



DIVERSITY
COUNCIL
AUSTRALIA

SUBMISSION

National Strategy to Achieve
Gender Equality

April 2023

Thursday, 27 April 2023

Chantelle Stratford
Acting First Assistant Secretary
Office for Women

By email: OFWengagement@pmc.gov.au

NATIONAL STRATEGY TO ACHIEVE GENDER EQUALITY

Dear Ms Stratford,

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

We have over 1,200 member organisations, reaching more than 20% of the Australian labour market.

We work with these organisations to increase gender equality outcomes in their organisations across matters of safety and wellbeing, recruitment, and talent development, pay equity, workplace flexibility and other areas that support the impact of caring responsibilities. We take an inclusive, intersectional and where appropriate, a trauma informed approach.

In preparing this submission, DCA survey employees from our member organisations, asking them to share their views on how the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality could support and progress workplace gender equality.

We received an unprecedented response to our member consultation survey with over 800 member employees responding. Achieving workplace gender equality is evidently an important issue for our members, many of whom have been working towards equity for a long time.

We believe a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality could be a powerful tool supporting and progressing gender equality in the workplace, and we commend the government for taking action to develop it.

As our submission outlines, there are many systemic and cultural barriers preventing Australian workplaces from progressing gender equality. We have made a number of recommendations that we believe, if implemented, will help the Strategy to deliver real change for workplace gender equality.

Please feel free to contact myself or Cathy Brown, Director of Communications and Advocacy, on 0424 578 698 or advocacy@dca.org.au, you require any further information about this matter.

Yours sincerely



Lisa Annese

Chief Executive Officer

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ABOUT US

Who we are

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) is the independent, not-for-profit peak body leading diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace in Australia. We provide DCA members with a unique knowledge bank of research, practice and expertise across all diversity dimensions, accrued over more than 30 years.

DCA's Membership represents over 20% of the Australian workforce

DCA's prestigious group of over 1,200 members is drawn from business and workplace diversity leaders and includes some of Australia's biggest employers. Our membership reaches over 20% of the Australian labour market.

About our members

1,200 member organisations, including almost 40 ASX100 Listed companies.

Our members are drawn from across the corporate, government and not-for-profit sectors and vary from small to large workforces in size.

Our founding members include ANZ, AMP, BHP, Boral, Coles, IBM Australia, Myer, Orica, Rio Tinto and Westpac.

DCA's Members are listed on our website here: <https://www.dca.org.au/membership/current-dca-members>.

Our belief, vision and mission

- Our **belief** is that diversity and inclusion is good for people and business.
- Our **vision** is to create a more diverse and inclusive Australia.
- Our **mission** is to encourage and enable Australian organisations to create diverse and inclusive workplaces.

What we do

DCA, formerly known as the Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment Ltd, was established in 1985 as a joint initiative of the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Business Council of Australia to demonstrate the business community's commitment to equal opportunity for women.

Our focus since then has expanded to cover all aspects of diversity in employment, reflecting changes in practice to embrace all areas of the diversity of human resources.

DCA is not government funded – its income is generated from membership fees, sponsorships and services to business/employers.

Our Research

DCA works in partnership with members to generate ground-breaking evidence-based diversity and inclusion resources that enables Australian organisations to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.

- **DCA research is grounded in the contributions of people with lived experience.** DCA projects use expert panels, focus groups, think tanks and surveys to make people with lived experience central to the project findings.
- **DCA resources are ahead of the curve.** They establish leading diversity thinking and practice, enabling Australian organisations to re-imagine and reconfigure the way they manage talent in today's dynamic operating environments.
- **DCA resources drive business improvement.** They are high impact, driving business improvement through providing evidence-based guidance on how to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.
- **DCA resources are practice focused.** They respond to the information needs of industry leaders and the people they employ.
- **DCA resources speak to the Australian context.** DCA projects generate leading diversity thinking and practice that speaks to Australia's unique and distinctive institutional, cultural and legal frameworks.
- **DCA resources considers all diversity dimensions.** The full spectrum of diversity dimensions are investigated including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status, age, caring responsibilities, race and cultural background, disability, faith and religion, LGBTIQ+ status, social class and work organisation.

Our advocacy on gender equality

DCA has been a long-standing advocate for gender equality in the workplace.

DCA is represented on the *Respect@Work Council* and the Fair Work Commission's working group on sexual harassment, and we regularly submit and provide evidence on government inquiries related to gender equality, which helps inform and improve legislation. Additionally, DCA has conducted research and advocacy on gender equality over many years, shedding light on the challenges and opportunities that exist in this space.

POSITIONING

The importance of taking an intersectional approach

Intersectionality refers to how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising and interlinked characteristics.

DCA's work over many years has recognised how intersectionality impacts the experiences of women in Australian workplaces. For example:

- DCA's *Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) women in Leadership*¹ research explored how the intersections of two key marginalising characteristics - race and gender - are still operating in workplaces to lock CARM women out of leadership.
- DCA, WGEA & Jumbunna's research, *Gari Yala: Gendered Insights*², found that Indigenous women who are also carers experience 'triple jeopardy'. That is, the combination of these three aspects of their identity overlap to amplify their experiences of discrimination and exclusion at work.
- DCA's *Class at Work*³ research shows that 45% of women from self-identified lower classes reported having experienced discrimination and/or harassment of some type.
- DCA's *Out at Work*⁴ recognised the 'double jeopardy' that LGBTIQ+ women face, where the combination of being a woman, and having a non-heterosexual identity combine to make it more difficult for them, relative to cisgender-gay-men or cisgender-heterosexual-women, to progress in the workplace.
- DCA's *Capitalising on Culture and Gender in ASX Leadership*⁵ found that culturally diverse women experience a 'double jeopardy' that lock out culturally diverse women from accessing leadership positions in their workplaces.

It is therefore critical that, in developing the *National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality*, policymakers understand intersectionality, and take an intersectional approach implementing such policies.

A note on binary language used in this submission

While gender does not exist in binary categories, these categories still have very real effects.

However, DCA recognises that there are people whose experiences and identities cannot be captured using binary language, and these limitations should be acknowledged whenever binary language is used.

A trauma informed approach

DCA's research⁶ into family and domestic violence and its impact on workplaces takes a trauma-informed approach which recognises that individuals may have experienced traumatic events or have ongoing trauma that may impact their ability to participate fully in the workplace. This approach involves creating a safe and supportive environment where employees can disclose their experiences without fear of judgement or retaliation. It also involves providing appropriate resources and accommodations to support employees who may be experiencing trauma-related difficulties.

SUMMARY

DCA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission. Gender Equality is an issue of significant interest to DCA and our member organisations.

In preparing our submission, we surveyed employees from our 1200 member organisations. Our survey drew on the questions in the consultation paper, but asked respondents to provide a workplace lens to the questions.

The survey was open for one week and we received a total of 807 responses from DCA members across a wide variety of industries.

Member Consultation Survey: Key themes

We asked our members 9 open-ended questions covering topics from the discussion paper for this consultation. Several key themes emerged in member responses, many of which were consistent across topics and questions.

THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT, BUSINESS AND THE COMMUNITY IN ACHIEVING WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY

We asked DCA members “What should be the role of government, business and the community in achieving workplace gender equality?” 219 respondents provided an answer to this question.

The key themes that emerged from this question were:

- That the government should “lead by example” when it comes to gender equality;
- Universal early childhood education and care;
- Addressing the gender pay gap; and
- Workplace safety;
- Accountability and compliance.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 1: Given that the Minister for Women also has ministerial responsibility for the Australian Public Service, there is an opportunity for Government to be a leader in workplace gender equality, including piloting programs or initiatives for public sector employees.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Noting that the Productivity Commission is set to examine Australia’s childcare system, DCA recommends that the Strategy should also further investigate creating a universal early childhood education and care system, which addresses pay rates for the sector’s mostly female workforce, and accessibility for families.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Families should also be better supported through improvements to parental leave, and encouraging and supporting men to take on more childcare responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The government, business and community should work together to close the gender pay gap.

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Strategy should acknowledge that it is the role of government to create systems for accountability and compliance for workplace gender equality.

PRIORITIES FOR ACHIEVING WORKPLACE GENDER EQUALITY

Workplace gender equality continues to be priority focus in diversity and inclusion (D&I) for many DCA Member organisations.

We asked DCA Members “What are your organisation’s priorities for achieving workplace gender equality in Australia?” 185 respondents provided an answer to this question.

DCA members nominated several key areas of focus, including:

- Improving representation;
- Pay equity;
- Flexible work and job design; and
- Addressing workplace culture (including a focus on eliminating workplace sexual harassment and gendered violence).

A small number of respondents stated that they were unclear on their organisation’s priorities or didn’t believe this was a priority for their organisation.

More than any other area, respondents indicated that their organisation was focussed on improving the representation of women. In male-dominated fields, respondents talked about representation as gender balance throughout their business, while others were focused more specifically on women in leadership. In female-dominated industries, respondents talked about issues around pay inequity.

Pay equity was raised throughout the survey, in this section, some respondents highlighted that the pay gap between male-dominated and female-dominated industries was a key area that needed to be addressed. While other respondents noted that there are systemic issues even where occupational segregation contributes further to pay gaps within industries.

Australia has one of the most gender-segregated labour markets in the OECD, and while it is improving, women continue to be under-represented in leadership in Australian businesses. Industrial and occupational segregation, or the concentration of men or women in certain industries or occupations continue to be significant factors that contribute to the gender pay gap.

RECOMMENDATION 6: DCA recommends that priorities under the Strategy should include a focus on: understanding and reporting on industrial and occupational segregation and how this contributes to the gender pay gap; women’s leadership; and pay equity – particularly in “feminised” industries.

PROGRESSING GENDER EQUALITY IN WORKPLACES

We asked DCA Members “Can you tell us about initiatives or programs that have helped you progress gender equality in your organisation?” We had 172 responses to this question.

Understanding how workplace programs contribute to gender equality is a useful tool for considering programs and initiatives for the broader community.

Key areas of focus for DCA members included:

- Embedding gender equality into D&I and business strategies;
- Specialised industry initiatives;
- Employee resource groups;
- Workplace culture;
- Flexible work options;
- Leadership programs;
- Intersectionality;
- Non-binary inclusion;
- Parental leave;
- Allies supporting gender equality; and
- Recruitment;

UNDERLYING CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EQUALITY

We asked DCA members “What are the underlying challenges for women’s economic equality that the Strategy could address?” 202 respondents provided an answer to this question.

Several key concurrent or interdependent themes emerged from the responses, including:

- The superannuation gap and lack of superannuation on parental leave;
- Parental leave and childcare;
- Traditional gender norms concerning work and care;
- Workplace flexibility; and
- Undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.

DCA has also previously supported calls for the [government to start paying superannuation on the Commonwealth Paid Parental Leave Scheme](#).

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Strategy should address the gender superannuation gap and lack of superannuation payments on parental leave.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Strategy should include plans to improve Australia’s parental leave offering.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The Strategy should include a plan to improve access to universal early childhood education and care.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Strategy should aim to break down traditional and outdated gender norms concerning work and care.

RECOMMENDATION 11: The Strategy should aim to improve the availability of mainstreamed flexible work options that allow workers to balance work and care responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 12: The Strategy should address the undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.

ADDRESSING GENDERED VIOLENCE AND HARASSMENT

We asked DCA members “What should be included in the Strategy to address gendered violence and harassment?” 188 respondents provided an answer to this question.

Key themes that emerged, included:

- Prevention and early intervention;
- Education;
- Engaging men;
- Improving complaints mechanisms; and
- Holding perpetrators accountable.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 13: The Strategy should include plans for evidence-based education on gendered violence and harassment.

RECOMMENDATION 14: Efforts to address gendered violence and harassment should focus on engaging men, at all ages.

RECOMMENDATION 15: The Strategy should aim to improve complaints and reporting mechanisms for gendered violence and harassment.

RECOMMENDATION 16: The Strategy should consider how to hold perpetrators accountable for gendered violence and harassment in the workplace.

RECOMMENDATION 17: DCA recommends that the Strategy be aligned with the work of Respect@Work and the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32.

RECOMMENDATION 18: The Strategy should ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to prevention and response agencies such as ANROWS, Our Watch, the Full Stop Foundation, and others.

HOW CAN THE STRATEGY TAKE AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO GENDER EQUALITY?

DCA members are increasingly aware of the need for and importance of taking an intersectional approach when designing, delivering, and evaluating Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) workplace initiatives.

We asked DCA members “How can the Strategy take an intersectional approach to gender equality?” 164 respondents provided an answer to this question.

Key themes that emerged included:

- Consult widely with a with diversity of groups;
- Improving intersectional data collection;
- Ensuring trans and gender diverse people are included; and
- Education about intersectionality.

Recommendations:

RECOMMENDATION 19: Australia does not currently collect data that enables us to understand how different marginalising characteristics impact gender equality. DCA is of the view that having more nuanced data collected would enable policy makers to design interventions that are more appropriate to the experiences of a diversity of men, women and non-binary or gender diverse people, particularly those from marginalised groups.

RECOMMENDATION 20: The Strategy should ensure that programs and initiatives are designed in a way that centres the voices of people from marginalised groups, for example First Nations people, culturally and racially marginalised people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ people.

RECOMMENDATION 21: When discussing intersectionality, DCA is of the view that it is important to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the term. In our experience, while the term is increasingly used in policy discussions, there is not always an agreed definition or understanding of the term.

UNDERLYING CHALLENGES IN THE WAY WE VALUE AND ALLOCATE PAID AND UNPAID CARE

We asked DCA members “What are the underlying challenges in the way we value and allocate paid and unpaid care that the Strategy could address?” 180 respondents provided an answer to this question. Common themes included.

- Insufficiency of current paid leave provisions

Many respondents noted that current paid leave entitlements are insufficient for workers with caring responsibilities. This included caring for children, elderly relatives and people with disability. Several respondents said that many carers use all their personal leave due to caring responsibilities and do not have enough to look after their own health and wellbeing.

- Shared care for parental leave

Many respondents pointed to the need for more gender-equal and better supported parental leave to place more value on care work and support parents.

- Flexible work for all and improved work/life balance

Several respondents noted that improving access to mainstreamed flexible work arrangements for all genders is important for supporting unpaid caring responsibilities.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 22: The government should consider ways to address the insufficiency of current paid leave provisions for those with caring responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 23: The Strategy should include provision to promote shared care for parental leave.

RECOMMENDATION 24: The Strategy should aim to improve the availability of flexible work options that allow workers to balance work and care responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 25: The Strategy should support flexible work and improving work life balance for all.

RECOMMENDATION 26: The Strategy should address the undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.

BARRIERS TO GENDER EQUAL LEADERSHIP AND REPRESENTATION

The key themes that emerged from this question were:

As highlighted earlier, gender equal representation and women's leadership is a key priority for DCA members. We asked DCA members 'What do you think are the main challenges to achieving gender equal leadership and representation?'. 203 respondents provided an answer to this question.

- Discrimination;
- Biased leadership models (including the impact of caring responsibilities); and
- Visibility.

Backlash was also raised by some respondents, the concern that equality will negatively impact other groups (in this case men).

However, DCA's research has shown that workplaces that are more diverse and inclusive are beneficial for everyone in the organisation – a finding that we would encourage the government to emphasise in their Strategy.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 27: The Strategy should include specific funding for leadership programs and initiatives that centre women from marginalised groups, including First Nations women, culturally and racially marginalised women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ women.

RECOMMENDATION 28: The Strategy should emphasise how diverse and inclusive workplace are beneficial for all.

INTRODUCTION

DCA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission. Gender equality is an issue of significant interest to DCA and our member organisations.

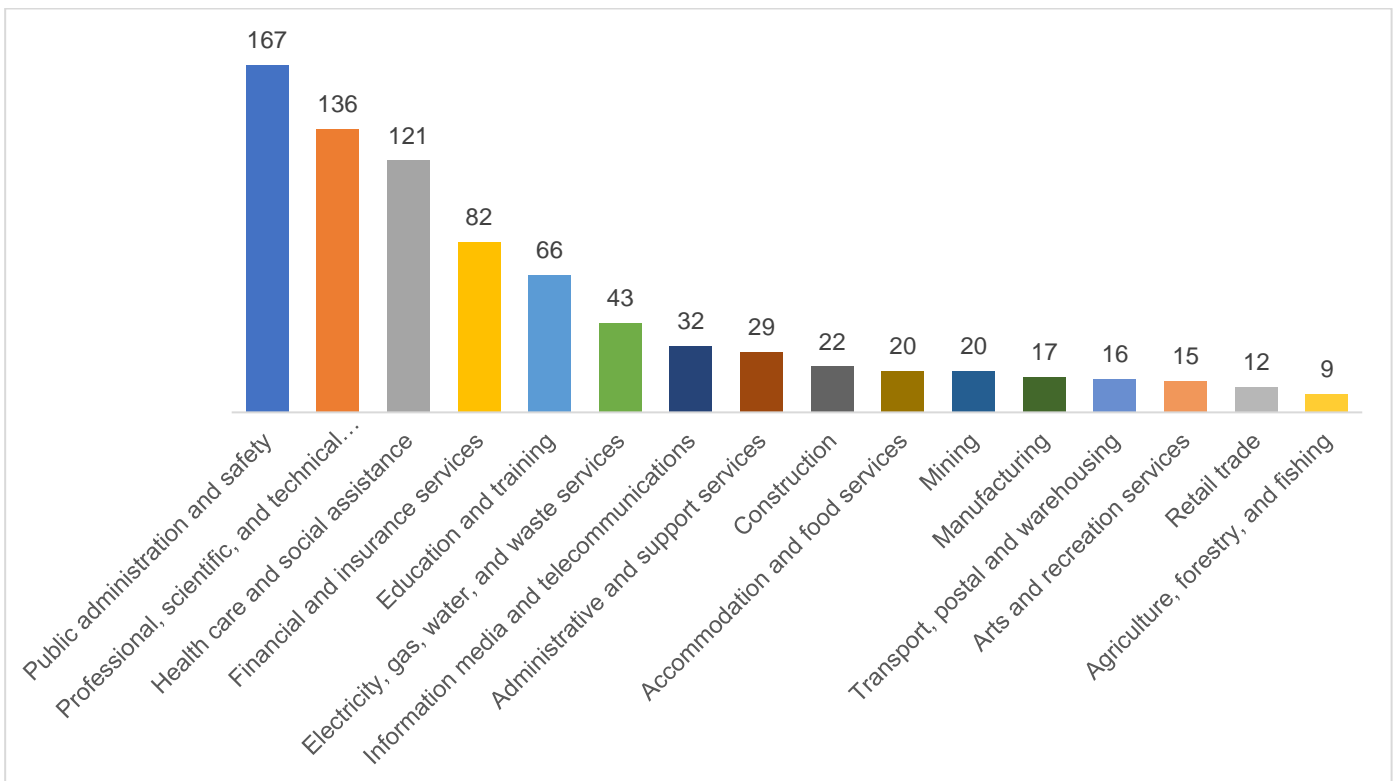
In preparing our submission, we surveyed employees from our 1200 member organisations. Our survey drew on the questions in the consultation paper, but asked respondents to provide a workplace lens to the questions.

The survey was open for one week and we received a total of 807 responses from DCA members.

This unprecedented response to our member consultation survey shows that achieving workplace gender equality is evidently an important issue for our members, many of whom have been working towards equity for a long time.

We received responses from members across a wide variety of industries.

CHART: Respondents by industry.⁷



The role of government, business, and the community in achieving workplace gender equality

We asked DCA members “What should be the role of government, business, and the community in achieving workplace gender equality?” 219 respondents provided an answer to this question.

Several key themes emerged from the responses, including:

- That the government should “lead by example” when it comes to gender equality;
- Caring for children should be better supported through better-funded, affordable and accessible childcare, improvements to parental leave, and encouraging and supporting men to take on more childcare responsibilities;
- Addressing the gender pay gap; and
- Accountability and compliance

The government should “lead by example” when it comes to gender equality

The most common response to this question was the government should “lead by example” when it comes to workplace gender equality. 35 respondents used the phrase “lead by example” in relation to the Australian government and/or the Australian Public Service.

At the very minimum government should be a role model and ideal employer.

Public administration and safety

Ensure women are equally represented at all levels of the public service, not clustered in customer service/public facing roles or departments that focus on social policy.

Public administration and safety

*Modelling equality in their own employment, recruitment and retention strategies.
Having a genuine commitment (not just a policy statement) to improving balance
and inclusion across all Departments and service areas.*

Other (please specify)

*Government responsibility should not be limited to systemic levers, policy and
legislation (although the foundation and indubitably very crucial to get this right),
Governments should be leading the way in progressive inclusion role-modelling as
employers.*

Electricity, gas, water, and waste services

RECOMMENDATION 1: Given that the Minister for Women also has ministerial responsibility for the Australian Public Service, there is an opportunity for Government to be a leader in workplace gender equality, including piloting programs or initiatives for public sector employees.

Universal early childhood education and care

Many respondents said that it is the role of government to provide better support for early childhood education and care. Respondents highlighted the need for better financial support, as well as more affordable and accessible childcare.

*To increase female workplace participation there needs to be greater financial
support for childcare. There needs to be more affordable services available.*

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Several respondents were also of the view that it is the role of government to improve and support parental leave.

*Create more affordable childcare to allow equal participation in the workforce.
Equal parental leave policies to reduce the parental load on one carer (typically
mothers).*

Retail Trade

Several respondents said that it is the role of government, business and the community to encourage and support men in taking on a greater share of caring responsibilities for children.

*Increasing women's participation in the workforce by having fathers play a bigger
role in carer responsibilities such as having paid parental leave in first two years of
birth to become primary caring during that time.*

Professional, scientific, and technical services

DCA commends the Government on the important steps it has already taken to make childcare more affordable for many families.

Affordable and accessible early childhood education and care is a key enabler for women’s workforce participation, and yet many women and families struggle with the cost and finding vacancies to suit their needs. What’s more, early childhood educators, most of whom are women, are amongst some of the lowest paid in the country.

While some organisations are finding ways to support their employees’ childcare needs, DCA believes that government too has a role to play in ensuring that all families can access quality childcare at a cost that does not present a barrier to participation, and that childcare workers can have rewarding and sustainable careers.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Noting that the Productivity Commission is set to examine Australia’s [childcare system](#), DCA recommends that the Strategy should also further investigate creating a universal early childhood education and care system, which addresses pay rates for the sector’s mostly female workforce, and accessibility for families.

DCA also recommends that the Strategy should include a focus on assisting families balance care.

RECOMMENDATION 3: Families should also be better supported through improvements to parental leave, and encouraging and supporting men to take on more childcare responsibilities.

Addressing the gender pay gap

Many respondents said that it is the role of government, business and the community to address the gender pay gap. This included addressing pay equity, pay transparency, and occupational and industrial segregation.

Higher pay for female-dominated industries like childcare and aged care.

Administrative and support services

Transparent wage brackets and increments for all industries (incl. private) - this ensures women and minorities looked after.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Provide guidance including goals and timelines. Health Care is a female dominated sector and it is less about representation of women, e.g., 4 out of our 6 executive members are females. But as a female dominated sector, pay levels are lower than

in male dominated sectors. The major issue for us are lower pay levels in general. There continues to be a structural element of different pay for male vs. female dominated sectors, which translates into super, life chances etc. Funding models, such as NDIS, reflect this problem.

Health care and social assistance

Eliminate the gender pay gap - government can make that happen.

Electricity, gas, water, and waste services

Reduction in gender pay gap with more authority in salaries across industries and more inclusive and openness of male dominated industries and support for females in male dominated industries.

Financial and insurance services

Enforcing greater transparency of pay so that inequality is visible. This will only be actioned if it is a legal requirement.

Mining

DCA notes the important work that has been undertaken by the government already in addressing the gender pay gap.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The government, business and community should work together to close the gender pay gap.

Workplace safety

Several respondents highlighted the important role the government can play in addressing harassment and discrimination.

Setting legal framework for addressing and preventing sexual harassment and sex-based discrimination, etc. Prioritising safety for girls and women. Acknowledging systemic discrimination and imbalance of power.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Accountability and compliance

Several respondents said that there should be a focus on accountability and compliance particularly in relation to systemic issues:

*Government must show leadership in removing *systemic* barriers to women's economic equality through targeted policies and strategies that strengthen employer/business accountability. For example, Government can incentivise funding by mandating gender targets, equity plans or relevant accreditation as funding eligibility criteria (an approach with documented success in increasing the*

number of women in mid-level leadership positions). Holding employers accountable through Bills like the recently passed Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Closing the Gender Pay Gap) Bill 2023. Business can implement initiatives—such as retention targets, equal hiring at all levels, promotion support, clear action against poor workplace culture—to increase women’s workforce participation and accelerate women’s economic equality. Businesses can also work with gender equity certification or accreditation programs such as The Science in Australia Gender Equity Athena SWAN awards or the Workplace Gender Equality Agency’s Employer of Choice for Gender Equality certification. These programs provide frameworks to identify and address inequities and have documented success in accelerating the increase of women in leadership positions.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Strong legal and compliance, as well as strong methods of checking employers are meeting their obligations.

Education and Training

RECOMMENDATION 5: The Strategy should acknowledge that it is the role of government to create systems for accountability and compliance for workplace gender equality.

Priorities for achieving workplace gender equality

Workplace gender equality continues to be priority focus in diversity and inclusion (D&I) for many DCA Member organisations.

We asked DCA Members ‘What are your organisation’s priorities for achieving workplace gender equality in Australia?’ 185 respondents provided an answer to this question.

DCA members nominated several key areas of focus, including:

- Improving representation;
- Pay equity;
- Flexible work and job design; and
- Addressing workplace culture.

Improving representation

More than any other area, respondents indicated that their organisation was focussed on improving the representation of women. Some respondents talked about representation as gender balance throughout their business, while others were focused more specifically on women in leadership.

A major focus for many organisations was addressing the gender balance across their organisation. Several organisations had specific targets for representation across the organisation, most commonly the “40:40:20” split:

Aiming for an organisational gender split of 40:40:20 (women:men:non-binary/any), with this ratio applicable at all levels.

Information media and telecommunications

At the company I work for we have inclusive and a diverse workforce with a 40/40/20 recruitment principle for gender equitable recruitment process of shortlisted candidates, we also have gender neutral panelled interviews, inclusive bathrooms and an alliance/partnership with pride in diversity to help support initiatives internally

Financial and insurance services

While some respondents indicated that their organisation was focussed on the need for gender balance across the employee lifecycle:

Our company data suggests the gender balance requires attention at all phases of employment – recruitment, development / promotion and retention. The company has a targeted action plan covering recruitment / development / retention.

Information media and telecommunications

Australia's occupational segregation is a significant contributor to the gender pay gap, and some respondents indicated that they were focussed on improving representation of women in specific occupations:

Increasing the number of women in executive, construction, science and technology roles.

Transport, postal and warehousing

Pay equity

Addressing the gender pay gap is an issue of significant importance for many DCA members. Not surprisingly, closing the gender pay gap was an area of focus in many of the respondent's organisations, as it was in the previous question.

Continuing to close the gender pay gap which is currently lower than national average.

Administrative and support services

Some respondents highlighted that the pay gap between male-dominated and female-dominated industries was a key area that needed to be addressed.

In particular, this was an issue raised by respondents in the 'Health care and social assistance' industry.

... it is about the pay levels we need to change in general to close the pay gap between female and male dominated sectors.

Health care and social assistance

We work in an industry with a very feminised workforce. Gender equality for us is better pay and better support for women to have careers in the industry. In addition, the removal of ageist policies that result in older women not being employed.

Health care and social assistance

While other respondents noted that there are systemic issues even where occupational segregation contributes further to pay gaps within industries.

[Our overarching department] has one of the lower gaps in Australia; however, [our agency] is one of the worst organisations. With acknowledged higher pay rates for male dominated medical professions and a global shortage this will be difficult to change.

Health care and social assistance

Some respondents highlighted the importance of recent reforms that will help close the gap.

Removing pay secrecy requirements - this is one of the biggest enablers of pay discrepancies between genders and races. If staff can't talk about it, then it won't be combatted.

Manufacturing

Addressing workplace culture

Given that important *Respect@Work* reforms have been implemented over recent months, a number of respondent's highlighted that addressing workplace culture was a specific focus in their organisation.

To ensure that our workplace is a welcoming and safe place that supports workplace gender equality - for our staff as well as the clients we support through our services.

Health care and social assistance

Systemic issues

A number of respondents noted that there were systemic issues that needed to be addressed for gender equality to be achieved in their organisation. Systemic issues are policies, practices or procedures that result in some people receiving unequal access or being excluded.

Start looking for covert and systemic barriers to equality and remove them.

Education and training

Unclear

A small number of respondents stated that they were unclear on their organisation's priorities, or didn't believe this was a priority for their organisation. While these responses were in the minority, we have highlighted them as we believe that this will be an issue that needs to be addressed in the *Strategy*.

All the talk is that it's one of the items on the agenda, however the walk is that little changes.

Public administration and safety

We have a visible range of diversity committees, workplace flexibility although this is often impacted by the views of senior leadership. For example, a requirement for 50% office attendance without any substantial argument for why this is necessary other than broad generalisations.

Financial and insurance services

Workplace priorities in [my organisation] don't seem to have much punch. There are wishy washy KPIs. 50% women at interview stage of leadership roles. Premier's target of 50% women in leadership reduced to 40% because it is a male dominated space. Just try harder. IWD is tokenistic. Still with the "what about International Mens Day?"

Transport, postal and warehousing

Australia has one of the most gender-segregated labour markets in the OECD, and while its improving, women continue to be under-represented in leadership in Australian businesses. Industrial and occupational segregation, or the concentration of men or women in certain industries or occupations continue to be significant factors that contribute to the gender pay gap⁸.

RECOMMENDATION 6: DCA recommends that priorities under the Strategy should include a focus on: understanding and reporting on industrial and occupational segregation and how this contributes to the gender pay gap; women's leadership; and pay equity – particularly in 'feminised' industries.

Progressing gender equality in workplaces

We asked DCA Members ‘Can you tell us about initiatives or programs that have helped you progress gender equality in your organisation?’ We had 172 responses to this question.

Understanding how workplace programs contribute to gender equality is a useful tool for considering programs and initiatives for the broader community.

Embedding gender equality into D&I and business strategies

More than any other area, respondents highlighted that embedding gender equality in their general diversity and inclusion strategies, and overall business strategies was essential to progressing gender equality.

Organisation development methodology to analyse data to identify systemic barriers to gender equity. Ensuring accountability sits with leaders / executives and not just P&C/D&I. Talent programs targeting women in traditionally male dominated leadership roles, programs supporting women back into work after career breaks. Setting financially linked targets for leaders.

Retail trade

Our D&I Strategy has gender equality as one of our five focus areas. Within this framework we provide training and education to employees and people leaders on unconscious biases, fair recruitment and selection, the impact of intersectionality on gender discrimination.

Financial and insurance services

Specialised industry initiatives

Many respondents were focussed on initiatives that focussed specifically on their industry:

We are a member of a program specifically designed to identify women in the early stages of their career and at university who are interested in becoming investment professionals.

Financial and insurance services

We are a male dominated industry so starting from behind because of this. Our initiatives include but not limited to: gender split tracking, by level, department,

globally; M/F split on interview shortlist, interview panel include gender split, require recruiters to submit female candidates; promotion is panel process (exec) to ensure that females are always considered; gender pay gap measuring & tracking; family friendly policies to attract & retain female employees

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing

Years ago [we] gained an exemption from the Sex Discrimination Act to advertise exclusively for women guards. and years later representation of women in guard and driver positions is not a problem..

Transport, postal and warehousing

A program where we allow women from other industries or who have had a career break to come in and spend 12 months learning the ropes and undergoing formal education with the plan to take on a permanent role in tech at the end of the 12 months. Strong gender agnostic parental leave offerings.

Information media and telecommunications

We are participating in the Career Revive initiative to help attract and retain people who have had extended career breaks (e.g. due to parental leave, caring responsibilities, etc).

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Many respondents also nominated Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as contributing positively to gender equality in their organisation.

We have a relatively newly formed gender equality staff network which is doing some great work.

Manufacturing

ERGs, also known as Employee Networks, or Employee Affinity Groups are voluntary, employee-led groups that serve as a resource for members and organisations by fostering a diverse, inclusive workplace aligned with an organisation's mission, values, goals, business practices, and objectives.

Workplace culture

Once again workplace culture was an important focus for a number of respondents.

As a department we have a group that is helping to implement grassroots initiatives that focus on improving workplace culture to improve gender equity. At the moment the workplace is toxic and not a pleasant environment for some female rangers. We

are reluctant to continue to increase the number of females being exposed to this toxic environment. We need to improve the culture first.

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing

Flexible work options

A number of respondents highlighted how workplace flexibility has helped gender equality.

What I have seen is that working from home and flex has enabled full-time work while caring for children easier. For example, two people in our team (male and female) start work and then log off to drop the kids at school and then come back again. This is much more accepted today.

Administrative and support services

Leadership programs

Given that women's leadership was a priority for many respondents, many respondents highlighted that they had women's leadership programs in place. However, many highlight the need to ensure such programs are not designed based on a deficit model.

We run leadership development programs across numerous organisations that focus specifically on women's leadership development - but I don't know that that is enough by a long shot. It still implies 'women need fixing'.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

One respondent indicated that they felt such programs were discriminatory – highlighting that there is work to be done to ensure that any backlash to initiatives designed to address gender inequalities is addressed.

Leadership for women programs. Again, I find this discriminatory and will only breed resentment.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Intersectionality

One respondent highlighted the need to ensure that programs are inclusive of all women:

Our director likes to employ women in power positions, straight, white women with children. Yes, I am being cynical - people tend to forget women who are not straight and don't want children.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Non-binary inclusion

A number of respondents also highlighted that gender equality needed to include people of all genders.

Use of pronouns in email signatures, awareness campaigns, acknowledgement and celebration and opportunities for conferences and events about women in STEM, gender inclusive restrooms

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Parental leave

Parental leave is an issue of significant interest to DCA and to our member organisations.

Recently, we have seen a number of DCA member organisations lead the way when it comes to parental leave offerings in Australia. We have also seen an increase in requests for resources and support from members regarding how to implement best practice parental leave policies.

Unsurprisingly then, parental leave was highlighted by a number of respondents.

There is a strong focus on improving parental leave policy, providing women support as they come back into the workplace from maternity leave, and addressing the pay gap. I would also argue that there needs to be a review of who's picking up the additional work as returning mothers come back into the workforce. A lot of other women are doing additional unpaid work to cover mother's as they re-enter the workforce, often part time to begin with, and this needs to be addressed.

Information media and telecommunications

Good maternity leave policies and being well supported to return to work in a part-time capacity enabled me to keep my foot in the door initially and return earlier and at a slower pace. However, the imbalance in supporting and encouraging fathers and non-birthing parents to jointly participate in flexible work and home duties has hindered my career progression and salary (my husband is a control case for me, same age, same qualifications and same experience prior to kids, with me actually slightly out earning my husband and being promoted slightly earlier, but 3x maternity leave periods and me taking the full brunt of part-time work hours during their early years has seen my husband soar out of reach). COVID-forced working from home policies, and widening flexible work policies to include not just part-time hours but normalising part-time staff by moving more of the workforce out of the office, meaning "out of sight, out of mind" is less of an issue for part-timers as we embrace new ways of working and communicating and understanding that there is more to input and achieving outcomes than being in the office. Thankfully my current workplace has used COVID arrangements as a positive lesson and is continuing with flexible work into the future. Being able to work from home 60% of the week allowed me to return to work 5 days 18 months (or more) before I would have attended an office 5 days!

Financial and insurance services

My organisation offers a good paternity leave policy, they also allow for part-time work and to a point, flexible work, however the frameworks around being successful are not where they should be and whilst you are able to take up these work options they do not always feel successful and creates a decision to either halt career or exit from the workforce, thus adding to the gender gap.

Information media and telecommunications

We have a generous parental leave policy (26 weeks' paid leave for primary and secondary carers) plus we pay superannuation on unpaid parental leave. We have Working Parents groups and provide support services to assist parents in the workplace. We offer coaching/networking programs focused on mid-senior female lawyers to help them achieve their career goals.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Allies supporting gender equality

The role of allies supporting gender equality was also highlighted by some respondents.

Having male allies who are invested in their female colleagues development, and understanding why it's so important for society as a whole.

Electricity, gas, water, and waste services

Recruitment

Promote the broad diversity of people at our workplace (not just gender) during recruitment of new staff. The People team participate in staff selection, and raise any instances of possible gender bias in applicants or decision makers. Showcase staff diversity by publishing an annual profile graphic.

Education and training

Underlying challenges for women's economic equality

We asked DCA members “What are the underlying challenges for women’s economic equality that the Strategy could address?” 202 respondents provided an answer to this question.

Several key concurrent or interdependent themes emerged from the responses, including:

- The superannuation gap and lack of superannuation on parental leave;
- Parental leave and childcare;
- Traditional gender norms concerning work and care;
- Workplace flexibility; and
- Undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.

Workforce participation is directly linked to the ability for women to work after having children - exorbitant costs of childcare, terrible paid parental leave scheme. Govt relies on business to pick up the tab (INCLUDING on superannuation payments on their own govt ppl scheme) and women opt out. Then inside the workforce there are cultural issues around flexibility, men taking flexible arrangements to be involved in care, women end up getting paid less, doing lower ranked roles, etc.

Retail Trade

In general, the expectation on women to carry the weight of unpaid labour and caring responsibilities, which affects their ability to earn at the same level as men. The unaffordability of living, especially as a carer and / or low income earner creates a cycle which begets disability, poverty and vulnerability to violence. Branching out, the underemployment of non-binary, trans and gender diverse peoples needs to be addressed through equitable practice, which can surely piggy back on the strategies put in place to address the challenges of women. This is no longer a binary conversation. Gender diverse and trans peoples are affected by the weight of patriarchal structures that consider the straight white 'able-bodied' cis man a "blue print" for being valued (and therefore economically rewarded) in employment - just as women are. The value of diverse thought needs to be addressed and rewarded.

Information media and telecommunications

... there is an underlying issue with housing and childcare affordability and accessibility that needs to be addressed to increase Women participation in the workforce. The dial for men being the 'breadwinner' is changing, but we must do things within our community to support the change. At the moment, most of the

mothers I know take full time responsibility of their children, whilst working - this creates a culture of burnout, and Women are feeling the brunt of this.

Transport, postal and warehousing

Specific targeted economic support - it is very difficult for a women to participate in the workforce and grow their career when they cannot afford to pay for education or take time to study. Childcare reforms that reduce the cost of childcare (early education and out of school hours care).

Financial and insurance services

Biggest challenges are social and cultural - the policies on paper cannot drive change in people's attitudes, stereotypes and stubborn gender norms. Until men take on more caring and domestic load it's incredibly difficult for women to reach their potential.

Public administration and safety

Too often I see assertive and direct women be labelled as 'aggressive' and 'difficult'. Their behaviour is no different to that of their male counterparts, however, they are looked over for mentorship and leadership positions as well as advancement opportunities.

Public administration and safety

In my extensive experience in the [sector], I have felt very supported, but a big issue I do witness and I think addressing would go a long way in gender equality, is encouraging and making it normal for men and fathers to have extended leave periods and part-time work arrangements. Normalising men adjusting their work hours and accessing flexible work to fully participate in caring duties currently largely performed by women would allow men to feel supported in undertaking these duties. We are at a point where (in the sector) it is accepted that women's work lives are impacted by these duties (and supported by workplaces) but there is still somehow the opposite expectation for men. When my first child was born, my boss casually asked how long I'd like to take off work and if I had any thoughts about how many days I would return to work. My husband (in the same role, same level and same experience as me, but in a different agency) was given zero support and felt the expectation that there would be no change required to his work life after becoming a parent. That has resulted in a definite primary/secondary caregiver split in our household and has impacted my ability to return to work and participate more in my career. So regardless of feeling supported by my workplace, without the support from the same "workplace" (the wider sector) for my husband, I am experiencing unintended consequences of gender inequality.

Financial and insurance services

Deep rooted perspectives of traditional gender-segregated roles not only in workforce but in households. Unless men are ready to undertake traditionally

female-dominated occupations and roles within workforce and households, the women cannot make a difference on their own. We need the other 50% of the population to get on board.

Public administration and safety

Occupational segregation is a huge problem that will be difficult to unpick and solve. This combined with the intrinsic dis-valuing of the work women have traditionally done in society (or been allowed to do), even though it is essential to economic functioning.

Public administration and safety

Review Sweden's system for paid parental leave (only accessible if both parents take it to normalise males taking leave from work). When parental leave is an option, women miss out 99% of the time. Address societies expectations of males vs. females. Government should invest in 'traditional female roles' instead of investing in 'male dominated' industries during tough times, this needs to change. Why is a plumber or tradie paid better than a nurse or childcare provider??

Agriculture, forestry, and fishing

RECOMMENDATION 7: The Strategy should address the gender superannuation gap and lack of superannuation payments on parental leave.

RECOMMENDATION 8: The Strategy should include plans to improve Australia's parental leave offering.

RECOMMENDATION 9: The Strategy should include a plan to improve access to universal early childhood education and care.

RECOMMENDATION 10: The Strategy should aim to break down traditional gender norms concerning work and care.

RECOMMENDATION 11: The Strategy should aim to improve the availability of flexible work options that allow workers to balance work and care responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 12: The Strategy should address the undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.

Addressing gendered violence and harassment

We asked DCA members “What should be included in the Strategy to address gendered violence and harassment?” 188 respondents provided an answer to this question.

Several key themes emerged from the responses, including:

- Prevention and early intervention;
- Education;
- Engaging men;
- Improving complaints and reporting mechanisms; and
- Consequences and disciplinary action for perpetrators.

Prevention and early intervention

A number of respondents highlighted prevention and early intervention.

Prevention, early intervention, response - more in the early stages for prevention - specialised response units and legal processes as current systems do not adequately cater - a national response rather than federated responses.

Mining

Education

Several respondents noted that education was critical to addressing gender violence and harassment.

Violence and harassment are both behaviours that arise from a lack of respect for the other. The concept of respect for all people needs to be taught from early childhood and kids need to see this respect being played out in society, otherwise they won't believe it. Community and workplaces, should support whistle-blowers who bring to light places with a culture of harassment. Groups with these problematic cultures should be encouraged with carrot and stick to change their culture into an equitable one.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Education that is more than watching a video and checking a box, real education that teaches men and women how to address and respond appropriately to this behaviour.

Administrative and support services

RECOMMENDATION 13: The Strategy should include plans for evidence-based education on gendered violence and harassment.

Engaging men

Many respondents noted that education specifically aimed at men and boys, and engaging men, were key to addressing gendered violence and harassment.

Training and education targeted at men taking action when they notice problem behaviours in their male colleagues. For too long the initiatives have been targeted at women, when it's time to shift the focus on those who have greater power to actually influence behaviour in this demographic.

Electricity, gas, water, and waste services

Education of boys between ages 6 - 24 to break intergenerational patterns of behaviour. Repercussions for sexual harassment - not just dismissal but damage to reputation and career prospects, such that behaviour is disincentivised.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Educational programs targeted at young males. change the narrative from victim blaming and teach girls and women how to avoid gendered violence and harassment and focus on education to males about perpetrating. Financial literacy programs available to girls and women. More funding into emergency assistance or support services to people who are experiencing or at risk of experiencing domestic and family violence and/or sexual assault.

Other (please specify)

Funding for programs for education and support for boys and men. It will take a long time to shift established behavioural norms.

Other (please specify)

RECOMMENDATION 14: Efforts to address gendered violence and harassment should focus on engaging men.

Improving complaints mechanisms

A number of respondents identified improving complaints and reporting mechanisms as key to addressing gendered harassment and violence.

A modern and research backed way to provide a safe space to allow reporting of the two aspects.

Construction

External body to which such instances can be reported.

Education and training

A safe place to report it that alongside help, offers free and immediate psychological support, as well as ensuring privacy.

Education and training

Zero tolerance, de-identified reporting systems, strategies to protect women in smaller organisations where de-identified reporting systems are unlikely to actually be 'de-identified'

Health care and social assistance

Training, ability to report to an agency that can act as an intermediary.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

RECOMMENDATION 15: The Strategy should aim to improve complaints and reporting mechanisms for gendered violence and harassment.

Holding Perpetrators Accountable

Many respondents saw strengthening consequences for perpetrators as important for addressing gendered violence and harassment.

Zero tolerance - anyone found guilty of an offence at work should be terminated immediately. Not promoting men out and quietly escorting women out the door which seems to be what happens.

Construction

Greater consequences. A legal system that supports women and judges and other legal professionals that are better educated about the impacts of violence on women and that what a woman wears or where she walks is not a woman "asking for it".

Health care and social assistance

Greater disciplinary actions for offenders in the workplace.

Financial and insurance services

Consequences with teeth and record attached to employment.

Health care and social assistance

Recommendations for harsh penalties for those individuals (and organisations) that are involved with or creating toxic environments.

Public administration and safety

RECOMMENDATION 16: The Strategy should consider how to hold perpetrators accountable for gendered violence and harassment in the workplace.

Addressing gendered violence and harassment should be a critical pillar of the Strategy. The Strategy should take a trauma-informed approach which recognises that individuals may have experienced traumatic events or have ongoing and ensure that appropriate resources and accommodations to support them.

DCA notes that the recent implementation of the full suite of recommendations from Respect@Work will contribute significantly to addressing gendered violence and harassment in workplaces.

RECOMMENDATION 17: DCA recommends that the Strategy be aligned with the work of Respect@Work and the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32.

RECOMMENDATION 18: The Strategy should ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to prevention and response agencies such as ANROWS, Our Watch, the Full Stop Foundation, and others.

How can the Strategy take an intersectional approach to gender equality?

DCA members are increasingly aware of the need for and importance of taking an intersectional approach when designing, delivering, and evaluating Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) workplace initiatives.

In the case of gender equity initiatives, taking an intersectional approach means the initiatives are more likely to be inclusive of and benefit all women. Workplace gender equity initiatives, even with the best of intentions, can inadvertently fail to consider the different life experiences and needs of all women – resulting in improved outcomes mainly for white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered women.

We asked DCA members ‘*How can the Strategy take an intersectional approach to gender equality?*’ 164 respondents provided an answer to this question.

The key themes in respondents’ answers included:

- Consult widely with a diversity of groups;
- Improving intersectional data collection;
- Ensuring trans and gender diverse people are included; and
- Education about intersectionality.

Consult widely with a diversity of groups

A number of respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring that the consultation to develop the Strategy includes people from diverse groups. For example:

Ensure diversity in respondents, highlight their experiences and note challenges common to women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds even if results from surveys indicate differing results (i.e. encourage people to think about whose voices are not always heard)

Public administration and safety

Consult intersectionally. Ask women, trans and gender diverse folks what do they need; those who are CARM, disabled, LGBTQIA+, of low social class, from a range

of religions, and First Nations. This is the only way to create an intersectional Strategy.

Information media and telecommunications

Some were more specific that the consultation includes marginalised groups:

Consultation with marginalised groups to ensure this is not just a 'white, able-bodied, cis, English speaking' women's Strategy.

Manufacturing

Or specific experiences of discrimination:

Be more intentional about understanding the diverse experiences of individuals that result from the overlapping/ intersection of the different identities they have (age, race/ ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, etc); and how these create multiple forms of discrimination for many.

Health care and social assistance

Some respondents also highlighted that consultation alone was insufficient – and that work needed to be done to ensure that decision makers also had diverse lived experiences:

Ensure the decision-makers at the table when the Strategy is being designed are a diverse group of people with a meaningful understanding of the lived experience of women from other marginalised backgrounds.

Electricity, gas, water, and waste services

Improving intersectional data collection

Australia does not currently collect data that enables us to understand how different marginalising characteristics impact gender equality.

This is a point highlighted by Miriam Glennie, Anna von Reibnitz, Jananie William, Sally Curtis and Sarbari Bordia⁹ in their report on gender pay gap reporting in Australia:

Australia does not collect intersectional data or require reporting on additional measures of disadvantage. The absence of such data means that it is difficult to understand how gender intersects with other factors to contribute to specific types of discrimination and contrasts with most public sector equality reporting frameworks that capture Indigenous status, disability and language background.

DCA Members have previously¹⁰ expressed strong support for improved data collection that would enable intersectional analyses. Our respondents to this survey also supported this position, arguing that:

... the existing evidence base and data collections have many limitations and affect our ability to understand the experiences of, and potential intersecting disadvantages of underrepresented groups. The Strategy should focus on efforts for Government to use (and collect, where appropriate) data on cultural background, socio-economic status and non-binary gender to support analyses that

enable improved understanding of intersectional disadvantage to inform an intersectional approach.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Investment in detailed intersectional equity analyses to inform program design and planning;

Collect, analyse and use disaggregated data based on sex, age, disability, and other social markers to inform target setting and to monitor progress towards equality;

Health care and social assistance

RECOMMENDATION 19: Australia does not currently collect data that enables us to understand how different marginalising characteristics impact gender equality. DCA is of the view that having more nuanced data collected would enable policy makers to design interventions that are more appropriate to the experiences of a diversity of men, women and non-binary or gender diverse people, particularly those from marginalised groups.

Respondents also echoed this view, pointing out that this would mean that policy interventions could specifically:

Consider challenges faced by women of colour, trans-women and disabled women that are additional to those faced by all women and build these into policy to ensure that they are supported and recognised.

Public administration and safety

Respondents also highlighted that those intersectional analyses would assist in demonstrating limitations of current interventions:

Clearly demonstrate with facts and stats that up until now, gender equality has only benefited white able bodies heterosexual women, by showing in percentage of not only 'women' in leadership, but 'women in colour' or 'women with disabilities' etc. Unless it's clearly described, main-stream people are not going to recognise. So not only show gender pay gap, but race pay gap or abilities pay gap etc. Also, bring the voices of so called "marginalised" women at the top and focus on working with First Nations women, and Migrant and Refugee women because they are the most marginalised in Australian society.

Public administration and safety

RECOMMENDATION 20: The Strategy should ensure that programs and initiatives are designed in a way that centres the voices of people from marginalised groups, for example First Nations people, culturally and racially marginalised people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ people.

Ensuring trans and gender diverse people are included

Throughout the survey a number of respondents highlighted that a gender equality Strategy needed to be specific in its inclusion of trans and gender diverse people:

Including trans and nonbinary people! this is absolutely essential - any discussion of gender equality is weakened without them. even if every other intersection is included, or every other minoritized group a woman could belong to is addressed, without trans and gender diverse people being at the centre of both discussions and solutions, the Strategy will be exclusionary (and honestly, hypocritical)

Public administration and safety

Education about intersectionality

RECOMMENDATION 21: When discussing intersectionality, DCA is of the view that it is important to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the term. In our experience, while the term is increasingly used in policy discussions, there is not always an agreed definition or understanding of the term.

For example, a number of respondents stated that they were unsure what intersectionality means:

Not sure what this question means.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

While some even took issue with the premise of the question:

Intersectional is not a real word.

Construction

Other respondents highlighted the need for education on what intersectionality is:

Explain what intersectionality is in the first place, a lot of people seem to just think of racism, feminism, homophobia as separate siloed things, and don't understand how they can compound into a single experience for someone. Including this definition in talks/panels/training/etc. will open people's eyes a bit.

Manufacturing

As well as building the capabilities of staff to respond to intersectional issues.

Build capacity of staff and partners to adopt an intersectional lens to equality.

Health care and social assistance

DCA's recent research on culturally and racially marginalised women included an explanation on intersectionality.

Understanding intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising and interlinked characteristics.



Multiple marginalising characteristics

Intersectionality recognises that some people have **multiple marginalising characteristics** (e.g., Black women, women with disabilities, Asian non-binary women) which negatively affect their access to opportunities. Current approaches to gender equity often treat ‘women’ as one homogenous group. Instead, intersectionality recognises that white women have more access to power, privilege, and resources than CARM women.

For example, DCA research found that while 5.7% of all ASX directors in 2015 were Anglo women, only 2.5% of all ASX directors were from non-Anglocultural origins.⁹



Interlinked characteristics

Intersectionality recognises that people experience multiple forms of bias or marginalisation all at the same time – these forms of bias or marginalisation are therefore *interlinked*.

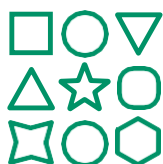
For example, an Asian woman at work may experience gendered racism (e.g., assumptions that she is not suitable for leadership as she will be passive and quiet) rather than sexism separately to racism.¹⁰



Compounding characteristics

Not only are marginalising characteristics interlinked, but they all act together to compound or amplify experiences of discrimination. For example, Black women are paid 67 cents for every \$1 that their white male counterparts earn.

Among all women, the wage gap is smaller: about 84 cents for each \$1. The difference over a 40-year career would mean earning about \$907,680 less than their white male counterparts.¹¹



Remember – not all characteristics are marginalising

For example, while “gender” is a characteristic for men, women, and non-binary people, in Australian workplaces today it is women and non-binary people who on average have less career opportunities than men and therefore experience workplace marginalisation.¹²

Similarly, race is a characteristic for both Black and white people, however it is Black workers who on average have less career opportunities than white people and therefore experience workplace marginalisation.¹³

Underlying challenges in the way we value and allocate paid and unpaid care

We asked DCA members “What are the underlying challenges in the way we value and allocate paid and unpaid care that the Strategy could address?” 180 respondents provided an answer to this question.

Several key themes emerged from the responses, including:

- Insufficiency of current paid leave provisions;
- Shared care for parental leave;
- Supporting flexible work and improving work life balance for all; and
- Addressing the gender pay gap.

Insufficiency of current paid leave provisions

Many respondents noted that current paid leave entitlements are insufficient for workers with caring responsibilities. This included caring for children, elderly relatives and people with disability. Several respondents said that many carers use all their personal leave due to caring responsibilities and do not have enough to look after their own health and wellbeing.

Definitely not significant flexibility for women - depends on where the woman works and their attitudes to care. Also very rarely looks at the role men could play in being carers and providing them with the same flexibility and access to leave so they can take on caring roles. 10 days personal leave, that can be used for caring, is not enough. Requires the person to use their annual leave, which means they may never actually get a break.

Health care and social assistance

Carer's and personal/sick leave balances should be separate from each other. Women are unfairly impacted due to holding primary caring responsibilities and so often use all personal leave balances for their children and are then expected to either work when they themselves are sick, or take leave without pay due to insufficient leave balances. This not only affects the person and their health, but also their superannuation due to lost income.

Public administration and safety

Parental Leave before, while and return processes are very fragmented. Standards are missing. The return to work should be a multiple year program. Getting back to work is the minor problem, the bigger is to constantly take sick leave, as kids are more often sick during the day care/kindergarten period. School stage is another problematic phase. In Australia these systems are not mature, and parents are faced with setbacks in their careers.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

RECOMMENDATION 22: The government should consider ways to address the insufficiency of current paid leave provisions for those with caring responsibilities.

Shared care for parental leave

Many respondents pointed to the need for more gender-equal and better supported parental leave as a way to place more value on care work and support parents.

Non-primary caregiver parental leave should be 'use it or lose it', see Scandinavian models that build this into parental leave to help increase its uptake. Building paid and unpaid care policies from the ground up, not just remodelled traditional ways of care.

Health care and social assistance

Parental leave should be seen as equally important for all new parents, not just mothers.

Public administration and safety

Paid parental leave for 52 weeks, including superannuation payments.

Other (please specify)

RECOMMENDATION 23: The Strategy should include provision to promote shared care for parental leave.

Flexible work for all and improved work/life balance

Several respondents noted that improving access to flexible work arrangements for all genders is important for supporting unpaid caring responsibilities.

Caring responsibilities fall on women in part because men are not afforded the same access to flexible work arrangements.

Other (please specify)

Flexible working in which the workplace culture normalises and supports people to take afternoons, mornings or days off for family events without consequences (provided they complete their agreed-on work) - focusing on productivity rather than hours in the chair. This works for both men and women and if it is normalised, it's an easy step from there to increasing men's take up of paid parental leave.

Other (please specify)

Stop making unpaid overtime an expectation, or a requirement of the job. Abolish "reasonable additional hours" - this rewards people who don't have unpaid care work as they are seen to be keen or committed. Instead, ensure there are enough people to do the work in work hours.

Other (please specify)

Having caring responsibilities has been like a taboo subject and not many people talk about their personal circumstances as they don't want to be viewed as any different to their colleagues. This is undercutting the extra effort that the person has to put into to be able to show up to their job every day and operate like they have nothing else going on in their life and perform to the same level as others who may not have barriers in place.

Information media and telecommunications

Work productivity, pressures, workloads and deadlines. General culture around the workplace on these topics.

Public administration and safety

RECOMMENDATION 24: The Strategy should aim to improve the availability of flexible work options that allow workers to balance work and care responsibilities.

RECOMMENDATION 25: The Strategy should support flexible work and improving work life balance for all.

Addressing the gender pay gap

Once again, some members noted addressing the gender pay gap as a key enabler of gender equality – in this case in order to ensure that the allocation of unpaid care is more gender equal. Some noted that responsibility for unpaid care and the gender pay gap and mutually reinforce each other.

Having women do most of the unpaid care is a societal issue that needs to be addressed in general. I feel that it's important to encourage and support men in working flexibly and taking on more of an active role. Some of the issue stems from the male partner in stereotypical heterosexual relationships often being paid more so it makes more "sense" for the woman to take on unpaid leave for caring responsibilities. This only further exacerbates the career gap. I feel that supporting young women in their career progression could be a way to address this in some part.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

There could be a way to avoid women take more unpaid work when the only reason is that they get paid less than their male partners and therefore it is financially the right thing to do.

Professional, scientific, and technical services

Resourcing the real cost of care is the biggest challenge. The response to date has been to under pay and under value caring roles; a significant contributor to the gender pay gap.

Electricity, gas, water, and waste services

It is a vicious cycle. I earn less so assume the unpaid care role which leads me to earn less to ensure I can meet those care needs, etc. Provide more carers leave? Educate so that gendered roles are not assumed?

Other (please specify)

RECOMMENDATION 26: The Strategy should address the undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.

Barriers to gender equal leadership and representation

As highlighted earlier, gender equal representation and women's leadership is a key priority for DCA members. We asked DCA members 'What do you think are the main challenges to achieving gender equal leadership and representation?'. 203 respondents provided an answer to this question.

This is a particular area of interest for DCA members and aligns with targets under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5.

Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls

Target 5.5: Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life.

Common themes that emerged in responses to this question were:

- Discrimination;
- Biased leadership models;
- Backlash;
- Parenting and care; and
- Visibility.

Discrimination

The most common barrier raised by respondents was discrimination (interestingly echoing the findings of DCA's research into the factors underpinning the pay gap). Discrimination could be how women are judged differently to men.

One of the main challenges is that women are judged in different ways (for example what female politicians wear compared to their male counterparts - it is a new avenue for criticism and takes the debate away from the real issues). One challenge is that we don't often see women in leadership, I mean we have had one female prime minister. A criticism we hear of women running countries is that they are too emotional and hormonal to say have the nuclear codes, this is reflected in other leadership positions. "We can't hire a woman because they are too emotional or too sensitive or they might decide to have a child".

Public administration and safety

Other forms of discrimination included structural barriers and lack of support.

Equality of opportunity through societal or professional structures limiting the "trickle up" to enable people to be considered for leadership positions.

Manufacturing

Misogyny, not enough women represented in key leadership roles, not enough men supporting gender equality.

Health care and social assistance

Biased leadership models

A number of responses highlighted outdated or biased models of what a leader should look like. This is also a theme that has come through in DCA’s recent research on culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership.

Leadership is still seen as a power game, not an enabler or service to an org/team/people/community. Therefore, the people that success are those that have the time, energy and inclination to play with power. Generally speaking, this is not women given other commitments!

Manufacturing

DCA’s new research report, [Culturally and Racially Marginalised \(CARM\) Women in Leadership](#), found that “biased leader prototype” is a barrier locking CARM women out of leadership roles.

LOCK 2

Biased ‘leader’ prototype:

CARM women need to act white and male to get ahead at work. Their experience (including international experience), language skills, and personal resilience are undervalued.

“Diversity is espoused, even celebrated at the bottom levels. But as you climb higher, there are certain traits that they value...basically you have to be male, white, six feet tall.”

KEY 2

Redefine ‘leader’ prototype:

Reflect on your current leadership and who is represented (or not) at senior levels. Ensure CARM women’s unique lived and professional expertise is valued in recruitment, recognition, and reward processes.

RECOMMENDATION 27: The Strategy should include specific funding for leadership programs and initiatives that centre women from marginalised groups, including First Nations women, culturally and racially marginalised women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ women.

Backlash

Backlash was also raised by some respondents, the concern that equality will negatively impact other groups (in this case men).

Fear from males. Protecting their positions.

Electricity, gas, water, and waste services

However, DCA’s research has shown that workplaces that are more diverse and inclusive are actually beneficial for everyone in the organisation – a finding that we would encourage the government to emphasise in their Strategy.

For example, DCA’s [Inclusion@Work Index 2021-2022](#) found that:

Surveyed workers were asked to indicate whether their organisation is taking action to create a diverse and inclusive workplace. The experiences of people working in D&I-active organisations were then compared with those working in D&I-inactive organisations.

Our analysis of the 2021–2022 dataset reveals inclusion and wellbeing are higher for both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers and non-Indigenous workers when working in organisations taking D&I action.

We found this to be the case for people with and without disability, culturally diverse and non-culturally diverse employees, men and women, and LGBTIQ+ and non-LGBTIQ+ employees. Clearly then, it’s not just people from under-represented groups who are benefiting from organisational D&I efforts.

- **Greater Inclusion for All.** *Both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers and non-Indigenous workers in organisations taking D&I action report feeling significantly more respected, connected, able to progress, and able to contribute at work compared to those not working in inactive organisations.*
- **Greater Wellbeing for All.** *In organisations taking D&I action, similar proportions of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers and non-Indigenous are very satisfied with their jobs (61% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 50% non-Indigenous) – and significantly more so than Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous workers in organisations where no action is being taken (21% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, 26% non-Indigenous).*
- **Greater Performance for All.** *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers and non-Indigenous workers in organisations taking D&I actions are also significantly more likely to put in extra effort in their jobs, to be working more effectively and innovatively and providing excellent customer service in their teams compared to those not working in active organisations.*

RECOMMENDATION 28: The Strategy should emphasise how diverse and inclusive workplaces are beneficial for all.

Visibility

Some respondents also highlighted the need to increase the visibility of female leaders.

Access to leadership program and mentoring, visibility. Provide more opportunities - for roles and learning opportunities.

Mining

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

FOCUS AREA	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>The role of government, business and the community in achieving workplace gender equality</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 1: Given that the Minister for Women also has ministerial responsibility for the Australian Public Service, there is an opportunity for Government to be a leader in workplace gender equality, including piloting programs or initiatives for public sector employees.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 2: Noting that the Productivity Commission is set to examine Australia’s childcare system, DCA recommends that the Strategy should also further investigate creating a universal early childhood education and care system, which addresses pay rates for the sector’s mostly female workforce, and accessibility for families.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 3: Families should also be better supported through improvements to parental leave, and encouraging and supporting men to take on more childcare responsibilities.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 4: The government, business and community should work together to close the gender pay gap.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 5: The Strategy should acknowledge that it is the role of government to create systems for accountability and compliance for workplace gender equality.</p>
<p>Priorities for achieving workplace gender equality</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 6: DCA recommends that priorities under the Strategy should include a focus on: understanding and reporting on industrial and occupational segregation and how this contributes to the gender pay gap; women’s leadership; and pay equity – particularly in ‘feminised’ industries.</p>
<p>Underlying challenges for women’s economic equality</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 7: The Strategy should address the gender superannuation gap and lack of superannuation payments on parental leave.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 8: The Strategy should include plans to improve Australia’s parental leave offering.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 9: The Strategy should include a plan to improve access to universal early childhood education and care</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 10: The Strategy should aim to break down traditional gender norms concerning work and care.</p> <p>RECOMMENDATION 11: The Strategy should aim to improve the availability of flexible work options that allow workers to balance work and care responsibilities.</p>

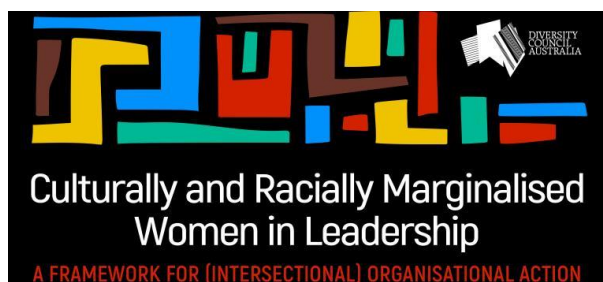
FOCUS AREA	RECOMMENDATIONS
	<p>RECOMMENDATION 12: The Strategy should address the undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.</p>
<p>Addressing gendered violence and harassment</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 13: The Strategy should include plans for evidence-based education on gendered violence and harassment.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 14: Efforts to address gendered violence and harassment should focus on engaging men.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 15: The Strategy should aim to improve complaints and reporting mechanisms for gendered violence and harassment.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 16: The Strategy should consider how to hold perpetrators accountable for gendered violence and harassment in the workplace.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 17: DCA recommends that the Strategy be aligned with the work of Respect@Work and the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 18: The Strategy should ensure that appropriate funding is allocated to prevention and response agencies such as ANROWS, Our Watch, the Full Stop Foundation, and others.</p>
<p>How can the Strategy take an intersectional approach to gender equality?</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 19: Australia does not currently collect data that enables us to understand how different marginalising characteristics impact gender equality. DCA is of the view that having more nuanced data collected would enable policy makers to design interventions that are more appropriate to the experiences of a diversity of men, women and non-binary or gender diverse people, particularly those from marginalised groups.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 20: The Strategy should ensure that programs and initiatives are designed in a way that centres the voices of people from marginalised groups, for example First Nations people, culturally and racially marginalised people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ people.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 21: When discussing intersectionality, DCA is of the view that it is important to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the term. In our experience, while the term is increasingly used in policy discussions, there is not always an agreed definition or understanding of the term.</p>
<p>Underlying challenges in the way we value and allocate paid and unpaid care</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 22: The government should consider ways to address the insufficiency of current paid leave provisions for those with caring responsibilities.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 23: The Strategy should include provision to promote shared care for parental leave.</p>

FOCUS AREA	RECOMMENDATIONS
<p>Barriers to gender equal leadership and representation</p>	<p>RECOMMENDATION 24: The Strategy should aim to improve the availability of flexible work options that allow workers to balance work and care responsibilities.</p>
	<p>RECOMMENDATION 25: The Strategy should support flexible work and improving work life balance for all.</p>
	<p>RECOMMENDATION 26: The Strategy should address the undervaluing of feminised or caring occupations.</p>
	<p>RECOMMENDATION 27: The Strategy should include specific funding for leadership programs and initiatives that centre women from marginalised groups, including First Nations women, culturally and racially marginalised women, women with disabilities, and LGBTQI+ women.</p>
	<p>RECOMMENDATION 28: The Strategy should emphasise how diverse and inclusive workplace are beneficial for all.</p>

DCA RESEARCH

DCA works in partnership with members to generate ground-breaking evidence-based diversity and inclusion resources that enables Australian organisations to fully leverage the benefits of a diverse talent pool.

Some DCA research that we believe may be helpful in formulating the Strategy include:



Culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) women in leadership

This ground-breaking new report re-examines the state of play for culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) women in leadership, focusing on how the intersections of two key marginalising characteristics - race and gender - are still operating in workplaces to lock CARM women out of leadership.



She's Price(d)less – 2022 update report

She's Price(d)less is the fourth in a series of reports that uses econometric modelling applied to data from the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey to unpack the factors that contribute to the gender pay gap.



Gari Yala (Speak the Truth) Gendered Insights

In 2020, the *Gari Yala* project documented the workplace experiences and recommendations of over 1,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers. This follow-up report analyses the original survey results by gender.



Inclusion@Work Index: Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce

A special edition report of DCA's Inclusion@Work Index 2021-2022 titled Mapping the State of Flex in the Australian Workforce highlights a positive link between flexible work and workplace inclusion and shows that the stigma around care, gender and flexible work continues.



Myth Busting Domestic & Family Violence at Work

This resource uses evidence to tackle some common myths about domestic and family violence and provides tools and resources for Australian organisations to become leaders in prevention.

ENDNOTES

¹ Diversity Council Australia (V. Mapedzahama, F. Laffernis, A. Barhoum, and J. O’Leary). *Culturally and racially marginalised women in leadership: A framework for (intersectional) organisational action*, Diversity Council Australia, 2023.

² Evans, Olivia (2021). *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): gendered insights*, WGEA Commissioned Research Report in partnership with the Jumbunna Institute of Education and Research and Diversity Council Australia, Sydney, Australia, accessed at: <https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/gari-yala-speak-truth-gendered-insights>.

³ Diversity Council Australia (Brown, C., D’Almada-Remedios, R., Dunbar, K., O’Leary, J., Evans, O., and Rubin, M.) *Class at Work: Does Social Class Make a Difference in the Land of the ‘Fair Go’?*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2020.

⁴ Diversity Council Australia (Brown, C., O’Leary, J., Trau, R., Legg, A.) *Out At Work: From Prejudice to Pride*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2018, accessed at: <https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/out-work-prejudice-pride>.

⁵ Diversity Council Australia (Shireenjit, J., O’Leary, J., Legg, A. and Brown, C.) *Capitalising on Culture and Gender in ASX Leadership*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2017, accessed at: <https://www.dca.org.au/research/project/capitalising-culture-and-gender-asx-leadership>

⁶ Diversity Council Australia and Our Watch, *Myth Busting Domestic and Family Violence at Work: Using Evidence to Debunk Common Myths and Assumptions*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia and Our Watch, 2021.

⁷ Respondents by industry:

Industry	Respondents
Public administration and safety	167
Professional, scientific, and technical services	136
Health care and social assistance	121
Financial and insurance services	82
Education and training	66
Electricity, gas, water, and waste services	43
Information media and telecommunications	32
Administrative and support services	29
Construction	22
Accommodation and food services	20
Mining	20
Manufacturing	17
Transport, postal and warehousing	16
Arts and recreation services	15
Retail trade	12
Agriculture, forestry, and fishing	9
Total	807

⁸ KPMG, *She's Price(d)less: The Economics of the Gender Pay Gap*, Prepared with Diversity Council Australia (DCA) and the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), Sydney, KPMG, 2022.

⁹ Glennie M, von Reibnitz A, William J, Curtis S, Bordia S, 2021. *Gender pay gap reporting in Australia – time for an upgrade*. The Australian National University: Canberra. Acced at:
<https://giwl.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2021/10/Gender%20pay%20gap%20reporting%20in%20Australia%20-%20time%20for%20an%20upgrade.pdf>

¹⁰ WGEA Submission, 2021, <https://www.dca.org.au/submissions/dca-submission-workplace-gender-equality-act-wgea-2012>.