



DIVERSITY
COUNCIL
AUSTRALIA

SUMMARY

Submission on the 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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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.

Recommendations

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.

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> <hr/> <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> <hr/> <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> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 4: The government, business and community should work together to close the gender pay gap.</p> <hr/> <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> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 8: The Strategy should include plans to improve Australia’s parental leave offering.</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 9: The Strategy should include a plan to improve access to universal early childhood education and care</p> <hr/> <p>RECOMMENDATION 10: The Strategy should aim to break down traditional gender norms concerning work and care.</p> <hr/> <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>

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	<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>

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<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>
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