

Investing in Women's Futures

South Australia's
Women's Economic
Empowerment Blueprint



Government of South Australia

Office for Women

Investing in Women's Futures

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The South Australian Government acknowledges and respects Aboriginal peoples as the State's first peoples and nations and recognises Aboriginal peoples as traditional owners and occupants of land and waters in South Australia.

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ASIC	Australian Securities and Investment Commission
AWE	Achieving Women's Equality
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
SASP	South Australia's Strategic Plan
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
UN	United Nations
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WIS	Women's Information Service



Premier's Foreword

When women and men do not have equal access to resources, or equal opportunities to take part in decision-making, there are direct economic and social costs for us all.

These costs are largely felt by women, but also have consequences for children, communities and the economy.

We must address the issues and disadvantages women face across their lifetime to avoid the cumulative disadvantage for our whole community. Economic empowerment of women is crucial to achieving true gender equality.

One of the costs of lack of financial independence is the unacceptably high rate of domestic violence, which I regard as a national emergency. In late 2014, South Australia created *Taking a Stand*, a policy document responding to domestic violence. Throughout 2015, its three major initiatives were implemented. *Investing in Women's Futures* is a further step, as the decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship is, for many women, affected by financial factors.

However, this blueprint is about helping *all* women gain financial independence and builds on South Australia's women's policy, *Achieving Women's Equality*. It outlines priority initiatives that are achievable now at a South Australian level.

The initiatives are aimed at the following areas:

- Superannuation and saving for retirement
- Reducing the gender pay gap
- Improving financial literacy
- Encouraging study and employment in non-traditional areas
- Reducing violence against women

As the first Australian state to allow women to vote and the first to allow women to stand for parliament, South Australia has been a leader in promoting gender equity. This blueprint is another contribution to that goal.

Investing in Women's Futures was released to coincide with International Women's Day 2016.

It is a document designed to be built upon over time by State Government, through the Office for Women, to continuously improve opportunities for the economic empowerment of women.



Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Premier of South Australia

Minister's Foreword

South Australian women are highly educated, employed in crucial roles and contributing to our community in larger numbers than ever; yet they still face challenges in the workplace.

Women continue to be paid less than their male colleagues for the same work, are less likely to reach management and executive roles and are more likely to spend their final years in poverty. Balancing family, life and work priorities has become increasingly harder and in single-parent families, these problems can be magnified.

To ensure a better future for South Australian women we need to address the barriers that impact on their economic wellbeing. By increasing their access to paid work we provide women with access to greater financial security through an independent income as well as enhanced social supports and improved self-esteem and mental and physical health.

Since most women live longer than men, they need to be able to manage the greater financial risks that they face. Providing them with the tools for increased financial literacy we give them the skills to manage their finances and to become business leaders, entrepreneurs and innovators.

Apart from being an issue of equity, the empowerment of women and girls, young and old, is one of the most effective ways to achieve higher economic growth. If we are to have a vibrant state, we need to engage with the best brains our society can offer. In a tight labour market characterised by intensive interstate competition, the imperative is to expand the pool of potential employees as much as possible. The largest, mostly untapped, labour pool available is women.



Hon Zoe Bettison MP
Minister for the Status of Women

Introduction

“the economic empowerment of women is crucial for achieving true gender equality.”

UN Women Australia National Committee

A woman’s experiences across her lifetime can have a major impact on her economic security. Women are more likely to earn less money than men, undertake the majority of unpaid caregiving and household chores and have fragmented work histories. They often experience greater levels of discrimination, harassment and even violence, have fewer employment opportunities and have lower levels of financial literacy and independence than their male counterparts. It is this combination of factors that can leave women in poor financial circumstances in later life and contributes to the gender pay and superannuation gaps.

The free and full participation of women in all aspects of society is critical to our future and to achieving gender equality. When women and men do not have equal access to resources or equal opportunities to take part in decision-making, there are direct economic and social costs. These largely affect women but also have consequences for their children, communities and countries.

Strategies and initiatives need to address the issues and disadvantages women face across their lifetime to avoid cumulative disadvantage and poverty and even homelessness in later life.

Investing in Women’s Futures: South Australia’s Women’s Economic Empowerment Strategy outlines initiatives and actions which aim to support women’s economic wellbeing across their lifetime by:

- Encouraging the undertaking of study, skills and employment in non-traditional areas, particularly science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)
- Improving financial literacy
- Reducing the gender pay gap
- Increasing economic wellbeing to reduce violence against women
- Providing support during parental leave and when returning to work
- Helping to manage caring responsibilities through access to a range of flexible work arrangements
- Educating women on superannuation and saving for retirement

For some women cultural differences, poverty, language barriers, lower education levels, physical distance from neighbours and towns, living with disability, gender identity, sexuality and age can also be barriers to their full participation. Some women experience varying configurations of these barriers in different degrees of intensity. This blueprint will enable the unique backgrounds, experiences and situations of all women to be considered in the development of strategies that promote their economic wellbeing.

Of course there are many more areas that require concerted effort before we will achieve gender equality. This blueprint outlines top priority initiatives which are achievable now at a South Australian level.

Non-traditional employment and STEM

Non-traditional employment areas for women are industries or roles that have 25 per cent or less women employees. Women have made great progress in education and the workplace during the past 50 years where we have seen women make impressive gains in historically male fields such as business, law, and medicine. However, in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM), women's progress has been slower.

Despite women's increasing participation rates generally, some STEM fields have disproportionately low numbers of women (such as engineering, physics, IT, defence).

As well as the gender pay gap in science there is a "leaky pipeline" of women in STEM careers. While women comprise more than half of science PhD graduates and early career researchers, just 17 per cent of senior academics in Australian universities and research institutes are women.¹

Female employees are most under-represented in mining (14.4 per cent of employees are women), water, gas, electricity and waste services (24.3 per cent), construction (10.4 per cent) and manufacturing (23.9 per cent).²

Statistics show that women's poor participation in STEM can begin at primary school. In our increasingly technologically driven society, women and girls need to be encouraged to see the possibilities that STEM related study and employment can provide.

International research has estimated that 75 per cent of the fastest growing occupations require STEM skills.³ As Australian employers have reported that they have difficulties recruiting STEM qualified graduates and staff,⁴ improving women's participation in these areas will help alleviate labour market shortages through increasing labour supply. There are also significant economic benefits for women involved in non-traditional employment including increased choice and availability of jobs and increased job security. Male-dominated roles are also generally better paid than female dominated roles.

Current initiatives and achievements

- *Edith Dornwell Internship for Women in STEM*
- *A Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics Strategy for South Australia*
- *Investing in Science Action Plan*
- *Women in STEM* website
- Support for the *Women in Resources SA Awards* and *Women in Innovation SA Awards*
- Participation in and support for the *Girls in STEM Professional Learning Community*
- Support for the *STEM Sista Program*
- *Women influencing Agribusiness and Regions Strategy*

New initiatives

- Social media campaigns to encourage young women into STEM for example #thisiswhata scientistlookslike #innertradie #iamanengineer
- Promotion of the UN International Day of Women and Girls in Science (11 February each year)
- ‘Wikibombs’ to highlight women role models working in STEM and other non-traditional roles
- Expansion of the Women in STEM website
- Working with universities to encourage and support their participation in the *Science in Australia Gender Equity* (SAGE) and *Athena SWAN* programs
- Linking Women’s Information Service Hubs to new regional science hubs
- State Government pilot ‘job swap’ network and shadowing program for women to share and enhance IT and other STEM skills
- Older women learning from young women – teaching IT and digital literacy skills pilot

Financial Literacy

It can be challenging for women to build financial security and economic independence. Factors which may contribute to their position include relatively lower income levels, the death of a spouse, divorce or separation and the fact that women tend to have less superannuation and life savings. These factors are linked with the tendency for women to take time out of the workforce due to caring responsibilities and the gender pay inequity in feminised roles.

Many women are uncomfortable talking about money and struggle to deal with financial decisions. The thought of making investment decisions tends to intimidate many women and so they just give up. In a 2014 survey conducted by Wells Fargo, 45 per cent of women graded their financial literacy as a "C" or below, while 65% of men gave themselves a "B" or higher.⁵

Some women rely on their partners to manage the family's finances and face a major crisis if their relationship breaks down. Women are also particularly vulnerable to "transmitted debt", that is, taking on debt from a spouse or partner because they have guaranteed a loan or are encumbered in a partner's business dealings or company.

In addition, some women experience violence from their partners and in their relationships, including experiencing economic abuse (controlling and humiliating behaviour in order to weaken women's economic security and independence). It is also difficult for a woman to leave a physically violent partner when she is financially dependent on him.

Particular cohorts of women may also experience additional barriers. For example:

- Women who are carers have reported feeling isolated due to their caring responsibilities and stated that this affected their capacity to access information from others in similar situations
- Older women often feel overwhelmed by the range of products and services available, particularly if they are required to take control of their finances later in life after the end of a relationship or if their partner passes away
- Cultural attitudes to money can be a major barrier to women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds being able to access and deal with financial institutions and government income-support agencies
- Women with disabilities sometimes find that the cost and suitability of transport prevents them from accessing banks and computers in libraries
- Women living in regional areas face physical barriers to accessing financial information including a lack of banks, counselling and other support services in nearby areas and the time and cost involved in travelling long distances to access such supports
- Aboriginal can women face additional barriers that are influenced by factors such as geographic location (isolation, lack of services and public transport in remote areas, increasing costs of fuel); age (lack of financial role models when they were growing up); and employment status (lack of budgeting skills).⁶

Initiatives that support women's financial literacy and money management skills are therefore fundamental to reducing the effect of these barriers and ensuring their long term wellbeing.

Current initiatives and achievements

- *Navigating the Money Jungle* – finance for young women brochure
- *Be Super Smart: Super Help for Women* project
- Developing a pilot program to enable women affected by domestic and family violence to engage in education and move towards engagement, participation and financial security

New initiatives

- Financial literacy information sessions at the Women's Information Service, including where to get financial advice
- Promotion of the ASIC *Women and Money Toolkit* website and resources
- Hosting an 'outreach' financial counsellor in the Women's Information Service, including for specific populations of women in a culturally friendly environment eg CALD women, Aboriginal women
- Working to raise awareness of the financial abuse of older women

Equal Pay

Pay equity is not simply an issue of identical pay for identical work. It exists within a greater context of disadvantage for women that includes direct and indirect discrimination, the undervaluing of skills in employment areas traditionally occupied by women, and continuing disproportionate division of unpaid labour.

The gender pay gap is influenced by a number of interrelated factors, including:

- stereotypes about women and men's roles and the way women and men 'should' engage in the workforce
- women and men working in different industries and different jobs. Historically, female-dominated industries and jobs have attracted lower wages than male-dominated industries and jobs
- a lack of women in senior positions, and a lack of part-time or flexible senior roles
- women undertaking most of society's unpaid caring work, often making it difficult to access senior roles
- women's more precarious attachment to the workforce (largely due to their unpaid caring responsibilities)
- differences in education, work experience and seniority
- discrimination, both direct and indirect.

The gender pay gap can start as early as a woman's first job out of university; data from Graduate Careers Australia shows that in 2014 women's earnings were 94.5 per cent of men's earnings (compared to 93.9 per cent in 2013).⁷

The national gender pay gap is currently 17.9 per cent, and has hovered between 15 per cent and 18 per cent for the past two decades.⁸ South Australia has the lowest pay gap in Australia at 10.8 per cent.⁹

Apart from being an equity issue, reducing the gender pay gap has significant economic benefits. Researchers estimate that Australian GDP could be improved by around \$56 billion a year if the effects of being a woman were removed from the wage gap.¹⁰

Achievements

- Promotion and awareness of *Equal Pay Day*
- Supporting the landmark "Equal Pay Case" for Community Services Workers

New Initiatives

- South Australian Government to undertake a gender pay gap audit across all agencies and develop a strategy to address any gaps
- Encouraging businesses to undertake gender pay audits and implement strategies to reduce the gender pay gap
- Undertaking research into the specific causes of the gender pay gap in South Australia
- Continuing to raise awareness of *Equal Pay Day*

- Development of a web resource with links to information and tools to assist women with skills to negotiate salary and pay conditions
- Promoting the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's Equal Pay Webinars for businesses in Adelaide and regional South Australia
- Encouraging businesses to become Workplace Gender Equality Agency Equal Pay Ambassadors
- Developing a toolkit on gender neutral recruitment practices

Violence against women

The cost of violence against women and their children to the Australian economy in 2009 was \$13.6 billion. It's calculated to rise to \$15.6 billion by 2012-22 without the right preventive action.¹¹

The decision to stay or leave an abusive relationship is, for many women, affected by financial factors. In some cases, financial dependency increases women's isolation and vulnerability to violence. The experience of domestic violence also significantly contributes to poverty, financial risk and financial insecurity for women, sometimes long after they have left the relationship.

1 in 20 older people will, at some point in their life, experience elder abuse from a person in a trusted relationship. Because of this trust older women can also be the victims of financial or economic abuse.

Economic abuse is also a form of violence. It includes a range of controlling behaviours which may keep women financially dependent on their partners and contributes to their isolation, such as preventing them from attending work or study or accessing other forms of financial support. Economic abuse may continue and even escalate after the relationship has ended such through refusing to pay child support and during property settlements.

Increasing women's employment participation as well as their financial knowledge and independence can have a significant impact on the reduction and prevention of violence against women. It is integral in supporting victims to get back on their feet.

While most actions across this blueprint will contribute to women's economic wellbeing and support the prevention of violence, the below actions specifically aim to support victims increase their economic wellbeing.

Current initiatives and achievements

- Domestic Violence Leave Entitlements for public servants
- Developing a pilot program to enable women affected by domestic and family violence to engage in education and move towards engagement, participation and financial security
- South Australian Government White Ribbon Workplace Accreditation

New initiatives

- Development of pre-employment programs, including quarantining of positions in existing programs for women escaping violence
- Raising awareness of the financial abuse of older women
- Expanding the pilot program to enable women affected by domestic and family violence to engage in education and move towards engagement, participation and financial security

Parental leave and employment participation

Women continue to undertake the majority of caring roles in a family – from parental leave to looking after their partner or an elderly parent. This affects their ability to undertake work and often results in large breaks in employment. Time away from the workplace also affects women's ability to step into leadership positions and climb the corporate ladder and impacts on their financial wellbeing, both during leave and at retirement.

Women continue to experience discrimination and harassment during pregnancy and when returning to work. In fact, a survey undertaken by the Australian Human Rights Commission found that 49 per cent of mothers reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace at some point during pregnancy, parental leave or on their return to work.¹²

Keeping in touch with the workplace while on leave enables employees to more smoothly transition back to the workplace. Women who have been kept up-to-date of workplace changes are more likely to return to work at the end of their leave. It also helps them maintain their skill and knowledge levels and reduces the impact that time spent out of the workforce can have on a woman's career progression.

As there are many industrial relations issues around leave entitlements and return to work, this blueprint focuses on supporting women's connection to the workplace during maternity leave as well as facilitating a smooth transition back into the workforce.

New initiatives

- Paid superannuation for State Public Sector employees on paid parental leave
- Updating local resources to provide assistance to women and men returning to work after parental leave
- Promoting the availability and uptake of *Keeping in Touch* days¹³
- Promoting the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Supporting Working Parents* website

Flexible work

Many people, particularly women, struggle to balance work and the responsibilities of caring for children, family members and friends. Access to flexible work options provides women with the ability to manage their work and caring responsibilities while remaining in employment.

With South Australia's ageing population an increasing number of older South Australians will wish or need to work; others will need caring from family members, many of whom will be in the paid workforce. Flexible working arrangements are therefore increasingly important to help older South Australians and carers participate in the workforce.¹⁴

90 per cent of Australian men and women believe that men should be as involved in parenting as women and that equal participation in caring work leads to greater financial and social equality over the life course.¹⁵

Men need to be encouraged to utilise flexible workplace arrangements; not only for their own benefit but also to enable them to share in caring responsibilities and enable their partners to have the benefit of greater workplace participation. 'Men and women therefore need to have equal access and equal success in working flexibly, without negative judgements or repercussions for their career progression.'¹⁶

Research has proven that the persistent myth that women seeking flexible options are less ambitious is far from true.¹⁷ In fact, women who work flexibly are equally if not more serious and committed to reaching their full career potential and are willing to take different routes to achieve their career aspirations.

When given the opportunity to work flexibly, women are our most productive employees, wasting \$14 billion less than their male colleagues every year. For every 71 women employed in flexible roles, an organisation gains a productivity bonus of one additional full-time employee. Making sure people with interrupted career paths achieve their potential would improve the return on our education investment by over \$8 billion.¹⁸

Current initiatives and achievements

- SASP Target 13 – Work Life Balance
- *Flexible Workplace Futures* Project
- State Public Sector Chief Executives made responsible for flexible work options within their agencies through performance agreements

New initiatives

- Identify strategies to mitigate the disadvantage facing older women with limited superannuation and reducing their vulnerability to homelessness
- Raising awareness of the gender superannuation gap
- South Australian Government to role model the uptake of flexible work arrangements as standard for every job, including the most senior roles - "all roles flex"
- Encouraging men to take up flexible work options

Superannuation

Women tend to live longer than men, making it even more essential for them to accumulate enough superannuation to last through retirement.

Women can also face unique challenges when it comes to retirement savings. Lower pay, time out of the workforce to raise children and running a single-parent household can make it challenging to build a reasonable amount of superannuation resulting in financial instability, reliance on pensions and other government supports, which may lead to poverty and even homelessness.

As noted by Australia's former Sex Discrimination Commissioner, '*[i]nstead of accumulating wealth through the retirement income system as intended, due to experiences of inequality over the lifecycle, women are more likely to be accumulating poverty*'.¹⁹

On average, when taking into account those who retire with no superannuation as well as those who retire with superannuation, women have around 54 per cent less superannuation than men. 39 per cent of women will reach retirement age with no superannuation at all, compared with just 8.4 per cent of men.

Like money management in general, many women can find superannuation daunting and confusing. Only 12 per cent of women think their super will be enough for retirement, and half of all women don't know how much they'll need for a comfortable retirement.²⁰ Education on super and financial security at retirement is essential to support older women's wellbeing.

Current initiatives and achievements

- *Be Super Smart: Super Help for Women* project

New initiatives

- Identify strategies to mitigate the disadvantage facing older women with limited superannuation and reducing their vulnerability to homelessness
- Raising awareness of the gender superannuation gap
- Holding Super and financial literacy information sessions at the Women's Information Service, including on how to consolidate superannuation and where to get financial advice
- Promotion of the ASIC *Women and Money Toolkit*
- Paid superannuation for State Public Sector employees on paid parental leave

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