

## National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality Consultation Submission

*This submission was in the form of an online survey with an 800-word limit. The question from the discussion paper we responded to was: **What are your priorities for achieving gender equality in Australia?***

Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand (GSANZ) has two key priorities for gender equality in Australia: **economic security** for all women, and **climate action**. These priorities connect with each factor discussed in the Strategy Discussion Paper. Women's economic security and climate action can only be achieved while also addressing complex intersecting barriers faced by women who are marginalised because of systemic discrimination towards their identity characteristics, such as colonialism, racism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia.

**Economic security:** is core to economic equality, and addressing women's economic security is an avenue to address multiple issues simultaneously. This encompasses women's access to dignified work and fair wages, and a supportive social security system. Women's economic security, independence and empowerment are important factors in gender equality, and therefore violence prevention.

As a family violence (FV) service provider, GSANZ supports Our Watch's gendered approach to violence prevention. *As such, economic security is a prevention strategy.* Research for the 2021 National Summit on Women's Safety found that young women in financial hardship are twice as likely to have experienced FV, and the violence is more likely to be severe. Supporting women's economic security can be a means to stop this violence from occurring.

Economic insecurity is a barrier for women leaving abusive relationships. Violence can impact economic security through economic abuse and the loss of employment, income, assets, and support networks. It can also be affected by the costs involved in leaving violent relationships, including legal and housing expenses. GSANZ advocates for *improving women's economic security to support women in crisis stages of FV and removing financial barriers to leaving abusive relationships.*

**Recovery:** Economic security is essential to recovery from FV. FV can have lifelong emotional and financial impacts on victim-survivors. Recovery involves rebuilding all aspects of victim-survivors' lives, including psychological, financial, physical, and social wellbeing. Recovery is a long-term process, and as such, ongoing

resources are required to address its impacts. This includes the mental health impacts of intergenerational trauma for both adult and children victim-survivors. GSANZ advocates for *supporting women's economic security to obtain financial independence as an essential aspect of recovery.*

A key part of economic security – and recovery from violence – is access to safe, secure, affordable housing. Unstable and unaffordable housing is an issue that is increasingly affecting women. GSANZ advocates *for policy reform to improve access to affordable housing and investment in transitional and long-term affordable housing.*

**Economic Participation:** Access to fair and flexible employment, that does not punish women for care responsibilities, and includes affordable childcare and public transport, facilitates women's workforce participation. GSANZ advocates *for these aspects to be prioritised when analysing employment options for women.*

**Liveable and Dignified Income:** Social security payments are essential to women's economic security. Currently, systemic barriers and processes are keeping women in economic insecurity by increasing their dependence on partners, and not valuing care and parenting work. For example, the 'member of a couple rule' assumes people receiving social security payments are financially reliant on their partner. This can particularly impact disabled women and increases the risk of financial abuse. GSANZ advocates for *raising the rates of social security payments, removing mutual obligations for parenting payments and reforming eligibility criteria.*

**Climate Justice:** We have already seen the disastrous effects of climate change across the globe, in the form of extreme temperature changes, rising sea levels and frequent natural disasters. The effects of climate change will have a disproportionate impact on already marginalised groups, including women and girls, by exacerbating existing power imbalances.

Australia's Gender Equality Strategy must consider jobs for women in a decarbonising economy, increased family violence risks during and post-disasters, and income, housing, and financial supports. GSANZ advocates that any cross-sector strategy that looks to the future **must address climate change and its impacts on women and girls.**

In the context of the Strategy, this involves placing a climate change lens onto all actions. For example, when discussing economic security and safety for women, considering:

- How government policies can create new employment and education opportunities for women when planning in a decarbonising economy.
- Whether FV services are funded for, and equip to deal with, the increasing rates of FV during and post disasters.
- How private renting and social housing, which women are more reliant on, can be more eco-friendly and energy efficient, to combat rising prices of non-renewable energy.

Climate action must centre First Nations knowledge of country, and prioritise First Nations economic justice, stewardship, control of land and self-determination. This is out of respect for First Nations people as Traditional Owners, as well as acknowledging that First Nations people are one of the groups that have been, and will be, disproportionately impacted by climate change. *GSANZ supports the findings and recommendations of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) report from the Australian Human Rights Commission on this issue.*