years and later in life.

### **Tailored support for First Nations communities**

Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFCs) provide a mix of culturally safe services and support for First Nations families including co-located universal health, early childhood education and other family services. The NSW Government will invest an additional \$98.7 million to increase support for existing ACFCs and build new centres to deliver culturally safe services and support for First Nations families with children aged 0–8.

### **Investing in the workforce**

Prior to COVID-19, it was predicted that an extra 10,500 educators and 3,150 additional degree-qualified early childhood teachers would be needed in New South Wales by 2023. This number is expected to be even higher in the wake of the pandemic.

To address staffing shortages across the early childhood education and care sector, the NSW Government will invest \$281.6 million over four years to attract more employees to the sector and retain current teachers and educators. This funding is expected to benefit over 18,000 future and current early childhood teachers and educators and will be used across a range of programs including:

- early childhood teacher higher education scholarships of up to \$25,000 to provide financial support while studying bachelor-level qualifications; students could also be eligible for a completion incentive payment if they remain employed in the early childhood education and care sector
- scholarships for students undertaking VET qualifications of up to \$2,000, in addition to the skills support available under JobTrainer and Smart and Skilled programs
- early childhood teacher supports, including supplements for employers who demonstrate best-practice workforce strategies.

To ensure the success of this workforce investment, the NSW Government will partner with tertiary and VET providers to streamline and fast-track pathways into the sector to boost the high-quality workforce pipeline. The NSW Government will also continue to advocate for the Commonwealth Government to increase the transparency of data relating to the early childhood education and care workforce, in order to support continuous improvement in policies and investments in this area.



## 1.2 Boosting access to affordable before and after-school care for all families

The NSW Government is committed to providing every child access to before and after-school care programs, to give parents more flexibility and offer students more opportunities to participate in sport, art or other extra-curricular programs.

The before and after-school care challenges are often exacerbated for women living in regional New South Wales because of the long distances that exist between schools and homes and the dispersed demand that can make service establishment and investment unviable.

To help remove this barrier for women in regional communities, the NSW Government will invest \$37.9 million over three years to 2024-25 to:

- provide targeted support for schools in regional and remote areas with low enrolment numbers
- support extra transport services to connect students in small regional and rural schools to offsite before and after-school care providers.

## 1.3 Wraparound support and grants to help women to secure steady employment

Women returning to the workforce after lengthy stints out of paid employment as full-time parents, carers or for other reasons often face barriers to re-entering the workforce. However, the needs of women are unique, and each individual's circumstance means that any support must be tailored to meet the individual needs.

As part of its economic recovery response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the NSW Government established the Return to Work Program, which provides grants to support women to overcome these barriers to returning to the workforce after extended periods away.

The NSW Government will build on the success of this program by investing a further \$32 million to support women to enter or return to the workforce. The enhanced program will continue to provide one-off grants of up to \$5,000 for women to

cover the cost of common financial obstacles in returning to work, including education and training, textbooks and stationery, professional attire, early childhood education, care and respite, transportation, technology and office equipment, and access to internet connections. Eligible women will be supported by a Return to Work Coordinator to develop a Return to Work Plan, setting out resources that will assist them to return to work.

For women who experience persistent difficulty in finding steady employment, the NSW Government will provide extra assistance through wraparound supports including connecting women to services, training and employment. The program is expected to support up to 6,000 women to return to the workforce.

## 1.4 Harnessing the economic opportunities for women from diverse backgrounds

Helping women from diverse backgrounds to enter and succeed in the workforce is a significant economic opportunity for the State. Currently, organisations known as social enterprises support women from diverse backgrounds to secure employment.

Many of these social enterprises employ staff that may otherwise struggle to find employment, providing training and education on the job to improve their long-term career prospects. Others produce resources and deliver services that help women enter the workforce or otherwise improve their financial literacy and security.

In 2021-22, the NSW Government established the \$30 million Social Impact Outcomes Fund (the Fund) which allows the Government to partner with social impact providers (including social enterprises) to deliver high-impact programs. The first investment round focused on advancing the social and economic wellbeing of women facing disadvantage. To support the development and growth of NSW's emerging social enterprise sector, the NSW Government will set aside \$1.29 million from the Fund to deliver competitive grants to social enterprises that improve economic opportunities for women facing disadvantage, to help them develop, grow or scale up and maximise their social impact in the State.



## 1.5 Opening work opportunities for women in the regions

Women in regional New South Wales can face different challenges to participating in the workforce. These challenges include demand for childcare services significantly outpacing supply, as well as lack of access to before and after-school care services.

Though many of the initiatives outlined in this Statement will help women right across the State, several will particularly benefit families in regional areas and enable more women in regional areas to participate in the workforce. For example, investment addressing barriers to accessing regional early childhood education and care, and investment in transport solutions to improve access to before and after-school care services, will specifically benefit regional and rural.

The NSW Government will continue to support the Rural Women's Network, investing \$3.7 million over four years. The Rural Women's Network provides invaluable support to women in rural New South Wales, delivering a range of high-profile initiatives and events. It links women in rural areas to information and services, creating opportunities to build personal and business resilience, to strengthen rural communities, share information and promote action on rural women's issues. It also provides opportunities for rural women to connect and develop skills and knowledge by supporting and delivering key high-profile initiatives and events which are well-recognised by rural women of New South Wales.





## Priority 2: Improve the experience of women in the workforce

Making workplaces safer and fairer is fundamental to improving the experience of women once they enter the workforce, allowing them to succeed in their chosen career. To improve equity in the workplace, the NSW Government will take bold steps to work towards closing the gender pay gap and helping more women into leadership positions.

Many of the reforms involve tackling gender discrimination as well as industry segregation, which are some of the major drivers of the gender pay gap. The NSW Government will also take action to boost transparency around the performance of both the public and private sector when it comes to fairness and equity at work.

### 2.1 Increasing transparency of public and private sector performance on gender equality

One of the key ways to help to close the gender pay gap and achieve equal representation in leadership positions involves increasing the transparency surrounding the payments, promotions and practices of employers. Raising awareness of the importance of gender equality and empowering female employees with more information can help to tackle gender discrimination, which is the biggest driver of the gender pay gap.

### Displaying women's employer of choice credentials on job search platforms

The WGEA Employer of Choice status is a certification issued by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) to companies that achieve best practice in creating equitable workplaces for both men and women.

To help jobseekers to make the most of this certification, the NSW Government will partner with recruitment platforms to display whether a company is a WGEA Employer of Choice on job search websites and ads which will help prospective employees identify workplaces that prioritise and act on gender equality in their workplace. This will provide a strong incentive for companies to improve their conditions for female workers in order to attract the best talent.

### Publishing public service workforce data

In December 2021, the Commonwealth Government released the results of the review into the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (Cth). The NSW Government welcomes the results of the review and the Commonwealth Government's commitment to adopt its recommendations.

In response to this review, the NSW Government will join the Commonwealth Government in reporting its workforce data to the WGEA. This will allow the WGEA to include information on gender equality in the NSW public service as part of its annual reports and online data, helping to expand the scope of the WGEA's reporting and promote a culture of transparency in both the public and private sectors.

### Annual performance statement

The NSW Government will publish an annual statement on the gender equality achievements of the biggest listed companies operating in New South Wales. The Statement will set out the performance of some of the State's biggest employers when it comes to supporting women in the workforce, helping to encourage companies to improve their policies and practices, as well as drive a race to the top when it comes to gender equality in the workplace.





## 2.2 Reducing gender segregation in key sectors

New South Wales has a highly gender-segregated workforce. Industries such as mining and construction have higher concentrations of male workers, while industries like education and aged care have higher concentrations of female workers. KPMG estimates that gender segregation accounted for up to 17 per cent of the gender pay gap in Australia in 2017.<sup>168</sup>

Industry segregation contributes to the gender pay gap as well as workplace culture. Some male-dominated industries have higher rates of pay than female-dominated industries, while industries that have lower proportions of female workers can be less welcoming for women.

Acting to lower industry segregation can help reduce the gender pay gap, improve workplace cultures and help address workforce shortages to ensure the NSW economy continues to grow.

### Working towards a goal of 15 per cent women in construction by 2030

The construction industry has already made steady progress to increase the number of women working in the sector, but women still only make up less than 12.7 per cent of its workforce and less than 2 per cent of related trade jobs, making it one of the most male-dominated industries in Australia.

Improving the proportion of women in the construction industry is important to drive female workforce participation and improve workplace cultures. It is also important to boost the skilled workforce needed to deliver the State's record \$110.4 billion infrastructure pipeline. Latest estimates indicate that skills shortages in the construction industry are forecast to exceed 105,000 nationally, with one-third of construction jobs advertised going unfilled.<sup>169</sup>

To help attract more women to the industry and address workforce shortages, the NSW Government will set a goal of 15 per cent women in trades and non-traditional roles in the construction industry by 2030. In order to achieve this, the NSW Government will invest \$20.2 million in skills, training and industry-led initiatives, working with the sector to attract and retain more women in its workforce. This funding will be used to:

- partner with the construction sector to sponsor innovative industry-led initiatives to increase female participation in the sector and improve construction industry culture
- work with the construction industry to improve workplace flexibility and opportunities to make it a more attractive industry to recruit and retain women
- support a range of skills and training initiatives needed to help more women to obtain the qualifications they need to enter the construction industry or seek a promotion.

As an interim measure, the NSW Government will double the current Infrastructure Skills Legacy Program target to 4 per cent of women in trade roles on major government construction projects of more than \$100 million, reflecting the successful work undertaken by industry so far, and support a target of 7 per cent of women in non-traditional roles on major government infrastructure sites.

These initiatives are a critical economic intervention to address skills shortages in the construction industry. The NSW Government will work with a range of industry representatives including industry associations, construction firms, sub-contractors and trade unions to reach the goal.



These initiatives will be coupled with ongoing work led by SafeWork NSW to continue to ensure awareness and compliance of obligations to provide clean and adequate amenities for women on worksites, supply proper and safe personal protective equipment, and remove offensive materials at worksites.

## Supporting diversity and flexibility in the public sector

Some of the most female-dominated industries in New South Wales include education and healthcare, sectors in which the NSW Government is a major employer. Currently men make up about 34 per cent of the NSW Government workforce, including 23 per cent of teaching roles and 13 per cent of nursing roles.<sup>170</sup> Conversely, other parts of the public sector remain male-dominated, such as professional firefighting where women make up only 10 per cent of all frontline roles.

The NSW Government is committed to driving diversity in the public sector, which delivers improved outcomes for New South Wales and helps to set a high standard for the private sector. To help to make the public sector a more attractive place for all people to work, the NSW Government will continue to promote flexible work policies, enabling workers to balance their caring responsibilities. The NSW Government will also make improvements to the public sector's paid parental leave arrangements and ensure workplaces are inclusive and flexible. As part of the 2022-23 Budget, the NSW Government will take action in the following four key areas.

First, in order to encourage more fathers to take parental leave, the NSW Government will provide all new parents in the public sector with 14 weeks of paid parental leave, regardless of their carer status or gender, thereby removing the 'primary' and 'secondary' carer distinction from the NSW Government's paid parental leave arrangements. Currently, NSW public service employees are entitled to 14 weeks paid parental leave if they are the primary carer of their child, and two weeks if they are the secondary carer.

This arrangement tends to reinforce the societal norm that mothers should take more time off to care for a child than fathers. In circumstances where both parents are employed in the public sector, each parent will be entitled to 14 weeks, taking their entitlement as a family to 28 weeks. In addition, the NSW Government will also expand the window in which parents in the public sector can take paid parental leave from one year to two years after birth, which is expected to drive uptake by fathers and provide greater flexibility to both parents in managing leave and care arrangements.

Second, to provide an extra incentive, the NSW Government will add a further two weeks of bonus paid parental leave (on top of the current 14 weeks) for public sector employees where leave is shared more equally between partners. This will apply where each parent takes at least 12 weeks parental leave, and exhausts any paid parental leave offered by their employers. Public sector employees whose partners work outside the public sector will be eligible for the bonus leave provided these conditions are met, and employees who are single parents will receive the full 16 weeks of paid parental leave.

Third, the NSW Government will extend paid parental leave to long-term or permanent out-of-home carers.

Finally, the NSW Government will continue to review its workplaces to make sure they provide appropriate facilities to cater for women. For example, a recent review of Fire and Rescue NSW established that 243 of 334 fire stations across the State required capital investment to ensure they had appropriate facilities for female employees. To address this, the NSW Government will invest \$51 million over 10 years to increase women's participation in the Fire and Rescue NSW workforce and enhance workplace safety, including upgrades and installing new female bathrooms at fire stations across the State.

Access to appropriate amenities at work is essential for women to feel they are a valued and respected part of the team. This proposal will not only improve the workplace conditions for current female firefighters, but help more women feel comfortable pursuing a career in firefighting.





## 2.3 NSW Government as a leader

The NSW Government will embed women's economic opportunity across its policy making systems and processes, ensuring that women's health, safety and participation are front of mind across all areas of public policy development. The NSW Government will also continue to set positive examples for the private sector and engage in advocacy for improvements across all parts of society.

### Women's action plans and impact assessments

The NSW Government will require all government agencies to develop women's action plans, outlining a strategy to improve women's economic opportunity within their own workforce. The Treasurer will request that these plans be reviewed by the Audit Office of NSW every two years, following discussion on appropriate scope and approach of this review.

The NSW Government will also introduce a requirement for government agencies to produce women's impact assessments in the development process for new policies. These assessments will ensure that important design features that affect women are not overlooked as policies are developed. For example, new public infrastructure should be designed with adequate lighting to make spaces safe at night, and new hospitals and precincts should be designed with adequate childcare services nearby. Details like these can be overlooked without a process to ensure consideration of the impact new policies can have on women.

The NSW Government will demonstrate its commitment to policy design that deliberately considers the needs of parents by building extended-hours childcare centres at hospitals that are currently under development, including the Westmead Precinct, Bankstown/Lidcombe, Shellharbour Hospital and Shoalhaven Hospital.

This will help support the workforce participation of all genders in these hospitals, enabling more doctors, nurses, allied health and support staff to access childcare that suits their work needs. The NSW Government will also review its other existing and planned hospital developments to consider other opportunities to ensure hospital staff have access to childcare facilities that suit their working needs.

### Procurement guidance

With a \$110.4 billion infrastructure pipeline and extensive service delivery function, the NSW Government is well-placed to use procurement relationships to influence the supplier market.

The NSW Government will encourage its large government suppliers to support women across their own workforces, leveraging the buying power of the NSW Government to promote equitable employment practices.

The NSW Government will also develop a certification mechanism for women-led businesses, as well as track and report on the proportion of women-led businesses in government procurement.

### Engagement with the Commonwealth Government

The NSW Government will also continue to engage with the Commonwealth Government to support improvements to national leave arrangements. This will ensure all workers across the country benefit from the support they need to balance work and life. This engagement includes encouraging the Commonwealth Government to pay superannuation on periods of paid parental leave, as well as the provision of 10 days of paid domestic and family violence leave.



## Priority 3: Support women in small business and entrepreneurs

Women currently make up about a third of small-business owners in New South Wales. This is despite the proven track record of high-performance of women-owned businesses, and the flexibility to balance work and personal priorities that self-employment provides.

Breaking down the structures that currently hold female entrepreneurs back is not only essential to improving the economic outcomes of women, but also to continuing to grow the NSW economy. To support the entrepreneurial endeavours of women, the NSW Government will invest in programs to address key barriers that hold businesswomen back, including access to capital, educational support and business networks.

### 3.1 Carla Zampatti venture capital fund

Female entrepreneurs are far less likely than male entrepreneurs to receive venture capital funding to help scale up their business. In 2021, wholly women-led start-ups received just 5.3 per cent of venture capital funding in Australia. One of the drivers of this disparity is the male-dominated nature of the venture capital industry. Only 1.2 per cent of registered venture capital firms in Australia were founded or co-founded by women. Because venture capitalists often rely on informal networks to ascertain investment opportunities, women are also less likely to find opportunities to pitch their idea and secure critical funding.

To address these challenges, the NSW Government will provide \$10 million in seed funding to establish the Carla Zampatti venture capital fund and \$2 million to establish and operate. This fund will seek to partner with the private sector to boost the funding pool available to NSW women looking to grow their business. The pooled funds will be invested in female-led start-ups to help more women entrepreneurs start and run successful businesses.



The NSW Government will provide \$10 million in seed funding to establish the Carla Zampatti venture capital fund.





**\$2 million**

in grants for bespoke networking programs for women



**\$5.4 million**

to extend free Women in Business TAFE course



A one-stop shop via Service NSW for women business owners

### 3.2 Networking, mentorship, leadership and financial upskilling for women in small businesses

One of the key barriers women face when starting up their own business in New South Wales is a lack of access to networks of colleagues and mentors they can rely on for advice, collaboration and financial backing.

To help connect women in small business with the right resources and support, the NSW Government will provide \$2 million in grants to industry associations, peak bodies and chambers of commerce to implement bespoke networking programs for women seeking to start a small business. These programs will provide female entrepreneurs in metropolitan and regional New South Wales with crucial links into networks of entrepreneurs with experience, expertise and resources that can help them on their business journey. The programs will also be targeted to help women in business to upskill and increase their capacity to establish and run a successful business.

### 3.3 Free Women in Business TAFE courses

TAFE NSW currently runs an educational course for female entrepreneurs called the Women in Business program. This program provides free classes on business, communication, finance, marketing and personal wellbeing and performance for women in New South Wales. Nearly 15,000 women in New South Wales across multiple sectors have participated in this program, gaining essential skills to help them start and run their own business.

The NSW Government will provide additional funding of \$5.4 million over four years from 2023-24 to extend this program and offer more opportunities to businesswomen to expand their skillset and boost their business.

### 3.4 Tailored advice for women in small business

The NSW Government will deliver a series of initiatives to help female entrepreneurs start and operate small business in New South Wales, including the launch of a one-stop shop via Service NSW for women business owners to access information and resources that can benefit them and their companies.

By working with councils, business chambers, local business organisations, peak organisations and industry associations, Service NSW will ensure the website contains up-to-date information on programs relevant to all women small business owners.

The Business Concierge team will also be expanded, with team members ready to provide free, personalised advice for women small-business owners on existing programs, grants and opportunities available exclusively for women, as well as generalised business and financial advice.

## Priority 4: Support and raise awareness of women's health needs

Enhancing support for women's health is crucial to improving the financial security and overall quality of life of women across New South Wales. Women's health issues often receive less recognition than issues that affect the entire population. Cultural taboos surrounding menstruation, menopause and reproductive health mean that some women face these issues in silence and with little assistance. This affects not only their health, but also their economic wellbeing, as they are forced to spend or forgo income to look after themselves.

The NSW Government will provide targeted support for a range of women's health needs including fertility services, perinatal depression, perimenopause and menopause. The programs will both provide direct help to women right across New South Wales and raise broader public awareness of women's health issues to break down social stigmas.

### 4.1 Affordable fertility treatments

While about 5 per cent of births in Australia involve some form of assisted reproductive treatment, the cost of these treatments is often prohibitively expensive. This can force families in New South Wales to face the impossible choice between preserving their own financial security and having children.

The NSW Government will invest \$80 million over four years to expand and extend the Affordable IVF Program Initiative to support women across the State to access affordable IVF and fertility services, including:

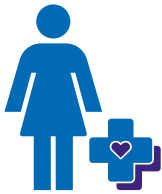
- rebates of \$250 for pre-IVF fertility testing
- publicly supported affordable IVF treatment for over 6,180 women
- rebates of up to \$2,000 for 12,000 women undergoing IVF in private facilities
- affordable fertility preservation for 350 women suffering from cancer or other health issues.

The NSW Government will also fund upgrades of publicly supported IVF clinics and establish a hub-and-spoke model that expands these services to regional New South Wales. Availability will be expanded in publicly supported affordable IVF clinics. The program will also continue the first statewide fertility preservation service for younger cancer patients at the Royal Hospital for Women in partnership with the University of NSW.

The NSW Government will also put in place five days of paid fertility treatment leave for the NSW public sector, helping teachers, nurses and other public sector workers to take the time they need to undergo and recover from fertility treatments.



The NSW Government will support upgrades of public IVF clinics and establish hub-and-spoke models that expand these services to regional New South Wales.



## 4.2 Launching menopause hubs across the State

There is a chronic lack of social and government support for women experiencing perimenopause and menopause related health issues in New South Wales. Most women going through menopause experience some symptoms, including hot flushes, night sweats, sleep disturbances, mood disorders or weight gain, while around 20 per cent of women experience more severe or prolonged symptoms. These symptoms and health risks not only affect women's health, but also impact their social lives and economic security.

The level of support for women facing challenges related to menopause is low. Social taboos constrain the discussion of experiences and reduces the likelihood that women will seek and receive the right medical assistance. There is also a general lack of medical resources provided in New South Wales to support women experiencing menopause.

The NSW Government will invest \$40.3 million over four years to establish up to 16 new services, including four hubs for women experiencing severe symptoms of menopause. The hubs will act as a central source of health expertise to support post-menopausal women, particularly those with bone health issues. The new hubs and services will support around 5,500 women annually, including virtual consultations to women who cannot attend a service in person.

The new services will provide expert advice and assistance for women managing severe menopausal symptoms, as well as helping to prevent fractures for postmenopausal women with osteoporosis, lower the risk of cardiovascular disease such as stroke, and provide support for weight management and urinary problems that can arise following menopause.

A statewide clinical network will also be established to support the implementation of these services for women experiencing severe symptoms of menopause in New South Wales. The network will also work with other health providers to improve the capacity of the broader NSW health system to support women going through menopause. Collaboration and knowledge-sharing with general practitioners, clinicians and other health professionals will help ensure women are able to access appropriate, high-quality care at the widest possible range of locations across the State.

The NSW Government will also launch a comprehensive education campaign across the State to increase awareness and conversation about perimenopause and menopause, its impacts on many women, and health solutions available to help women during this period of their lives.



**\$40.3  
million**

to establish up  
to 16 new  
menopause services



**\$25.0  
million**

to develop  
female facilities  
at community  
sporting grounds



**\$5.2  
million**

to not-for-profit  
organisations  
to provide  
postnatal mental  
health support





### 4.3 Support mothers with postnatal mental health

Postnatal depression affects about 14 per cent of new mothers in Australia each year and can develop up to one year after the birth of a baby.<sup>171</sup> Postnatal depression can affect the ability of women to perform daily tasks and critically affect their psychological and physical health and safety. Women suffering from postnatal depression can also face social stigma that assumes new mothers ought to experience a positive state of mind following their baby's birth. The resulting shame that mothers experiencing postnatal depression feel can prevent them from reaching out for support or sharing their struggles with others.

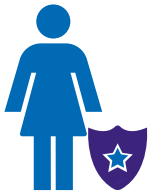
To support mothers experiencing postnatal depression, the NSW Government will provide \$5.2 million to not-for-profit organisations to provide counselling services and educational resources. This funding will also be used for trusted organisations to provide other wraparound supports to assist new mothers manage postnatal depression, as well as raise public awareness to tackle the social stigma that surrounds postnatal mental health.

### 4.4 Female facilities at community sporting grounds

Several community sporting grounds across the State continue to lack the right infrastructure needed to properly support women to participate in sport. A lack of appropriate bathroom facilities not only compromises the comfort of women, but it can also deter women from joining a sports team to improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

The NSW Government will invest \$25 million to continue to develop female change rooms and toilets at community sporting grounds across the State. This funding will improve the experience of women that use the grounds for sport and exercise and help more women to take up sport and improve their health.

Funding will also support installing appropriate and safe lighting at these grounds. Enhancing lighting will help improve safety at these facilities, particularly at night, helping to make sure that no woman feels unsafe while participating in their favourite sport or exercise.



## Priority 5: Respect for women and women's financial security

Embedding respect for women in the workplace and throughout society, stamping out harassment and violence against women, and promoting women's security is paramount to supporting women to succeed at work and in life. To increase women's safety, the NSW Government will advocate to bring about cultural change in society's attitudes and respect towards women, as well as invest in programs that support those women who experience domestic or family violence, or struggle to secure adequate housing.

### 5.1 Stopping sexual harassment in the workplace

In March 2020, Australian Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins released *Respect@Work*, a report on the National Inquiry into Sexual Harassment in Australian Workplaces. The report made 55 recommendations to improve the safety of women in the workplace. One of the recommendations was to include a positive duty requiring employers to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate sexual harassment in the workplace.

In response to this recommendation, the NSW Government will invest \$9.7 million for SafeWork NSW to establish a *Respect@Work* taskforce to educate employers across New South Wales on their obligations to provide safe workplaces, including preventing sexual harassment in their workforce. The taskforce will monitor and work with major employers across the State to ensure they are complying with their responsibilities to keep their employees safe from sexual harassment.

The taskforce will provide employers with best-practice guidance on the ways to meet their obligations and prevent sexual harassment in their workplaces. This will include a toolkit of resources for employers regarding their obligations for preventing and addressing sexual harassment in the workplace.

### 5.2 Stopping violence against women and increasing support for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence

#### Women's Safety Commissioner

The NSW Government will establish a Women's Safety Commissioner to provide expert advice to government on continuing to improve the safety of women in New South Wales. The Commissioner will strengthen cross-government efforts to prevent and respond to domestic and family violence and harassment. The Commissioner will also play a role advocating for wider reform and efforts to address domestic and family violence outside of government.

#### No Wrong Door Safer Pathways

The Safer Pathway program is the NSW Government's overarching response to domestic and family violence. The Safer Pathway model provides wraparound services to victim-survivors of domestic and family violence from a single point of contact. After reporting their situation, each victim-survivor is contacted by one domestic and family violence support worker who connects them with the various supports and services that they require. This may include legal counsel, housing, medical and psychological attention, and early childhood education and care. This model ensures that victim-survivors do not have to visit multiple services and retell their story multiple times to receive the support they need.

The NSW Government will invest \$43.6 million over four years to further improve the Safer Pathway program. The program will be expanded from providing short-term coordination of supports to a long-term case management service. It will also pilot ways to expand referrals into Safer Pathway to service more women at risk of domestic and family violence, including those who are unwilling or unable to engage with NSW Police. This will ensure all women in New South Wales that need support to be safe from domestic and family violence have access to help through the Safer Pathway program. The NSW Government will also upgrade the program's digital and IT systems, making them more efficient and user-friendly, enabling case workers to dedicate a greater proportion of their time to directly helping victim-survivors.

## Audio-visual link facilities in court and tribunal rooms

The NSW Government will invest \$18.0 million to establish audio-visual links in court and tribunal rooms across the State. Access to audio-visual links can reduce trauma for victim-survivors of domestic and family violence by allowing them to appear remotely and avoid being in the same room as their abuser.

## Court-appointed questioners for domestic and family violence complainants

The *Criminal Procedures Act 1986* was recently amended to prohibit self-represented defendants in domestic and family violence criminal proceedings and related Apprehended Violence Order proceedings from directly cross-examining complainants. This amendment was designed to prevent victim-survivors experiencing the trauma of being cross-examined by their own abuser.

The NSW Government will invest \$8.0 million to allow examinations to instead be conducted using court-appointed questioners or technology in a new service to be delivered by the NSW Government.

## 5.3 Stamping out street harassment

The NSW Government will invest \$30.0 million to tackle street harassment and improve women's safety across public spaces in New South Wales. Funding will be used to address street harassment by researching and co-designing solutions with women including infrastructure upgrades such as lighting, CCTV and other initiatives to boost foot traffic in key public spaces. Funding will also be used to launch an anti-street harassment campaign and consider other policy solutions to stamp out street harassment.

## 5.4 A shared-equity scheme for single parents, older singles and key worker first home buyers

Single mothers and older single women are cohorts that are disproportionately likely to have trouble in achieving homeownership. Without safe and secure housing, the physical safety and financial security of women is severely compromised. The NSW Government will help to address this problem by running a two-year trial of a shared equity scheme, which will help vulnerable single women own their own home.

The trial will be open to single parents and older singles with an income of less than \$90,000. These design parameters, while gender-neutral, will support vulnerable women. This scheme is partly intended to assist a growing cohort of women that do not qualify for social housing but are unable to buy their own home.

Under the scheme, the NSW Government will take a minority ownership stake of up to 40 per cent in a property alongside the home buyer. The Government's equity contribution reduces the size of the initial deposit a home buyer needs and the size of their ongoing mortgage repayments. There will be up to 6,000 places available during the trial, shared across single parents, older singles and key worker first home buyers.

“We’ve all done it, held the keys between our fingers when walking to the car.”

Focus group participant, commissioned research (March/April 2022)



# Projections and measurements

This Statement and the 2022-23 NSW Budget combines both short and long-term reforms to significantly improve opportunities for women in New South Wales. This task is no small endeavour and touches many areas of policy. Ambitious investment is required now and into the future to yield equally large returns for women, families and the NSW economy. Such change will require a sustained effort from the NSW Government over the next decade. This Statement lays the foundation and embeds the path for that step change.

## Projections of the impact of early childhood education and care reforms

The early childhood education and care reforms outlined in this Statement are expected to deliver a step change in the economic prosperity of the women of NSW.<sup>172</sup> As part of the Review, NSW Treasury modelled the estimated impact of a package of the early childhood education and care reforms on:

- childcare availability and demand
- labour market outcomes, with a specific focus on women
- the NSW economy
- NSW Government revenues
- costs and workforce disincentive rates for example households.

This section sets out a summary of the modelling results, with further information found in a technical paper available on the NSW Treasury website.<sup>173</sup>

The modelling of the economic benefits applies likely behavioural responses based on international and domestic evidence. Uncertainty in the behavioural response is reflected in the expression of projected benefits as a range, rather than a point estimate. Assumptions have been applied regarding the detailed policy design of the early childhood education and care reforms. The modelling results capture the integrated benefits of the Commonwealth and State measures working in a complementary manner.

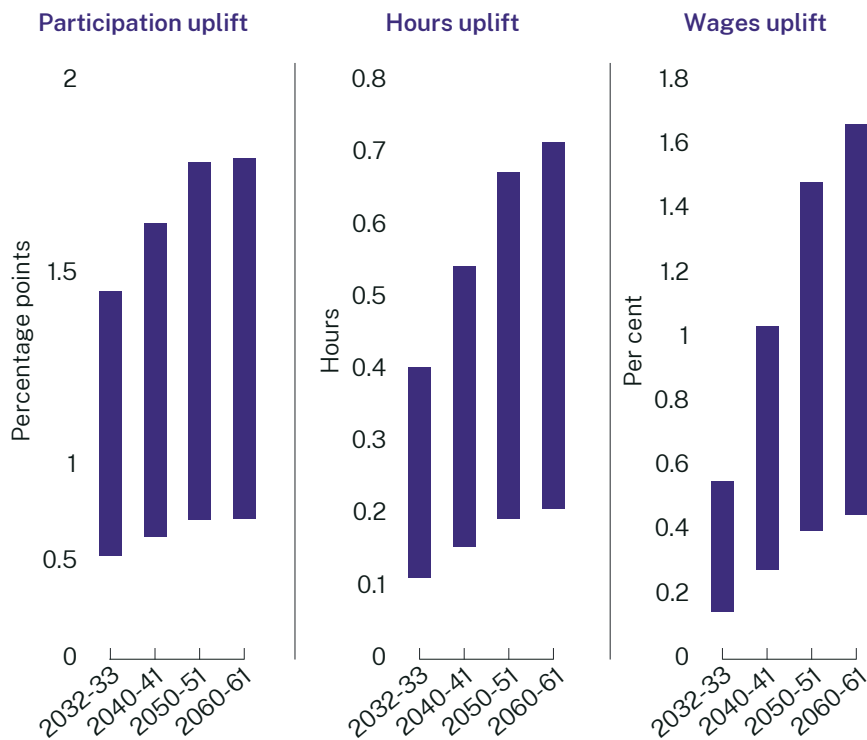
While other initiatives will also contribute towards increasing women's economic opportunity, they have not been modelled, as it is difficult to identify specific outcomes on an individual initiative level. However, it is expected that the momentum being created by this focus on women in the workforce will drive significant change, which will be measured and monitored through the indicators identified in the next section.

## Impacts for women’s economic opportunities in the labour market

The reduction in childcare costs and increase in access and availability from the package of early childhood education and care reforms, including the Affordable and Accessible Childcare and Economic Participation Fund (the Fund), the provision of universal pre-kindergarten and changes to the Child Care Subsidy in line with the policy commitments of the new Commonwealth Government, are estimated to achieve the following:

- Increase the women’s workforce participation rate, which would be between 0.4 and 1.3 percentage points higher than under the baseline by the tenth year of operation (2032-33), or between 13,000 and 47,000 additional women employed. This would account for between 4.0 and 14.1 per cent of the current participation gap with men.<sup>174</sup>
- Increase the average number of hours of paid work worked by women by between 0.1 and 0.4 hours per week compared with the baseline by the tenth year of operation, equivalent to between 13,000 and 48,000 women shifting from part-time to full-time work. This would account for between 1.7 and 6.1 per cent of the current gap with men on average hours worked.<sup>175</sup>
- Increase average women’s wages by between 0.1 and 0.6 percentage points by the tenth year of operation, which would account for between 2.0 and 7.6 per cent of the current wages gap with men.<sup>176</sup>

**Figure 22: Estimated impact of early childhood education and care reforms on women’s labour market outcomes**

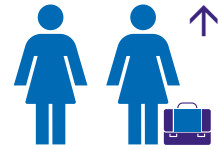


Source: NSW Treasury



0.4 to 1.3

percentage points increase in women’s participation by 2032-33



13,000 to 47,000

additional women employed by 2032-33



13,000 to 48,000

women shifting from part-time to full-time work by 2032-33



**\$4.7 to  
\$17.1 billion**

increase in NSW  
Gross State Product  
(GSP) per year by  
2032-33 (in real  
2021-22 dollars)



**\$1,200 to  
\$4,400**

increase to income  
per household per  
year by 2032-33 (in  
real 2021-22 dollars)



**0.5 to 1.9%**

increase to the size  
of the NSW economy  
(measured in GSP  
per year) by 2032-33

## Impacts for the NSW economy and NSW Government revenue

These improvements for women's economic outcomes in the labour market as a result of the package of early childhood education and care reforms and the prospective changes committed by the incoming Commonwealth Government, are estimated to drive the following economic and revenue benefits:

- Increased aggregate economic activity of between \$4.7 billion and \$17.1 billion (in real 2021-22 dollars) each year by 2032-33.
- This translates into between an additional \$1,200 and \$4,400 income (in real 2021-22 dollars) per household per year by 2032-33.
- This would increase NSW Government's own-source revenues between \$158 million and \$577 million per year by the tenth year of operation, primarily driven by payroll tax (between \$85 million and \$308 million) and increase the size of the national GST pool by between \$149 million and \$540 million. This would translate into between \$42 million and \$153 million for New South Wales if there is no change in the distribution of GST between states.





## Impacts for families and workforce disincentive rates

The charts below set out the impact of the package of early childhood education and care reforms, combined with changes to the federal Child Care Subsidy as proposed by the new Commonwealth Government.

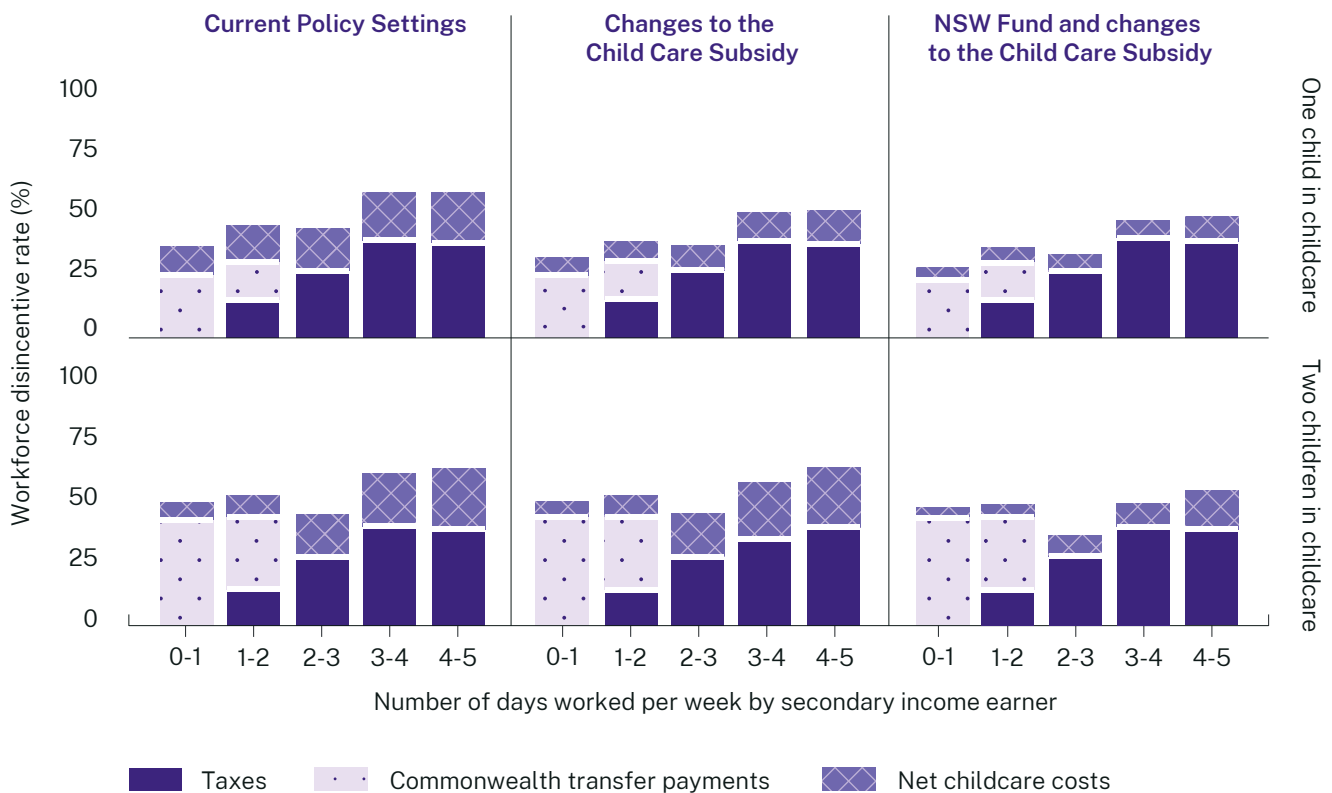
### Example of middle-income household with two children in childcare that benefits from the Fund

- Primary Income Earner Salary: \$95,000
- Secondary Income Earner Full Time Equivalent Salary: \$85,000
- This represents approximately the median full-time equivalent salaries for households in New South Wales with at least one child aged 0–5. These salaries are assumed to grow in line with Child Care Subsidy indexation
- This household currently faces a workforce disincentive rate of up to 68 per cent (on the fifth day).
- This indicates that a secondary income earner would take home only 32 cents in the dollar for income earned on their fifth day of work in a week, compared with working only four days per week.

Under the combination of changes to the Child Care Subsidy and the Fund, the maximum workforce disincentive rate that this household would face would be reduced to 52 per cent.



**Figure 23: Workforce disincentive rates faced by the secondary earner in the example middle-income household**

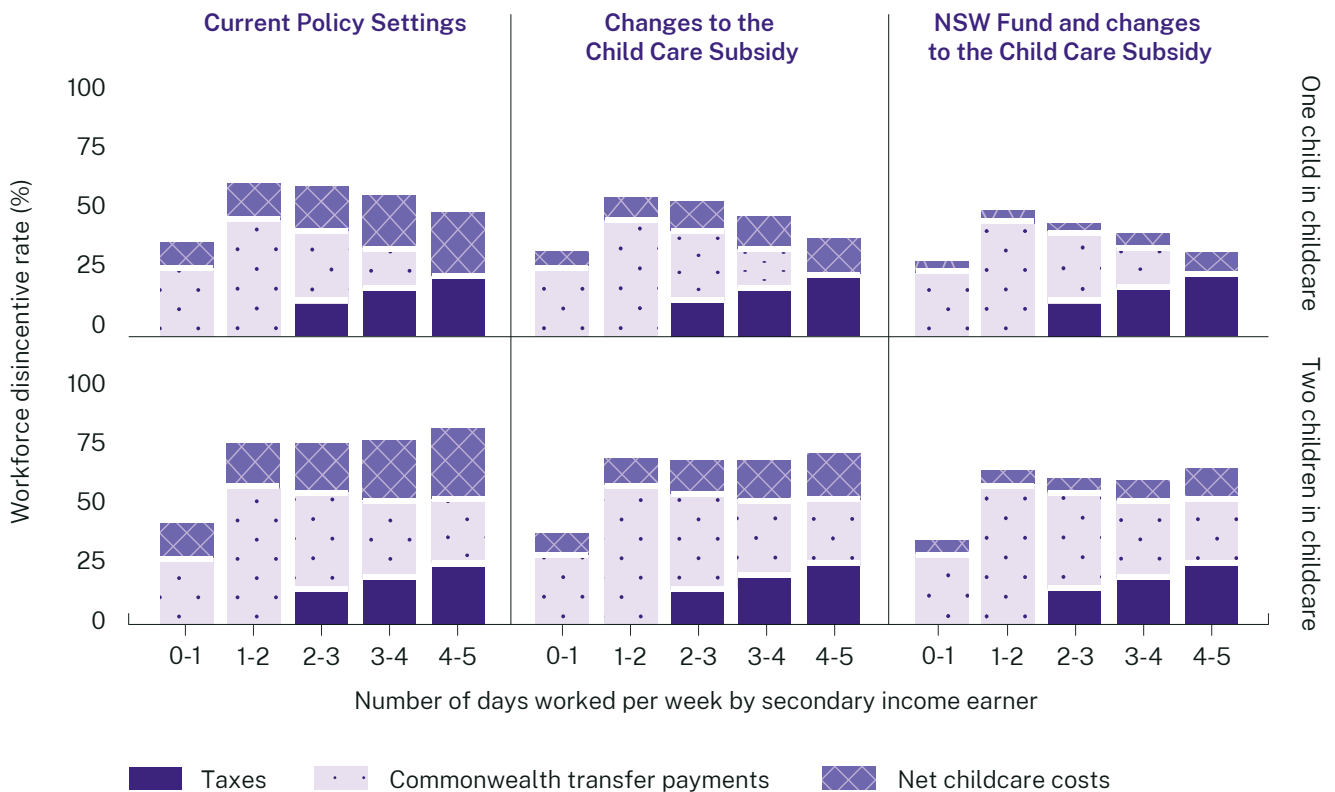


Source: NSW Treasury<sup>177</sup>

### Example of low-income household with two children in childcare that benefits from the Fund

- Primary Income Earner Salary: \$70,000
- Secondary Income Earner Full Time Equivalent Salary: \$50,000
- This represents approximately the 25th percentile of full-time equivalent salaries for households in New South Wales with at least one child aged 0–5. These salaries are assumed to grow in line with Child Care Subsidy indexation.
- This household is assumed to rent, consistent with most households with children aged 0–5 earning a similar income.
- This household currently faces a workforce disincentive rate up to 79 per cent (on the fifth day).
- This indicates that a secondary income earner would take home only 21 cents in the dollar for income earned on their fifth day of work in a week, compared with working only four days per week.
- Under the combination of changes to the Child Care Subsidy and the Fund, the maximum workforce disincentive rate that this household would face would be reduced to 62 per cent.

**Figure 24: Workforce disincentive rates faced by the secondary earner in the example low-income household**



Source: NSW Treasury<sup>178</sup>

## Measuring our progress

The implementation of the reforms outlined in this Statement will be reviewed and monitored regularly, with reporting on the key indicators listed below as part of an annual Women's Opportunity Statement in the NSW Budget.

These indicators will enable the NSW Government to clearly define the desired tangible impacts and outcomes to be achieved through the reforms, as well as measure and track the success of the reforms in delivering better economic opportunities

and outcomes for women over time. In addition to the indicators in the table, the NSW Government intends to track the progress of the proportion of NSW fathers taking parental leave and will work with industry and WGEA to develop an appropriate indicator.

Outcomes	Indicators	NSW – most recent data	Desired movement
<b>Women's workforce participation</b>			
Improve women's participation	Gap in labour force participation rate between women and men in NSW <sup>179</sup>	9.0 percentage points (12 month average to April 2022) <i>Labour force participation rates:</i> <i>Women: 61.0%</i> <i>Men: 70.1%</i>	↓
	Difference in average hours worked per week by women and men in NSW <sup>180</sup>	6.6 hours (Feb 2021) <i>Average hours worked per week:</i> <i>Women: 31.4 hours</i> <i>Men: 38.0 hours</i>	↓
	Reduced net childcare costs for households identified as facing high workforce disincentive rates	Baseline under development	↓
<b>Equity at work</b>			
Reduce gender pay gap	NSW Gender Pay Gap <sup>181</sup>	\$220.90 per week or 12.0% (Nov 2021)	↓
Increase women in leadership	Proportion of women on ASX200 boards <sup>182</sup>	34.2% national figure (Nov 2021) Data for NSW not available	↑
	Proportion of female CEOs in ASX300 companies <sup>183</sup>	6% national figure (2021) Data for NSW not available	↑
	Female representation on NSW Government boards <sup>184</sup>	46% of all board positions (April 2022)	↑
	Proportion of females in NSW Public Sector senior leadership <sup>185</sup>	42.7% (2021)	↑
<b>Women in small-business and entrepreneurship</b>			
Increase the number of female business owners and entrepreneurs	Proportion of female business owner managers in NSW <sup>186</sup>	34.3% (April 2022)	↑
	Proportion of private funding, including venture capital, provided to female-founded or co-founded start-ups in NSW <sup>187</sup>	20.7% (2021)	↑



The implementation of the initiatives in this Statement will require extensive engagement with the diverse community of New South Wales.

The NSW Government is making intentional and purposeful investments to create generational change and make New South Wales the state of choice for women and their families, with significant benefits for the entire community. Governance mechanisms will be established to help drive the long-term change, requiring sustained effort and leadership over the next decade.

The NSW Government will establish an ongoing review and monitoring framework, as well as engage in detailed consultation with stakeholders to ensure the success of the reforms and encourage long term focus and action to increase women's economic opportunities right across the State.

## Stakeholder engagement

The implementation of the initiatives in this Statement will require extensive engagement with the diverse community of New South Wales. The NSW Government will engage with interested stakeholders over the coming months to implement this high impact work, including consultation on the detailed implementation of the reforms. In a state as uniquely and highly diverse as New South Wales, it is important to harness the diversity and talent as a key element of strong economic growth. In developing policies and implementing the investments outlined in this Statement, the NSW Government recognises the strength of diversity and seeks to capture the extraordinary opportunity of creating a truly inclusive society.





## Partnering with First Nations women and communities

The reforms set out in this Statement are designed to benefit all women in New South Wales. As such they will benefit First Nations women, their children, their families and their communities. In recognising that First Nations women experience particular challenges and enabling factors, the NSW Government will work with First Nations women to develop appropriate responses and initiatives that best support them and their communities to thrive.

The NSW Government will also partner with First Nations women to provide advice on the implementation of the reforms set out in this Statement. These include reforms specifically designed to support First Nations women and families, such as Aboriginal Child and Family Centres, as well as reforms which are broader in their applications, but which are expected to particularly benefit First Nations people.

For example, the introduction of paid parental leave for NSW public service employees who are permanent out-of-home carers or foster parents will significantly

benefit First Nations communities, given that 14 per cent of authorised out-of-home care or foster carers are First Nations people.<sup>188</sup>

The aspirations and barriers to economic participation and socio-economic realities for First Nations women in New South Wales remain unique and require the policies set out in this Statement to be delivered in a way that acknowledges and builds on the strengths and opportunities available for First Nations women right across New South Wales.

## Behavioural insights

The NSW Government will also engage the Behavioural Insights Unit to inform the roll-out of many of the reforms set out in this Statement. The Behavioural Insights Unit is a specialist research arm of the NSW Government that combines evidence from behavioural sciences and economics to deliver better outcomes for the people of New South Wales. The Behavioural Insights Unit will help to guide this engagement to ensure that the policies and programs set out in this Statement, in particular the policies relating to early childhood education and care, are accessible to as many people as possible.









# Background to the Women's Economic Opportunity Review

This Statement draws on the findings of the Women's Economic Opportunities Review (the Review), which was established by the NSW Government in February 2022.<sup>189</sup>

## Scope of the Review

The Review considered how to improve women's economic opportunity over the next five to 10 years through increasing workforce participation, improving equity at work and supporting women in small business. It identified barriers to women's economic participation and reform opportunities to address structural and non-structural barriers to women participating and succeeding in the workforce and to parents and carers being able to balance work and life.

The core focus of the Review was on women's economic participation and opportunities. However, noting that women's access to work is impacted by a range of interrelated factors (including women's health and safety and experiences of family, domestic and sexual violence), this Statement and the 2022-23 NSW Budget seek to address many of the issues in parallel.

## Expert Reference Panel

The NSW Government established an Expert Reference Panel to support the Review. The Panel provided subject matter expertise and advice which has informed this Statement.

The Expert Reference Panel was chaired by Sam Mostyn AO, President of Chief Executive Women. The other members of the Panel were:

- Maha Abdo OAM, CEO Muslim Women Association
- Blair Comley PSM, Partner EY Port Jackson Partners
- Jillian Kilby, CEO and Founder of The Infrastructure Collaborative and The Exchange
- Leslie Loble OAM, Co-Chair of the Council on Early Childhood Development
- Daisy Turnbull, writer and teacher.



## Methodology

The Statement has been informed by an extensive review of the existing literature, data analysis, commissioned research, public submissions and consultation with stakeholders.

### Literature review and commissioned research

A desktop review was undertaken of the existing literature on gender inequality and the barriers to women's economic participation, as well as potential reforms to address these. Further research was also commissioned for the purposes of the Review. This included:

- a rapid synthesis of the body of research being led by the University of Sydney Women and Work Research Group on the views and experiences of women in relation to economic participation
- analysis of empirical data on economic outcomes for women and men in New South Wales and Australia, comparison to equivalent international data, analysis of workforce disincentive rates and modelling of the long-term economic and fiscal impact of improving women's economic outcomes
- research on the experiences and expectations of working women in Western Sydney, including focus groups involving 45 women from Western Sydney.

## Public submissions

Members of the public, organisations and other stakeholders were invited to make submissions to the Review via the NSW Treasury website between 7 February 2022 and 6 March 2022. A total of 91 submissions were received from a range of stakeholders, including individuals, unions, local councils, peak bodies, non-government organisations, universities and private organisations. Submissions identified various barriers to women's economic participation and proposed reforms to increase economic opportunities for women.

The three most identified barriers to women's economic participation included:

- early childhood education and care costs, quality and access
- support and respect in the workplace
- access to flexible work.

Several submissions highlighted the affordability of early childhood education and care and its limited availability outside of typical working hours (9am–5pm) as key issues affecting women's workforce participation. In the workplace, identified factors impacting women's career advancement included the challenges of balancing work and caring responsibilities, a lack of flexibility in senior positions, and unsafe and unwelcoming workplace cultures.

Submissions also emphasised that limited access to flexible working arrangements in certain industries and at senior levels remained a significant challenge to be addressed, noting the career penalty attached to part-time work.





## Focus groups

Twenty-five face-to-face and online focus groups were held with a diverse range of women, with a total of 150 participants. These included young women, older women, employed and unemployed women, women with children, self-employed women, women living in regional New South Wales, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, First Nations women, women living with a disability, carers, women from the LGBTQIA+ community and single mothers. Participants came from a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds and were a mix of ages. Both metropolitan and regional areas were represented in focus groups.

Key issues highlighted by participants included personal safety, sexualisation and sexual harassment, motherhood and its challenges, the responsibilities that often fall to women, and underrepresentation of women in positions of influence. Participants valued the financial security provided by a job, as well as other benefits such as a sense of purpose and accomplishment, learning new skills, and the opportunity to follow their passions. However, they also noted a range of issues women face in workplace, including barriers to workforce participation, pay equality and advancement, as well as challenges in the workplace, such as sexism, gender bias, sexual harassment and discrimination.

Women in the focus groups also emphasised the importance of financial literacy, lamenting that topics like tax and superannuation are largely missing from the education curriculum, leading to superannuation often being overlooked as an asset by women. Working mothers represented in the focus groups called for greater access to affordable childcare options, citing childcare as a significant factor in their decision to return to work after having children.

## Targeted engagement

The NSW Government also conducted targeted engagement with key peak bodies and other stakeholders. This included a survey of women's organisations and targeted consultations, including with First Nations and culturally and linguistically diverse women and women in regional New South Wales.

A survey of 19 select peak organisations who work with or represent women was conducted in March 2022. The survey explored women's economic participation, including the barriers to workforce participation, the factors impacting on current earnings or earning potential, financial literacy and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's work and finances.

The top three most identified barriers to women's workforce participation were:

- caring responsibilities and domestic duties
- cost of early childhood education and care
- challenges re-entering the workforce after a significant time away.

Respondents highlighted the impacts of the pandemic on the work and finances of women they work with or represent, namely:

- juggling working from home and home-schooling children
- reduction in income
- loss of employment.



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