

Position Statement
Creating Gender Equality in Gippsland

10 April 2019

Gender Equality is the **'equal chances or opportunities for groups of women and men to access and control social, economic and political resources, including protection under the law'**. (World Health Organization)

Gippsland & Gender Inequality

Gippsland women are completing year 12 and entering university at higher rates than their male counterparts. However, women are grossly under-represented in industry, with only 35.4% in full time work compared to 66.2% of men.

As a result **49.6% of Gippsland women live below the poverty line**. This financial stress has flow on effects to their children and results in poor health and education outcomes. The longer a woman lives in poverty, the more debt she accumulates and the less likely she is to ever get out of poverty. When women retired they have a lower level of superannuation (nationally \$157,050 compared to \$270,710 for men) with **almost 35% of women approaching retirement having no superannuation** at all.

Women have less representation in politics, at local and federal levels. In Gippsland only 34.2% of local councillors are women which is way below the state average of 50%. Without representation, women's needs such as health care, child care and social and emotional supports are unlikely to be addressed.

Women and girls should not face reduced opportunities based on the biological sex which they were born.

Achieving gender equality will increase Australia's GDP by \$297 billion.

Commitment to a National Gender Equality Strategy

In 2012, the *Workplace Gender Equality Act* established the Workplace Gender Equality Agency which is tasked with promoting gender equality in Australian workforces. There is currently no National Gender Equality Strategy that outlines in a systematic manner how we are going to achieve true gender equality in the workforce.

We are asking for a National Gender Equality Strategy, using evidence based targets and addressing barriers women face when participating in economic opportunities such as: childcare affordability and options, the undue burden of care women experience, inflexible work rosters and insecure work (casual and/or short term contracts).

To achieve gender parity we need gender equality in all areas of community, including education and training, leadership and representation, sport and recreation as well as the media, arts and religious leadership. A National Gender Equality Strategy needs to focus on all areas of community and ensure a gender lens is applied to all policies, procedures, projects and budgets.

Commitment to a Strong Women's Health Network

We seek a commitment that the Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN), an independent women's health peak with membership from all States and Territories, will be publicly and adequately funded to provide ongoing advice on policy, practice change, research, and new and emerging areas of women's health. The funding should have bipartisan support to ensure sustainability, even during changes in government. It is important that the independent women's health peak not be directly involved with service delivery to ensure that there is no conflict of interest or perception of conflict of interest. Rather, it should work collaboratively with service providers to identify emerging issues, policy development, and research areas of concern to women's health and well-being, with a particular focus on rural and remote women as they have additional challenges in achieving equality.

Scenario

A woman leaves high school at 17 to pursue a hairdressing apprenticeship. After completing her apprenticeship she earns \$47,731 a year, working long hours including Saturdays to earn a little extra money. At 26 she marries her partner, an electrician working for a company, contracted to the power station. Every few months when the job he is working on finishes he loses his job, only to be rehired by the same company when a new job comes up. Even though he had done a 4 year apprenticeship, equivalent to his wife, his wage is \$120,000 a year, but it is unpredictable and inconsistent. They primarily rely on her wage as it is constant. At 28, they have their first child, with another one at 30. The cost of childcare is \$80 a day after childcare rebates, with limited full time places available for children under 2 years. Struggling for childcare options the woman leaves her job as the cost of childcare doesn't justify the hours she is working. The family's wage becomes unstable due to the nature of her partner's income.

The cost of living takes most of their wage, and financial stress causes a lot of arguing in the house, which puts a strain on their relationship leading to divorce at the age of 38.

She moves with the children back into her parents' house and relies on child support and Newstart payments. Her parents, now retired, help take care and financially support the children while she gets back on her feet. At this point her superannuation is more than \$80,000 lower than her ex-partners, and she has few assets in her name. As she has been out of the industry for so long she struggles to gain employment and decides to retrain as a community service worker, which puts her into another \$20,000 of debt, which in turn puts a strain on her parents' superannuation savings.

She is 40 before she returns to work, but due to the nature of the industry she is only on three year contracts, which makes it difficult to get a loan for a house, so she is trapped in a cycle of renting.

If Australia had gender equal workplaces which supported the needs of women she would have been:

- On a wage comparable to her husband's as they had a similar level of education
- Her childcare needs would have been addressed which would allow her to continue working
- Her superannuation would take into account the time off she had to bear and raise children
- Her work would be permanent full time, as opposed to contract.

This would have resulted in:

- Her contributing consistently to the tax base, instead of relying on social payments.
- Consistent superannuation contributions which would make her less likely to rely on pension payments as she ages.