

## **Media Release - Tuesday 11 May 2021**

### **Focus on women is a welcome start, but deep structural change is needed for gender equality**

Tonight's budget demonstrates that the Government has started listening to women, which is a good first step. Now comes the hard work. It's not enough to treat women like a 'special case' in need of siloed solutions. We need a government which is prepared to make deep structural changes to its ways of working in order to achieve real gender equality says the Equality Rights Alliance (ERA).

ERA welcomes the childcare and aged care packages as a welcome shift to investing in Australia's social infrastructure. *'The pandemic showed us that our understanding of Australia's infrastructure is inadequate. Infrastructure goes well beyond roads and communications,'* says Helen Dalley-Fisher, senior manager of Equality Rights Alliance. *'During lockdown, our healthcare, childcare and aged care systems were as vital as emergency services and transport networks. It's time the Federal Budget took investment in social infrastructure seriously as an investment in our future, as well as an investment in women, who are the primary employees and users of social infrastructure.'*

The budget's investment in aged care is a welcome step in this direction. More than 85% of workers in aged care are female<sup>i</sup> and 2 in 3 people using aged care services are women.<sup>ii</sup> Investment in aged care is a positive long-term step towards a more equitable economy for women and attention to the workforce is welcome. The next step must be ensuring adequately remunerated and decent work for the largely female aged care workforce.

Investment in early childhood education and care (ECEC) and in pre-school education is another example of investment in our social infrastructure. 97% of workers in ECEC are female and ECEC is critical to opening pathways for women to work. Making ECEC more affordable for people with multiple children in care is a small but important step forward. The positive ECEC measures in the budget must be followed up with greater attention to the needs of the largely female ECEC workforce, the benefits of quality care and education for children and affordability measures which reach more women, particularly women on low incomes and those in education or looking for work.

The increase in funding to address gendered violence is also welcome. Although \$1.1bn is nowhere near enough on its own to address violence against women, it's a welcome escalation from previous funding levels and we note the government's indication that this is a down payment on the National Plan. We look forward to increased funding commitments as the new National Plan is developed.

However, the lack of investment in social housing in the budget is very disappointing, particularly as older women are the fastest growing group of people facing homelessness. Increasing affordable housing stocks in Australia would provide stimulus benefits in the short term, while leaving

**Equality Rights Alliance**

**Women's Voices for Gender Equality**

Level 5, 161 London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2602 | PO Box 1022 Dickson ACT 2602

T: 02 5104 2954 | F: 02 6175 9993 | E: era.admin@ywca.org.au

[www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au](http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au)

Australia with assets which will provide economic security for single mothers, older women and others who struggle with housing affordability long into the future.

The other big losers from this budget are people on low incomes, who are disproportionately women.<sup>iii</sup> *'Assistance with a house deposit is great, unless you can't afford the repayments. Then it's meaningless'* says Helen Dalley-Fisher. *'We need increased investment in social housing and an increase in the rates of welfare payments in order to prevent women getting locked in a cycle of poverty.'*

The difference between tonight's budget and the disastrous October budget is stark, and we congratulate the government on the progress made. However, ultimately the budget can only help to achieve gender equality if Government can shift away from treating us as a special interest group and learn to build budgets which consider the needs of women from inception and across all revenue and expenditure areas. We congratulate the Government on producing a Women's Budget Statement for the first time in many years, and we hope that this is the first step towards a truly gender responsive budget.

***For media comment or speakers for interview, please contact Helen Dalley-Fisher, Equality Rights Alliance – Senior Manager on 0413 065 822 or [era@ywca.org.au](mailto:era@ywca.org.au).***

## **About Equality Rights Alliance**

Equality Rights Alliance (ERA) is Australia's largest network advocating for women's equality, women's leadership and recognition of women's diversity. We bring together 64 non-government organisations and social enterprises with a focus on the impact of policy or service delivery on women. We are one of six National Women's Alliances, and are funded by the Commonwealth Government's Office for Women and auspiced by YWCA Australia

We believe the advancement of women and the achievement of equality are matters of fundamental human rights. We advocate for gender equality, women's leadership and government policy responses that support women's diversity. Using a range of methods to consult and engage with women in Australia, we work to bring the voices of women from diverse life situations to policy makers.

## **More information about Gender Responsive Budgeting**

### **What is GRB?**

The outcomes and effects of government policies are gendered – just because a policy doesn't mention gender doesn't make it gender neutral. Any area of public policy, such as taxation, housing, urban design, infrastructure investment and health, can impact people differently depending on their gender and other lived experience.

The gendered impact of policies is largely invisible unless a gender lens is used to identify the different outcomes. Considering of the gendered effects of policies can be a powerful means to promote gender

### **Equality Rights Alliance**

#### **Women's Voices for Gender Equality**

Level 5, 161 London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2602 | PO Box 1022 Dickson ACT 2602

T: 02 5104 2954 | F: 02 6175 9993 | E: [era.admin@ywca.org.au](mailto:era.admin@ywca.org.au)

[www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au](http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au)

equality as well as delivering more efficient policymaking. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), is a form of policy analysis that assesses the budget in terms of its gendered reach and its gendered impact, allowing government to make informed decisions about how to best support women and people of marginalised genders and to combat gender inequality.

### **Why do we need GRB?**

The COVID19 crisis has created unprecedented pressure to address the needs of women and close the gender gap across all areas of federal policy. Climate change will increasingly place pressure on our economic and social structures, putting women and other vulnerable people at risk. We need deep systemic change to our economy and our public policy systems to address systemic biases and make real lasting change for all women and people of marginalised genders.

Australia has a strong history of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and we regularly make international commitments<sup>iv</sup> to implement GRB or similar systems. Gender responsive policy development processes (such as GRB) are quickly becoming normalised among national governments<sup>v</sup> and Australia has faced repeated international criticism for our failures to meet our commitments under CEDAW.

Despite this, Australia currently has no federal GRB mechanism. Our current gender-unaware approach to policy and budget development leave us unable to identify and capitalise on opportunities to improve women's economic welfare and tap their economic potential. Without knowing the effect of general policy on women, we are working in the dark. Intersectional GRB is a way to lift that darkness and reveal the effects of policy on the lives of more than 51% of the Australian population.

### **What does GRB look like?**

GRB is in use in many countries around the world and there are many GRB models. It is crucial to note that the Women's Economic Security Statement (WESS) is not an adequate form of GRB on its own. The WESS is essentially a list of spending initiatives and programs specifically aimed at women. It does not contain an analysis of how the general budget affects women and it silos 'women's issues' into a specialist document, which creates an impression that policy makers don't need to worry about the effect of general policy measures on women.

ERA recommends that an effective Australian GRB process must:

- **sit at a range of points** across the policy and budget development cycle, not at a single point in the process. Key points are during policy development, at the point of assessing costs and benefits, and in the budget papers themselves;
- be **deeply embedded in the normal routines** of budget and policy development;
- **identify gender biases** and improve awareness of gender among policy and decision makers;
- **identify the resources** needed to achieve equality;
- increase **transparency and accountability** on gender issues;
- establish **measurable indicators** for public reporting;
- incorporate an increasingly sophisticated **intersectional analysis**, and

#### **Equality Rights Alliance**

#### **Women's Voices for Gender Equality**

Level 5, 161 London Circuit, Canberra ACT 2602 | PO Box 1022 Dickson ACT 2602

T: 02 5104 2954 | F: 02 6175 9993 | E: era.admin@ywca.org.au

[www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au](http://www.equalityrightsalliance.org.au)

- involve actors both inside and outside government (such as NGOs and universities) to monitor and evaluate policy. This should include both internal review and review by resourced outside actors such as NGOs and researchers.

It is vital that GRB does not become merely a compliance activity. Training and leadership in this area must stress that GRB is a vital tool for developing better targeted policy and more efficient use of resources.

To be sustainable over the long term, an Australian gender responsive policy process requires:

- active parliamentary support and monitoring,
- a resourced and well-trained public service with oversight and leadership in Cabinet, in Treasury and in all Departments, and
- access to the necessary data for GRB analysis.

---

<sup>i</sup> Kostas Mavromaras, Genevieve Knight et al *The Aged Care Workforce*, 2016 March 2017 Department of Health [https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/www\\_aihngen/media/Workforce/The-Aged-Care-Workforce-2016.pdf](https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/www_aihngen/media/Workforce/The-Aged-Care-Workforce-2016.pdf), accessed 10 May 2021.

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *GEN Aged Care Data – People using Aged Care* 27 April 2021 <https://www.gen-agedcaredata.gov.au/Topics/People-using-aged-care>, accessed 10 May 2021

<sup>iii</sup> Mauray, Susan *Poverty in Australia 2020: What does a gendered analysis reveal?* 21 Feb 2020 <http://www.powertopersuade.org.au/blog/poverty-in-australia-2020-what-does-a-gendered-analysis-reveal/19/2/2020> Accessed 10 May 2021.

<sup>iv</sup> See for example Australia's commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the *25% by 2025* G20 agreement, and various Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW).

<sup>v</sup> As of 2017, almost half of OECD countries (15 out of 34 members) had introduced, planned to introduce or were actively considering the introduction of gender budgeting.