

## Submission to Queensland Women's Strategy

Thank you for the opportunity to offer a submission in the consultation process for a new Queensland Women's Strategy Discussion Paper.

The Queensland Government is to be applauded for the suite of initiatives that it has embarked on to advance gender equality in the State, including its thorough measurement of monitoring of gender equality indicators of progress in its Women's Strategy Report Cards.

This submission provides some research insights and evidence-based policy considerations that can equip the Queensland Government to address gender inequities in economic outcomes and opportunities, and steer the state towards a more gender equitable future.

I offer my professional expertise as an academic economist specialising in gender equality in the workforce and with experience in public policy. Although I am professionally based interstate, I take particular interest in supporting the advancement of gender equality in Queensland as my home state.

In full transparency, I declare that I contributed a commissioned independent report on Gender Responsive Budgeting for the Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS).<sup>1</sup> Parts of my submission refer to this work.

If it would be of assistance, I would be pleased to support the Queensland Government in further analysis and consultation in the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Available online at <<https://www.qcoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Gender-Responsive-Budgeting-for-Queensland-QCOSS-Report-.pdf>> and <<https://www.qcoss.org.au/publication/report-gender-impact-analysis-of-the-qld-budget-2021-2022/>>

## Questions to consider

- What are the top three issues that need to be addressed to achieve gender equality in Queensland, and what are the most important actions to respond to?

### *1) Break down gender stereotypes and cultural norms that perpetuate traditional notions of masculinity*

Improving opportunities and outcomes for women in society requires dismantling traditional norms that prescribe particular behaviours, attributes and roles for men and women. These traditional gender stereotypes constrict what women are conditioned to aspire to, as well as what men are conditioned to aspire to. It also influences the types of behaviours and roles in society that men are either rewarded for if they fulfil them, or are penalized for if they do not conform to these roles.

The traditional 'male-breadwinner' / female-caregiver norm prescribes a role for men in society that is associated with control over resources, authority in decision-making, and power and status relative to others, and relegates women to subservient roles. When women make progress in gender equitable ways, such as by stepping into positions of public influence or leadership, it disrupts this social norm and can come with risks of backlash towards women.

Research shows beliefs that adherence to traditional attributes of masculinity has negative repercussions not just for women's economic opportunities, safety and wellbeing, but also for the productivity in workforces and for the mental health and safety of men themselves. Men who ascribe to the traditional norms are more likely experience difficulty expressing emotions other than anger, and a higher likelihood of suicide ideation. Shifting stereotypes also means shifting attitudes among all members of society, including the attitudes and beliefs held by women too.

Pressures that perpetuate these gender norms prevail across all domains of society including in workplaces, government and politics, schools and education, community organisations, sports, the media and popular culture.

*An essential, but often overlooked, component of gender equality policies is the strategic investment in initiatives that work to challenge traditional gender stereotypes and cultivate healthy ideals of masculinity for men and boys.*

Government can play a powerful role in dismantling these norms and stereotypes through leading in best practice, providing evidence-based information to raise public awareness and inform educational campaigns, and by incentivising and more directly steering change in practices within organisations.

### *2) Apply a gender lens to policymaking*

Even if a policy is designed to be gender-neutral, every policy initiative in the budget has the potential to impact men and women differently. These unintended consequences can mean that a policy may result in inadvertently worsening the gender gaps that Government is striving to close in other ways. The Queensland Government is to be commended for providing a practical gender analysis toolkit online which organisations can apply to an assessment of their own practices and

and programs.<sup>2</sup> It is equally as critical that the government applies this same gender lensing approach to its economic policymaking and service delivery. This instils the principle of gender equity into the actions of government, helps to alert policymakers to unintentional blindspots in their own policy decisions, and accelerate progress towards closing gender gaps in outcomes.

The process of applying a gender impact assessment to government policy making is formally called "Gender Responsive Budgeting", but it basically means that before any policy is implemented, it is stress-tested to assess whether it will have a disproportionate impact on men compared to women. The process involves thinking ahead to identify the ways in which the policy can either advantage, or potentially disadvantage, men and women in different ways. These gender-based differences arise not necessarily by intent, but because of the different, industries, occupations, economic circumstances, and different roles in the household, organisations and wider community that men and women tend to take in their lives. It is also influenced by gender patterns in society that are less visible: for example, government support for apprenticeship training will disproportionately benefit males, because males comprise the majority of apprentices. As another example, government investment in physical infrastructure has the effect of generating demand for more jobs for men than for women, because the workforces and businesses hired in these infrastructure projects (such as construction, engineering and trades) are male-dominated sectors.

Gender Responsive Budgeting is not about deprioritising policies that are found to disproportionately benefit men. Rather, it is about identifying ways to adjust or bring in other initiatives that would offset these gender effects. For example, publicly-funded physical infrastructure projects could require the construction companies and suppliers contracted to deliver the project to have gender equitable policies in place and to provide evidence that their policies are proving to make these sectors more supportive of and safer for women.

*Investing in Gender Responsive Budgeting should not be viewed as "another layer of bureaucracy". On the contrary, it improves the robustness of policymaking. Instilling gender lensing to government policy means that policymakers are factually informed about the ways that their proposed budgetary measures will impact all Queenslanders. This is an essential ingredient for more effective, responsible and equitable policymaking.<sup>3</sup>*

There is immense scope for the Queensland Government to lock in and consolidate the progress it has already made on gender equality initiatives by establishing a formal process of Gender Responsive Budgeting in its policymaking. Taking this step to legislate Gender Responsive Budgeting, and invest in the capacity to undertake this process in its subsequent budgets, would not only strengthen the Government's prospects of achieving its gender equality goals – it would also preserve this current Government's legacy and secure Queensland's path towards gender equality beyond the current budget and onward into the future.

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<sup>2</sup> Gender analysis toolkit, Office for Women and Violence Prevention, Queensland Government <https://www.justice.qld.gov.au/about-us/services/women-violence-prevention/women/queensland-womens-strategy/applying-gender-lens/gender-analysis-toolkit>

<sup>3</sup> I offer further explanation, and a practical analytical example, of Gender Responsive Budgeting, applied to the Queensland State Budget, in a commissioned report that I undertook for the Queensland Council of Social Service. The report provides a basic illustration of what Gender Responsive Budgeting is and how to use the analytical findings to adapt policy to be more gender equitable.

### 3) Properly valuation of care services

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical important of healthcare and community services as an essential thread that keeps society and the economy stitched together. Yet the pandemic also revealed the extent to which these sectors and their workforces are under-valued and under-resourced. Care services applies to frontline health workers, as well as workers who provide childcare, disability care, aged care, mental health services, and community services.

Although a significant component of funding of Queensland's care sector depends on funding allocation from the Federal Government, there is scope for State Governments to collectively initiate and press for national level reform on these funding allocation decisions. While government pushback with funding concerns, the research also shows that expansions in public provision of care services (including childcare, aged care and disability care) actually pays for itself, as it enables more women with caring responsibilities to participate more fully in the paid workforce, and flows through into higher income, spending and therefore tax revenue for the government.<sup>4</sup>

*Investing in the healthcare workforce, including through lifting pay and working conditions, is not just about improving outcomes for these women: it is about acknowledging the true value of care work.*

- What learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic are critical to inform a new Queensland Women's Strategy?

As noted in point (3) above, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of the healthcare sector, including the provision of mental health care and community services. The healthcare and social assistance industry is a female-concentrated sector, providing employment for around one in five Queensland women.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic has highlighted the need to invest the healthcare sector, and especially in its people, as an essential component of a safe and resilient society and as a building block for a flourishing economy. The role of care as a profession also needs to be elevated in status and respect within society.

- What can be done in Queensland to address persistent gender stereotypes, and conscious and unconscious gender bias?

Government can play a role in the dissemination of well-informed guidance for organisations on how to equitably facilitate workplace practices that minimise the distortionary impact of unconscious bias. This is especially critical as organisations adopt to longer-term working-from-home arrangements as the COVID-19 pandemic continues: while there is potential for flexible working arrangements to support women's workforce participation by facilitating a more manageable balance of work and caring responsibilities, there is also a risk that workers who are not present "in the office" will be marginalised and overlooked for career opportunities, and miss out on the benefits of networks and in-person connections. Drawing on insights from organisational psychology and management, it can be inferred that such biases will predominantly disadvantage

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<sup>4</sup> Dixon, J. (2021) Simulations of increased government expenditure in the care sectors, Appendix A, Independent modelling published by National Foundation for Australian Women, Gender Lens on the Budget 2020-2021 <<https://nfw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A.pdf>>

<sup>5</sup> ABS (2021) Labour Force Australia.

women unless strategic interventions are put in place to ensure inclusion.<sup>6</sup> Awareness about these types of risks or threats to equality is an example of the type of information that needs to be disseminated to workplaces and business leaders, to ensure that organisations' responses to COVID-19 pandemic do not inadvertently jeopardise progress.

While much public resourcing on gender equality is channelled towards activities to improve women's individual capacity (for example, scholarships for women in STEM), organisation-level approaches can be more effective by addressing the systemic factors that give rise to inequality and deter these women's from entering or remaining in these fields. Organisational-level approaches places the onus on institutions and organisations to realise their role and responsibility for curating a bias-free, genuinely meritocratic workplace, as opposed to placing the onus on women to absorb the costs of a biased system and attempt to modify their behaviours to fit in to this biased system. A knowledge on unconscious bias and gender norms also equips individual women – once they have succeeded in entering traditionally-male workplace and stepping into positions of influence and leadership – to work towards changing the institutional structure and culture that they part of, helping to further break down barriers for the next generation that follows them.

The Queensland Government can play a role in propelling progress in 'de-biasing' organisations. This could be through informational awareness, support for organisations to invest in improving their practices and processes, and through incentive and reward mechanisms such as accreditation systems. Incentive strategy can also entail making grants and procurement opportunities contingent on an organisation demonstrating a research-driven approach to gender equality and the achievement of meaningful indicators of progress.

These seeds of these gender norms and stereotypes are sown early on a person's life: the Queensland Government can also play an essential role in bringing into place educational programs within schools to alert young people to the existence of gender stereotypes and biases, and equip them with the knowledge of what works to challenge these biases and replace them with healthier ideals.

- What do you think would be the most positive difference a new Queensland Women's Strategy could make for women, girls and gender equality in Queensland?

An outcome that would truly signify progress is addressing rates of violence against women: to not simply reduce it, but to eliminate it. Adopting the aim of eliminating violence, rather than simply reducing it, is an important distinction because it aligns with human rights<sup>7</sup> and does not allow room for tolerance.

Rates of violence against women are a metric that reflect a multitude of other dimensions of gender inequality, including those that are difficult to see or measure. The common denominator underpinning any act of de-valuing, denigration, subordination, marginalisation, or harm against women – from harassment and violence, to pay inequity and sexist jokes – is a belief that masculinity equates to power, supremacy and control.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibarra, H., Gillard, J. and Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2020) Why WFH Isn't Necessarily Good for Women, *Harvard Business Review*, 16 July 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations <https://www.ohchr.org/en/hrbodies/cedaw/pages/cedawindex.aspx>

- **What does a gender-equal Queensland look like?**

A gender-equal Queensland means a society where women have the freedoms and opportunities to participate fully in all dimensions of society, and to be treated and valued fairly for their contributions – on par with the opportunities and valuation of worth that applies to men.

A gender-equal Queensland also means one where *all* women have the same opportunities as men. This means addressing the biases and barriers that confront and unfairly impeded women from disadvantaged cohorts, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women, women with disabilities, women who identify as LGBTQL, women from culturally and linguistically under-represented backgrounds, women from geographically remote areas, and women with caring responsibilities.

Addressing the needs of women and girls, and pursuing gender equality, requires not just focusing on women and girls: men and boys are part of gender equality too. Gender equality requires educating everyone about the prevalence of gender biases and norms, and pointing out the ways that gender stereotypes disadvantage both men and women.

It is important that men and boys do not feel sidelined or threatened by the pursuit of gender equality in society, otherwise efforts to support women and girls' rights and opportunities can be derailed and challenged by retaliation and backlash.

- **What do you consider to be the key role of the Queensland Government in addressing the needs of women and girls and driving gender equality?**

The Queensland Government can have a powerful influence by leading by example: it can commit to being a model of best practice in gender equality practice, within its own workforce as well as in its delivery of public services. It can also promote awareness and best practice throughout the private sector and other community organisations, through supporting and incentivizing best practices for gender equality and sharing evidence-based information on what works to reduce gender inequities and bias.

The Queensland Government also plays a key role by defining what gender equality encompasses and contributing to the measurement and monitoring of gender equality indicators of progress, such as the comprehensive set of data that is collated and publicly shared via the Queensland Women's Strategy Report Cards. This clearly conveys the Queensland Government's recognition of the importance of this goal and its understanding of the broad dimensions of social and economic outcomes that gender equality relates to – participation and leadership; economic security; safety; and health and wellbeing.

It is strongly recommended that the Queensland Government continues to invest in this reporting initiative. Where there is scope to improve upon in the future is to continue to improve the disaggregation of data according to other dimensions of identity (such as First Nations women, migrant women, women with a disability, and women from low socioeconomic backgrounds). There is also scope to expand the concept of these metrics to be indicators of 'gender equality' more holistically, beyond a focus on women. For example, a key indicator of progress on gender equality is the proportion of men who take parental leave, the proportion of unpaid care and

domestic work undertaken by men, and men's representation in fields where they are traditionally under-represented such as nursing. In other words, although we place focus on improving women's representation in such areas as STEM, leadership and political positions, efforts focus is placed on lifting men's involvement in the activities and role which are traditionally considered to be the domain of women. Improvements in these dimensions would bring about benefits from both men and women, help to break down restrictive stereotypes, and lead to a more gender-balanced society.

In governments' efforts to achieve gender equality, a dimension of change that it often overlooked is the force of resistance and retaliation that can be activated in response to social change. Proponents of gender equality might make the assumption that, as women make progress, it will be well received by society. Yet research shows that women who disrupt the status quo and step into traditionally male-dominated roles – particularly when stepping into positions of influence and authority – are subject to hostility, criticism, denigration that seeks to undermine their value and is not applied to men in equivalent roles. This is particularly visible in the treatment of women in the media and in politics. This lack of support, backlash and hostility towards women's progress can also come from other women themselves, including those who also place a high value on the adherence to traditional norms and women who fear that policies to support women's advancement threatens women's opportunities to prove their capacity through "merit".

One of the most harrowing illustrations of retaliation against women's progress comes from a study of Australian households where the female partner begins to out-earn her male partner: it is found that this improvement in women's workforce earning is associated with an increased likelihood of domestic violence and emotional abuse.<sup>8</sup> because this undermines the male-breadwinner/female-care-giver norm. If initiatives aimed at supporting women's economic progress are to succeed, it is essential to also invest in initiatives that nurture a society that genuinely embraces and accepts successful women. We are far from that achieving that type of culture, and it is understandable that those in power perceive gender equality initiatives as a threat to the opportunities, status and authority personally afforded to them. Nurturing a society where men are encouraged to aspire to more than wealth, status and power will mean that women's economic progress is less of a threat, less likely to face retaliation and resistance, and more likely to be genuinely and sustainably achieved.

*An important role that the Queensland Government can take, to support long-lasting progress towards equality, is to invest in research and practical strategies to combat resistance to progress on gender equality – this is currently an overlooked component in most public policy strategies.*

In the remainder of the submission, I expand on this points above share some evidence-based strategies that relate to the issues relevant to the Queensland Women's Strategy.

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<sup>8</sup> Zhang, Y. and Breunig, R. (2021) 'Gender Norms and Domestic Abuse: Evidence From Australia', IZA Discussion Paper No. 14225, Institute of Labor Economics.

## Evidence-based strategies to address gender inequities

Much of the research in the field of gender inequality traces these gender gaps back to the influence of biases and societal norms that are embedded in workplaces practices, business decision-making, institutional systems, and the societal culture that shapes our behaviours in everyday life. Closing gender gaps and achieving equity on the basis of gender requires dismantling these biases and structures.

The evidence base in this field points towards several system-based interventions that can form part of the package of initiatives that can be promoted, incentivised or directly implemented by the government.

### 1) Set up formal systems for gender gap auditing and reporting, supported by toolkits and resources

The Queensland Government has demonstrated excellent initiative in analysing and disseminating a range of metrics on gender equality, produced in the Women's Strategy Report cards.<sup>9</sup>

There is scope for this form of gender gap measurement and reporting to be undertaken more widely and systematically at the level of organisations. Organisations that regularly conduct gender pay gap audits, and systematically report on the outcomes of their gender gap audits, are more likely to see a narrowing of their gender pay gap. This finding came out of the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre's analysis of company-specific data that is collected by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).<sup>10</sup>

Under the Workforce Gender Equality Act, all private sector companies with 100 or more employees are already required to report to WGEA annually on a set of gender equality indicators, including a measurement of pay gaps, and whether the organisation has strategies in place to address gender inequities.<sup>11</sup> The WGEA dataset covers nearly 4.4 million employees, equivalent to at least 40 per cent of the Australian workforce. Non-compliant organisations can be listed publicly.<sup>12</sup>

While WGEA requires companies to report on their gender pay gap and other gender inequality metrics, there are additional steps that companies can take beyond merely reporting on their data. The BCEC detected that undertaking a gender pay gap audit and establishing measures of accountability, such as a formal commitment by the company to report the outcomes of the audit to the company's Board or Executive, corresponds to a greater narrowing of gender gaps within an organisation. WGEA's requirements do not obligate companies to have these accountability measure in place, but asks them to report on whether or not they do. WGEA has found that the absence of these accountability measures can lead to what has described as an "action gap", where analytical insights are generated but not acted on.<sup>13</sup> BCEC's analysis of the WGEA data detected that companies that ceased to conduct a pay gap gender audit did not just stall, but regressed, on gender equality indicators. Institutionalising

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<sup>9</sup> Women's Strategy Report Cards, Queensland Government <<https://www.publications.qld.gov.au/dataset/womens-strategy-report-cards>>

<sup>10</sup> Cassells, R. and Duncan, A. (2021) *Gender Equity Insights 2021: Making it a priority*, BCEC-WGEA Gender Equity Series, Issue no. 6 <[https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2021/03/BCEC-WGEA-Gender-Equity-Insights-2021\\_WEB.pdf](https://bcec.edu.au/assets/2021/03/BCEC-WGEA-Gender-Equity-Insights-2021_WEB.pdf)>

<sup>11</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/about>>

<sup>12</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/what-we-do/compliance-reporting/non-compliant-list>>

<sup>13</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/newsroom/new-wgea-data-shows-employer-action-on-gender-equality-has-stalled>>

processes for gender gap analysis and accountability appear to provide the impetus for companies to convert their data collection efforts into action and ongoing progress.

An important element that supports the effectiveness of the WGEA reporting requirements is that WGEA provides a set of resources, including analytical toolkits and research-driven information, that equips organisations with the capacity to adequately undertake this analysis and use their insights constructively.

Private companies with fewer than 100 employees are exempt from WGEA reporting requirements. The public sector is also not obligated to report to WGEA. WGEA have recently initiated processes for all State and Federal Governments to voluntarily participate in WGEA's gender gap reporting process.<sup>14</sup> *There is scope for the Queensland Government to participate in this voluntary WGEA reporting process as a signal of its commitment to gender equality, as an exemplar of best practice, and as a leading jurisdiction this space.*

There is scope for the Queensland Government to design mechanisms for private sector employers with fewer than 100 employees, and potentially other community organisations beyond workplaces, to be supported to engage in these gender equality practices. This does not necessarily have to be on a mandatory basis, but could be incentivised on a voluntary basis, with a primary focus on broadening the accessibility of informational resources and toolkits for change to these organisations.

Supporting these organisations to engage in gender equality practices can entail identifying and addressing any costs or resourcing constraints that prohibits smaller sized firms from analysing their gender pay gap and implementing more equitable practices. In relation to organisation size, a recent analysis of gender gap reporting processes across multiple countries including Australia, conducted by the Global Institute for Women's Leadership, highlighted the effectiveness of reporting requirements as a mechanism for closing gender gaps in pay and workforce outcomes, and prescribed that the threshold size for reporting obligations should be lowered to 50 employees so as to expand the share of the total workforce who benefit from these reporting requirements.<sup>15</sup> In addition to resourcing capabilities, the complexities of preserving analytical robustness when conducting disaggregated analyses and pay gap audits on small-sized datasets needs to be considered.

Expanding the scope of these gender equality practices is not necessarily about expanding legal obligations, but extending the availability and accessibility of the knowledge and information that these reporting agencies offer. Agencies such as WGEA have invested in developing evidence-based informational resources and practical guidance to support organisations to adopt more gender equitable practices. There is also potential for the Queensland Government to further its investment in research and connections with the research community.

In addition to companies' reporting obligations, WGEA provides incentives for organisations to implement practical steps to promote and achieve gender equality through the Employer of Choice accreditation scheme.<sup>16</sup> The scheme is well designed to recognise best practice gender equality policies in the corporate space. However, it is possible that the HR capacity and administrative resourcing required of companies to fulfil the accreditation process, or even the fee to participate in the EOC accreditation scheme, could be prohibitive for some smaller-sized enterprises. There is potential for

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<sup>14</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/what-we-do/reporting>>

<sup>15</sup> Global Institute for Women's Leadership and Fawcett Society (2021) *Gender pay gap reporting: A comparative analysis*, King's College London <<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/research/gender-pay-gap-reporting-comparative-analysis>>

<sup>16</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency <<https://www.wgea.gov.au/what-we-do/employer-of-choice-for-gender-equality>>

governments to investigate the extent to which small and medium enterprises, and their employees, are impeded from engaging with these gender equality initiatives and resources.

In light of the many ways that the effect of gender can be compounded by the biases and barriers associated with sociodemographic characteristics, there is scope to improve the data collection mechanisms that would enable an intersectional lens to be applied to gender pay gap analysis. However, collecting information disaggregated by sociodemographic characteristics brings additional resourcing requirements and other practical challenges for all organisations. The privacy and personal sensitivities surrounding the collection and analysis of data of this nature are among these challenges. Mechanisms to improve this data infrastructure can be explored, including through government consultation with workplaces about the difficulties of collating intersectional data.

The reporting requirements of WGEA do not obligate that analyses of companies' gender gaps are published *publicly*. There is currently interest and debate as to whether this step would help to accelerate progress on gender equality. As an indication of the effects of mandated transparency in gender gap reporting, a longitudinal analysis of the impact of mandated transparency enacted by legislation in Denmark in 2006 found that the policy resulted in a narrowing of the gender pay gap among companies.<sup>17</sup> The analysis shows that this outcome arose due to a slowdown in the pace of men's wage growth. It resulted in an overall lower wage bill for the organisation, and without any reduction in productivity. The relative advantages and potential risks of adopting public reporting is an issue for further exploration and analysis for governing bodies.

To provide an example of a legislative initiative that another jurisdiction has recently taken, the Victorian Government has recently brought into effect the Gender Equality Act. Victoria's Gender Equality Act requires all Victorian public sector departments and agencies to conduct a gender audit of their workforce, as well as to apply a gender impact assessment of its delivery of public services.<sup>18</sup> Victoria's Gender Equality Act originated from the 2016 Royal Commission into Family Violence.<sup>19</sup> The Royal Commission found that, in order to reduce family violence and all forms of violence against women, Victoria needs to address the gender inequality that systemically prevailed in broader society. In response, in 2016 the Victorian Government released Victoria's first gender equality strategy, "Safe and Strong", where the Victorian government committed to legislative change to promote gender equality. This legislation illustrated a recognition that violence and disrespect against women is enabled by the gender biases and barriers that persist, often implicitly, in everyday organisational practices and behaviours. It is hoped that this recognition the link between violence against women and the prevalence of gender biased behaviour in everyday workplaces and society, is particularly informative for the Queensland Government, given the State's concerted efforts to address the issue of violence against women and the connected issue of coercive control.

## 2) Provide toolkits to de-bias organisational practices

Research from behavioural economics and organisational management highlights the many ways that organisations perpetuate gender biases and traditional gender norms in their everyday workplace practices. Examples include the subjective judgements, affinity biases and other forms of unconscious

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<sup>17</sup> Bennedsen, M., Simintzi, E., Tsoutsoura, M. and Wolfenzon. D. (2019) Do firms response to gender pay gap transparency? NBER Working Paper No. 25435 <[https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w25435/w25435.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w25435/w25435.pdf)>

<sup>18</sup> Victoria's Gender Equality Act 2020 is overseen by the Commission for Gender Equality in the Public Sector <<https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/about-gender-equality-act-2020>>

<sup>19</sup> <https://www.genderequalitycommission.vic.gov.au/history-gender-equality-act-2020>

or implicit biases that can enter into workplace decisions in relation to pay, hiring, promotion, leadership appointments, and performance evaluation. It extends to decisions regarding the allocation of capital funding and the choice of which projects or entrepreneurs to financially back, leading to a concerning under-representation of female-led innovations and investment in ventures that would address women's needs.<sup>20</sup>

A growing body of research-based insights is available on the interventions that work to interrupt subjective biases and design environments where more objective, gender equitable workplace outcomes can be achieved. As an example, a collation of these evidence-based insights are available in the work of Professor Iris Bohnet, behavioural economist and member of the G7 Advisory Council on Gender Equality, in the publication 'What Works: Gender Equality By Design'.<sup>21</sup>

Government can play a role in the dissemination of well-informed guidance for organisations on how to equitably facilitate workplace practices that minimise the distortionary impact of unconscious bias. This is especially critical as organisations adopt to longer-term working-from-home arrangements as the COVID-19 pandemic continues: while there is potential for flexible working arrangements to support women's workforce participation by facilitating a more manageable balance of work and caring responsibilities, there is also a risk that workers who are not present "in the office" will be marginalised and overlooked for career opportunities, and miss out on the benefits of networks and in-person connections. Drawing on insights from organisational psychology and management, it can be inferred that such biases will predominantly disadvantage women unless strategic interventions are put in place to ensure inclusion.<sup>22</sup> Awareness about these types of risks or threats to equality is an example of the type of information that needs to be disseminated to workplaces and business leaders, to ensure that organisations' responses to COVID-19 pandemic do not inadvertently jeopardise progress.

While much public resourcing on gender equality is channelled towards activities to improve women's individual capacity (for example, scholarships for women in STEM), organisation-level approaches can be more effective by addressing the systemic factors that give rise to inequality. Organisational-level approaches places the onus on institutions and organisations to realise their role and responsibility for curating a bias-free, genuinely meritocratic workplace, as opposed to placing the onus on women to absorb the costs of a biased system and attempt to modify their behaviours to fit in to this biased system. A knowledge on unconscious bias and gender norms also equips individual women – once they have succeeded in entering traditionally-male workplace and stepping into positions of influence and leadership – to work towards changing the institutional structure and culture that they part of, helping to further break down barriers for the next generation that follows them.

The Queensland Government can play a role in propelling progress in 'de-biasing' organisations. This could be through informational awareness and support for capacity building, as well as through incentive and reward mechanisms such as accreditation systems and making grants or procurement opportunities contingent on an organisation demonstrating a research-driven approach to gender equality and the achievement of meaningful indicators of progress.

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<sup>20</sup> Venture Capital and Entrepreneurship, Women and Public Policy Program, Harvard Kennedy School  
<<https://wappp.hks.harvard.edu/venture-capital-and-entrepreneurship>>

<sup>21</sup> Bohnet, I. (2016) *What Works: Gender Equality By Design*, Harvard University Press  
<[https://scholar.harvard.edu/iris\\_bohnet/what-works](https://scholar.harvard.edu/iris_bohnet/what-works)>

<sup>22</sup> Ibarra, H., Gillard, J. and Chamorro-Premuzic, T. (2020) Why WFH Isn't Necessarily Good for Women, *Harvard Business Review*, 16 July 2020.

In addition to strategies to promote gender equality and de-bias practices *within* organisation, an important complementary dimension of organisations' contributions to gender equality and women's economic outcomes is via the way that organisations, businesses and funders choose to invest their capital and resources. Investment can take the form of direct investment of enterprises, such as through backing new venture capital projects, as well as their choices of how to invest their capital in existing companies, product development, technical and scientific investments, cultural and media products, and advertising platforms. It is well recognised that existing capital allocation decisions are biased in ways that disadvantage women and sideline investments that would deliver benefits and progress for women.<sup>23</sup> There is scope for the Queensland Government to help to systematically attain transparent information on which businesses, ventures and investments would contribute to gender equality and positively shifting gender norms – and those that simply perpetuate existing inequalities and traditional norms. This is part of a shift towards a value-driven, conscientious investing that governments can play a role in through information collation and leading by example. It is also likely that gender-aware and ethical investment criteria will become more prominent in the future as corporate social responsibility. There is scope for the Queensland Government to expand support for existing initiatives that promote and support the practice of 'gender lens' investing, which often operate in the not-for-profit, philanthropic space but offers a framework that could be upscaled and formalised by businesses more systematically.<sup>24</sup>

### 3) Dismantle gender norms for men and women

The pursuit of gender equality requires policy interventions that dismantle traditional gender norms surrounding the expected roles of men and women in society, which limit the opportunities of both women and men. These norms perpetuate disparities in economic outcomes, but also have repercussion for mental health and wellbeing of both men and women. There is solid evidence that allegiance to traditional gender norms is the common denominator and more powerful underlying factor that predicts violence against women.<sup>25</sup>

The pursuit of gender equality requires policy interventions that tackle both the under-representation of women in traditionally male-dominated roles, but also the under-representation of men in traditionally female-dominated roles, which generally receives much less policy attention. The issue of gender segregation and pay inequities in the workforce has been examined by the Australian Government Senate Inquiry 'Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality', chaired by Senator Jenny McAllister in 2017.<sup>26</sup> Many of the policy recommendations generated by this Senate Inquiry are relevant to the Queensland Government's gender equality strategy.

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<sup>23</sup> Koning, R., Nanda, R., and Cao, R. (2021) One More Way the Startup World Hampers Women Entrepreneurs, Working Knowledge, Harvard Business School <<https://hbswk.hbs.edu/item/one-more-way-the-startup-world-hampers-women-entrepreneurs>>

<sup>24</sup> An example is Australians Investing In Women (AIW).

<sup>25</sup> Our Watch, Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) and VicHealth (2015) *Change the story: A shared framework for the primary prevention of violence against women and their children in Australia*, Our Watch. <<https://www.ourwatch.org.au/resource/change-the-story-a-shared-framework-for-the-primary-prevention-of-violence-against-women-and-their-children-in-australia>>

<sup>26</sup> Senate Committee (2017) *Gender segregation in the workplace and its impact on women's economic equality*, Parliament of Australia <[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance\\_and\\_Public\\_Administration/Gendersegregation](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Gendersegregation)>

In terms of policy action, parental leave for fathers is one of the key policies that supports women's employment outcomes through shifting gender norms surrounding parental caregiving within households, and specifically shifting parental involvement among fathers. Canada provides a case example and evidence of policy effectiveness that is instructive for Queensland, with the province of Québec implementing the Québec Parental Insurance Plan in 2006. The provision of five weeks of non-transferable parental leave to fathers, paid at 70% to 75% of wage replacement rate, had the effect of increasing fathers' contribution to unpaid household duties, as well as increasing women's labour force participation, and specifically in full-time employment.<sup>27</sup>

This shift in fathers' behaviour in parenthood was found to generate longer-term effects that can help sustain gender equality goals into the future. Québec's parental leave policy improved fathers' bonding with their children, challenging the traditional gender norm that constricts men from experiencing this important emotional dimension and caring role in their lives. Within households of heterosexual couples, parental leave for fathers has been shown to dismantle gender norms within the attitudes of the next generation of children.<sup>28</sup> These shifts can contribute to sustainable progress in gender equality over time across various aspects of society.

When putting this policy into practice, it is not sufficient to simply offer parental policy to men – the stigma and social penalties associated with contravening traditional norms stands in the way of men being able to make use of these policies. The Canadian experience attests to the tensions and negative stigma that fathers faced in their own workplaces when aspiring to make use of the parental leave on offer to them, reflective of the impedimentary influence of cultural norms.<sup>29</sup> Accompanying the provision of non-transferable parental leave for fathers, strategic investment is therefore also needed to shift cultural norms surrounding the expected roles of men in society, to make it more socially legitimate for men to take on these caring and parental roles.

While this analysis has been based on a heterosexual couple household, with the aim of improving fathers' involvement in childrearing and mothers' opportunity to engage in work outside of the home, policy entitlements should of course be articulated in a way that is fitting for same-sex couples and single parents. There is also scope to do more to promote men's uptake of care leave beyond parental leave. A way to promote and legitimise parental leave uptake among men is to draw upon tools of behavioural science to design the policy as an 'opt-in' policy by default. This approach would mean that any father to has a child is automatically assigned their leave entitlement, and must take additional steps to 'opt out' of taking leave. The opt-in by design mechanism has proven to be a distinctive feature of policy uptake across a range of settings.<sup>30</sup> *The Queensland Government can lead by example by extending non-transferable parental leave for fathers in the Queensland Public Sector and encourage its adoption in the private sector too.*

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<sup>27</sup> Dunatchik, A. and Özcan, B. (2019) Reducing Mommy Penalties with Daddy Quotas, Working Paper No. CASE/213, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics; Patnaik, A. (2019) Reserving time for Daddy: The consequences of fathers' quotas, *Journal of Labor Economics*, 37(4): 1009-1059; Wray, D. (2020) Paternity Leave and Fathers' Responsibility: Evidence From a Natural Experiment in Canada, *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 82(2): 534-549.

<sup>28</sup> Unterhofer, U. and Wrohlich, K. (2017) Fathers, Parental Leave and Gender Norms, IZA Discussion Paper No. 10712.

<sup>29</sup> Harvey, V. and Tremblay, D.G. (2020) Paternity leave in Québec: between social objectives and workplace challenges, *Community, Work and Family*, 23(3): 253-269.

<sup>30</sup> Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA) (2018) *Harnessing the power of defaults*, Governance Note, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Australian Government.

<<https://behaviouraleconomics.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/resources/harnessing-power-defaults.pdf>>

Shifting societal norms – for the betterment of women, men and individuals of all genders – needs to also encompass investing in programs and strategies that encourage and reward men and boys to aspire to unpaid caring roles in their families and community, and vocations in the care sector in the paid workforce. *Government has the opportunity to do much more in this space of shifting social norms and alleviating the pressure that is placed on men to conform to harmful and constrictive notions of masculinity. Because the seeds of these gender norms are sown very early in life, government investment in these programs should span to educational programs.* An example of an excellent initiative designed to support men and boys to break free of the constraining norms of traditional masculinity is the Men's Project, developed by the Jesuit Society in partnership with academic researcher Professor Michael Flood of QUT.<sup>31</sup>

While much focus is placed on supporting and empowering women to step into non-traditional roles, in my own assessment government policy has done comparatively very little to support men to do the same. This oversight will not only curtail the potential effectiveness of female-focused policies, it could actually trigger negative ramifications for women. For example, research shows that improvements in women's economic earnings above that of her male partner is linked to a higher risk of domestic violence and emotional abuse, because this undermines the male-breadwinner/female-care-giver norm. If initiatives aimed at supporting women's economic progress are to succeed, it is essential to also invest in initiatives that nurture a society that genuinely embraces and accepts successful women. We are far from that achieving that type of culture, and it is understandable that those in power perceive gender equality initiatives as a threat to the opportunities, status and authority personally afforded to them. Nurturing a society where men are encouraged to aspire to more than wealth, status and power will mean that women's economic progress is less of a threat, less likely to face retaliation and resistance, and more likely to be genuinely and sustainably achieved.

*The potential for the government to take on a role in informing, influencing and incentivising gender-aware capital investment decisions, through the application of Gender Lens investing, also applies to identifying investments that meaningfully shift gender norms.* Beyond simply achieving equality and diversity of representation which is often an initial target for gender equality programs, it is the process of shifting gender norms that will genuinely drive and sustain fundamental change.

#### 4) Embed educational insights and capacity-building into the policy package

Policies that aim to incentivise, promote or mandate gender equality initiatives need to be accompanied by opportunities for people to build their own understanding of the existence, causes and consequences of gender bias, and for this understanding to be factually informed by the research. This equips people to build a genuine understanding of the rationale for these policies being implemented. Research shows the absence of a genuine belief that equality initiatives are warranted can lead to negative repercussions, including workers exerting lesser effort and commitment to their job when gender equality policies are implemented.<sup>32</sup> There is also an ongoing risk of resentment, retaliation or pushback against equality and diversity initiatives, that can stem from a perception that these initiatives

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<sup>31</sup> The Men's Project and Flood, M, (2018) *The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne. Also see <<https://jss.org.au/what-we-do/the-mens-project>>

<sup>32</sup> Ip, E., Leibbrandt A., and Vecci, J. (2020) Do gender quotas damage hierarchical relationships? Complementary evidence from a representative survey and labor market experiments, *Journal of Management Science*, 66(2): 805-822.

jeopardise opportunities for the non-target cohort and threaten the value of tradition.<sup>33</sup> This can ultimately undermine the entire effectiveness of any attempts to initiate progress.

*Government investment in programs and mechanisms to collate, translate and disseminate research-based insights on gender bias in an educational, factual way to organisations and workplaces will enhance the likely effectiveness of the gender equality initiatives in which it is investing.* This can be facilitated through informational resources and campaigns, including through educational bodies to reach younger generations and through public awareness campaigns, and through investment in research translation and communication initiatives with the academic and research community. Tailoring the information to explain the way that gender bias is compounded by other forms of bias attached to sociodemographic characteristics and dimensions of personal identity is a critical part of this initiative too. In addition to the resources provided by agencies such as WGEA to equip organisations, resources and 'community of practice' models have also been developed by the Victorian Government health agency, VicHealth. In addition to a concerted focus on preventing violence against women, VicHealth's work also has applicability to workforce practices, including breaking down gender stereotypes, using behavioural economics to address unconscious bias, and drawing upon psychological insights to understand resistance to gender equality initiatives and achieve more effective messaging.<sup>34</sup> *To optimise the effectiveness of all other initiatives aiming to promote women's advancement in society, there would be immense value in the Queensland Government investing in a stream of research-based resources on how to manage resistance to gender equality initiatives, that has practice applicability to workplaces and community organisations.* The work of various other women's health and advocacy community groups in Queensland, whose insights and initiatives are well informed by the lived experiences of women and communities, also contributes valuable insights towards this knowledge base.

## 5) Address pay equity and the undervaluation of work undertaken by women

A large body of research into gender pay gaps attests that a key factor for the overall earnings gap<sup>35</sup> between men and women is the gender segregated nature of segments of Australia's workforce, particularly with respect to terms of workers' industry and occupation of employment.

The low average pay of some female-dominated sectors is in part attributed to their relatively flat pay gradient, where earnings do not rise significantly in commensuration with a worker's accumulated years of experience, skill or longevity of service, in the same way that many other higher-paying sectors are characterised by an upwards pay trajectory. This is illustrated in the Grattan Institute's report analysing the earnings of teachers over their working lives, in comparison to other professions that also require a university degree (Chart 2).<sup>36</sup> This presents an opportunity for the government, in enterprise bargaining and wage-setting processes, to focus on mechanisms for formalising workers' career

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<sup>33</sup> Anglim, J., Sojo, V., Ashford, L.J., Newman, A. and Marty, A. (2019) Predicting employee attitudes to workplace diversity from personality, values, and cognitive ability, *Journal of Research in Personality*, 83: 1-14.

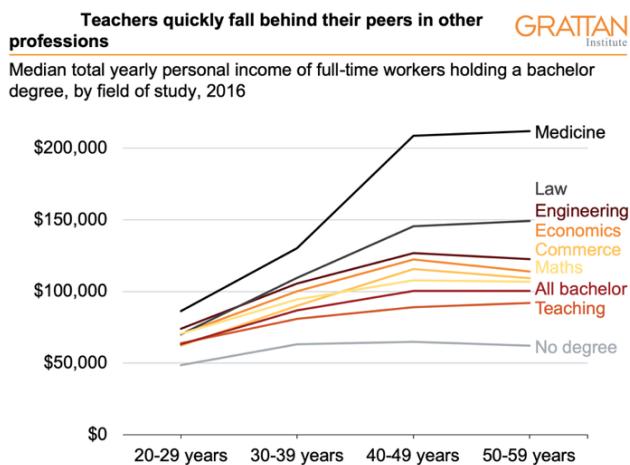
<sup>34</sup> VicHealth (2018) *(En)counteracting resistance: Strategies to respond to resistance to gender equality initiatives*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Victorian Government <<https://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au/-/media/ResourceCentre/PublicationsandResources/PVAW/Encountering-Resistance-Gender-Equality.pdf>>

<sup>35</sup> Based on the latest data available, the average weekly ordinary-time earnings for full-time workers in Queensland in May 2021 were \$1752 for men and \$1479 for women, equivalent to a gender earnings gap of 15.5%. The national average gender gap was 14.2% (ABS Average Weekly Earnings, Australia. Cat. No. 6302.0).

<sup>36</sup> Goss, P. and Sonnemann, J. (2019) Attracting high achievers to teaching, Grattan Institute <<https://grattan.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/921-Attracting-high-achievers-to-teaching.pdf>>

trajectories in these sectors and better recognising, via remuneration, the value of the skills and specialist knowledge that is accumulated over their years of service.

Chart 3 – Annual personal income of full-time workers with Bachelor degree, according to field of employment



Source: Reproduced from Nolan, J. and Sonnemann, J. (2019) 'Three charts on teachers' pay in Australia', Grattan Institute <<https://grattan.edu.au/news/three-charts-on-teachers-pay-in-australia/>>

The low pay rate of female-concentrated sectors can also be understood as an under-valuation of jobs that involve the delivery of care and other human services that align with the domain of women prescribed by the 'male-breadwinner and female-caregiver' model of society. The pandemic has highlighted the society-wide value of these traditionally female professions, which is not fully reflected in the wage rates paid to these individual workers. In economic terms, the inadequacy of existing wage setting mechanisms to accurately capture the true value of these workers' output to the economy, and overall functioning of society, is akin to a 'market failure' associated with a positive externality. When the positive value that a product or service generates for society is not factored into its market price (in this case, when the social value of care work is not factored into the wage rate of workers), the market mechanism will generate an insufficient level of output. In the case of the delivery of care and human services, this market failure is manifested in a shortfall in skilled workers relative to society's needs. This is being observed with reported shortages of workers in these care sectors, as highlighted by the recent Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety which flagged acute concerns about shortages of nurses, allied health workers, personal care workers and aged care specialists such as workers with specialist expertise in dementia.<sup>37</sup> In the education sector, this shortfall can also take the form of teachers teaching subjects outside of their subject knowledge (that is, teaching 'out-of-field') and shortages of education specialists such as experts to assist students with learning difficulties and additional needs.<sup>38</sup>

An impediment to the achievement of gender pay equity via the current industrial relations tribunal system stems from the way that equal pay cases have arrived at their determinations by relying on a direct comparison between a female-dominated and male-dominated occupation. To put forward the case that a low-paid female-concentrated occupation should be paid more than their current rate, the

<sup>37</sup> Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety <<https://agedcare.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/final-report>>

<sup>38</sup> Weldon, P. R. (2016) Out-of-field teaching in Australian secondary schools. Policy Insights, no. 6), Australian Council for Educational Research <<https://research.acer.edu.au/policyinsights/6/>>; Prince, G. and O'Connor, M. (2018) Crunching the numbers on out-of-field teaching in maths, Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute <<https://amsi.org.au/media/AMSI-Occasional-Paper-Out-of-Field-Maths-Teaching.pdf>>

industrial relations tribunal system has evolved in a way that requires a comparably skilled, but higher-paid, male occupation to be identified (a “male comparator”). The case needs to be proven that the (relatively lower-paid) female-dominated occupation and (relatively higher-paid) male-dominated occupation require the level or same complexity of skills to perform their job, meaning that any differential in pay rates is attributed to a gender-based discrepancy that therefore constitutes an inequity. The success rate of equal pay cases that have been awarded on this rationale has proven to be extremely low. This points towards a need to address the fundamental undervaluation of traditionally women’s work through other means.

Queensland’s state industrial relations systems has made progress on pay equity by recognising the gender biases embedded in the precedent determinations of the Federal industrial relations system, and adopting a broader range of indicators to identify the undervaluation of work based on gender without depending on the logic of identifying a directly comparable male occupation. These advances in these state jurisdictions resulted from government-initiated inquiries and reviews which led to the development of equal remuneration principles.<sup>39</sup> *As part of this Women's Strategy process, the Queensland Government can consult specifically on this industrial relations issue to identify the extent to which the system is adequately addressing the under-valuation of women's work.*

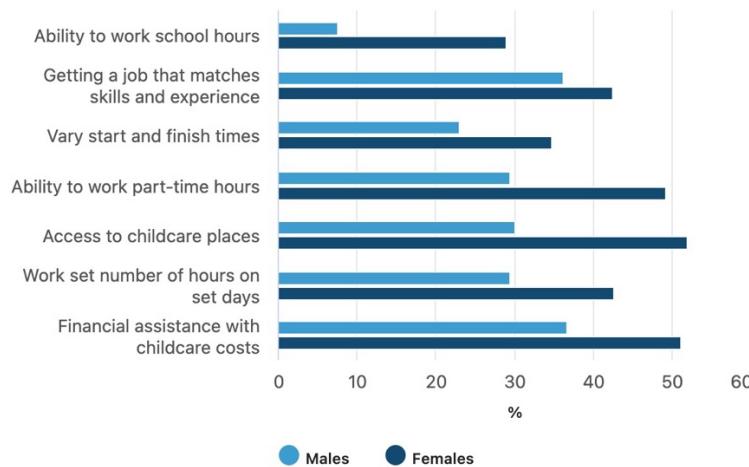
*Conducting an accurate valuation of work traditionally undertaken by women is an important step towards achieving equitable pay.* This has been encumbered by the conventional approaches on how to measure economic output and productivity. The ‘outputs’ of care work and provision of human-oriented services – such as healthcare and social assistance, childcare, aged care, community services, mental health services, disability care, and teaching and learning – are generally not easily quantified in the conventional way that statisticians measure the production of inanimate, physical goods that are retailed in the economy. The value of the provision of care and human services is not only less tangible, but extends far beyond the benefits accruing to the individual, and beyond the present time period. This value includes the economic gains of building a healthy, skilled population who will contribute of productive capacity of the workforce now and in the future. The provision of human services that build an individual’s earning capacity and financial self-sufficiency contributes towards alleviating demand on government welfare. *There would be benefit in the Queensland Government investing in a proper assessment of the value of the care workforce and ancillary industries, as a means of acknowledging the true worth of this sector and accurately informing wage determination decisions.*

The provision of care services is also a critical enabler of the labour force participation of women who have unpaid care responsibilities. The provision of formal care services permits these workers to allocate their time and capabilities towards paid workforce participation and make more productive use of their skills which benefits the economy overall. Shortfalls in access to childcare places and prohibitive childcare costs have been identified as the most common barriers to workforce participation for Australian women (Chart 4).

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<sup>39</sup> Smith, M. and Whitehouse, G. (2020) Wage-setting and gender pay equality in Australia: Advances, retreats and future prospects, *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 62(4): 533–559; Layton, R., Smith, M. and Stewart, A. (2013) Equal Remuneration under the Fair Work Act 2009, Report commissioned by the Fair Work Commission Pay Equity Unit  
<<https://www.fwc.gov.au/about-us/news-and-events/equal-remuneration-report-published>>

Chart 4 – Incentives to join or increase participation in the labour force, by gender



Source: ABS Barriers and Incentives to Labour Force Participation Australia, 2018-19.

The economic payoffs generated by the public provision of care services can be quantified by economic modelling. Estimates of the overall economic impacts of expanding the government provision of care services, to a level that would meet current shortfalls in availability, is found to generate an increase in GDP by activating higher hours of paid work among unpaid carers, translating into higher disposable income and therefore spending in the economy.<sup>40</sup> This stimulatory effect flows back to the government budget via the increase in revenue collected through income tax, business taxes and sales taxes, meaning that means that the initial outlay from the government budget largely pays for itself. The recurrent expenditure associated with this investment is matched by a future stream of recurrent benefits.

Despite this investment having the potential to boost a state's economic activity, the challenge for state jurisdictions is that a portion of these recurrent benefits technically flow to the Australian Government in the form of personal income tax and GST revenue. State governments will need to urge cooperation from the Australian Government to recognise the positive revenue and GDP implications of investments in the public provision of care services, including the future cost savings for the Australian Government's welfare system.

In government policy proposals that focus on improving the standards, quality, accessibility and availability of care services (such as in childcare and aged care), priority tends to be placed on increasing the number and delivery of places, but with lesser focus on investing in and adequately remunerating the workforce that deliver these services to the public. Expansions in staffing tend to be based on population projections, meaning that staff ratios do not expand. In addition to supporting the pipeline of suitably qualified workers needed to sustain these workforce and their quality of service provision, the pressure point that is commonly cited by governments is costs. This is where it is essential to more fully understand and recognise the society-wide benefits that these care workers generate, and how this compares to how much they are personally remunerated. There is always potential for total government expenditure to be reapportioned towards the investments that deliver greater economic

<sup>40</sup> Dixon, J. (2021) Simulations of increased government expenditure in the care sectors, Appendix A, Independent modelling published by National Foundation for Australian Women, Gender Lens on the Budget 2020-2021 <<https://nfw.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Appendix-A.pdf>>

benefit in terms of lifting women's workforce participation rates, and to implement taxes or levies on the industries, businesses and outputs that have proven to be the largest beneficiaries of government expenditure and investment allocations in the past. There is also a need to lift the status of these vocations in the eyes of the wider public, which is a characteristic of more progressive countries in the gender equality space.<sup>41</sup>

In acknowledging the recurrent benefits emanating from investment in care services and social infrastructure (including healthcare, social housing, aged care, mental health services, disability care, social assistance services, and education training), the institutional and incentive architecture that influences governments' priorities and investment decisions needs to be fully understood. It is possible that the way in which credit rating agencies determine their assessments are having the effect of elevating certain investment types over others, in a way that works again gender equality goals. Potentially, current systems of valuation might be leading to a prioritisation of projects that have traditionally been relied on for delivering immediate and quantifiable payoffs, and take the form of tangible assets (such as physical infrastructure). By comparison, identifying the payoffs and value of investments in services, such as childcare, are more complex, less visible, and are likely to be perceived as harder to "capture" or store, as opposed to a fixed asset. This makes analytical task of quantifying these benefits all the more important. *As part of its Women's Strategy, the Queensland Office for Women might gain insight by investigating the extent to which the State's credit rating is dependent on the nature of the infrastructure assets that the government holds – and whether this has the potential to bias a government's spending and investment decisions towards project that disproportionately support male-concentrated sectors.*

Hopefully the spread of COVID-19 continued to be kept under control in Queensland, however there is a risk of future outbreaks that would put Queensland's health services and care workforce under strain, as has been observed in Victoria and New South Wales. *If this occurs, there is strong justification for the expanded and tailored provision of mental health services and other professional support for the frontline workers who have experienced intensified work pressures throughout the pandemic, including in the female-concentrated healthcare and social assistance industry and the community and support services sector.* These investments are critical for minimising the risks of psychological burnout and attrition among these workers, and to ensure these professions continue to attract a pipeline of future workers. Pressures on the workforce sustainability of these sectors have been intensified by restrictions on labour mobility arising from international border closures. Professional career support may also take the form of assisting affected workers to temporarily pivot into other roles within their industry, to assist them in managing the trauma of working in frontline roles throughout the pandemic. Flexibility in the type of support offered, to match the needs of the individual worker, would be valuable.

*The provision of 'wellbeing leave', in addition to existing paid leave employment entitlements, is another form of support that can be considered for adoption in these high-pressure sectors, as an investment in workers' mental health and guarding against the risk of burnout and attrition.* Several organisations in Australia have provided this form of support to their staff, and it has also been implemented internationally.<sup>42</sup> This can also be encouraged across all sectors of the workforce as an investment of

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<sup>41</sup> Country note on Finland, Results from TALIS 2018, OECD  
<[https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TALIS2018\\_CN\\_FIN\\_Vol\\_II.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/talis/TALIS2018_CN_FIN_Vol_II.pdf)>

<sup>42</sup> 'Nike Is Closing Its Corporate Offices, Giving Workers A Week Off To 'Prioritize Mental Health', Forbes  
<<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jackkelly/2021/08/30/nike-is-closing-its-corporate-offices-giving-workers-a-week-off-to-prioritize-mental-health/?sh=18bb30115734>>

the mental health of the community more generally. Government and business investment in this type of support for workers helps to alleviate the toll and pressures on the mental health services down the track.

*There is also a case for hazard pay to be provided to workers in these high-pressured, high-risk sectors, in recognition of the additional health and safety dangers that the COVID-19 pandemic has produced and will continue to impose.* Internationally, there are examples of local and state jurisdictions providing in hazard pay to frontline and first respondents in the form of legislated increases in pay rates, stipends or one-off payments.<sup>43</sup> Subsidies or tax concessions, such as rebates on council rates or long-term concessions for state and local government services such as parking and public transport, could also be used as mechanisms to deliver these pecuniary benefits to these cohorts.

## 6) Supporting women's workforce participation

Women's capacity to participate in the workforce can be promoted by:

- *Support and invest in programs that target women who are returning to the paid workforce after a period of absence.* Women in these circumstances often report that their suitability, capabilities and credentials are diminished and dismissed by prospective employers, creating unfair setbacks. Furthermore, the skills and capabilities that they acquire through their parental and community roles (for example, through their contributions to volunteer initiatives) are not often recognised as valuable. Women can internalise these setbacks in a way that erodes their self-esteem and motivation, and steers them towards accepting roles that are below their credentials. The Australian Government 'Career Revive' pilot program is an example of a type of program that equips businesses to attract and retain women who are returning to work. This includes the provision of a comprehensive set of resources to guide organisations. It would be in the interests of the Office for Women to investigate the uptake of this program among Queensland women, the effectiveness of the program in achieving its goals, and the potential for the Queensland Government to build on this program in addition to its own. Another example of an innovative program that private companies have embarked on from grassroots levels to support women's return to the workforce is the Encoreship program.<sup>44</sup> My own assessment of the Encoreship program, based on my interaction with Queensland women who have participated in it, is that it well designed to flexibly respond to the real hurdles that women returning to the workforce have faced. These features including providing default opportunities for upskilling, recognising the broad applicability and transferability of women's previous experiences, and offering opportunities for job-sharing and part-time appointments without diminishing the importance and status of these roles.
- *Improve the affordability, accessibility, flexibility of childcare, outside-hours kinder, extra-curricula school activities, and other care services for children and dependents – especially targeted at women who work non-standard hours, are single parents or sole carers, are unemployed and in search for work, and women seeking to increase from part-time to full-time hours.* However, expansions in the availability of these care services must be accompanied by expansions in the resourcing of these

<sup>43</sup> <https://www.ems1.com/coronavirus-covid-19/articles/local-governments-providing-hazard-pay-stipends-for-first-responders-Oe7UtlA42phouiP4/>

<sup>44</sup> An example is the Encoreship Program which supports women through work placements, upskilling and retraining opportunities, the removal of skill requirements that could be attained on the job, and the flexibility of job-sharing for candidates seeking part-time or flexible hours.

care sectors, including investing in a pipeline of suitably-qualified workers, so that the additional demand on the sector can be accommodated and without the risks of a deterioration in quality of care or an exacerbation of shortages in places. While there is a strong case for the provision of free or heavily subsidised childcare in particular, as a specific means of reducing impediments to women's workforce participation, such a service can only be equitable and adequately provided with an intensive investment on the supply side. This encompasses expansions in resources, suitably qualified staff that can meet the needs of all children, accessibility and availability of places in all locations, and flexibility of access to accommodate the varying needs of parents and families. Without intense investment on the supply side, international experiences indicate that government commitment to provide free or universal childcare could result in an erosion of quality and even potential legalities if not all children can be assured of a place.<sup>45</sup> The provision of free or heavily subsidised childcare, that cannot simultaneously deliver on quality and access, could still result in the segmented markets, where a private market emerges in response to willingness of some families to pay for better access. Improving the availability and affordability of childcare requires a long-term roadmap, identifying the policy levers that are within scope of State and Local Governments and can innovate beyond these, in the form of additional subsidies, grants and resource investments.

- *Promote a more even sharing of unpaid care and domestic work between men and women within the household, across all stages of the life course but especially on the arrival of a new child.* Achieving such a significant change requires dismantling the deep-seated, pervasive influence of the traditional male-breadwinner/female-caregiver template of roles that still infuses many dimensions of society. A key policy lever that has proven to shift the dial on this front is the provision of a non-transferable paid parental leave for fathers, provided at a rate and duration that is financially attractive for men to take up (compared to the two weeks at minimum wage rate currently available to new fathers under the Australian Government's Dad and Partner Pay scheme). Shifting norms can entail removing notions of a 'primary' and 'secondary' carer, and to instead offer the default option of 'shared caregivers'.
- *Expand the provision of safe, affordable, accessible social housing women in vulnerable circumstances, matched with wraparound services to support these women into secure employment.* The Queensland Government's expanded investment in social housing provides a significant and valuable investment. To empower the women who are dependent on social housing, and provide stepping stones for them to regain financial independence, the policies and programs focused on supporting women's return to work can be particularly tailored and offered to women residing in social housing.

Once in the workforce, women's employment can be supported by:

- *Encourage a broad recognition of the transferability of skill and workforce experience across different industries and occupations, by prospective employers.* This will support displaced women who are compelled to shift into other industries and occupations for new employment opportunities.

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<sup>45</sup> 'Germany rules parents with no day care options can sue cities for lost earnings' <<https://www.dw.com/en/germany-rules-parents-with-no-day-care-options-can-sue-cities-for-lost-earnings/a-36102866>>

- *Incentives and support for displaced workers to engage in reskilling, retraining and skills accreditation to improve their prospects of employment in high-growth areas. This* needs to be accompanied by data-driven labour market information so that displaced workers can identify the areas with genuine job prospects. Fast-tracking process for reskilling displaced workers, and provided targeted guidance to women to ensure that they are fully aware of their eligibility for reskilling and employment opportunities, can expedite these transitions and minimise the risks of skill erosion and the scarring effects of unemployment.
- *Incentivise the hiring of new staff as a means of targeting workers who have found themselves unemployed and encourage the movement of workers into better employment opportunities.* Federal Government support, such as the JobKeeper scheme, tended to prioritise the retention of existing staff, which was important at the time. Fostering a culture of change and dynamism is critical for a healthy and resilient economy.
- *Promote flexible employment arrangements, including working-from-home, flexible hours and job-sharing arrangements, accompanied by guidance for organisation on how to ensure inclusion among these flexible employees.* Job-sharing does not need to be confined to low intensity jobs, but can also apply to senior and executive roles. It delivers a more diverse set of skills and ideas to the role, as well as the opportunity for the two workers to learn from each other through mutual mentorship. It provides temporal flexibility for women with caring responsibilities. However, there is a risk that any of these flexible arrangements may unintentionally disadvantage women by still affording implicit advantages to workers who are present and 'in person' on the work site, owing to the nature of unconscious biases. To support equity among organisations that are adopting working-from-home as an ongoing working arrangement, the government can play a role in guiding organisations on best practice policies and their legal responsibilities to facilitate equitable, inclusive work practices in this new operating environment. Given that women will be over-represented among the employees that opt for working-from-home and flexible arrangements, it is vital for gender equity outcomes that business culture evolves in a way where working-from-home employees are not disadvantaged through unconscious biases. This can be facilitated by ensuring businesses are equipped with research-backed information on strategies to avert this.

## 7) Skill development and access to promotional opportunities

Gender equality in workforce outcomes needs to target not just women's employment numbers, but the *quality* of women's employment opportunities. A distinctive difference in men and women's workforce experiences is that men tend to accelerate up the career ladder more quickly than women do. This is even observed at junior levels where differences cannot necessarily be attributed to the interruptions of having children.

Australian women already possess strong skill sets and on average are more highly educated than men. There is also evidence that women, on average, are more likely than men to possess the personal traits that are conducive to higher workplace performance, such as conscientiousness. The impediment is that women's skills and attributes are unduly dismissed, valued less than men, or considered obsolete if women do have a career interruption. The under-valuation of women's capacity is compounded with the tendency for the skills, experiences and traits to be over-valued relative to their demonstrated worth.

Broadly, promoting an awareness about the existence and impacts of gender biases, and equipping organisations with the practical knowledge to identify and tackle these implicit and systemic biases, would be a powerful way to drive meaningful and long-lasting change in Queensland workplaces. *There is scope for the Queensland Government to design a program that supports and incentivises all workplaces in the private sector to develop a genuine understanding about the influence of gender biases, and to empower them with evidence-based knowledge of how to tackle these biases.*

Research shows that developing an authentic understanding about the existence of gender biases is an essential ingredient for workplace equality interventions to be effective. It is not just so much about businesses fulfilling reporting requirements, but about defining meaningful gender equality targets to aim for, and incentivising well-informed action.

Looking specifically at strategies to improve women's promotional opportunities, existing evidence of strategies that have worked effectively to improve women's representation among senior and executive levels point towards the effectiveness of setting specific targets in the gender composition of these roles. The ASX200 30% Club is an example of a targeted approached that successfully steered women's representation in executive roles towards this 30% figure. More ambitious targets can set that more accurately reflect the composition of the population, namely 50% female, or a ratio of 40:40:20 (40% male, 40% female, and 20% non-binary or any gender).<sup>46</sup> *There is scope for the Queensland Government to play a role in recognising and rewarding organisations that achieve these equality targets, to incentivise and normalise this workforce dynamic.*

Targets needs to be matched by a strategic plan to support women's progression through the pipeline towards these senior roles. Steps to strategically de-bias existing systems of recruitment, promotion and evaluation processes within organisations will contribute towards providing women with stronger, and more equitable, opportunities for promotions. An example could be businesses deliberately broadening the potential traditional career pathways, or fields of specialities and background experience that are expected of candidates, when making executive appointments. The focus needs to be placed on equipping and incentivising organisations to improve their systems and processes, rather than place the onus on women and imply women are responsible for these outcomes due to their own deficiencies.

*There is scope for the Queensland Government to invest in and financially support programs that specifically target women's re-entry to the paid workforce and have proven their success.* These are often grassroots, small-scale interventions that are initiated by organisations who are visionary innovators and have a genuine understanding of what works. Successful models can be identified and rolled out to other organisations. An example is The Encoreship Program developed a coalition of female-owned enterprises.<sup>47</sup>

Improving opportunities for women in the workplace also requires equipping workplaces to review and reconfigure their existing workplace practices and cultures to identify ways that they unintentionally promote masculinised behaviours which implicitly sidelines and disadvantages women. A stark example is the culture of endorsing and rewarding overtime hours – a practice that has been explicitly linked to the persistence of the gender pay gap and impinges upon workers' capacity to balance work and caring

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<sup>46</sup> <https://www.globalwomen.org.nz/diverse-boards/what-is-404020/>

<sup>47</sup> <https://www.mamamia.com.au/alpha-h-encoreship/>

responsibilities.<sup>48</sup> More broadly, research shows that workplace cultures that elevate competitive pay structures (such as bonuses), pay flexibility (necessitating individual negotiation), overtime hours (as a marker of dominance and endurance) and conformity to default core hours (aversion to temporal flexibility) are less conducive to gender equality, and are in fact characteristics associated with hyper-masculinised workplace cultures and a higher incidence of harassment, burnout and toxic leadership behaviour. Interventions to address this type of workplace culture, as a means of promoting gender equality, includes strategically investing in a culture of psychological safety, which has benefits not just for gender equality, but for mental health, productivity and performance, and equality and inclusion for all cohorts more broadly.<sup>49</sup>

*There is scope for the Queensland Government to design an incentive and reward structure to promote the adoption of these healthier and more responsible work practices among Queensland businesses.* This includes potentially through tenders and procurement policies, grant eligibility, formal recognition of best practice (akin to WGEA's Employer of Choice accreditation scheme), and leading by example in its own public service.

8) **Support workforce participation of women with caring responsibilities and encourage men to take on a greater share of these responsibilities**

Expanding the provision of paid parental leave for fathers – and making it non-transferable in a use-it-or-lose-it entitlement – has been demonstrated to improve the full-time workforce participation rates of mothers and improve the sharing of unpaid work within the households. The province of Quebec in Canada provides a comparable case study for the Queensland Government to look towards.

It is well established that the affordability, accessibility and flexibility of formal and informal care services are important determinants of women's labour supply, as the provision of care services frees up women to allocate their time to paid work and a more productive use of their skills and capabilities. This has been largely been analysed in the context of the provision of childcare, but also applies to the provision outside-hours kinder and school care, disability care, aged care, and care services for people with mental health conditions and challenges. Quebec's suite of policy responses to support more gender equitable outcomes in society also encompassed improving the affordability of childcare services, resulting in an increase in childcare usage. Evaluation studies of the impacts of Quebec's policies detected that increased resourcing and quality assurance processes was also needed to ensure that standard of care could be upheld under a larger demand placed on the system. This points towards the need for any policy initiatives to expand publicly-provided places in care services to be matched by investments in the relevant care workers and resourcing, including administrative support.

Improving opportunities for women in the workforce requires a cultural shift or evolution in societal norms regarding the roles of men and women in society. As noted elsewhere in this submission, an essential, but overlooked, part of gender equality policies is strategic investment in initiatives that dismantle traditional stereotypes and cultivate healthy ideals of masculinity for men and boys. This not

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<sup>48</sup> Berdahl, J.L., Cooper, M., Glick, P., Livingston, R.W., and Williams, J.C. (2018) Work as a Masculinity Contest, *Journal of Social Issues*, 4(3): 422-448; Biasi, B. and Sarsons, H. (2020) Flexible Wages, Bargaining, and the Gender Gap, NBER Working Paper No. 2789, National Bureau of Economic Research; Goldin, C. (2014) A Grand Gender Convergence: Its Last Chapter, *American Economic Review*, 104 (4): 1091-1119.

<sup>49</sup> Delizonna, L. (2017) High-Performing Teams Need Psychological Safety. Here's How to Create It, *Harvard Business Review*, 24 August 2017.

only applies in workplace contexts, but across all domains of society including community, sports, media and popular culture.

A specific cohort of women who have become even more vulnerable during the pandemic are new mothers. For many new mothers, it is the support of their family members – including their own mother – that enables new mothers to manage this time of their life and, especially through the provision of grandparental care, to return to work. The capacity for grandparents and other family members to provide this support has been impeded by international and interstate border closures, placing migrant women especially at risk. These factors are potentially exacerbating the pressures experienced by new mothers and their partners, and heightening the risks of post-natal depression or other mental health conditions, and impeding their capacity to sustain their connection to the workforce.

*The Queensland Government can demonstrate best practice leadership in this area by expanding the availability of non-transferable paid parental leave to fathers in the Queensland public sector, and by encouraging and incentivising businesses in the private sector to do the same.* Making this leave for fathers non-transferable – so that it cannot be transferred to mothers – is essential for helping to normalise this behaviour about men and reducing the social stigma that can deter fathers from making use of the policy even when it is available.

## 9) Support for women experience compounding and intersecting bias and barriers

Women from under-represented, marginalised and disadvantaged backgrounds experience more acute workforce biases and barriers. This includes Australia's First Nations women, women living with a disability, migrant and refugee women, women from under-represented cultural, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, single mothers, women who identify as LGBTQI+, women of older age (the fastest growing cohort of the population who are at risk of homelessness), younger women (who have experienced a disproportionately higher share of job losses and fall in post-secondary education enrolments during the pandemic), women from geographically remote locations, and women from low socioeconomic backgrounds. An intersectional lens needs to be applied to all analysis and policy considerations, to appreciate the experiences and circumstances of women in disadvantaged cohorts, and to ensure that the Queensland Women's Strategy will be equitable, inclusive and deliver effective outcomes for all Queensland women.

Women who have experienced, or are experiencing, domestic and family violence, and women who are dependent on or on the wait list on social housing, must also be recognised as a priority cohort.

Research on policy initiatives to improving outcomes for women who are under-represented in the workforce points towards the effectiveness of well-designed mentoring programs that connect participants with role models whom they can trust and identify with, and the creation of a diversity taskforce or manager with responsibility for embedding accountability and transparency into an organisation's goals and performance targets. The provision of carefully designed, research-driven, educative information to workplaces would be valuable for enhancing broader awareness about intersectional biases, address possible misconceptions, and nurture an understanding that addressing intersectional biases requires a collective response and should not be an onus that is placed solely on individuals or marginalised communities to solve.

As with the issue of gender equality generally, many initiatives that strive to improve the representation of under-represented cohorts of the workforce tend to focus on improving the capabilities, opportunities, aspirations of the individual, such as through the offering of scholarships or dedicated

placements through targets and quotas.<sup>50</sup> However, there is little use in ushering in more women from under-represented backgrounds if the workplace culture does not offer them an equitable opportunity to flourish, to be heard and respected, and to experience a sense of inclusion and belonging, once they are there. This spotlights the need for promoting broader cultural change and awareness within workplaces, organisations and the wider community, including through the conviction and commitment of leaders. Building representation of minority cohorts at a critical mass – as opposed to token individual appointments – will assist with the broader cultural change.

In terms of broader initiatives to support women's workforce participation, entrepreneurship and upskilling opportunities, the community groups that represent the interests of these cohorts of women, or provide dedicated support services to them, are well equipped to identify the specific challenges and needs of these cohorts of women and provide insights on what's needed in terms of practical policy responses. Often the initiatives that emerge at grassroots prove to be the best innovations to address these challenges, and can be replicated or upscaled with government assistance.

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<sup>50</sup> Dobbin, F. and Kalev, A. (2016) Why diversity programs fail, and what works better, *Harvard Business Review*.