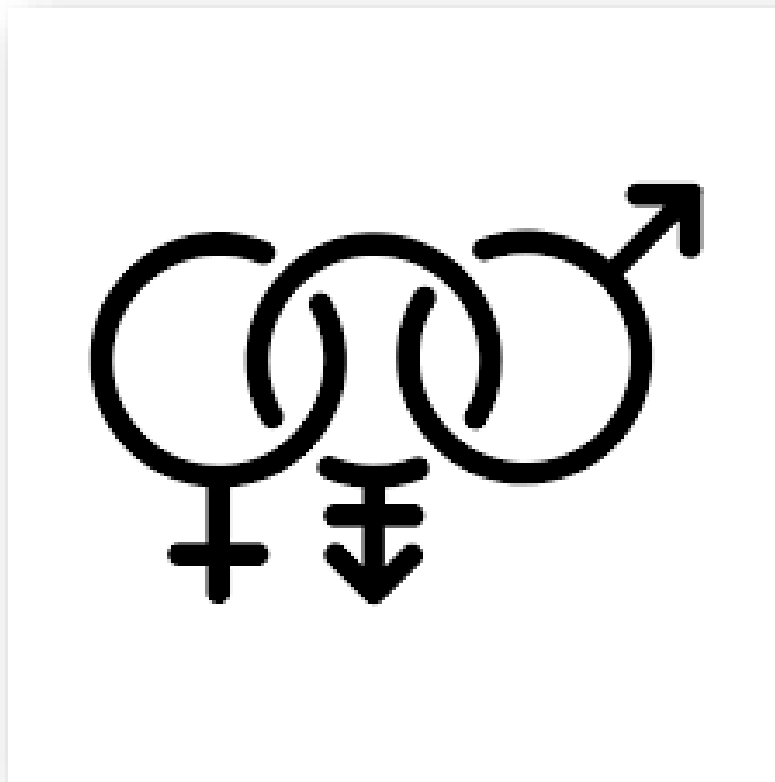


Gender Equity: enabling women and girls to reach their full potential

Recommendation paper to inform the State Governments Women's Plan- June 2019



Ways to make a difference

Introduction

The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS) represents 300 community service organisations and individuals, and more than 500 organisations involved in the provision of community services to the people of Western Australia.

WACOSS is committed to genuine engagement, authentic collaboration, and building trusted relationships with members, communities, and governments.

We work to see justice and equity for all, including an end to poverty, discrimination, homelessness, and family and domestic violence. Our vision for an inclusive, just and equitable society speaks directly to our aspiration for a gender-equal Western Australia.

Across the world progress on gender equality has moved at glacial rate. According to the 2017 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report,¹ at the current rates of change it will be another 217 years before we close the gender gaps in education, employment and politics. In light of this stagnation and recent developments, such as the global #metoo and #timesup movements that has shed light on widespread subordination, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and assault suffered by women in all spheres of life, WACOSS is motivated to expedite its commitment to gender equity and welcomes the opportunity to provide comment to inform the State Governments development of a Women's Plan.

Our work on gender equity is based on the understanding that systematic discrimination against women and girls is both a cause and a result of the power inequality that drives poverty.²

WACOSS is committed to challenging and changing the attitudes and behaviour that lie at the heart of gender inequality, and the laws, policies, and government programs that sustain it. We recognise that everyone—women and girls, men and boys, and those who are gender diverse—has a stake in gender justice. Men play a critical role in the transformational change that is necessary to realise the rights of women and to improve the social position of women in relation to men.

In early 2019, the State Government announced the development of a Women's Plan (the Plan) to address gender inequality in WA and invited contributions from the WA community.

WACOSS commends the State Government and Minister for Community Services, Children's Interests and Women's Interests for their leadership in responding to the groundswell of opposition to women's unequal position.

This paper aims to inform the development of the Women's Plan by identifying some of the issues faced by women as a result of systemic and structural inequalities. It explores the impact of these inequalities and offers recommendations on how greater equality could be achieved.

¹ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017>

² Oxfam, The Power of People against Poverty: Oxfam Strategic Plan 2013–2019

These recommendations are clustered under the six priority areas, which are closely aligned to the State Governments discussion paper *Women's Voices: Building a Stronger WA Together*,³ those being:

- Health and wellbeing
- Safety and justice
- Economic independence
- Safe Secure Housing
- Community Service Sector
- Leadership

Background

The advancement of women and the achievement of gender equality are matters of human rights, and a condition for social justice that should not be seen in isolation as a women's issue. They are the only way to build a sustainable, just and developed society. Empowerment of women and equality between women and men are prerequisites for achieving political, social, economic, cultural and environmental security among all peoples.

Gender inequality is the most pervasive form of discrimination in the world. It is no coincidence that the majority of the world's poor are women and girls. We know that gender is a main predictor of who will be poor and who will have power in the world today.⁴ Gender discrimination cuts across prejudice on the basis of other identifiers (such as age, race, sexual orientation, indigenous status, caste, class, ethnicity, HIV status, and disability), affecting how women already living in poverty experience oppression.⁵ Gender inequality drives poverty and denies women their fundamental rights. WACOSS believes that ending poverty begins with securing women's rights.

The gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen in the past decade, a phenomenon commonly referred to as "the feminization of poverty".

Women living in poverty are often denied access to critical resources including economic. Their labour goes unrewarded and unrecognised. Their health care and nutritional needs are not given priority, they lack sufficient access to education and support services, and their participation in decision-making at home and in the community are minimal. Caught in the cycle of poverty, many women lack access to resources and services to change their situation. The previous decade has seen Australian Federal Governments Social Security policy decisions further entrench women and their children into severe poverty.

The intersection between the over-representation of women in poverty, and an explicit ideological shift towards more punitive and controlling welfare measures under the guise of 'mutual obligation' is producing a level of discrimination and subjugation of women that is at odds with changing community attitudes and

³ <https://www.communities.wa.gov.au/wa-have-your-say/womens-plan/>

⁴ Oxfam Canada, Gender Justice: Why Gender Equality Matter

⁵ Oxfam International, Ending Violence Against Women: A Guide for Oxfam Staff (2012)

values in other domains. This is at its most pernicious in the Parent Next program and the roll-out of the Cashless Debit Card.

While we now condemn blatant discrimination against women in our laws, many of the attitudes that allowed such discrimination to exist continue to persist in our social policy. Single mothers are being forced into a compulsory parenting program that requires them to comply with incongruous demands such as the signing of privacy waivers.

Women's equality is eroded when government programs disproportionately hurt them and undermine their autonomy

Our vision for a gender equal Western Australia

In a gender equal Western Australia, each woman and girl would be able to exercise her freedoms and choices and realise all her rights, such as to live free from violence, to participate in decisions, live a life of dignity, free from poverty and to earn equal pay for equal work.

What is gender equality?

WACOSS adopts the definition of gender equality as that applied by the State Government as being:

...all people have the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections, regardless of gender. Gender equality also means that attributes which have been socially constructed as intrinsic differences between women and men, for example nurturing qualities or assertiveness, are equally valued and rewarded

Simply having equality of opportunity is not sufficient for women, as equal opportunity fails to recognise that equal treatment will not produce equitable results, given the different life experiences of genders. To achieve equality of outcome, it is important to also have equity. For this reason WACOSS's focus is on achieving gender equity. The definition used is that of the WA government which defines gender equity as:

..recognising that, because of historical disadvantages, different steps may need to be taken to create fair and equal outcomes

Gender equity recognises that women are not a homogenous group. Differences in socio-economic, ethnic, educational opportunity and health mean women do not have the same sense of equal opportunity as each other.

Gender diversity

Gender identity refers to the gender with which someone identifies; an individual's sense of being a man, woman, neither or a combination.

We acknowledge the discrimination and inequality often experienced by people who are trans, intersex or who identify outside of the gender binary. The work of WACOSS seeks equality for everyone regardless of

their gender identity. Our use of 'women' throughout the document includes trans-women and other gender minorities.

Our Recommendations:

Our work in tackling difficult issues, systems, behaviours and attitudes that foster inequality and exclusion, sees WACOSS play a pivotal role in advancing equality of women.

WACOSS acknowledge the work of feminist organisations that first led the call for change. We also recognise the in-roads made by the Australian and Western Australian governments to increase equality. However, despite the groundswell of support and the numerous initiatives aimed at equality, statistics show we are failing women and girls, especially our most vulnerable. Change is still needed and WACOSS is committed to be an influencer and facilitator of that change.

WACOSS seeks to contribute to the positive social transformation of Western Australia to ensure every woman and girl can enjoy equal human rights and equal opportunities in all spheres of life as outlined in the following priority areas.

1. Health and Wellbeing

Services and resources (including health, sports and recreation, social care) of the same quality should be accessible to women and girls and adapted to their needs and preferences.

Opportunity exists to improve equity, efficiency and transparency in administration and governance of these services through the collection and analysis of sex-disaggregated data, gender mainstreaming, gender-responsive budgeting and gender equity policy decision making. These tools and methods expose gender inequalities and ensure better allocation of resources in the health and wellbeing sectors according to the needs and preference of women.

It is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal women experience higher levels of violence, poverty and disadvantage due to issues of multiple layers of trauma which has spanned many generations, dispossession and the operation of racism throughout history in policy, media and the community attitudes. This paper only touches on some of the issues and provides only some of the possible solutions. WACOSS supports and recognises the solutions for Aboriginal women must be determined by Aboriginal women.

WACOSS recommends:

- The Western Australian government embeds gender-responsive budgeting and gender mainstreaming into all government work streams, policies and budgets so any structural inequalities are identified and mitigated.
- The Western Australian government influence positive reform of our Federal Social Security System to end entrenched poverty for women and children. And abolish gender bias policies that remove women's autonomy, trap women in poverty and damage women's mental wellbeing.
- The Minister for Women is sufficiently resourced to oversee the Plan and is responsible for auditing the application of a gender lens within all Ministries.

- Health professionals be trained in recognising and responding to family and domestic violence and trauma informed practice.
- Awareness-raising campaigns about the multiple and structural causes of gender discrimination, particularly as they relate to Aboriginal women, and the societal benefits of gender equality.
- Implementation of recommendations outlined in the Sustainable Health Review⁶ that recognise not all Western Australian's have access to health care and some experience worse health outcomes because of social, economic and cultural inequality.

2. Safety and Justice

Urgent action is needed at all levels to prevent violence against women and girls, assist victims and survivors, hold perpetrators accountable, and raise awareness of all forms of violence against women, with a view to changing attitudes and behaviours.

While Australia has had a Minister for Women, and Western Australia a Minister for Women's Interest and Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence since 2017, violence against women remains a serious blight on our society.

On average, one woman a week is murdered by her current or former partner⁷. One in three Australian women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15⁸. Indigenous women are 32 times as likely to be hospitalised due to family violence as non-Indigenous women⁹.

Campaigns such as #metoo and #timesup have gained global attention for their exposure of the prevalence of subordination, verbal abuse, sexual harassment, and sexual assault suffered by women in all spheres of life. These campaigns have created fresh momentum to condemn all forms of sexual, psychological, physical violence and harassment and calls for stronger measures to prevent, protect, prosecute and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls at all spheres of society.

The root cause of any form of violence against women, including family and domestic violence, is gender inequality. Compounding women's experiences of violence are its long-term consequences that further entrench the social disadvantage of women through poverty and financial hardship, limiting employment and education opportunities. This can lead to housing insecurity and/or homelessness and contributes to poorer health outcomes.

Where violence leads to family breakdown, it further contributes to persistent intergenerational disadvantage through impacts such as asset loss, inheritance loss, reduced income, and reduced social networks (Bird & Shinyekwa 2005).

⁶ Sustainable Health Review (2019): Final Report to the Western Australian Government. Department of Health, Western Australia.

⁷ [Australian Institute of Criminology \(AIC\) 2017](#)

⁸ [Australian Bureau of Statistics \(ABS\) 2017](#). Personal Safety, Australia, 2016, ABS cat. no. 4906.0. Canberra: ABS

⁹ *ibid*

Organisations such as Equality Rights Alliance have endorsed the 32 recommendations contained in the National Social Security Rights Network's (NSSRN) report 'How well does Australia's social security system support victims of family and domestic violence'¹⁰. The report found significant issues within how the social security system responds to domestic and family violence and has made 32 recommendations to address these issues, including recommendations on the application of special circumstances, payment levels, waiting periods for newly arrived residents, care of children and Centrelink's service environment.

Certain vulnerable groups continue to experience higher levels of violence and disadvantage. These include Indigenous children and young people; people in out-of-home care; people with disability; people who are sexually diverse, transgender, gender diverse and intersex; people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people living in rural and remote areas (AHRC 2016).

Family violence is worse in Aboriginal communities than other Australian communities for many reasons. Cultural discrimination, trauma, dispossession destroyed many Aboriginal communities, and the effects are still being felt. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience both far higher rates and more severe forms of family violence compared to other women. Therefore the solutions must be led by Aboriginal women within their communities with support from Governments and the broader community service sector.

WACOSS recommends:

- Greater investment in primary prevention initiatives and research to end family and domestic violence.
- Aboriginal female leaders drive and design, develop and deliver solutions in their communities.
- Gender-sensitive urban planning that guarantees the safety and wellbeing of women in public places.
- Greater collaboration and sharing of information across sectors on victim-survivors of FDV and perpetrators of violence with a greater range of measures for perpetrator accountability .

3. Economic Independence

Australian female workforce participation is low by international standards, particularly for full time work. There are many more women working two or three days a week in Australia compared to other developed countries.¹¹

Partly this is cultural, but partly it is the interaction of Australia's tax, welfare and childcare systems. Income traps have long been a feature of the system for low and middle income women. Some women face effective tax rates of 80, 90 or more than 100% for moving from two-to-three, or three-to-four day's work, once the costs of childcare are factored in.¹²

¹⁰ Sally Cameron, How well does Australia's social security system support victims of family and domestic violence, (Surry Hills: National Social Security Rights Network, 2018)

¹¹ Cassidy, N. and Parsons, S. (2017), The Rising Share of Part-Time Employment, RBA Bulletin

¹² Stewart, M (2018), Mothers have little to show for extra days of work under new tax change, The Conversation

Further steps are needed in particular to close the gender pay, social security sole parenting payments and Newstart gaps. And to eliminate occupational segregation, starting with educational and occupational choices made in young adulthood.

Despite improvements in the gender pay gap,¹³ men still out-earn women on average by 21.3% taking home \$25,717 a year more than women. At 22% Western Australia's gender pay gap continues to be greater than the national average of 17%. Women are disproportionately represented in work that is part-time (16% women, 5% men) and casual work (14% women, 11% men). They undertake the lion's share of informal care with significantly more utilising carer's leave (72%). Deloitte Access Economics estimates the replacement value of informal care with formal care providers to be \$60.3 billion.¹⁴

Nationally, rates of poverty for females in 2014 were estimated to be 1 percentage point higher than those for men (13.8% vs. 12.8%, respectively) (ACOSS 2016). Similarly, deep and persistent social exclusion has been found to be more prevalent for women (5.2%) than for men (3.7%) (McLachlan et al. 2013). This is especially apparent among older women, and where rates of homelessness are increasing as noted below.

As at June 2016, the majority (83%) of the 618,900 one-parent families with dependents in Australia were single mother families (ABS 2017). Women make up 49.3% of people in receipt of the Newstart Allowance and are more likely to be in receipt of Newstart for longer periods, making up 52% of people in receipt of Newstart for 2 to 5 years and 54% of people in receipt for 5+ years.¹⁵

WACOSS recommends:

- The balanced representation and participation of women in all spheres of decision-making.
- Gender quotas to be introduced into the Western Australian public sector.
- The public sector in Western Australia to undertake annual pay gap analysis and report outcomes and actions to Parliament.
- Development of policies that promote fathers to do more 'fathering' in early years.
- Policies to provide families with children with a continuum of supports, allowing parents to stay in paid work as children grow up thereby reducing the risk of violence resulting from financial hardship.
- Changes in work place cultures to support the higher utilisation of carer leave and flexible work practices by men.
- Measures are introduced to decrease occupational segregation (e.g. increase the share of women in STEM fields and non-traditional employment and increase the share of men in education, health and care professions).
- The State and Federal government continue to address the availability and affordability of quality childcare as an important issue impacting labour market participation.
- Reduction in gender pay inequality.

¹³ <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-gender-gap-report-2017>

¹⁴ <https://www.carersaustralia.com.au/storage/Access%20Economics%20Report.pdf>

¹⁵ Australian Government, "Indicator 1.2.1 Proportion of population living below the national poverty line, by sex and age" Sustainable Development Goals Data. 17 July 2018, <https://www.sdgdata.gov.au/goals/no-poverty/1.2.1>

- The WA Government works in partnership with WACOSS in our advocacy to increase social security payments for sole parents and Newstart to ensure every woman and child live above the poverty line and are able to fully participate in their communities.
- The WA Government reforms concessions to ensure they are adequate and equitable for women, especially for single parent households.

4. Safe Secure Housing

Access to and rights over housing are shaped by gender. Women's experiences of economic inequality (including the over-representation of women in key poverty indicators and the gender wealth, income and retirement gaps) combine with an increasingly unaffordable housing market to undermine the position of women in housing systems. Compounding this is the impact of violence, specifically domestic and family violence, on women's experiences of housing. Issues relating to economic inequality, violence and unequal distribution of caring responsibilities represent a set of challenges specific to gender which reveal both the gendered dimensions of housing stress and homelessness and the need for solutions which are gender responsive. Patterns of housing assistance use can be considered as being gendered as:

- Women make up 59% of those using specialist homelessness services and 64% of those whose requests for specialist homelessness assistance go unassisted.
- Women are the majority of adult tenants in public housing. There are 297,740 adult women living in public housing and 218,784 adult men.
- Women make up 60% of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) recipients and are more likely to be paying enough rent to be eligible for the maximum CRA payment and more likely to remain in housing stress after the payment.

WACOSS recommends:

- Housing affordability and homelessness policies recognise that housing is, first and foremost, a human right.
- Policy responses to housing affordability recognise the role of housing in meeting the safety, participation, health and wellbeing needs of women and advancing gender equality.
- Policies are needed to address overcrowding in Aboriginal Communities so as homes are safe and secure for women and their children.
- Large-scale investment in social and affordable housing supply to meet the specific needs of women.
- The Western Australian Government recognises and supports the call of WACOSS to increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance and adequate income support which are critical for women's access to housing and a demonstrated commitment to closing gender inequity.

5. Community Service Sector

A study commissioned by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and released in 2016 found that investment into the care economy of 2% of GDP in just seven countries would create over 21 million jobs and help countries overcome the twin challenges of gaining populations and economic stagnation. The

report, which analysed the employment growth potential in the care economy (education, health services and social care activities) in Australia, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK and the USA, also demonstrated how investing in care narrows the gender pay gap, reduces overall inequality and helps redress the exclusion of women from decent jobs.

In the seven countries modeled, an investment of 2% of GDP would see the employment rate of women increase by 3.3 to 8.2 percentage points (and by 1.4 to 4.0 percentage points for men) and the gender gap in employment reduced. Across the countries studied, it was estimated that the majority of jobs created would be taken up by women (between 59% and 70%), reflecting in part the current concentration of women in the care industries. Besides creating new jobs, investment in both childcare and social care would help tackle some of the central economic and social problems confronting contemporary societies: low productivity, the care deficit, demographic changes and continuing gender inequality in paid and unpaid work

As a sector with a strongly female workforce, gender equity is of significant importance for community service organisations. In 2012, the Fair Work Commissions Equal Remuneration Order (ERO) required human services agencies to pay annual increases of between 23 per cent and 45 per cent over 8 years (to 2020). In Western Australia, this was followed by a 2013 decision of the Industrial Relations Commission to amend the Crisis Assistance, Supported Housing Industry – Western Australia Interim Award 2011, and the Social and Community Services (Western Australia) Interim Award 2011 in line with the national system to increase rates of pay.

However, in Western Australia, advances achieved through the ERO and WAIRC decisions have been undermined by successive State Governments' refusal to accept their continued role in fully funding historically undervalued sectors. In the 2011-12 State Budget, \$600 million over four years was provided in order to meet the historical funding shortfall for the sector. It was not to address the ERO-based salary increases awarded after the fact, as has since been claimed. The failure to provide funding to fully cover those increases was compounded by changes to the indexation policy for community service contracts. In 2004, the Non-Government Human Services Sector Indexation Policy was introduced, which used a methodology set at 80 per cent Wage Price Index and 20 per cent CPI. In 2015 this changed to 100 per cent CPI, with no allowance for wage growth.

In 2018 the Western Australian government amended the Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy (2011) (DCSP) effective from 1 October 2018¹⁶.

However, since its introduction, numerous services with contracts established prior to 2018 have been extended and rolled-over multiple times, with inadequate indexation and no opportunity to renegotiate funding levels or service outputs. The impact of roll-overs where there is inadequate indexation and no allowance for the ERO wage increases is that organisations are placed in the position where they must provide services with ever dwindling resources. This risks organisations being forced into a position where

¹⁶ https://www.finance.wa.gov.au/cms/uploadedFiles/Government_Procurement/Policies/dcspp.pdf

service provision is restricted and service quality impacted due to the downward reclassification of their workforce.

It is beholden on the State Government to set an example of good practice, both through its treatment of its employees in the public sector, but also through its purchasing of services and policy decisions around service contracts.

There is both a legal (Fair Work Commission) and moral responsibility for employers to pay employees at the correct rate. Likewise, the State Government should create service environments that uphold these requirements. For to do otherwise, risks comparison to those large corporations outsourcing cleaning services at below cost in an attempt to distance themselves from direct responsibility for the employment terms and conditions of those workers.

These issues are important given the gendered nature of those employed in the social services.

WACOSS recommends:

- The State Government lobby at a national level for an investment of 2% of GDP which would create 600,000 new jobs
- A whole-of-government audit of DCSP Policy compliance in the contracting of community services since 2012.
- Any future contract roll-overs must include either indexation at ERO award compliant rates, renegotiation of outputs, or DCSP compliance.
- Reinstatement of an Independent Review of DCSP Implementation and Impact, building on the work previously undertaken by Curtin NFP Initiative and Department of Treasury
- Clear policy, guidelines, and accountability and compliance mechanisms for DCSP implementation across Government. Including annual reporting to Parliament on human service commissioning and service outcomes.

6. Leadership

Women's leadership and equal participation in public and political life is both a matter of social justice and a means of promoting accountability for gender equality and women's rights.¹⁷ Women's leadership is critical to ensuring that economic and social policies promote greater gender equality.¹⁸

WACOSS believes gender equality needs to be at the centre of the political agenda and mainstreamed into all policies, legislation, services, activities and budgets. A strong political commitment and high visibility – complemented by awareness-raising, capacity building, sex-disaggregated data and concrete actions with sufficient funding – are needed from both state and federal governments.

¹⁷ Oxfam International Policy Position, 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). 2010

¹⁸ Oxfam International, Women and the 1%: How Extreme Economic Inequality and Gender Inequality Must Be Tackled Together (2016)

Studies have found a pronounced and statistically significant relationship between the number of women on boards and the number of women in senior leadership positions in narrowing the gender pay gap.¹⁹ It has also been shown that increased female representation reduces the likelihood of fraud and increases social responsiveness.²⁰

WACOSS recommends:

- The Western Australian government establishes gender equity indicators and outcome measures, and a platform for regular reporting of data. These need to endure over time to inform policy and ensure wise investment.
- Cross-party support and commitment to Western Australia's Women's Plan and Family Domestic Violence Strategy the outcomes of which will take far longer than an electoral cycle.
- The needs and solutions for vulnerable groups are identified in the Women's Plan and Family and Domestic Violence Strategy. These include Aboriginal women, young women; women with disability; women who are sexually diverse, transgender, gender diverse and intersex; women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and women living in rural and remote areas.
- Leaders to champion gender equality within their sectors, industries, communities and families are identified.
- The media and advertising industries improve their understanding of the damage their promotion of sexism and stereotypes can have, and to see the role they can play in positive cultural change.
- Political parties as well as public, private and not for profit sectors take all lawful steps, including adopting quotas where deemed appropriate, to increase the representation of women, Aboriginal women, and women from diverse backgrounds.
- Boys and men be engaged in achieving gender equality.

Conclusion

This paper outlines our commitment to contributing to the State Governments development of a Women's Plan by considering the interdependencies and connectivity between the six focus areas identified in the discussion paper *Women's Voices: Building a Stronger WA Together* alongside the key priority areas for WACOSS of: Family and Domestic Violence; homelessness; and, poverty.

The recommendations have been arrived at based on the principle of mutuality where the strength of the outcome is driven by the interconnection of the individual recommendations. The recommendations are designed to be viewed collectively with each informing the other to achieve a holistic framework for equality.

In realising the recommendations, WACOSS welcomes the opportunity to contribute further to the development of the Women's Plan through ongoing discussion and collaboration with the Department of Communities.

¹⁹ BankWest Curtin Economics Centre (2016) Gender Equity Insights 2016, Inside Australia's Gender Pay Gap

²⁰ Ibid