



National Women's
Equality Alliance

POLICY POSITION: ECONOMIC SECURITY AND FAIR WAGES FOR WOMEN

Proudly led by YWCA Canberra, the Working with Women Alliance (WwWA) is one of the five National Women's Alliances that play a key role in ensuring women's voices are central in the policy development process by providing evidence-based, intersectional gender equality advice and civil society expertise to government on areas of most impact and influence to Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality.

The National Women's Equality Alliance is a portfolio under the WwWA that champions the vision of a society where every woman has the opportunity to thrive, unencumbered by systemic barriers.

POLICY STATEMENT: ECONOMIC SECURITY AND FAIR WAGES FOR WOMEN

Executive Summary

Gender inequality has far-reaching and lifelong consequences, shaping the economic security, safety, and well-being of people across Australia.

One in three Australians hold a negative bias about women's ability to participate fully economically, politically or in education. These biases shape how women move through the world and mean that many are at serious risk of violence, housing insecurity and poverty.

This policy position statement highlights the urgent need for policies that prioritise women's economic equality. By ensuring access to secure employment, fair wages, financial independence, and adequate care services, Australia can create pathways to long-term safety, stability, and equality for all.

Key Recommendations

Ensure economic security and fair wages for women:

1. Increase income support payments to at least \$82 per day.
2. Implement recommendations from the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce.
3. Improve wages and working conditions in the care economy.

Women in poverty in Australia

Australia is one of the richest countries in the world, yet women continue to live in poverty. In fact, women are more likely than men to be living in poverty in Australia.[i]

Despite being more likely to engage in higher education, women are concentrated in low-paid, insecure industries. On average, women in Australia earn only 78c for every dollar that men earn.[ii] This adds up to a yearly difference of more than \$28,000. Women would need to work an extra 44 days each year to match the earnings of men. For women with disabilities, culturally and linguistically diverse or migrant and refugee women, rural and regional women, older women or for First Nations women, this gap is even more pronounced.

Non-discretionary costs like food, housing and electricity make up a larger proportion of women's incomes, so the dramatic increases in costs of living over the last five years have had a more significant impact on women's lives. This impact is especially high for single parents, given that one in three sole parent households live in poverty.[iii] The effect of price rises on older women has also been substantial, given they are likely to retire, on average with \$50,000 less superannuation than men.[iv]

For women and gender-diverse people leaving violence, the financial burden can be overwhelming. Research suggests the average cost to escape violence is \$18,000, a significant challenge, particularly for those who are already more likely to face economic disadvantage.[v]

Increase income support payments to at least \$82 per day

Throughout their lives, women are more likely than men to be dependent on income support and government payments to make ends meet.[vi] Current rates of income support payments leave people unable to afford rent, food, sufficient heating and cooling and transport. To ensure adequate support, payments should be increased and adjusted in line with living costs. Disability and Illness and Single Income Family supplements should be established and benchmarked to the additional costs incurred by people with disabilities and single parents. Raising rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance will also mean that older women are less likely to live in poverty as they struggle to afford rising rents. Increasing Jobseeker payments to at least \$82 would cost approximately \$9.5 billion each year, a fraction of the revenue the Australian Government loses through the capital gains tax discount.

Implement recommendations from the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce

The Women's Economic Equality Taskforce offers comprehensive recommendations for improving economic equality in Australia, including leveraging government purchasing powers to incentivise equitable employment practices. These recommendations include improving the wages, security and safety of workers in the care economy, most of whom are women as well as incentivising men to take paid parental leave and improving the affordability and accessibility of early childhood education. WEET have also recommended additional investment in employment programs run for and by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women.[vii]

Improve wages and working conditions in the care economy

The care industry is drastically underfunded and simultaneously overrepresented by women, who comprise 76% of the health care and social assistance industry.[viii] WEET has recommended policies that improve working conditions in the care industry through increased wages, improved security and safety of work and recognition of the Care and Support Economy as critical to our society.[ix]

The Australian Government should continue supporting the Fair Work Commission's decisions on the Aged Care Work Case,[x] in furthering award wage increases and providing additional funding through existing arrangements and exploring new grant opportunities. While funding wage increases for the early childhood education and care workforce[xi] is a positive step, worker retention payments should extend beyond the current two-year limit, ensuring long-term support aligns with modern award rates and associated costs.



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References

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