



NSW WOMEN'S STRATEGY

2018-2022

Advancing economic and
social equality in NSW



The term Aboriginal is used throughout this publication to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The NSW Government is deeply appreciative of the significant contributions of Aboriginal women to the development of the *NSW Women's Strategy*.

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A message from the Minister

As the Minister for Women
I am honoured to represent the
3.99 million women across NSW.¹



It gives me great pleasure to present the *NSW Women's Strategy 2018-2022*, which aims to advance social and economic equality between women and men, and girls and boys.

The Strategy affirms the Berejiklian Government's commitment to empowering women and girls to have full access to opportunity and choice, be valued for their diversity, be recognised for their contribution, and be able to participate in all aspects of life freely and safely. NSW wants to ensure the barriers are removed to enable women and girls to live the lives they choose.

I believe there is a real need to promote recognition and credit for women's contributions and achievements in all aspects of society.

As a society we need to encourage women to take pride in their accomplishments, to have the confidence and courage to set bold goals, and to champion all women to celebrate their achievements so we can encourage women coming after us to discover their true potential.

We also need to be mindful of the fact that gender equality is not only a women's issue; it is a social and economic issue that affects everyone.

As a government, we cannot do this on our own. We need the community at large to support us in championing the cause. That is why it is imperative that men are part of this journey too.

While it is important to reflect on the challenges, it is also vital that we focus on the solutions and areas where we can have the greatest impact on improving outcomes for women and girls.

The Strategy identifies three priority areas – economic opportunity and advancement, health and wellbeing, and participation and empowerment. We will report on these priority areas and measure our progress over time.

Our schedule of targeted actions will be contained in an annual action plan that will sit alongside the strategy.

This strategy is the result of a comprehensive process of consultation with the NSW community. I would like to thank everyone who contributed their time and expertise to shape this important piece of work.

As we now accelerate our work towards gender equality, I look forward to seeing generations of women and girls break through barriers, and create greater opportunities together.

The Hon. Tanya Davies MP
Minister for Women

Vision

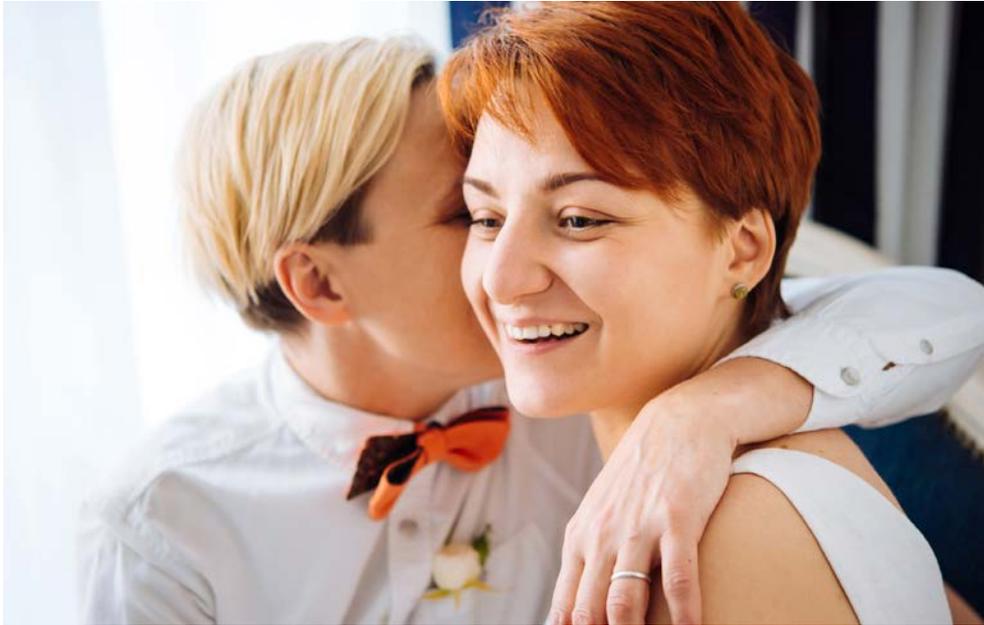
Women and girls in NSW have full access to opportunity and choice, their diversity is recognised, they are valued for their contribution and are able to participate in all aspects of life freely and safely.

Women and girls in NSW are supported by government and the community to achieve this vision.

The *NSW Women's Strategy* is underpinned by recognition of the inherent dignity and equal rights of all people as legislated and protected by the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth), *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977* (NSW), *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW) and the United Nations' *Women's Empowerment Principles*.² The Strategy supports Australia's commitment to the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals*, specifically Goal 5 - Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.³

The 12 Premier's Priorities demonstrate a commitment to whole-of-government and whole-of-community work to improve safety, opportunity, equality and participation for the people of NSW.⁴ The *NSW Women's Strategy* builds on this work to continue to drive economic and social change for women and girls in NSW.







A snapshot of Women in NSW

Women across NSW make important contributions in all fields of endeavour including the arts, science, health, sports, social welfare, business and politics, and in our families, communities and neighbourhoods.

However, despite the varied and critical roles that women and girls play in our communities, we know they continue to experience inequality and disadvantage based on their gender. By ensuring women and girls have equal opportunities to participate and achieve, we will make NSW a better place to live for everyone.

Women have different and diverse characteristics related to their race, ethnicity, disability, sexuality, gender identity, age, geography and socioeconomic status. When these factors interact, experiences of discrimination and disadvantage can intensify.

The NSW Government has published *Women in NSW* reports since 2012 examining gender equality against data indicators in key areas including education and learning; safety and justice; work, financial security and leadership; and health and wellbeing. Progress trends relating to gender equality referred to in this strategy draw upon the data indicators in the published *Women in NSW* report series.



By ensuring **women and girls** have **equal opportunities** to **participate** and **achieve**, we will make **NSW** a **better place to live** for everyone.



The most recent data demonstrates:



Women make up **59.9%** of **undergraduate completions**.⁵ However, the **median starting salary** for **women** is **lower** than **men**.⁶

About **1 in 5**

directors in **NSW-based ASX500 companies** are **women**.⁷



Across the **NSW labour market**, **women working full-time** earn an **average** of **\$239.70 less** than **men per week**,⁸ with women **over-represented** among **lower paying industries**.⁹



Mothers are **more likely** than fathers to use **flexible work arrangements** to **care for children**.¹⁰

Approximately **72%** of **NSW small business owners** are **male** and **28%** are **female**.¹¹



Women account for almost **two-thirds**

of **NSW Government sector employees**, but occupy only **37.4%**

of **senior leadership roles** in the **NSW Government sector**.¹²



Aboriginal women are **well represented** in **vocational and education training (VET) courses**¹³ but **under-represented** in **undergraduate and postgraduate completions**.¹⁴



Proportionally, **females** are **less likely** than **males** to **study science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects** in **Years 11 and 12**¹⁵ and **STEM-related undergraduate courses** at **university**.¹⁶



Girls complete **secondary school** at a **rate** of **78%** compared to **69%** of **boys**.¹⁷





Women make up **68.5%** of all **primary carers** in NSW.¹⁸ **Unpaid care** is **critical** to the **sustainability** of our **health** and **community services** systems. It would **cost** over **\$60.3 billion** to replace the **hours of care** provided by **unpaid carers** in Australia.¹⁹

Women residing in **remote** and **very remote** areas recorded **higher rates** of **domestic assault** victimisation than women residing in **major cities**.²⁰



Women in NSW account for **68.3%** of **domestic assault victims** recorded by **NSW Police**, but are the **minority** of **persons of interest** of domestic assault (**20.6%**).²¹ **Intimate partner violence** contributes to **more burden** of **disease** (the impact of illness, disability and premature death) **than any other risk factor** for women aged **25 to 44**.²²



69% of **female same-sex couples** in **NSW** live in the **Greater Sydney** area.²³

On average, **NSW women** live **4.2** years longer than **men**.²⁴



30.6 years is the **average age** women in **NSW** give **birth** for the **first time**.²⁵

NSW women aged **16 years** and over **smoke** at **lower rates** than **men** (**12.3%** compared to **18.1%**). **Women** from **non-English speaking countries** have the **lowest proportion** of **smokers** (**8.0%**).²⁶



18.2% of **women** in **NSW** have a **disability**, the **same rate** as **men**.²⁷

In **2017** proportionally **more women** than **men** experienced **high** or **very high** **psychological distress**.²⁸



28% of **women** in **NSW** were **born overseas**,²⁹ and **26.5%** of **households** speak a **language** other than **English** at home.³⁰

The case for change

Over the past five years, through the *Women in NSW* report series, we have been able to identify areas where advances are being made, and those where more work is needed to improve outcomes for women. The collection and annual publication of this data has been central to understanding the case for change and targeting actions under the strategy.

Expectations surrounding women's contribution to domestic and caring responsibilities impact significantly on women's capacity to enjoy the same workforce opportunities as men. Mothers in NSW continue to undertake the majority of unpaid household work,³¹ limiting their capacity for full-time employment and affecting their financial security in retirement.³²

Under the *NSW Carers Strategy 2014-2019*,³³ we will continue to support carers to have opportunities to participate in paid work and have the same rights, choices and opportunities as other members of the community.³⁴

It is recognised that the diverse nature of women carers, such as older and younger, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Aboriginal carers, has an impact on the experience of carers.³⁵

Despite efforts to address the gender pay gap, women in NSW continue to be paid less than their male counterparts, with the gap in average weekly earnings between what women and men earn in NSW at 14.3 per cent.³⁶ This gap continues when comparing superannuation balances and other savings at retirement. On average, Australian women retire with approximately half the amount of superannuation of men, leading to increased economic insecurity and risk of poverty in older age.³⁷

In NSW the proportion of women in the labour force remains lower than men's (60 per cent of women compared to 70.2 per cent of men in June 2018).³⁸



In **NSW** the proportion of women in the **labour force** remains **lower than men's** (60% of women compared to 70.2% of men in June 2018).³⁷



Young people entering the workforce continue to be guided differently towards career options depending on their gender. Women in NSW continue to be under-represented in traditionally male-dominated occupations and industries such as construction (11.2 per cent); mining (14.9 per cent); electricity, gas, water and waste services (17.9 per cent); transport, postal and warehousing (22.1 per cent); manufacturing (29.8 per cent); agriculture, forestry and fishing (31.7 per cent); and wholesale trade (35.5 per cent).³⁹ Women account for 30.1 per cent of principals of private law firms⁴⁰ and 10.2 per cent of senior counsel.⁴¹ Women are under-represented in some senior and key creative roles in the screen, media and entertainment industries.⁴² Women are also under-represented in nominations for major Australian arts awards.⁴³

A gender imbalance also exists between women and men at decision-making and leadership levels in business, government and the community.⁴⁴ One in four seats in NSW Parliament are held by women,⁴⁵ and women hold over one third (37.4 per cent) of senior leadership positions in the NSW Government sector.⁴⁶ Women also represent only around one-third of business owners in NSW.⁴⁷ Diversity in leadership and role modelling leads to a greater breadth of ideas, participation and progress. When women are at the decision-making table, there are better financial results for business and the community.⁴⁸

Aboriginal women are leaders in their communities, politics, government and business, and play an important role as influencers, decision-makers and initiators of projects to improve the lives of their families and communities now and in the future. However, there is a significant need to address the ongoing disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal women in NSW. This includes their poorer health, economic, social and emotional outcomes compared to non-Aboriginal people.^{49, 50}

Women experience different patterns of health and illness, disease risk factors, and access to and use of health services compared to men, and require targeted support for their own health and wellbeing needs.

Women are more likely than men to experience domestic and family violence, sexual assault and harassment, be victims of domestic homicide, and face discrimination and sexual harassment in workplaces.⁵¹

Economic independence and financial security can support women to stay safe in relationships or access suitable housing. In turn, women who are healthy and safe have increased opportunities to participate in social life and connect with other people in their communities and networks.

Increasing women's economic participation leads to benefits for individuals, families and the community. In 2009, Goldman Sachs calculated that the rise in female employment between 1974 and 2008 had boosted Australian economic activity by 22 per cent, and that further closing the gap between male and female employment rates would have important implications for the Australian economy.⁵² In 2018, KPMG estimated that if the gap between Australia's female and male workforce participation rates were halved, the annual GDP would increase by \$60 billion between 2018 and 2038, and the estimated present value of household consumption over the 20-year period would be raised by almost \$140 billion.⁵³ Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but is linked to a country's overall economic performance.⁵⁴

Advancing the role, status and contribution of women and girls in our communities will grow the talent pool available for the workforce, encourage more diversity and flexibility for women and men in the workplace, and result in increased innovation, productivity and prosperity for the individual and the nation.

Our approach

What we did

We spoke with a diverse range of people across New South Wales in both metropolitan and regional areas to better understand how to advance economic and social equality for women and girls across the state. The Minister for Women met with over 350 people from business, community and government sectors who spoke about the challenges and priorities for achieving gender equality, and proposed ideas for action and investment. Consultations took place in:

- Batemans Bay
- Broken Hill
- Lismore
- Newcastle
- Penrith
- Sydney CBD
- Tamworth
- Wagga Wagga.

Additionally, we held an online consultation through the NSW Government *Have Your Say* website and received close to 350 responses. We also held targeted consultations with government and non-government organisations, and groups working with and advocating for the needs of girls and women.

The following agencies and groups were included in the targeted consultation:

- ACON
- Create NSW
- Council for Women's Economic Opportunity
- Department of Finance, Services and Innovation
- Disability Council NSW
- Domestic and Family Violence and Sexual Assault Council
- Early Childhood Australia
- Department of Family and Community Services (FACS), NDIS Implementation
- FACS Ageing
- FACS Carers
- FACS Housing and Homelessness
- FACS Multicultural Advisory Group
- Local Government NSW
- NSW Police Force
- NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
- NSW Department of Industry
- NSW Ministry of Health
- NSW Public Service Commission
- Office of the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People
- Office of Sport
- Social Innovation Council
- Women affiliated with the Aboriginal Legal Service
- Women in Film and Television NSW (WIFT)
- Women's Health NSW

Development of the Strategy was overseen by a reference group comprised of key government partners.



Some highlights of what we heard

Women's participation in the labour force is vital to their economic and social independence. Availability and affordability of childcare often affects women's decisions about returning to work and the hours they work.



“Women still do the vast majority of the caring, parenting and household duties alongside their often full-time work role. Much of women's work is invisible in the economy.”

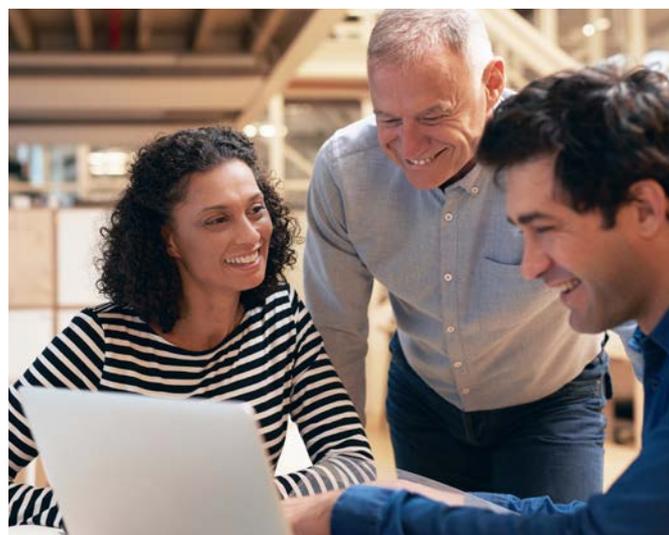
- Have Your Say respondent

Women are keen to support more men to access flexible work arrangements in NSW so fathers can fully participate in childcare responsibilities and enable a 'partnership' approach to managing family needs, where possible.



“Encouraging flexible workplaces for women and men is an effective gender equality strategy. Flexible working policies enable all employees to meet family and wellbeing commitments which may help balance gender-segregated workplaces.”

- Have Your Say respondent



Young women want access to a broad range of career pathways. Information and advice provided to young people is often shaped by traditional views about 'men's work' and 'women's work'. Parents, teachers, career advisers and community leaders need to know about options and create opportunities for female students to access a wide range of careers. Encouraging more female students to study STEM subjects is critical in building a diverse workforce that drives innovation and productivity into the future.



“We need to make sure more young women are encouraged to pursue STEM subjects and show them women who are successful in these fields.”

- Have Your Say respondent

Mentors and role models are an effective way to support and empower young women to gain skills in diverse areas, identify future work possibilities and share their journey to success. By recognising and celebrating women as leaders in NSW, we can present role models for young women to admire, emulate and strive towards.



“Women and girls are heavily influenced by stereotyped media images of women to conform to what is considered attractive or acceptable.”

- Have Your Say respondent





Women need access to information and services that respond to their different and diverse needs. Sexual and reproductive health services are particularly critical. Healthy lifestyles and healthy role models are important in changing the narrative about what is 'attractive' and what to 'aspire to'.

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“Self worth and good self-esteem are essential for personal growth and confidence to take risks and step out of the norms of society where an individual can innovate and lead change.”

- Have Your Say respondent

Secure housing promotes financial security and wellbeing. Challenges exist in maintaining safe and stable housing for many women as a result of domestic and family violence, breaks in employment, lower incomes and lower retirement savings.

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“The smaller amounts of superannuation women hold compared to men leave older women disadvantaged. Homelessness amongst older women is an increasing problem, driven by factors such as the high cost of private rental housing, particularly in Sydney.”

- Have Your Say respondent



Many women identified benefits associated with establishing networks and connecting with their local communities. The importance of enabling individuals to connect with supports was highlighted by women who expressed feelings of isolation in the community, including women from CALD backgrounds and women in regional and rural areas.

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“All women benefit from the opportunity to participate socially and within their community.”

- Have Your Say respondent

Communities need to be supported to challenge the long-held cultural myths and taboos that result in behaviours that disadvantage women and young girls in today's society.

”

“The challenges culturally and linguistically diverse women experience are the same as all women, but exacerbated by cultural difference and the lack of understanding and empathy of mainstream society in relation to cultural difference. Cultural difference in society is strength and a resource, but it is not often perceived as such.”

- Have Your Say respondent

Our targeted priorities for women

The NSW Government is committed to improving the lives of women in NSW by achieving equality of opportunity through policy, innovation and collaboration.

The NSW Government recognises we cannot affect change in isolation. Addressing the challenges facing women requires the involvement of all levels of government, non-government organisations, the community and the business sector. Under this strategy, we will target future investment in areas where we can make the greatest improvements. As such, our response will focus on the three priorities that women from across NSW have consistently said are important to them:

1. Economic opportunity and advancement



We will improve women's financial wellbeing and security, and support diverse and flexible employment opportunities for women and girls. We will create employment opportunities across occupations and industries where women remain under represented.

2. Health and wellbeing



We will promote and support a holistic approach to women's health across the lifespan. Women's physical, social and economic potential is maximised when they are healthy and their health needs are addressed.

3. Participation and empowerment



We will support women's engagement through social networks, access to information, and building confidence using diverse representations of women and girls.

These are not stand-alone issues and we recognise the intersections between the three priority areas.

Improvements made in these areas will benefit everyone, not just women. Gender-balanced leadership can lead to new ways of thinking, creativity and broader perspectives, healthy women support healthy families, and active participation will enrich individual lives and directly benefit the social fabric of NSW. By getting this right, we are collectively investing in the state's economic and social prosperity for the betterment of all.

Targeted actions that fall under each priority area will be presented in the strategy's annual action plans.





1. Economic opportunity and advancement



We will improve women's financial wellbeing and security, and support diverse and flexible employment opportunities for women and girls. We will create employment opportunities across occupations and industries where women remain under-represented.

Access to work, financial security and financial literacy are critical to women's wellbeing across their lives. Staying connected to the workforce across the lifespan fuels ambition, broadens career prospects and increases the likelihood of economic security. It also helps people to better prepare for a more secure future after retirement.

Women's contribution to the workforce is vital to the economic prosperity of NSW. Employment growth in NSW continues to surge with the number of women entering the workforce helping to drive this trend. Female employment in NSW climbed five per cent over the year to June 2018, more than double the 10-year average rate.⁵⁵ Female employment increased by 89,179 over the 12 months, and full-time employment growth among women climbed 3.7 per cent.⁵⁶

But women are still missing out on opportunities. We know that women continue to face certain barriers to employment and promotion compared to their male counterparts. Women with disability in particular have very low rates of workforce participation.^{57, 58} Understanding the work needs of growth industries and the skill sets required to perform jobs of the future may provide better scope for creating access and opportunity for women entrepreneurs and small business owners.

Women are more likely to work part-time or casually,⁵⁹ take breaks from paid employment to provide unpaid care for their children or others, and be over-represented in lower paid industries and occupations,⁶⁰ ultimately resulting in lower earnings and retirement savings compared to men.⁶¹ A contributor to women's workforce participation is traditional gender roles, which uphold the view that women are better placed than men to fulfil caring responsibilities. We want to better position caring roles as a shared responsibility so that women are supported to stay in the workforce. Implementing flexible work practices and workplaces for both men and women contribute to achieving this.⁶² We also understand that many women make up single-parent working households,⁶³ which can provide a further challenge to financial security.⁶⁴

We support the Australian Government's strategy *Towards 2025: Boosting Australian Women's Workforce Participation*, which aims to boost women's workforce participation to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.⁶⁵ Key to this work is building a childcare system that provides parents with more choice and opportunity to work. As part of the NSW Government's *Jobs for the Future Strategy*, we are exploring ways to make NSW the best place to work for women with children.⁶⁶

Boosting participation requires facilitating access to under-represented industries and occupations. We want to improve this by attracting women into non-traditional industries and entrepreneurial opportunities. Challenging stereotypes associated with different types of work may facilitate a diverse workforce and reduce sex segregation across occupations and industries. This work must begin in the formative years.

Diverse workforces are dynamic, more productive and better able to deliver high-quality services. Gender-balanced leadership can enable shared learning through increased perspective and experience, thereby improving organisational performance.⁶⁷ We are focused on building on the positive gains women continue to make in public life, decision-making and leadership.



How will we respond?

The NSW Government is committed to supporting women's economic opportunity and advancement. We are implementing a number of initiatives to support this commitment, including the Premier's Priority to drive public sector diversity, the *Jobs for the Future Strategy*, establishing a STEM partnership with the CSIRO, the Investing in Women funding program, flexible work practices, and promoting board and committee opportunities.

We are working hard to establish the NSW Government sector as a champion for women in leadership and workplace flexibility. This is complemented by our ongoing commitment to making NSW the best place to work for women with children. The NSW Government sector is taking action in three key areas:

- **Diversity** – Increasing the proportion of women in senior leadership positions across the Government sector to 50 per cent by 2025.
- **Flexibility** – The NSW Government has committed to making all roles flexible on the basis of 'if not, why not' by 2019. The NSW Public Service Commission released a flexible working strategy *Make Flexibility Count*⁶⁸ in December 2017 to guide implementation of this policy commitment across the government sector. The framework takes a principle-based approach designed to promote flexible working, build a culture of trust, drive outcomes, and share best practice and technology.
- **Equality** – Women in Australia continue to experience bias and discrimination in the workplace as a result of gendered expectations and norms. The NSW Government sector will implement strategies to address inequality in the government sector workplace, including assisting workplaces to tackle unconscious bias.

Over the next four years, we will focus our efforts on working with partners across the NSW Government and in the community to address the disparity in areas including earnings, financial security, financial literacy, representation in leadership roles and education. We will do this by broadening access to opportunities, supporting female leadership targets and building pipelines for advancement.

Over the next four years, through annual action plans, we will:

- consult with industry to develop innovative approaches to provide women with greater economic opportunities
- boost women's NSW Government board and committee opportunities by promoting the NSW Boards and Committees Register to secretaries of principal departments
- explore ways to make NSW the best place to work for women with children, including greater access to childcare and reducing disincentives to workforce participation
- work with the Australian Government to identify pathways and supports for carers and mothers re-entering the workforce
- improve visibility of STEM subjects and career pathways for girls and young women
- improve opportunities for women in the arts and cultural industries
- explore partnership opportunities with private industry and the education sector to promote entrepreneurial opportunities and develop networks for women
- boost the number of skilled women construction workers and the number of women in trade-related work.

2. Health and wellbeing



We will promote and support a holistic approach to women's health across the lifespan. Women's physical, social and economic potential is maximised when they are healthy and their health needs are addressed.

Women in NSW are living longer and healthier lives than ever before. We have seen positive changes in women's health over the last decade with proportionally fewer women smoking,⁶⁹ physical activity increasing,⁷⁰ more women being screened for breast cancer⁷¹ and deaths from coronary heart disease significantly reduced.⁷² However, the prevalence of overweight women and obesity remains a challenge, particularly for those experiencing disadvantage in our community.⁷³

The NSW Government is responding to these challenges to improve women's health and reduce inequity. However, good health can only be achieved by working together with the community and across agencies.

Good health and wellbeing is vital for women as it enhances quality of life, improves the productivity of the workforce, increases capacity for learning, and strengthens families and communities. While women and men share many of the same health challenges, they also differ in patterns of certain illnesses, risk factors, and access to and use of services.

There are also a range of health issues specific to women because of biology, or which are experienced disproportionately by women, such as breast cancer. The social determinants of health, including housing, employment and caring responsibilities, also impact on women's opportunities for better health.

While good mental health is essential to the overall health and wellbeing of both men and women, women are disproportionately affected by certain mental health conditions. Data from the *2007 National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing* showed that, of people aged 16–85 years, around 14 per cent of women will

experience depression and 32 per cent of women will experience anxiety during their lifetime, compared to nine per cent and 20 per cent respectively for men.⁷⁴

Lesbian, bisexual, queer and other non-heterosexual identifying (LBQ) women are at particularly high risk of experiencing mental health issues. Data from the *2016 Sydney Women and Sexual Health Survey* indicated that of the 595 LBQ women surveyed in NSW who responded to this question,⁷⁵ 357 (60 per cent) reported they have received a diagnosis of depression, anxiety disorder or other mental health disorder.⁷⁶

Mental health disorders can affect women at any time in their life, but there is an increased chance of mental ill-health during pregnancy and the year following the birth. Data from the *2010 Australian National Infant Feeding Survey* showed that in 2010–11, one in five mothers of children aged 24 months or less had been diagnosed with depression, and more than half of these mothers reported that the depression was diagnosed from pregnancy until the child's first birthday.⁷⁷

Women at risk of experiencing poorer health and wellbeing include carers,⁷⁸ Aboriginal women, women from CALD backgrounds and women experiencing socioeconomic disadvantage.⁷⁹

In recent years there has been significant growth in NSW in the number of women over the age of 55 years accessing homelessness services.⁸⁰ Women face particular challenges in maintaining stable housing as a result of lower incomes, breaks in employment, lower retirement savings, and due to experiences of domestic and family violence.

Women need access to information and services that respond appropriately to female health needs. Approaches need to support women across the lifespan, such as female-specific preventative health screening programs. Other support may be time-limited, for example, responding to a woman's experience of menopause.

The complex health and wellbeing needs of mothers need to be suitably addressed. Motherhood can be associated with a range of physical, psychological and social health implications for women and their families. Supporting the good health of mothers before, during and after birth, promotes positive long-term wellbeing outcomes for women and their families, and ultimately the wider community.

How will we respond?

The NSW Government is committed to increasing opportunities for all women and girls in NSW to be healthy and well at every stage of their lives.

Service delivery in NSW is guided by the *NSW Health Framework for Women's Health 2013*, which is responsive to the biological and social health and wellbeing needs of women.⁸¹ In addition to mainstream services, we support a range of health services that aim to improve the health status of women. Twenty Women's Health Centres across NSW, for example, provide a holistic, woman-centred approach to the delivery of primary health care.

Over the next four years, we will accelerate our efforts to respond to any gaps in women's health services, and target the social and biological determinants affecting women's health.

It is important to acknowledge the disproportionate impact of domestic, family and sexual violence experienced by women and girls. The NSW Government continues to deliver reforms under the *NSW Domestic and Family Violence Blueprint for Reform 2016-2021: Safer Lives for Women, Men and Children*,⁸² the *NSW Sexual Assault Strategy 2018-2021*,⁸³ and the *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018-2023*.⁸⁴

Over the next four years, through annual action plans, we will:

- identify opportunities to continue to improve the coordination, integration and delivery of services to women within the NSW Health system
- work across government to respond to the needs of older women at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness and housing stress. Our efforts will include increasing focus on the multi-faceted contributors to women's experiences of housing instability and developing innovative housing solutions for older women
- through *Future Directions for Social Housing in NSW*,⁸⁵ we will drive better outcomes for tenants including helping those who are able to transition out of social housing. Under the *Social and Affordable Housing Fund* we will encourage new proposals that target older women. Under *Start Safely* we will provide assistance and financial help to secure stable housing for women who have experienced domestic and family violence
- continue efforts to nurture the health and wellbeing of all mothers and their babies through the provision of best-practice primary health care, including targeted health services for at-risk women and their children
- improve the way we identify and respond to young women who self-harm in primary care and other health settings.



3. Participation and empowerment



We will support women's engagement through social networks, access to information, and building confidence using diverse representations of women and girls.

Women contribute to communities, connect through many different types of relationships and build networks that strengthen their links to place, self-identity, culture and language.

Women's connection to others and the wider community helps build a sense of purpose and reduce social isolation. There is a direct link between building social connections and improving the quality, purpose and meaning of people's lives.⁸⁶ Social connection is a strong predictor of increased mental and physical health.⁸⁷

To build social capital for women, especially those who experience greater barriers (due to geography or language for example), it is important that opportunities for establishing connections are supported. This is achieved when we provide better opportunities for women to find their place among networks and have their voices heard.

Formal and informal networks support women to build relationships and respond to the issues that affect them and people in their communities. For some women, such as those living in regional and remote areas, networks are essential for connecting with others and accessing information and services. Networks provide opportunities to engage with peers, and address issues unique to local communities.

Forming a healthy sense of self, personal identity and collective belonging is linked to a sense of hope for the future, a feeling of control over things that unexpectedly happen and strength to overcome challenges. This is especially important for children and young people. Young women are more likely than other age groups to experience high or very high psychological distress and intentional self-harm.⁸⁸

The top three concerns for young people were school or study problems, coping with stress and body image.⁸⁹ Fostering a strong sense of cultural identity is critical for CALD and Aboriginal women and girls to develop resilience and support healing.⁹⁰

Social media has revolutionised the way we communicate and establish networks. For young people especially, the online world is a space in which self-identity and relationships are shaped and expressed. An attitudinal survey of 1,000 children and young people in March 2017 by the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People NSW found that over 80 per cent use social media twice or more a day, with 40 per cent of children and young people using social media continuously.⁹¹

The use of social media is linked to increasing rates of anxiety, depression and poor sleep in young people.⁹² Young women need access to information about protecting their online privacy and how to respond to cyber bullying.

Mentoring can be a powerful tool to provide social support to young people during an often challenging transition period into adulthood. A good mentor can provide inspiration, guidance and leadership to a young person, increasing skills, confidence and resilience.⁹³ We consider that mentoring can help girls and young women reach their higher potential.

The NSW Government recognises the importance of improving financial literacy for women and girls to achieve greater economic participation and empowerment.⁹⁴ Having knowledge from a young age about income management and superannuation, and planning for retirement can improve women's economic security across the lifespan.

Participation in sport creates inclusive, equitable, healthy and safe environments for women and men, girls and boys. The rise of women's elite sport in NSW provides significant opportunities to challenge traditional norms and stereotypes, and promote diversity in sport leadership. It is an exciting and empowering social shift that is breaking traditions, expectations and creating a new cohort of role models.

How will we respond?

The NSW Government is committed to supporting opportunities that enable women and girls to actively participate in their communities, build their confidence and resilience, and celebrate their achievements. Organisations such as the Older Women's Network and initiatives such as the Rural Women's Network provide invaluable social support to women in NSW, while the NSW Woman of the Year Awards celebrate and acknowledge exceptional women.



over
80%

An attitudinal survey of **1,000 children and young people** in March 2017 by the Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People NSW found that over **80%** use **social media twice or more a day**.

In 2018 the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Commissioner, is leading a national conversation – Wiya Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) – with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to hear their priorities, challenges and aspirations. The results of the Women's Voices consultations will inform our responses to issues facing Aboriginal women and girls.

Over the next four years, through annual action plans, we will focus our efforts on empowering more women across the state through targeted social initiatives.

- We will maximise opportunities for the community to reflect on and celebrate the entrepreneurial, economic, cultural and political achievements of women across NSW.
- We will identify and support opportunities for women across NSW to engage with networks, information and services that respond to their needs.
- In November 2017, Minister for Sport, the Hon. Stuart Ayres MP announced the development of a *Women in Sport Strategy*. This strategy will maximise the health, social and commercial benefits of sport participation by engaging new partners and developing inclusive, respectful sporting cultures, clubs and venues which cater for women's needs.
- NSW Government agencies, will work with Commonwealth agencies to develop innovative approaches to supporting the online safety of young women and girls.
- We will work to embed multicultural principles through the Strategy's implementation and through the development of future initiatives for CALD stakeholders and communities.



Implementation

The NSW Women's Strategy is using a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach to advance social and economic equality for women and girls.

Over each of the next four years we will produce an annual action plan, which will present initiatives under each of the three priority areas and, where appropriate, include agreed targets and outcomes to enable progress to be measured. Development of each action plan will consider the diverse needs and inequities experienced by women across NSW, and recognise the important role the NSW Government plays in leading, supporting and working in partnership with people from different sectors and communities.

Annual action plans allow flexibility to consider future actions as new ideas emerge, or the needs of specific cohorts or communities are identified.

Monitoring and evaluation

Critical to improving outcomes for women and girls is an ongoing commitment to data collection, monitoring and evaluation. Mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation will be established to support the implementation of the Strategy.

Understanding the factors that drive inequality and how these can be addressed will improve existing approaches and guide the development of new action.

Governance and reporting

The Minister for Women is responsible for overseeing the impact on women and girls of NSW Government policy and practice, to ensure equitable outcomes.

We will convene a *NSW Women's Strategy* Interdepartmental Committee to guide and support implementation, monitoring and reporting of action plans. The Interdepartmental Committee will also play a critical role in identifying initiatives and required resources for inclusion in future action plans.

Where appropriate, partner agencies with lead actions under the Strategy will provide an annual report on progress to the Interdepartmental Committee and the Minister for Women. Some actions in the Strategy are subject to alternative reporting governance, and reporting on these actions will be drawn from these sources.





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