

S Your Turn submission

# Submission to the Women's inequality taskforce – Your Turn discussion paper

Date: 14 April 2023

## About ACOSS

The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) is a national voice in support of people affected by poverty, disadvantage and inequality and the peak body for the community services and civil society sector. Our vision is an end to poverty in all its forms; economies that are fair, sustainable and resilient; and communities that are just, peaceful and inclusive.

## Summary

### **The questions from the Your Turn discussion paper that ACOSS responded to included:**

What are the underlying challenges for women's economic equality that the strategy could address?

What are critical factors that exacerbate gendered disadvantage over the life course?

Are there issues you (or your organisation or community group) would address first? Are there issues that should be addressed together?

There was an 800 word limit for this submission

### **Introduction:**

As a community services peak ACOSS is committed to promoting policies to address gendered inequality experienced by women and families on low incomes, struggling to find paid work, dealing with inadequate health and care services, facing homelessness or dealing with the impact of the cost-of-living crisis and climate disasters. To help women on low incomes, we need:

### **Income support policies to lift women and children out of poverty**

- Lift base rates of JobSeeker and Youth Allowance to the same level as the single pension and index all working-age payments twice per year in line with the Consumer Price Index and wages.
- Benchmark Rent Assistance to actual rents, requiring a 100% increase in the payment in 2023-24.

- Establish a Single Parenting Supplement of at least \$200 per week (reflecting number and age of children). This could be paid via Family Tax Benefit Part B.
- Restore wage indexation for Family Tax Benefit Part A.

### **Employment and labour market programs that enable the participation of women**

- Improve the affordability of early childhood education and care by lifting the subsidy to 95% for low-income families and removing activity tests, extending access to free preschool for three-year-olds and ensuring equality in access for First Nations children.
- Local job creation programs to provide jobs for women who are long term unemployed.
- Redesign ParentsNext and provide vocational guidance services for parents returning or joining to the paid workforce.

### **Urgent Government investment to support the female-dominated community sector workforce and improve access to services**

- As main service purchaser, the Commonwealth must guarantee to fund pay decisions made by the Fair Work Commission affecting the community sector.
- Invest in a government-funded, 15% interim wage supplement to the early childhood education and care sector to stop workforce attrition.
- Appropriately index community services funding so real value of grants does not reduce over time.
- Adequately fund peaks and advocacy organisations to inform public policy and service design as it affects women.

### **Investment at scale to increase the stock of social housing to reduce rental stress and homelessness, disproportionately impacting women on low incomes**

- Build on housing policy and institutional foundations by committing to a 10 year, 25,000 dwelling per year pipeline of social housing investment.
- Develop a new national First Nations Housing strategy, supported by a boost to funding for Indigenous Community Housing Organisations (ICHOs) and a new inter-governmental remote housing funding agreement.

### **A fair tax system and which reduces gender inequality and secures adequate revenue**

- Do not proceed with the stage three tax cuts which offer little benefit to women on low incomes.

- The cost-effectiveness and fairness of tax expenditures should be examined as part of the present expenditure review process, along with review of direct expenditures in each portfolio.
- Tax concessions for superannuation contributions should be replaced by an annual two-tier refundable rebate paid into the fund, capped at a contribution level sufficient to support an acceptable retirement income for a typical worker.

### **Policies to support women with energy costs and recovery from climate disasters**

1. Fund local community resilience hubs, local council community resilience committees, and vulnerability data generation to empower communities to build their resilience and manage recovery
  - Resource community service organisations to build the resilience of their clients.
  - Increase the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment from \$1,000 to \$3,000, and from \$400 per child to \$1,000 per child. Remove the \$20,000 asset limit. Increase the Disaster Recovery Allowance to \$73 a day, indexed to wages.
  - Introduce supports for people on low incomes to recover from disasters, including housing; recovery centres; food relief; legal and social support; mental health support; specialist domestic and family violence services; and other support tailored to community needs, particularly in regional and rural areas.
  - Establish an Energy Transition Authority to coordinate the effects of the energy transition, including developing plans for diversified regional development that promotes economic participation, including of women.
  - Invest in energy efficiency improvements for low-income homes to cut emissions and energy bills and create thousands of local jobs.
  - Provide up to \$2,000 per household in emergency energy debt relief to reduce energy payment difficulties.
  - Reduce energy bills for people on low incomes by removing the costs of the Small-scale Renewable Energy Scheme (SRES) from energy bills (or exempting people on low incomes from paying).