



NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026

Consultation report

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Contents

Overview	1
About the consultations	2
Consultation	2
Submissions	3
Organisations consulted	3
Progress since the NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022	4
Key themes and priorities	4
Economic opportunity and advancement	4
Health and wellbeing	5
Participation and empowerment	5

Acknowledgements

We would like to recognise the incredible contribution that women across NSW made in telling us what mattered most in their lives, and what they would like to see in the next NSW Women's Strategy.

We would also like to acknowledge the time and care that stakeholders took to share their insights from working with women in different fields and different locations.

Overview

In the 4 years since the *NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022* was released, there has been significant government action and investment to progress gender equality for women and girls. The *NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026* (the Strategy) will build upon the progress already achieved and seek to identify new strategies to further advance outcomes for women in NSW.

The development of the latest Strategy considered input from a range of sources and voices from across NSW. Women NSW led statewide consultation to shape the direction and priorities of the Strategy.

Women NSW heard strong support for focusing on increasing women's economic opportunities and participation in society, as well as emerging issues for women that require new responses. Communities across NSW shared their views on current priorities, the impacts of gender and how policy and investment decisions should be made.

This report outlines the themes and insights gained through direct conversations with people across NSW as well as quantitative analysis of survey responses. The consultation revealed both specific issues to be incorporated in the Strategy and issues that would benefit from consideration and inclusion in other NSW Government strategies.

‘Achieving equality is not progressive, it’s overdue.’

Sydney woman

About the consultations

Women from across NSW were consulted to understand their views and priorities to inform the development of the *NSW Women's Strategy 2023–2026*. Stakeholders were asked to respond to the 'Towards a New NSW Women's Strategy Discussion Paper', which set out the achievements of the former *NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022* and questions to frame input for the forthcoming Strategy.

A key component of the consultation was ensuring that the voices of women and girls from diverse communities and backgrounds were heard and captured. While a strategy for women aims to improve outcomes for all women and girls, it is particularly important that we improve outcomes for those who experience greater levels of disadvantage. In the context of the next NSW Women's Strategy, we identified the following focus communities:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls
- carers
- girls and young women living in or who have lived in out-of-home care
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, intersex, queer and/or asexual (LGBTIQ+) women and girls
- older women
- women and girls experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage
- women and girls facing homelessness
- women and girls from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities
- women and girls in contact with the criminal justice system
- women and girls living in regional, rural, remote and cross-border areas
- women and girls with disability
- women and girls with a mental illness
- young women
- women veterans (and the women partners of veterans and service members)
- women and girls who have a history of, or are currently experiencing, domestic, family or sexual violence.

Six targeted consultation methods were employed to reach women and girls from diverse communities and backgrounds, and key stakeholders. Input

from recent consultations supporting the Women's Economic Opportunities Review was also considered, deepening the evidence in key areas.

Consultation

Women and girls

The voices of women and girls, and the priorities they identify, are paramount in shaping the new strategy. Consultation included:

- deep consultation in online and in-person forums, and public outreach with women and girls across NSW (229 individuals). Online forums targeted women living in:
 - Central Tablelands
 - Hunter-Newcastle-Port Stephens
 - Illawarra and Shoalhaven
 - North and Mid-North Coast
 - South East and Southern Tablelands
 - South West Sydney
 - Sydney
 - West and Far West NSW.
- broad consultation with women through the 2022 NSW Women's Strategy Have Your Say Survey with responses to the discussion paper (1,796 individuals).

Those who work with women and girls

Many organisations have an interest in outcomes for women and girls and have gained insights from working closely with them. We consulted with organisations across a range of areas:

- focus communities: older women, young women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, LGBTIQ+ women, women with disability, and women from CALD backgrounds
- themed areas including health, housing and homelessness, rights and justice, education, and local government.

Stakeholders

We engaged with representative bodies and organisations with specific expertise in providing advice on priorities and the experiences of women and girls. This included:

- consultation with Ministerial Advisory Council members
- submissions from peak bodies and stakeholders responding to the 2022 NSW Women's Strategy Have Your Say Discussion Paper (15 submissions).

Submissions

Submissions were received from:

- Australian College of Nursing
- Carers NSW
- Domestic Violence NSW
- Full Stop Australia
- Future Women
- individual submission
- Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association
- No to Violence
- Anti-Discrimination NSW
- Endometriosis Australia
- Women's Legal Service NSW
- Women's Electoral Lobby
- Australian Services Union
- Femeconomy
- Social Enterprise Finance Australia.

Organisations consulted

We consulted with organisations including:

- ACON
- Carers NSW
- Council for Intellectual Disability
- Council for Women's Economic Opportunity
- Disability Council NSW
- Ethnic Communities' Council of NSW
- Homelessness NSW
- Local Government NSW
- Multicultural NSW
- Muslim Women Australia
- NSW Carers Advisory Council
- NSW Council of Social Service.
- NSW Department of Communities and Justice
- NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing
- NSW Ministry of Health
- NSW Office of Local Government
- Older Women's Network
- SafeWork NSW.
- Tenants Union of NSW
- Women's Health NSW
- Settlement Services International
- Aboriginal Affairs NSW

Progress since the NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022

We began the consultation process by asking participants what progress had been made for women since the release of the *NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022*, some of the responses are capture below.

Increased public awareness about the issues that impact women

In the survey, there was a clear appreciation of the increased public awareness of issues that impact women and public conversations that had previously been under-represented. Participants told us that there has been an increase in understanding, particularly in relation to issues faced by women in the workplace.

Equally, participants felt there had been an increase in community awareness around domestic and family violence and sexual assault, and improved responses to these problems.

Successful programs and initiatives

When asked to identify specific programs or initiatives that had made a difference to them since 2018, survey respondents highlighted:

- reduced childcare fees
- introduction of new affirmative consent laws
- the Staying Home Leaving Violence and Safer Pathway programs
- networking, mentoring and scholarships for women to re-enter the workforce, including Women in Trades and TAFE NSW Women in Business program
- local women's community services.

Following the significant disruptions and challenges in recent years, women across NSW also highlighted the strengths and value of local services in supporting women and communities, and connecting them both socially and to broader economic networks.

Key themes and priorities

The following key themes emerged from the consultations.



Economic opportunity and advancement

Workplaces where women can flourish, with good conditions and flexibility to meet other life demands.

Eliminating workplace harassment, boosting safety and respect

Consultation strongly reinforced the need to address the range of issues that have an impact on equality, particularly for women from diverse communities. Participants told us that they experience harassment, bullying and discrimination in the workplace, from everyday conversations through to a lack of appropriate facilities available for women.

Reducing the gender pay gap

Addressing the gender pay gap was a key theme that emerged, including looking at the drivers of the pay gap and low pay in female-dominated caring industries.

Workplace flexibility and leave arrangements

Workplace flexibility and leave arrangements were seen as critical to women's ability to participate in the workforce and to achieve life and work objectives. However, women told us that using their entitlements was not without potential pitfalls as they felt it could mean their career was disadvantaged.

Transitions between careers and life stages

Women identified a key opportunity in making it easier to move between different life and career stages, including returning to work after career breaks to care for children, accommodating parenting and caring responsibilities through access to care arrangements and training or reskilling.

Fostering ambition and success for women in business

Across NSW, we spoke with women and girls who have aspiration for themselves and their communities, and who have the potential to become leaders as entrepreneurs or business owners.

Fostering ambition and success requires support for women and girls from a young age to build their careers and potential to create and lead businesses.

Improving financial wellbeing and security throughout life stages

Participants raised concerns that financial wellbeing and security underpin their access to life opportunities in other areas. Supporting women's financial wellbeing, including buffering against financial shocks, particularly in retirement, and promoting job security were seen as key.



Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing at every stage of life underpin social and economic participation for all women and girls

Safer relationships, safer communities

A priority for participants was preventing and responding to all forms of violence against all women in all settings – through prevention, intersections with justice and specific responses for focus communities (for example, in addressing elder abuse).

Understanding and awareness of women's health needs

Women across NSW reported that they felt there was not sufficient community-wide understanding of women's health needs, in part due to limited research.

Increasing understanding and awareness of women's health needs, including reproductive health, was identified as a priority to ensure women can access appropriate and effective healthcare.

Services and support for women's and girls' physical and mental health

Women identified access to a variety of affordable and appropriate health services as a key priority. This includes perinatal and mental health care, and services that cater to the needs of focus communities and women living in rural and regional locations.

Accessing affordable mental health services and promoting wellbeing for younger women and women from focus communities was also raised by participants.

Safe and secure housing

Safe, secure housing was reported as a critical issue for women in every regional forum and was raised by stakeholders. Participants pointed to the connection between access to a home and their health and engagement with work and community.



Participation and empowerment

Increased representation, participation and empowerment of all women, including women from focus communities

Boldly championing women, girls and gender equality

Boldly championing women, girls and gender equality was called out as a key aspiration for the Women's Strategy. Key to this is supporting equality, addressing gender discrimination from an early age, and changing the expectations of men and boys (which will benefit them too).

There was also a call to recognise childcare as a parenting issue, not a women's issue.

Uplifting focus communities: culture as strength

Participants told us that we needed to proactively uplift focus communities and recognise the opportunities and specific experiences of different groups of women.

There was a desire for inclusion and recognition of the strengths that focus communities offer.

Leadership and representation

Leadership and representation was raised as a key issue in the consultations. There is an opportunity to improve the visibility of women, through formal leadership in government, business and community, and increase representation of women across all domains.

Rebuilding connections

Women keep communities together; however, this suffered somewhat during the COVID-19 pandemic, bushfires, floods and other environmental shocks. Participants asked for this role to be recognised, valued and supported.

Sport and activity

The consultations identified that women care about being active and engaged. Participants called for increased opportunities for women and girls to enter and continue to participate in sport, and improving the visibility of women in sport – particularly community (rather than elite) sport.

Women NSW

More information

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