



Australian Women's Coalition

Barriers to Women's Employment Women and Recession Project

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Women**Speak**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

BACKGROUND	3
KEY ISSUES FROM THE TAI REPORT	5
SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM WORKSHOP CONSULTATIONS	6
Education and training programs.....	7
<i>Eligibility and access.....</i>	7
<i>Costs.....</i>	7
<i>Younger women.....</i>	7
<i>Migrant and refugee women</i>	7
<i>Women seeking to re-enter the workforce.....</i>	7
<i>Women in remote and regional areas</i>	8
<i>Indigenous women.....</i>	8
<i>Older women</i>	8
<i>Online training.....</i>	8
<i>Training outcomes</i>	8
<i>Leadership training and mentoring programs.....</i>	9
Child-care arrangements.....	9
<i>Other care arrangements</i>	10
Employment-based issues.....	10
<i>Pay inequity.....</i>	10
<i>Valuation of traditional female occupations.....</i>	11
<i>Flexible working arrangements.....</i>	11
<i>Under-employment</i>	12
<i>Employment opportunities in remote and regional areas.....</i>	12
<i>Micro-credit and micro-finance programs</i>	12
<i>Transition to workforce</i>	12
<i>People with disabilities.....</i>	13
Unpaid work	13
Superannuation and retirement funding	13
Transport	14
Other issues	14
<i>Information access.....</i>	14
<i>Data and research needs.....</i>	14



REFERENCES 15

APPENDIX 1: POLICY ISSUES RAISED IN CONSULTATIONS 16

ADELAIDE CONSULTATIONS..... 16

BRISBANE CONSULTATIONS..... 18

BROKEN HILL CONSULTATIONS 19

CAIRNS CONSULTATIONS 22

DARWIN CONSULTATIONS 24

HOBART CONSULTATIONS 25

MACKAY CONSULTATIONS 28

MELBOURNE CONSULTATIONS..... 29

PERTH CONSULTATIONS..... 31

SYDNEY CONSULTATIONS..... 36

THREE SHIRES CONSULTATIONS 38

BACKGROUND

The National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW)¹, with the four national alliances of women's organisations (Australian Women's Coalition (AWC), National Rural Women's Alliance, Security for Women (S4W), and WomenSpeak), conducted consultation workshops across Australia during October and November 2009. Workshops were held in Adelaide, Brisbane, Broken Hill, Cairns, Cooma, Darwin, Hobart, Mackay, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney.

The workshops were supported by different entities in each city, together with the State Offices for Women and Women's Policy. Final reports on individual workshops are available on the NFAW website. Summaries of policy issues for each of the consultation sites are at Appendix 1 of this Executive Summary.

The objective of the workshops was to flesh out the statistical data on factors affecting women's hidden employment identified in *The Impact of the Recession on Women*², a report commissioned by Security for Women and NFAW from The Australia Institute (TAI).

The national women's organisations wanted to assess the impacts of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC) for women – particularly marginalised groups including young women; to assess whether the Government responses to the GFC adequately addressed women's concerns; and to identify any appropriate policy changes required to deal with identified issues. It has become clear through our consultations with women that there are many barriers facing women who want to work.

There are a number of public policy concerns for the Commonwealth and States that have arisen.

One is whether current policies and programs designed to address social inclusion have failed to accept the need for a careful gender analysis, and in consequence have overlooked the issues facing these women who are keen to get jobs³. We note that the recently launched social inclusion report A

¹ <http://www.nfaw.org>

² David Richardson, 2009, *The Impact of the Recession on Women: Background Paper*, The Australia Institute, viewed 12 January 2010, <https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&type=1&pubid=698&act=display>

³ <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/SIAgenda/Pages/Overview.aspx>

*Stronger, Fairer Australia*⁴ does not specifically address women except in the context of violence against women.

While recognising that one of the major drivers of social exclusion is lack of access to the job market, there is no recognition in social inclusion literature that many women seeking a job are not counted in official statistics, as demonstrated by this study by the national women's groups.

Two (out of six) of the Government's social inclusion priorities are:

- 'targeting jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity'
- 'breaking the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods and communities'⁵.

This report strongly suggests that the Government needs to make a strong commitment to analysing these patterns of disadvantage by gender, and to take account of the current invisibility in official data of some women job seekers.

All attempts to obtain Government data that has been analysed by gender are hindered by the lack of publicly available data, despite the fact that virtually every Government form filled in asks whether the individual is male or female. It is clear that the data is held, but not given sufficient importance to analyse it.

A second broad area of concern relates to the need to enhance the productivity of the Australian economy.

The national women's groups are conscious that, notwithstanding any short-term effects of the GFC, Australia's future economic wellbeing and potential productivity improvements require not only a better educated and more skilled workforce, but also an increase in workforce participation by those groups currently under-represented in the workforce.

Treasury has noted⁶ the need for greater female workforce participation as one means of enhancing productivity. Similarly, examination of the

⁴ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009, *A Stronger, Fairer Australia: National Statement on Social Inclusion*, viewed 31 January 2010, <http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Documents/ReportAStrongerFairerAustralia.pdf>

⁵ *ibid.*, p.4.

⁶ See for example Budget Papers 2008-09.

incidence of poverty in retirement and dependence on Government pensions and benefits has highlighted the merit of greater retirement savings by women (dependent on their workforce participation and on solutions to the gender pay gap), while Parliamentary Reports have similarly identified the importance of new policy measures to reduce the gender pay gap, enhance equity in incomes, and increase capacity to save for retirement⁷.

In January 2010, the Prime Minister spoke of the need to improve productivity, not least to manage the demographic transition to an older society.

The consultation workshops highlighted ongoing concerns about these issues – and other – signalling that further Government measures are imperative.

KEY ISSUES FROM THE TAI REPORT⁸

Women's employment patterns are different to men's:

- women 'drop-in, drop-out' without becoming officially 'unemployed'
- women's employment patterns (especially those of second income earners) are not reflected accurately in current statistical collections
- there is a substantial number of potential workers who constitute the 'hidden unemployed', with women making up to 80% of these in prime working age groups
- these women cite 'caring responsibilities' as a prime reason for inability to enter the workforce within four weeks;
- these women are markedly concentrated in particular regions, which suggests intervention strategies need to be regionally tailored rather than one-size-fits-all
- the GFC has had a disturbing and dramatic effect on existing superannuation balances of women who have been in the workforce.

⁷ See for example: House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, *Pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce*, viewed 20 January 2010, <http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ewr/payequity/report/fullreport.pdf>

⁸ David Richardson, 2009, *op. cit.*

SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES FROM WORKSHOP CONSULTATIONS

The consultations identified a range of systemic economic, social and institutional barriers to women wanting to enter or re-enter the workforce. (See Appendix 1 for details of the specific issues raised at each consultation site.)

Overall there was a real concern expressed that systemic barriers further disenfranchised disadvantaged groups and perpetuated social inequities in Australia.

The systemic barriers to specific women's workforce participation will create a driver of social exclusion for them. Linking to the Government's priorities for social inclusion, women re-entering the workforce should be a key target of the 'jobless families' priority.

Government also speaks about social inclusion needing a 'locational' approach: we link this to the specific needs that women in rural and remote areas need for workforce training, access, participation.

It seems clear that a Social Inclusion Agenda should respond to this explicitly.

A number of key themes emerged from issues raised in the workshops. In particular, participants highlighted fundamental concerns in areas such as:

- education and training programs
- child-care arrangements
- employment opportunities and associated issues
- unpaid work
- superannuation and retirement funding
- transport.

Many of the issues cut across themes, reflecting their systemic nature.

Education and training programs

Eligibility and access

Current Commonwealth policy excludes women who are not officially counted as 'unemployed'⁹ from accessing Employment Services Agencies (ESA), and/or subsidised Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and Vocational and Employment Training (VET) programs.

Costs

The costs of training courses impose significant barriers and are disincentives for many disadvantaged groups. Although the Federal Government provides free/subsidised training in occupational areas identified as having a skills shortage, women are often channelled into employment areas that do not reflect what they really want to do. (See comments further below about women being 'funnelled' into caring services.)

Younger women

The 'sudden-death' cut off from supported child-care and mentoring programs for disadvantaged young women leaving the current Jobs, Education and Training (JET) system, together with the impact of the current taxation system on low-income second income earners, reduces the financial incentives for young women with dependent children to remain attached to the workforce.

Migrant and refugee women

There is little ongoing financial support available from governments for disadvantaged groups such as migrants and refugees to develop adequate spoken and written English language skills to a level which would enable them to participate in TAFE and VET programs, and to develop social skills and self-confidence needed for such continued skills development and workforce attachment.

Women seeking to re-enter the workforce

There are significant problems with the design of appropriate training programs for women who have been detached from the workforce for some

⁹ Under the definitions used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), unemployed people are those aged 15 years and over who:

- were not employed for more than one hour during the reference period (the week before they were surveyed)
- had actively looked for work at any time in the four weeks up to the end of the reference week and were available for work in the reference week or
- were waiting to begin a new job within four weeks from the end of the reference week and could have started in the reference week if the job had been available then.

time. Women who have been caring for children or disabled or aged family members are particularly concerned about opportunities for re-training which will help them re-enter the workforce.

Women in remote and regional areas

Women in regional areas (for example, Cooma–Monaro, Bombala and Snowy River Shires, Broken Hill, Mackay and Cairns) expressed particular concerns about their ability to access training courses of relevance to their local region, as many TAFE and VET courses focus on skills shortages in metropolitan or large regional centres rather than the employment needs of local areas.

Indigenous women

Indigenous women also raised concerns about access to relevant training courses in their regions. They had particular concerns about training courses that aimed to integrate them into employment schemes that were based on White–Anglo models and had no relevance or respect for Indigenous culture.

Older women

The move to a higher age for eligibility for the Age Pension has highlighted a need for opportunities for affordable re-training for women approaching retirement who might wish to move to less stressful occupations, or simply take the opportunity to change career streams.

Online training

Although distance and online training programs are available in some courses, that is not always a practical solution for those who want training. Many disadvantaged groups do not have easy access to computers or fast Internet connections and are thus excluded from that mode of study. This can be a particular difficulty in rural and remote areas of Australia.

Training outcomes

Participants across the board raised real concerns about the lack of direct links between training and job opportunities: training needs to be outcome-oriented. It is common for women to take myriad short courses without being able to find suitable jobs after completing their course. This is of concern to Indigenous women in regional areas in particular. Part of the problem lies in a lack of appropriate career counselling, but there are also broader concerns that many employers are reluctant to engage people without work experience. The problem is both systemic and endemic.

Participants noted that paid work experience after training may enhance future employment opportunities. That measure would also improve job seekers' self-confidence and expose them to Australian workplace cultures – an issue which is of particular concern for migrant and refugee women and Indigenous people.

Leadership training and mentoring programs

A number of participants raised concerns about the lack of female representation in managerial or decision-making roles. More needs to be done to harness women's approaches to entrepreneurship and innovation.

It has been shown that having women on boards improves companies' efficiency because of the 'soft skills' women add. While there is a renewed interest in having more women on boards a significant cultural change is needed.

Although there is a growing number of leadership programs for women, course participants often don't get the follow up practical support and mentoring required to maximise the benefits of leadership training.

Child-care arrangements

Child-care arrangements – or the lack thereof – were identified as a major barrier to workforce attachment in all areas of Australia. There are critical issues in access and affordability of child-care services, including out of school hours care (OSHC) (including vacation care) for school-age children up to age 12 years which prohibit many women from study and/or workforce attachment.

The lack of age- and culturally-appropriate models of care was of particular concern in all regions.

Many locations have no access to OSHC or vacation care, in large part a reflection of current funding arrangements, as well as a failure to implement Labor election commitments to 'stop the double drop' or to maximise the 'Building the Education Revolution' (BER) program to ensure provision of adequate and appropriate facilities for OSHC and vacation care. While it is understood that state education authorities in a number of jurisdictions have used BER funds to establish facilities which will be suitable for OSHC and vacation care, care providers have been evicted from premises during renovations, leaving them without suitable facilities.

The shortage and costs of child-care facilities are major concerns and pose significant economic issues for women seeking employment. For example, if a woman loses her job (as many did during the GFC) she still needs to keep

her children in day care because centres have very long waiting lists. The costs of child-care while seeking new employment place significant burdens on household finances.

The Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations' report, on the provision of child-care¹⁰ and the House of Representatives Committee on Employment and Training report on pay equity¹¹ have both made valuable recommendations on funding and planning of child-care (and of OSHC and vacation care). It is imperative for Government to develop new approaches which will facilitate better provision in areas of need, and which will stimulate innovative approaches to providing age- and culturally-appropriate care services.

Other care arrangements

A number of participants highlighted a lack of adequate support or respite services catering to people with a disability or a level of frailty. This impedes the capacity of women who are primary carers for disabled or frail family members from re-training in readiness to re-join the workforce, or indeed from engaging with the workforce. This problem was strongly identified by a number of women from migrant and refugee groups.

Employment-based issues

Pay inequity

Participants expressed significant concerns about the inequity associated with the gender pay gap and general undervaluing of occupations traditionally associated with female workers.

It was noted that Queensland has implemented a system for dealing with pay inequities: the Equal Remuneration Principle (ERP), which works in conjunction with other industrial legislation. These measures allow work predominantly performed by women to be assessed to determine if the work is under-valued on the ground of gender. It further examines how industrial instruments such as Awards are implemented to ensure that the ERP is entrenched.

¹⁰ Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2009, *Provision of Childcare*, viewed 20 January 2010, http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/child_care/report/report.pdf

¹¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, *op. cit.*

However, the system (and similar mechanisms in New South Wales (NSW)) has effectively backfired in the case of nurses' wages. Under state industrial relations legislation, nurses in NSW and Queensland had had significant increases in wages, based on the value of their work. Any wage advantages that nurses in Queensland and NSW had gained over nurses in other states will be lost under new national award changes.

The NSW workshop noted that pay inequities and disparities also occur within occupational groups. For example, nurses in aged care facilities earn significantly less than their counterparts in public hospitals despite having the same qualifications and doing the same job. Teachers in primary schools earn more than teachers in early childhood education and care.

Valuation of traditional female occupations

Participants in a number of regions raised concerns that systemic barriers to employment risk creating an underclass of poorly paid women (such as nurses, cleaners, carers). Because of family circumstances many women in traditionally female occupations often have to work part-time or in casual positions and have limited savings capacity or ability to invest in retirement funds. The concerns were not just about the level of wages, but also about the way the workers are regarded – the status they are given in society.

Many participants expressed concern that they tend to be 'funnelled' into low-paid care services employment – for example, aged care – without consideration of their individual needs or wants, or their other skills and qualifications.

Flexible working arrangements

Participants in all sessions raised significant concerns about working arrangements. Employer inflexibility – such as resistance to family friendly hours which could include job-sharing – was identified as a key barrier to employment. There also seemed to be a degree of employer resistance to employing older women, sometimes on grounds of 'over-qualification'. This is a systemic issue that needs to be rectified given the Government's commitment to a higher age for eligibility for the Age Pension.

The lack of flexibility in the workplace was also identified as a significant barrier to female participation in senior positions. Although female participation in higher education is greater than that of males¹², they continue to be poorly represented in senior positions. Anecdotal evidence

¹² ABS, 2009, *Education and Work, May 2009*, Cat. No. 6227.0, viewed 28 January 2010, [http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/92DCF2C65BFBF519CA257677001486D9/\\$File/62270_May%202009_Reissue.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/92DCF2C65BFBF519CA257677001486D9/$File/62270_May%202009_Reissue.pdf)

indicates that much of the national investment in education and training of women is lost because they drop out of the workforce for longer periods than they want to because employers are not providing sufficient flexibility to enable them to balance family and careers effectively.

Under-employment

Under-employment of women was identified as a critical issue across the board. This raises significant concerns about the health and wellbeing of female employees as under-employment undermines self-esteem, decreases job satisfaction, and increases work-related stress levels.

The problem not only affects women in low-paid positions who are unable to earn enough to pay the bills because they are allocated insufficient hours of work; it also affects women in more senior positions who are constrained from seeking alternative work or promotion because of a lack of flexible working arrangements that acknowledge work-life balance issues.

Specific examples include: a Tasmanian survey of female carers in aged residential care where very few had enough hours on offer to become or maintain financial security; and casualisation of academic staff at James Cook University.

Employment opportunities in remote and regional areas

There is a clear need to establish specific regional development programs to generate employment opportunities and occupational diversity in many regional areas. This issue was of particular concern in consultations held in Broken Hill, the 'Three Shires' (Cooma, Bombala, Snowy Rivers) and in tropical north Queensland (Cairns and Mackay).

Micro-credit and micro-finance programs

There is an emerging interest in the development of micro-credit and micro-finance programs to assist women to generate self-employment opportunities. The Ministerial Council of Ministers for Women, stimulated in part by the Tasmanian Government, is developing an options paper on this.

Transition to workforce

Participants noted a general lack of support for people transitioning between benefits and workforce. The requirement to report any hours worked (particularly for recipients of Disability or Age Pensions – and the associated paperwork involved – serves as a disincentive to engage in the workforce, thus perpetuating the poverty cycle and isolating people from social networks.

Concerns were also raised about the lack of ongoing support for migrant and refugee women transitioning to the workforce.

People with disabilities

Participants across the board raised particular concerns about employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Of particular concern was the lack of proactive programs specifically targeting the employment of people with disabilities. Furthermore, as noted above, the requirement to report any hours worked effectively discourages people from seeking employment.

It was noted that employers may need targeted incentives to engage people with disabilities and mental health issues.

Unpaid work

Participants in all regions noted the need for new approaches to valuing women's unpaid work as carers and volunteers, as well as measures to reframe statistical collections to recognise women's contributions as carers and volunteers.

A number of groups raised the possibility of introducing a scheme similar to the recognition of prior learning (RPL) arrangements to reflect the skills acquired in carer and volunteer roles.

Superannuation and retirement funding

Participants expressed concerns that the current superannuation and taxation systems discriminate against women. In general, women are paid less and their working lives are prone to interruptions because of family and other care responsibilities. As a result, they have much lower superannuation balances and therefore lower retirement incomes.

Reform of superannuation schemes to reduce disincentives to saving for persons of modest income was raised as a possible remedy for endemic problems. Removing the \$450.00 threshold and introducing a Government-sponsored default scheme were all seen as mechanisms that would help improve women's capacity to save for retirement.

Concerns were also raised about the current taxation system which discriminates against women who are second income earners in households with modest family incomes. The tax burden taken together with the costs of child-care effectively make a return to work financially unviable for families where a choice is possible.

Transport

Many regional groups identified poor public transport as a significant barrier to reaching job or training openings from their places of residence. Potentially, a job might be available two or three suburbs, or some kilometres away, but poor public transport, or lack of a personal car makes the job inaccessible for many women. Transport was also identified as an impediment for child-care arrangements.

Other issues

Information access

Participants in a number of workshops identified a critical need for improved information access and dissemination and mentoring schemes. The need covers a number of dimensions: younger women need to be informed of the long-term consequences of not having full-time, well-paid employment; and unemployed or under-employed women need to have access to information and resources about job opportunities in their local area. Networks that enabled all women to share ideas and experiences was a common theme.

Although some participants acknowledged that information relevant to their needs was available on the Internet, lack of access to fast speed Broadband impeded their access to the information.

Data and research needs

A number of regions identified the need for more data and research to inform public policy makers. This was a major issue in Tasmania, because data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics is commonly not available on a small area basis because of concerns about confidentiality and privacy¹³. Areas of particular concern were:

- gender-disaggregated data on hidden unemployment and workforce underutilisation
- gender-disaggregated data on the impacts of the economic stimulus packages to demonstrate the equity of distribution between employment sectors.

¹³ In January 2010 the Tasmanian Government made a grant to UnionsTasmania to carry out research and improve data on women and work.

REFERENCES

- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2009, *Education and Work, May 2009*, Cat. No. 6227.0, viewed 28 January 2010,
[http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/92DCF2C65BF519CA257677001486D9/\\$File/62270_May%202009_Reissue.pdf](http://www.ausstats.abs.gov.au/Ausstats/subscriber.nsf/0/92DCF2C65BF519CA257677001486D9/$File/62270_May%202009_Reissue.pdf)
- Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2009, *A Stronger, Fairer Australia: National Statement on Social Inclusion*, viewed 31 January 2010,
<http://www.socialinclusion.gov.au/Resources/Documents/ReportAStrongerFairerAustralia.pdf>
- House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009, *Pay equity and associated issues related to increasing female participation in the workforce*, viewed 20 January 2010,
<http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/ewr/payequity/report/fullreport.pdf>
- Productivity Commission, 2009, *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector: Draft Research Report*, viewed 18 January 2009,
http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/91717/not-for-profit-draft.pdf
- Richardson, David 2009, *The Impact of the Recession on Women: Background Paper*, The Australia Institute, viewed 12 January 2010,
<https://www.tai.org.au/index.php?q=node%2F19&type=1&pubid=698&act=display>
- Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment & Workplace Relations, 2009, *Provision of Childcare*, viewed 20 January 2010,
http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/eet_ctte/child_care/report/report.pdf

APPENDIX 1: POLICY ISSUES RAISED IN CONSULTATIONS

ADELAIDE CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

- There need to be mechanisms to share success stories highlighting what individuals have done/achieved to overcome barriers.
- There needs to be better access to community mental health and drug and alcohol services. Currently people with all manner of problems – such as depression and anxiety – face huge waiting lists. There are services for the younger job seekers, but little for those aged 25 and over.
- The improvements to Commonwealth measures to support registered/eligible job seekers are welcome initiatives to help deal with presentation issues (for example, teeth, spectacles, clothes, one-off payment of bills, two weeks of child-care). But these are available only once an individual has reached a nadir. The policy should aim to prevent people becoming discouraged: help should kick in earlier to 'stop discouraging the disempowered'.
- A regional focus in responses to the economic downturn is important.
- There is a deplorable lack of useful, gender-specific data to enable better planning of education, training and other services.
- TAFE courses need to have fees reduced. They are a barrier to women without eligibility for benefits or registration with bodies such as Workskills.
- Accessible community services are needed for people with a disability, and the disability policy needs a human rights underpinning. Many people with a disability feel they suffer from community stereotyping.
- Retirement and superannuation are a concern for women, many of whom are delaying retirement and fear the lack of a guarantee under present policy that they won't lose their existing savings. There needs to be a universal superannuation scheme.
- Current tax policies are a disincentive for women as second income earners. The policies need to change to reduce the barriers.

- There is a need for innovative local job creation schemes – for example local horticulture initiatives could employ local people.
- The lack of adequate public transport is a tremendous barrier.
- Care program models need to be developed. For example, bringing sport and recreation youth workers back into the system although public liability insurance issues have probably made many providers risk-averse.

BRISBANE CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

- Employment programs need to be holistic and able to adapt to the individual needs – age, gender, and people at different 'work ready' stages, especially women trying to enter/re-enter the workforce who still have caring responsibilities. Employment programs also need to address specific issues in particular regions.
- Child-care costs need to be reviewed – especially in relation to women with responsibilities for school-age children. This includes before and after school care and vacation care.
- The campaign for pay equity needs to be continued. It has important economic consequences for women as they get older, particularly in relation to superannuation. It also has considerable consequences for Government spending as women without superannuation remain in the public pension system. One of the strategies could be to try to get women to enter non-traditional female work – for example the mining industry where pay is high.
- The interaction between the tax system and the welfare system needs to be examined, particularly the impact this has on people's entry/re-entry into the workforce.
- An education/information campaign for high school students needs to be developed to inform young people of the consequences of not having full-time well-paid employment. This could be possibly be developed by a coalition of women's groups, unions and the Office of Women, and offered through neighbourhood centres.
- A peak body of neighbourhood centres within Queensland should be created to enable sharing of information and resources and to offer support as well as becoming a more powerful advocacy body.
- Employers need to be educated about flexible work practices and pay rights and employees' right to request working arrangements that accommodate work–life balances.

BROKEN HILL CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

- There are problems with adequacy of broadband access/quality, which affects women seeking to make use of Internet resources.
- There appear to be jobs available, for example there are vacancies in community services and there is always work in hospitality, but there are barriers to mature women taking up these jobs.
- Some women are available to work in a lesser capacity than standard variations of the full-time equivalent position. These women are sourced and found according to a local network of female business and community leaders in a generally ad hoc fashion. Formalising a network of 'who is who' and 'who needs what' in terms of employment opportunities may provide opportunities.
- There is a significant problem with the supply of child-care, notably for school-age children before and after school and during school vacations. It was noted that the Y was 'unable to take the financial risk' to develop outside school hours care (OSHC) programs. This risk comes about because of the length of time it takes to gain the numbers needed for the OSHC service to be cost neutral for a community charity which attracts very little local government operational support. Vacation care, however, has existed at the YMCA for many years. This program augments the other programs available at the YMCA and helps maintain this community charity in the city.
- Access to TAFE courses and the related capacity of many women to make effective applications for positions is a matter for concern. Many women need assistance with understanding what they have to offer; which makes them reluctant to put themselves forward. 'TAFE can't help if the women aren't motivated'.
- Many women maintaining a caring role also volunteer substantially whilst outside the paid workforce. When it is time to re-enter the workforce, some believe they have no skills and yet they have held various volunteer positions and gained many skills.
- Is there scope for volunteer work which can be verified by an organization to gain recognition of prior (RPL) status and certification? This may give some women the 'pieces of paper' they need to apply for positions and the confidence to know their skills are transferable.
- Some local people seem to do 'endless' small-scale TAFE courses without being followed through into placement in ongoing jobs.

- The importance of a blend of training with on-the-job work experience was noted.
- Many women who would otherwise be well-suited to positions, for example in the Municipality operated human services, lack confidence and capacity to develop formal applications.
- There is a need for affordable programs to help women develop these skills if the women are to overcome barriers to employment. It was reported that the average age of current care workers is 54 years, and there is a need to recruit and train younger women. Suggested approaches which could help could include information sessions helping women to develop self-confidence.
- The traditional male hegemony of the community is still felt strongly by women.
- The existing Commonwealth financed employment service is willing to assist with career counselling and placement, but is unable to offer these women a complete service – the conditions of Commonwealth funding are such that the service is to be provided to those individuals eligible for or in receipt of Commonwealth income support. Most of the married women seeking employment, career counselling and the like, are not eligible for benefits in their own right.
- There was agreement that these employment services should be funded to assist the 'hidden' unemployed.
- Young women seem 'to lose their voices' once they move beyond school. There is a need for services and activities which will continue to engage young women. The YWCA is very active, but more is required. More services for all women, and forums in which women can voice their opinions would encourage younger women to speak as they would be joining a chorus, not having to find the 'bravery' needed to speak alone.
- There is concern for the farm families, where the women must often run properties in the absence of menfolk, providing volunteer contributions to the family enterprise as well as to the community, yet also need access to career counselling and work options. There is a need for recognition and perhaps certification of volunteer community service which recognises the worth of such activity in cases where women are seeking paid employment.
- It was noted that there are many trained nurses among this farmwife population who are now out of the workforce but who could re-engage.
- There is a problem with the adequacy of Commonwealth Isolated Children's payments for farm children forced to board in town to

attend high school – the school leaving age is about to be raised to 17 years, but eligibility for payment ceases at age 16.

- There was concern expressed about Indigenous people's future employment opportunities at a time when many state entities (health, education etc.) are scaling back their local workforce. The point was made that there are extensive opportunities for traineeships for Indigenous workers, but very few actual jobs at the end of the traineeships.

CAIRNS CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

- There need to be mechanisms to share success stories highlighting what individuals have done/achieved to overcome barriers.
- There needs to be better access to community mental health and drug and alcohol services. Currently people with all manner of problems – such as depression and anxiety – face huge waiting lists. There are services for the younger job seekers, but little for those aged 25 and over.
- The improvements to Commonwealth measures to support registered/eligible job seekers are welcome initiatives to help deal with presentation issues (for example, teeth, spectacles, clothes, one-off payment of bills, two weeks of child-care). But these are available only once an individual has reached a nadir. The policy should aim to prevent people becoming discouraged: help should kick in earlier to 'stop discouraging the disempowered'.
- A regional focus in responses to the economic downturn is important.
- There is a deplorable lack of useful, gender-specific data to enable better planning of education, training and other services.
- TAFE courses need to have fees reduced. They are a barrier to women without eligibility for benefits or registration with bodies such as Workskills.
- Accessible community services are needed for people with a disability, and the disability policy needs a human rights underpinning. Many people with a disability feel they suffer from community stereotyping.
- Retirement and superannuation are a concern for women, many of whom are delaying retirement and fear the lack of a guarantee under present policy that they won't lose their existing savings. There needs to be a universal superannuation scheme.
- Current tax policies are a disincentive for women as second income earners. The policies need to change to reduce the barriers.
- There is a need for innovative local job creation schemes – for example local horticulture initiatives could employ local people.
- The lack of adequate public transport is a tremendous barrier.

- Care program models need to be developed. For example, bringing sport and recreation youth workers back into the system although public liability insurance issues have probably made many providers risk-averse.

DARWIN CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

- The Commonwealth needs to revise training programs so that they are more flexible and personal as well as providing professional development.
- Training need to link to actual employment.
- More flexible learning opportunities need to be provided.
- Remedies are needed for poor transport to and between regional and remote communities.
- It is time for a whole-of-government approach which recognises the unique situations in the Territory.
- There is an overwhelming need for more child-care, including out of school hours and vacation care to assist women to engage in training and to participate in the workforce.

HOBART CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

The following issues are identified as areas requiring action to overcome barriers to female workforce participation.

- In aged care, where 90% of the workforce is female, a ratio of workers to residents needs to be introduced to ensure quality care and reduce the stress and overworked nature of the current workforce. The hourly rate for aged care workers (currently \$16.30 per hour) also needs to be increased to get ratios up in order to encourage people to work in the sector. Aged care workers in Tasmania receive lower rates of pay than their mainland counterparts.
- Mentoring programs for women of all ages should be encouraged to provide options and support for entering the workforce.
- Micro-credit and micro-finance programs should be encouraged to promote entrepreneurial opportunities that women can make for themselves and encourage women into non-traditional areas.
- There should be a review of the JET child-care assistance in order to support young mothers to pursue work and further study options, beyond years 11 and 12. The program needs to be revamped (taking into consideration the original model) to ensure long-term benefits in terms of breaking women out of the poverty cycle and achieving educational outcomes.
- Compulsory financial literacy should be introduced into schools. The Government should expand good practice programs operating around the state to support young mothers to complete their education and enter the workforce.
- Efforts should continue to raise the status of caring professions and the value this has to a well-functioning society.
- Due to the limited current research and data available in Tasmania on female workforce participation, more local research should be commissioned on women and work with a view to establishing a permanent 'women and work' research group similar to that in other states.
- Sex and relationship education for young people, and particularly young women, should be incorporated into the national curriculum to reduce the number of teen pregnancies. A broader focus on health and well-

being, including body image and self-esteem development, should also be integrated into the curriculum.

- The Government should abolish the \$450 threshold for superannuation and the 15% contributions tax as both have a detrimental impact on women. If superannuation contributions are to be taxed, this should occur at the end and not in the middle to maximise the benefit of accumulated superannuation for women. Superannuation should also be payable on paid parent leave contributions.
- Education programs for women in high school and tertiary education should be in accessible formats for women with disabilities to access information about employment and superannuation.
- Funding to support women with disabilities to obtain employment should be given to employers rather than women, as many women don't know how to contribute and need support to get into work.
- An holistic, whole-of-government approach should be taken to improve women's workforce participation. There should be a focus on reducing barriers for people living with disadvantage with interventions aimed at improving access to transport, increasing language skills and improved access to child-care.
- Incentives should be offered to employers to overcome perceived barriers associated with offering employment to people with disabilities, mental health issues or parenting responsibilities as this will lead to greater productivity.
- Recognising that the GFC has increased the level of crisis among the population and increased the demand for community services, there needs to be an increased injection of funds into related areas.
- There needs to be pay parity for the community sector (a female dominated sector) to encourage more people to enter the sector, and to ensure services continue to be provided for those most in need – many of whom are women.
- There is a need for increased resourcing for schools in disadvantaged areas, including JET schemes. Early intervention with literacy and numeracy should commence in pre-school and will have benefits for women later in life.
- Paid parental leave is essential to improving women's workforce participation.

- Respective relationships programs and assertiveness for women should be promoted, as well as programs that expand the choices available to women.
- The 20% wage difference between men and women needs to be addressed, as well as the 'ghettoing' of women into caring roles and the devaluing of these professions.
- Employers should be encouraged to think more creatively about ways to support women with family responsibilities to take on management positions, including those wanting to work part-time and requiring additional leave during school holiday periods.

MACKAY CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

- Child-care costs should be reviewed to examine how child-care costs prohibit many women from entering/re-entering the workforce.
 - The review should also consider the issues around outside school hours care – in particular flexibility, cost and adequacy of provision in areas where employment is not high but where transport costs prohibit job seekers, especially women, from seeking child-care outside their area.
- A survey of Women on Boards and in Executive positions should be undertaken in the Mackay/Whitsunday region and barriers to women's participation identified.
- The delivery of Company Director's Courses for women in the Mackay/Whitsunday region should be explored by the local Office for Women.
- Employment programs need to be holistic to ensure that particular needs of job seekers can be met to ensure people – especially women – are given the appropriate support needed to enter/re-enter the workforce.
- Institutions in the Mackay/Whitsunday delivering education and training courses should consider providing transport for participants.
- The Queensland Government should investigate how community centres are funded and the impact this has on the continuity of operations in these centres.
- The Queensland Government should investigate the operations of the school 'Work Experience' program and examine the way in which it impacts on people's ability to gain entry into the workforce.

MELBOURNE CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

- There should be greater transparency in Government stimulus packages – who is receiving them and who is eligible.
- Data on the outcomes of the stimulus packages needs to be disseminated. What jobs have been created?
- There is a need for improved information and data on employment:
 - what sectors of work need employees
 - what jobs are available
 - where the positions are located
 - what is the pay?
- There is a need for more accurate data on OSHC, and data which looks at OSHC as an enabler for women to engage in the workforce.
- There is a need for improved gender disaggregated data and gender analysis across all sectors of government and policies.
- Micro-finance and micro credit programs should be available to women to assist them to become economically independent.
- The JET program should be reviewed.
- TAFE and VET course fees need to be reduced.,
- Current retirement and superannuation options for women need to be readdressed. Many women delay retirement due to a lack of security and fear that under the current system and the recession they will lose their savings.
- The issue of under-employment of women needs to be addressed. The impact of under-employment will not be seen as immediately on women as it is on men. The impact on women will be seen in their superannuation and savings.
- The issue of unpaid hours of women should be addressed. Employers should reduce the workload to suit the hours women work or they should be paid for the hours.

- The Government should review job-sharing. The Government should show that there is value in job-sharing and should provide incentives to employers to provide job-sharing positions.
- There should be bilingual teachers in all English courses for migrant and refugee women.
- The value of unpaid work should be recognised. Unpaid care work should be classified as unpaid employment after certain hours of care. Caring should be considered as a qualification when carers return to the workforce.
- There should be more support for respite care.
- The current system of OSHC and vacation care should be reviewed, OSHC should be more flexible, affordable and accessible.
- Child-care and OSHC should be shifted away from being a women's issue and should be seen as an equal responsibility between men and women.
- The \$450 superannuation threshold should be removed. This disadvantages many women who work on a casual basis or are secondary income earners, and impacts on their retirement income.
- The issue of pay inequity between men and women should be addressed.
- Employers should be encouraged and trained to support women with caring responsibilities, and offer flexible work practices.
- There need to be improved regulations to protect employees on maternity leave and guaranteed return to work rights for contract workers.

PERTH CONSULTATIONS

POLICY ISSUES

Messages to deliver – What specifics do we want to address?

- Policies need to consider the impact of economic development of care across the ages for women who want to be in the workforce. What investment are we prepared to make?
- Potential partnerships need to be identified.

Child-care and out of school hours care

- Policies need to revisit the issue of who provides child-care and the cost arrangements. What is the value to parents? Is it worth the trade-off? In the old days child-care was provided by the Government, not private organisations.
- Services should be both community-based and corporate, instead of market dominance by corporate bodies. (The risks associated with dominance by private corporations is illustrated by the case of the ABC fallout).
- Commonwealth policy on financing child-care needs to enable research on and support for other models.
- Family day care must not be ignored – it plays a big part. There needs to be an holistic approach to solve the problem the way they want to have it solved.
- State governments need to be talking to each other about security of venues for OSHC.
- Families with disabilities need to be able to access a range of child-care and respite services. There are WA Government specialist resource units in geographical areas who can help with access to the programs.
- Funding allocations to disability areas need to be reviewed to address transport, informal training and child-care for children with disabilities. The Department of Education does look after it to some degree, but once a child leaves school they are on their own. They need ongoing and meaningful training once they leave school and need skilling and meaningful employment opportunities.

Younger women

- Young women without children have a sense of isolation from older women, and lack a relationship with the women's movement (an anti feminist backlash). We need to ensure that we mentor and collaborate with younger women so they don't fall into the same traps we did. Young women become socialised into thinking they will always stay in the sector. They know they are low paid and have long shifts etc but still can't imagine where else they would be. It is important to revalue low-paid work. Many women love their work but it is very stigmatised both socially and economically.
- It is important to encourage young people to go to university, but we need to ensure it is culturally appropriated. The same applies to flexible employment – it needs to be culturally appropriate.
- There are a number of issues that need to be addressed in relation to the needs of young mothers (possibly teenagers) in obtaining training. Child-care is paramount, so that they can have face-to-face training. On-line or distance education is generally not suitable for this group (due to a lack of access to computers, difficulty in concentrating with one or more babies in the house etc.). Child-care in this instance could also provide a support role for the young mothers (many of whom are Aboriginal, and so may face extra problems).

Employment, career paths and working arrangements

- Assistance to people who have become unemployed as a result of the global economic crisis is fine – but does not help people who were not employed, but want to become so.
- Better career paths need to be provided for women in female dominated areas, for example, nurses don't have a strong career path.
- More men should be involved in the debate, especially in relation to flexible work practices – they might also enjoy the same flexibility. There was some discussion around the idea of partnerships and men and women being equal partners – but 'as long as they are willing to show commitment we will work with them'.

- Questions were raised in relation to the trades industry and fair pay consultation. Do women want to be brick layers? Does raising the debate about women in trades help? It was noted that some progress was being made in the trades – for example the 'Tap Girls' program for female plumbers.
- Issues were raised about women who are of workforce age, but are also carers. Child-care is now on the table, but respite services for other carers are few and far between. Respite care is very difficult to obtain and women eventually give up trying because they have to prove disability of the person being care for, which is incredibly insensitive. It is degrading in the extreme for the women to even just fill in the paperwork to do it. Female and male employees in government who are in caring roles have been given flexibility, for example, paid maternity leave which is now part of the Fair Work Act. But it needs to be recognised that many people provide long-term care. We need to tap into those men who are also carers. How much more do we need to say and when? We have the answers but they cost money! Continuous turnover in Commonwealth agencies might mean that a lot of people don't have any history of policy in that area. Corporatisation of policy agendas means that people don't have the knowledge and experience.
- There was a comment about the invisibility of women once they are on paid maternity leave or on leave due to caring responsibilities. We need to make sure they are still attached and have strong links to the workforce. This can occur through ongoing inclusion in professional development and invitations to work functions while on carers leave or parental leave. Many women get deleted from email lists and so on when they go on leave. Truly flexible conditions are very hard; since 1996 it's been very hard to work part-time; and women have to turn down promotions etc. to juggle caring responsibilities
- Equity of wages is an essential step. For example, Community Employers WA is organised so they can pay better wages. Flexible employment is essential as it allows for caring, which is necessary for both men and women. People want to work for the agency even though the pay is bad and funding is at risk.
- Commonwealth policy is disappointing re Job Services Australia. One participant mentioned not even being able to get a Certificate I training through them. This is very detrimental to women. Some providers are not accredited training organisations so do not have

recognition. There were also some complaints about cost of fees for women who are self-funded. For those who have lost jobs in the economic downturn, some fees are paid. But if not in work in the first place this assistance does not apply.

- Income support while training is a disincentive – Austudy is less than Newstart.
- Career counselling needs to be available through well-promoted channels and undertaken by properly qualified persons.
- Assistance could be considered to provide incentives for employers to take on persons who are disadvantaged.
- It is important to look at the supply of jobs. Barriers for women in senior positions were there before the recession and are now just amplified.

Training

- Fees are too high (training used to be free). It is very expensive for some courses. Competitive tendering is a huge issue in the provision of job services, and you get what you deserve.
- There are difficulties in training people appropriately. Income support while studying can be a disincentive; Austudy is less than Newstart.
- Properly trained career counsellors is an issue. From 2012, a minimum qualification of Certificate IV (or above) will be required nationally. But what if career counselling is called something else (for example, student services)? People are sometimes funnelled into those areas when the training provider needs more people to enrol, although it might not be the area that people want to work in. There are professional standards, but they are not necessarily being met.
- There is cause for optimism about the future. The new Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development may be able to address some of these issues. Likewise, the new National VET Advisory Council might help the situation, as it has a broad based charter of guiding equity reform in the national training system.
- Job Services Australia needs to consider eligibility criteria and the lack of support for meaningful training that is appropriate to the individual client.

- The federal allocation of training money needs to acknowledge the important role played by non-accredited training for lower level training (Certificate 1 and below).
- Fees for training can be prohibitive and need to be reviewed.

Migrant and refugee women

- In relation to the Australian Migrant English Program (AMEP), an example was given about African women with six children using up six out of their allocated 10 child-care places in one day. The programs need to be more culturally aware. Career counselling has also been downgraded in the AMEP providers in Western Australia. (They used to have psychologists employed in this area, in recognition of the complexity of working with people who may be traumatised etc.).
- Some sort of system is required whereby people can get assistance to get experience. Employers may need incentives to take disadvantaged groups on. Potential employees need to know about Australian working conditions and requirements, for example turning up on time. Policies need to recognise that some people have survival skills, not social skills.
- Child care provision in the AMEP program (English for new migrants) is inadequate.
- Support and career counselling in the AMEP program has been downgraded (at least in WA).

SYDNEY CONSULTATIONS

POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS

Participants suggested a variety of solutions in relation to improving women's workforce participation. These include:

- Rather than focusing on policy solutions within a neo-liberal economic framework, which do not tend to achieve change for women, there is a need for policies which confront the existing work culture.
- Policies should place more value on caring, challenge the role of men in sharing work and family responsibilities, and allow women to participate in the labour market on their own terms.
- In relation to migrant workers, there is a need for education in the community, especially regarding discrimination. Participants also suggested that the Government provide a job guarantee at the end of training, which may improve migrant women's capacity to access higher paid work, and help to address job shortages in Australia. Additional English language training and long-term support is also needed.
- There is a need for women to be able to access training and re-training without any financial penalty (especially in relation to the parenting payment).
- There should be an onus/positive duty on employers to demonstrate why they don't support true flexibility.
- There should be a gender audit of Commonwealth and State Budgets.
- As a matter of national urgency, there should be a national report/strategy in relation to pay disparity for aged care, nurses, etc.
- Superannuation should be paid for women on paid maternity leave, and people on welfare payments and unpaid maternity/carers leave.
- Official unemployment statistics should be revised to encompass the hidden unemployed.
- Policy formulation could be de-centralised to non-metropolitan areas, so that policymakers have greater exposure to the issues that women are facing.

- The recommendations contained in the Productivity Commission's draft report on the not-for-profit sector¹⁴ should be considered, in particular those related to Government funding of community services work, which is primarily undertaken by women.
- Alternatives should be provided for people who can't remain in school, and training opportunities should be offered for teachers in vocational education training (VET).
- Governments should consider increased regulation and service provision in relation to child-care (for example, by providing child-care and out of school hours care on school premises).
- Governments should encourage businesses to provide additional child-care (for example, by offering incentives to businesses).

¹⁴ Productivity Commission, 2009, *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector: Draft Research Report*, viewed 18 January 2009, http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/91717/not-for-profit-draft.pdf

THREE SHIRES CONSULTATIONS POLICY ISSUES

- Money for programs targeting women is important.
- At my age as a mature aged student, there is a lack of transport. I don't want to move away, I want a local job.
- I want to have training (and) skills.
- In the community services, aged care and disability sector, I'd like to see more funding for resources, training and development, and for more hours.
- I also think there is not enough representation or recognition of women in higher jobs, such as Managers and CEOs.
- And in reference to the Government's current policy change on working longer until you're 67, I want to see choices here, choices for days worked and hours, choices to change employment/career direction and be supported to train, and in particular, they need to change how this message is being sold to the public. I'm also not sure that everyone's health and wellbeing will allow them to continue working full-time.
- There needs to be more TAFE funding and courses tailored to women's needs for work.
- There needs to be more support for nurses.
- As a society, although women are doing more, we're not being recognised.
- We can't grow in this region; there are not enough employment opportunities.
- We need big business here: transport, and infrastructure.
- We have a small town feel, to bring people here.
- We have to challenge the Government policy that big is beautiful.
- We are a local organisation, in a local area that employs local people.
- The Government policy needs to change.
- I work in the aged care sector in respite care. I don't have trouble finding work. The age group I work with is from 24–63. Our award rate

of pay is low. The aged population will increase significantly by 2050. Staff in our sector are mainly female.

- I'd like to see more valuing of women's contribution to society, the way we hold communities and families together.
- I have an industrial ecology idea incorporating low carbon miles.
- We need higher levels of education.
- Bring new industry e.g. fine wool/fabrics and other manufacturing industries need to be brought into the region..
- Abattoirs are shipping interstate and overseas- Educational ideas.
- I hope that the good things the Government are doing continue to happen.
- We need to get disability policies working properly.
- Creation of more casual and part-time jobs for women is important.
- People need to be re-skilled, for work opportunities and new opportunities for women to enter the workforce need to be generated.