

## National Council of Women Australia additional submission to the 2020 Budget

### Introduction:

National Council of Women Australia (NCWA) did submit a short budget submission earlier in 2020. The submission was written prior to the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia and the economic restrictions governments have placed upon Australian businesses and citizens. As the Federal budget has been delayed NCWA welcomes an opportunity to make some additional comments and suggestions in the lead up to the budget which is now scheduled for October 2020.

As stated in the previous submission NCWA is a non-government umbrella organisation with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives. NCWA has an extensive membership of Affiliate organisations (all with significant membership numbers) from all Australian States and the ACT. NCWA membership also includes a large number of Associate members (women who join as an individual). All members of NCWA are volunteers and no government funding (State or Federal) is received for the operation of NCWA.

In the previous NCWA submission it referred to the following:

- Economic wellbeing/security
- Housing
- Education
- Health
- Women's Alliances

The NCWA submission included sixteen recommendations

### Additional Submission:

NCWA understands the serious nature of the COVID-19 pandemic for over 25,000 Australian citizens who have contracted the contagious respiratory illness. Sadly over 600 people, many older Australian have lost their life, many of those people in residential aged care. However over 21,000 have recovered from COVID-19.

NCWA also understands the economic ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic and the need for governments to implement a suite of stimulus measures to help those Australian businesses shut down and employees who have found themselves out of work through no fault of their own.

Many Australians and businesses however have been severely disadvantaged because of ongoing and inflexible internal border closures and the continued restrictions that continue in all states, many with very few or a small number of COVID-19 cases. While border closures are the responsibility of the State governments border closures have had a significant impact on the economic recovery of all States and Territories, unemployment levels, domestic and family violence and mental health in particular.

Noting the Federal government has carried the majority of the economic stimulus measures NCWA also acknowledges the Federal government has established six initial priority areas of reform, and the formation of six National Cabinet Reform Committees:

- Rural and Regional Australia
- Skills
- Energy
- Infrastructure and Transport
- Population and Migration
- Health

However NCWA hopes that these committees will consult with women, non-government community organisations and community advocates and ensure there is an opportunity for everyday Australians to contribute to these committees deliberations and discussions as plans are put in place to take Australia out of a COVID-19 led recession. NCWA also hopes that each of the committees membership is diverse and has geographical representation.

#### **Aged Care:**

There is a significant and urgent need to review and increase residential aged care funding and ensure that the proper staff training is mandatory for the entire residential aged care and home care workforce. These two essential components for residential aged care and home care cannot wait until after the Royal Commission brings down its report. Funding must be addressed in the next and future budgets.

Many people including many NCWA Constituent Council members note the single biggest impediment to providing quality care in residential aged care facilities was the removal of the high care/low care distinction in these facilities. This distinction should be urgently reinstated.

#### **Childcare:**

The cost of childcare has a huge impact on workforce participation, especially for women. Any childcare costs interact with the taxation system and as such extra hours of paid work are financially unattractive. There is a need to review and restructure the early childcare sector to ensure it is affordable for parents of all young children.

NCWA notes there are staffing regulations for long day care however also notes that in the vulnerable aged care sector staffing levels are not regulated.

#### **Domestic and Family Violence:**

Job losses and business closures can bring increased financial stress which may then lead to domestic and family violence. The Institute of Criminology recently released some damning statistics after conducting an online survey of 15,000 Australian women about their experience of domestic violence during the initial stages of COVID-19. In the three months prior to the survey conducted in May 2020 almost 12% of those women who responded reported experiencing at least one form of emotionally abusive, harassing or controlling behaviour. NCWA notes that additional funding has been announced for domestic and family violence, however there is a need for a review of all government funding programs to ensure there are positive outcomes for such programs. There is also a need for a wider strategy to tackle the drivers of domestic and family violence.

**Mental Health:**

Given the length of necessary lock downs in Melbourne and greater Victoria, borders closed by some state governments to other states for no health reasons, some businesses still locked down after many months and a curfew in place in Melbourne, people working from home and juggling home schooling the mental health for many is a very serious concern.

Thinking about the lonely elderly men and women in residential aged care, the struggling for those parents home schooling, young people missing out on the events especially in year 12, the struggling for many working from home without contact with other people, the financial stress for many people and those just scared of contracting the extremely contagious respiratory illness indicate more must be done for people's mental health. There is a need for appropriate strategies and increased services especially in rural communities given the ongoing pandemic. In particular in relation to anxiety, affective disorders including depression and substance abuse disorders and sadly the surge in suicide.

Recently the University of Sydney's Brain and Mind Centre forecast a significant surge in suicides. Professor Ian Hickie has stated that young people with existing mental health disorders are particularly vulnerable as are those who have lost jobs, income or dropped out of education.

More accurate and timely regional and demographically -specific information on the incidence of suicide and suicidal behaviour will help governments and communities respond more rapidly to emerging crises. Almost all of the mental health services are delivered by State and Territory governments with Federal funding- as such there is a need for a more collaborative effort and effective and measurable outcomes across the targeted areas of:

- suicide prevention
- treatment and support for people with severe and complex mental illness
- physical health improvement of people living with mental illness and reducing early mortality
- system performance and system improvement
- national system for collection and coordination of information on suicide and self-harm

Mental health services are experiencing unprecedented call volumes from locked down Victorians. Recently the national mental health body released figures showing two in three calls to the Coronavirus Mental Wellbeing Support Service nationally were coming from Victoria, up from 43% in June. People with new presentations of mental health concerns and those who disconnected from services will need proactive outreach to re-engage. Rapid access to assessment treatment and support must be available across the spectrum of mental ill health.


**Social and Community Housing:**

The pilot program by the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments working together to fast-track additional community housing will go some way to lessen the problem of not nearly enough new social and affordable homes in New South Wales. The agreement however is for one state only and the need for additional social and affordable housing is an urgent requirement in all States and Territories. Unfortunately there is an urgent need for older women's housing initiatives and women's crisis and transitional housing initiatives. Women are overrepresented in the rental housing market and single older women are the fastest growing cohort at risk of homelessness.

Housing for Aboriginal people is urgently needed especially in Western Australia. Several families sharing a house leads to lack of school attendance for children, lack of attending work or looking for a job.

As already mentioned in the NCWA budget submission sent earlier this year there is an urgent need for a review of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRS) as it currently remains inadequate for women and men living in the private rental market. NCWA notes the CRS is a non-taxable income supplement, however the single maximum rent assistance payment (provided other criteria are met) is only \$138.00 if rent is \$307.20 or over per fortnight. Most private rent for housing is at least \$600-\$800 per fortnight. Even in rural towns \$600 per fortnight is not uncommon.

In conclusion the previous NCWA budget submission (which is attached) has over sixteen suggested recommendations. While it is important that COVID-19 case numbers continue to be suppressed and monitored businesses must be able to open back up. State borders must be opened urgently by State Premiers for an economic recovery for Australia.



President NCWA  
31 August 2020.

Attached earlier NCWA Submission to budget 2020

## National Council of Women Australia submission to 2020 Budget

### Introduction:

National Council of Women Australia (NCWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a short submission to the 2020 Budget process and is also very grateful for allowing an extension of time for the submission to be received.

NCWA is a non-government umbrella organisation with broadly humanitarian and educational objectives. NCWA has an extensive membership of Affiliate organisations (all with significant membership numbers) from all the Australian States and the ACT. NCWA membership also includes a large number of Associate members (women who join as an individual). All members of NCWA are volunteers and no government funding (State or Federal) is received for the operation of NCWA.

In June 2017 and October 2018 NCWA held two conferences in Canberra with a diverse range of speakers, including experts in the field, academics and practitioners. The conferences produced a range of suggested recommendations and agreed conclusions for twelve critical areas of concern. Areas of concern included women and poverty, education and training for women, adequate housing for women, women's health, domestic and family violence and economic security for women.

These critical areas very much relate to the Federal Budget. Unfortunately, there are many different ways to measure poverty. Many describe it as the economic condition by both the lack of money and basic necessities. It is my understanding that women face a higher risk of poverty than men in all OECD countries except Denmark, Finland and Greece. Again, according to the OECD men and women over 66 years of age are more than double the national average relating to poverty.

The NCWA short submission will reference the following:

- Economic wellbeing/security
- Housing
- Education
- Health
- Women's Alliances

### Submission:

Women retire with 47% less superannuation than men on average. Women live on average five years longer than men. Approximately 40% of older single retired women live in poverty and experience economic insecurity in retirement and of women in the workforce approximately 40% of women work part-time. An estimated 220,000 women miss out on superannuation contributions as they don't meet the requirement to earn \$450 per month (before tax) from one employer.

Currently superannuation does not extend to the Federal Government Paid Parental Leave Scheme. Other leave entitlements include superannuation. There are flow on impacts especially to older women in retirement as a consequence.

Pensions and allowances are adjusted to maintain their value against increases in the cost of living. Social Services payments such as Newstart, Youth Allowance and the Age Pension increase twice a year through indexation however different payments are pegged to different rates. Some payments eg service pensions are adjusted with MTAW. Currently the single Age pension (total) is \$933.40, Veteran Payment \$1009.80 and the War Widows or Widowers payment is \$949.10.

Newstart should not be considered a long-term payment however, but a transitional payment. Women make up just under 50 per cent of people receiving Newstart and are more likely to be in receipt of Newstart for longer periods, making up 52 % of people in receipt of Newstart for two to five years and 54 % of people in receipt of Newstart for five years or longer. Women also make up 66% of part-rate recipients of Newstart. Such figures support the fact that women experience poverty for longer than men and that Newstart is an essential supplement for the part-time and casual workforce which has many more women than men.

The majority of public housing tenants are women. Women are also the major recipients of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and live in private rentals. NCWA understands that there is a huge number of people on a public housing wait list in all Australian States and Territories. There is a need for a national housing strategy and much more needs to be done to provide social housing initiatives at the local government level. Unfortunately, housing stress impacts women more often than men. Women often have other family responsibilities (a carer for an older parent as an example) and as such are unable to relocate to either find employment or suitable cheaper housing. Women are often unable to house share because of young children. Access to housing for women can also be influenced by a range of other factors.

The Commonwealth Rent Assistance payment remains inadequate for those women and men in the private rental market. While it is a non-taxable income supplement the single maximum rent assistance payment (provided other criteria are met) is \$138.00 if rent is \$307.20 or over per fortnight. Most private rentals are double that amount. NCWA members report that it almost the norm for private rents to be at least \$600 per fortnight.

Domestic and family violence is a major barrier to employment and significantly increases the vulnerability of women receiving Newstart. Women (more likely than men) flee a home for safety and security reasons after experiencing domestic and family violence. Domestic and family violence contributes to women's economic insecurity. Sadly, there are women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are often over fifty years of age and find themselves looking for work after marriage breakdown often as a result of domestic and family violence. Some of these women have never had a job or not for a very long time.

The Australian Institute of Criminology late last year released a major study of domestic violence which demonstrates it is significantly linked to alcohol and poverty contradicting government policy focusing on gender equality as the key to eradicating domestic and family violence.

The data collected by the Australian Institute of Criminology was through a systematic review of 39 qualitative studies that examined domestic violence offending and re-offending. Despite the wide range

of data sources, samples and measures of violence findings are remarkably consistent across studies. The data found a third of offenders had been drinking or were drunk and alcohol significantly increased the severity of violence. The study also concluded violence was concentrated among a relatively small group of repeat offenders and in more disadvantaged areas.

The report comes amid concern that reported incidents of domestic and family violence have increased in the nine years since the national plan was launched. The authors of the report also struggled to find studies that examined mental illness as a driver of domestic and family violence.

The Australian Institute of Criminology Report demonstrates the need for a wider strategy to tackle the drivers of domestic and family violence.

Housing for Aboriginal people is an area needing urgent action especially in Western Australia. Several families sharing a house leads to lack of school attendance, lack of attending a job or searching for one. Other issues that can impact Aboriginal communities include the lack of services, ineffective government programs, lack of medical care and decaying infrastructure.

Women also find lack of workplace flexibility and many still have a disproportionate share of unpaid work and care making it almost impossible to attend any programs providing the building of new skills training. Training needs to be provided in more flexible modular units and online as people living in regional, rural and remote communities often find it impossible to access training. There is no doubt that there is also a changing nature of work in many parts of Australia. An explosion of data use and automation in recent years means that a large number of jobs have disappeared.

There is also no doubt that low-skilled workers with lower education attainment find it more difficult to find work as there has been a collapse in the demand for low-skilled workers. As such there is a need for policies and training programs targeted at the low skilled who have the highest rate of unemployment. University graduates should be encouraged to undertake skills training, leading to a widening of the scope of their career paths.

For many women and men a range of health issues prevent them seeking employment. These health issues need to be addressed in the first instance before attending training programs otherwise once the training program has been completed the person will still be dealing with the health issue. These issues include depression, hypertension, anxiety, osteoarthritis and asthma. Other serious health issues which must be addressed include alcoholism and drug taking.

A significant overhaul of the education curriculum for high school is critical. More emphasis should be placed on technical skills including school based apprenticeships. Coding should be a compulsory subject in schools and more emphasis on IT skills an important component of learning. In order to progress these initiatives, the teacher training curriculum also needs to be reviewed.

Carer assistance paid by government has grown over the last few years and that is most welcome. While NCWA understands some of these payments are means tested and paid at the pension rate, the carer allowance which is designed to assist with the costs of providing care and not means tested is a flat payment for all and is not linked to the intensity of the care given.

The six National Women's Alliances supposedly operate to represent women's organisations across Australia. While the Federal government funding is not significant for each Alliance most of the funding is now taken up with management fees (eg ERA to YWCA) staff and rental office space. NCWA believes that some alliances (the sector-based) do valuable work, others get caught up with small single issues organisations and no longer represent the large membership of mainstream women and family organisations. NCWA members believe it would be timely to review the role of the alliances especially the issue-based alliances.

NCWA also believes that funding for the Women's alliances should be an open tender process when the contracts come up for renewal.

**Recommendations:**

- 1. The Australian Government should immediately act to amend the Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992 to remove the exemption from paying the superannuation guarantee in respect of employees who earn less than \$450 a month (before tax) from one employer.**
- 2. The Australian Government should include the superannuation guarantee being paid on the Paid Parental Leave Scheme and Carer payment.**
- 3. The Australian Government should have an objective for the superannuation system that includes specific reference to women's retirement incomes.**
- 4. Any Australian Government policy analysis in relation to the superannuation guarantee should compare the impact for men and women.**
- 5. The Australian Government should amend the Sex Discrimination Act 1984 to ensure companies and businesses are able to make higher superannuation payments for their female employees if they wish to do so.**
- 6. The Australian government review the Newstart payment with a view to increasing it.**
- 7. The Australian Government review the adequacy of Commonwealth Rent Assistance for single pensioners in particular. As it is no longer adequate it should be increased and indexed to rental costs.**
- 8. Ensure all Social Service payments are pegged to the CPI for twice yearly increases and review the Aged Pension, Veteran's Payment and Widow and Widower payment. (These payments should be equal for each of these cohorts.)**
- 9. Overhaul the Jobactive Provider Network to ensure performance indicators include successful job placements outcomes**
- 10. Introduce a licencing system for Jobactive providers rather than a tendering process.**
- 11. Review employment support for Aboriginal and CALD women**



**12. Develop a national housing and homelessness strategy**

**13. Develop through COAG an increase in affordable and permanent social housing options in all States and Territories**

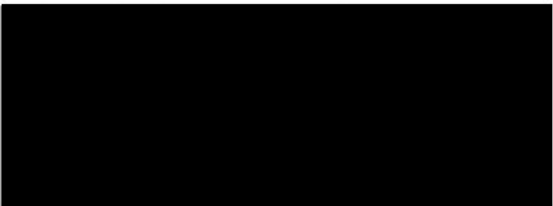
**14. Review the carer payment and introduce a simple three- tiered structure linked to the intensity of the care given reviewed every three years.**

**15. Review the current Federal Government strategy to tackle the drivers of violence against women and their family.**

**16. Review all Federal Government funding to programs aimed at reducing the incidence of domestic and family violence to ensure all programs produce measurable outcomes.**

**References:**

1. Women in Super
2. Australian Government Website- Department of Social Services
3. The Australian Institute of Criminology
4. Australian government Website- Office for Women



President NCWA