

Intersectionality at work

Diversity Council Australia (DCA) Policy Briefing for Senator the Hon Katy Gallagher, Minister for Finance, Women and the Public Service.

Action required:

1. Apply an **intersectional approach** to on all gender equality policy matters, and
2. Increase support – especially funding – to enable the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) to **collect intersectional data**. Amend the WGEA Act to enforce the collection and reporting of intersectional data.

Why?

Intersectionality refers to how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising and interlinked characteristicsⁱ. First coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw in 1989 to talk about Black women's experience in the USA, it is increasingly being used in Australia by governments, businesses and other stakeholders in the context of gender equality work.

Globally, advocates for gender equality refer to intersectionality as the key to ensuring no women is left behind. UN Women developed a [resource](#) on an intersectional approach to **Leave No One Behind**ⁱⁱ. This issue was the subject of their [Global conference](#) in 2020 on measuring gender and intersecting inequalities calling for better data to inform political discourse and spark necessary change.

The need for intersectional data to inform gender equality policies and advocacy featured in discussions at the recent [Commission on the Status of Women in New York](#) (CSW68). DCA was at this event and conducted two parallel sessions focusing on marginalised women and the critical importance of taking an intersectional approach to gender equality. Without intentionally collecting and analysing intersectional data, we cannot develop effective gender equality strategies that include marginalised women. Without an intersectional approach, only cisgender white women benefit and this creates even more inequality amongst women.

DCA offers:

- [An intersectionality explainer](#) which defines intersectionality, explains why it is important and gives evidence-based examples of compounding discrimination at work.
- Concepts and language about intersectionality that are constantly evolving in response to global and national research, practice and experience, such as events like CSW68.
- Research and data on marginalised women at work:
 - [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women](#)ⁱⁱⁱ
 - [Culturally and racially marginalised women](#)^{iv}
 - [Older women](#)^v
 - [Culturally diverse LGBTQ people](#)^{vi}

- Our research found that current workplace diversity and inclusion initiatives fail to address the complexity of intersectional identities.
- Indigenous women who are carers in our *Gari Yala*^{vii} study experienced ‘triple jeopardy’ with three aspects of their identity amplifying their experience of discrimination and exclusion at work.
- Our ground-breaking research into culturally and racially marginalised (CARM) women^{viii} examined how race and gender operate in workplaces to lock CARM women out of leadership.
- We developed a framework for action to help organisations attract, engage and retain older women.^{ix}
- We examined how cultural background impacts on LGBTQ people’s experience at work and the complexity of multiple and intersecting identities.^x

- The **RISE** project – Realise. Inspire. Support. Energise. (RISE) is a visionary project, funded by the Office for Women, managed by DCA in partnership with Settlement Services International and Chief Executive Women. Working with 25 organisations across the country, DCA is currently collecting intersectional data and using it to inform tailored action plans for CARM women to help them progress to leadership positions.
- DCA has developed an organisational self-assessment tool, completed by both the organisation and the CARM women involved, an action plan template and a support model to collect intersectional data AND apply an intersectional approach to address the entrenched systemic barriers they face when it comes to career advancement in Australian workplaces.

Recommendations

The Australian government:

1. Prioritise supporting an intersectional approach to all gender equality policy matters, in line with global advocacy placing intersectionality as a key to addressing gender inequality.
2. Recognise and fund the critical importance of collecting intersectional data to inform policies on gender equality.
3. Provide adequate funding for WGEA to collect and analyse intersectional data.
4. Amend the WGEA Act to ensure workplaces are required to collect and report on intersectional data.

Other relevant DCA resources:

[Centring Marginalised Voices at Work – Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

Diversity Council Australia (Mapedzahama, V., Ojinnaka, A., Deo, S. and O’Leary, J.) *Centring Marginalised Voices at Work: Lessons from DCA’s Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM) Women in Leadership Research*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2024.

[Racism at Work – Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

Diversity Council Australia (P. Anderson, V. Mapedzahama, A. Kaabel, and J. O’Leary) *Racism at Work: How organisations can stand up to and end workplace racism*, Diversity Council Australia, 2022.

ⁱ Diversity Council Australia. *Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership. A Framework for (Intersectional) Organisational Action*. [Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership: Intersectionality Infographic \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

ⁱⁱ UN Women. UNPRPD. Intersectionality Resource Guide and Toolkit. An Intersectional Approach to Leave

No One Behind 2021. [INTERSECTIONALITY RESOURCE GUIDE AND TOOLKIT \(unwomen.org\)](https://unwomen.org)

ⁱⁱⁱ Diversity Council Australia. Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research UTS. Workplace Gender Equality Agency. Australian Government. *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth)*. Gendered Insights. 2021. [gari_yala_genderedinsights2021.pdf \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

^{iv} 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. [Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership: Synopsis \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

^v Diversity Council Australia (Tilly, J., O’Leary, J. and Russell, G.) *Older Women Matter: Harnessing the Talents of Australia’s Older Female Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2013. [Older Women Matter – Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

^{vi} Diversity Council Australia/Pride in Diversity, *Intersections at Work: Understanding the Experiences of Culturally Diverse LGBTIQ+ Talent*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia/Pride in Diversity, 2020. [Intersections at work: Understanding the Experiences of Culturally Diverse LGBTQ Talent \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

^{vii} Diversity Council Australia. Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research UTS. Workplace Gender Equality Agency. Australian Government. *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth)*. Gendered Insights. 2021. [gari_yala_genderedinsights2021.pdf \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

^{viii} Diversity Council Australia. *Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership. A Framework for (Intersectional) Organisational Action*. [Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership: Intersectionality Infographic \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

^{ix} Diversity Council Australia (Tilly, J., O’Leary, J. and Russell, G.) *Older Women Matter: Harnessing the Talents of Australia’s Older Female Workforce*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia, 2013. [Older Women Matter – Diversity Council Australia \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)

^x Diversity Council Australia/Pride in Diversity, *Intersections at Work: Understanding the Experiences of Culturally Diverse LGBTIQ+ Talent*, Sydney, Diversity Council Australia/Pride in Diversity, 2020. [Intersections at work: Understanding the Experiences of Culturally Diverse LGBTQ Talent \(dca.org.au\)](https://dca.org.au)