29 January 2021

### [The Hon Michael Sukkar MP](https://ministers.treasury.gov.au/ministers/michael-sukkar-2019)

Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2601

By online submission

Dear Minister and Assistant Treasurer

The Working Women’s Centre SA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission on priorities for the 2021-22 budget.

The Working Women’s Centre SA is a non-government organisation that provides free and confidential information, advice and representation to vulnerable workers residing in South Australia about their rights at work. We are experts in gender-based employment issues and consult with thousands of women yearly about their experiences in the workforce.

Recovering from the economic impacts of COVID-19 will no doubt be a strong priority for the 2021-22 budget. We have been conducting targeted research into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on young women in Australia. Evidence shows that young women have been affected significantly during this pandemic, exacerbating prior conditions of gender inequality.

**We urge Treasury to place gender equality as a high priority in the 2021-22 budget.**

**Recommendations:**

* **Implement an analysis of how budgetary measures will impact women prior to all decisions for the 2021-22 budget and ensure that funding addresses the needs of women.** This is an essential process to ensure that the budget is geared towards gender equality and does not further entrench the uneven impacts of COVID-19.
* **Create a bold package of stimulus funding for direct job creation in feminised industries. As part of this package, increase funding for social infrastructure, the expansion of our childcare and education systems, public aged care, arts projects, and social housing construction.**Investment in these sectors would create far more new jobs for women.
* **Double the number of graduate jobs in the public service**, to improve the capacity of our public service and create secure jobs for young women.
* **Expand funding for women to participate in apprenticeships, traineeships, and cadetships.** As a positive first step, in the 2020-21 budget, supports were included for 500 STEM cadetships and apprenticeships targeted at women. If more cadetships, traineeships, and apprenticeships were funded specifically for women, it would better enable women to gain secure and well-paid employment in male-dominated fields.
* **Permanently increase the rate of social security safety net payments to above the poverty line, and extend these supports to other vulnerable people, including temporary visa holders.** This would significantly reduce the financial hardship experienced by many women due to COVID-19.
* **Increase subsidies to childcare and early education so that these services are accessible for all families.** Making childcare more affordable will increase workforce participation for women and create more job opportunities for women in the sector.

These suggestions have been shaped by our research on the impact of COVID-19 on young women. As part of this research, we have been conducting an ongoing survey of young women in South Australia. We will briefly outline some findings.

Three areas of gendered COVID-19 impact are of particular concern:

1. Loss of work, unemployment, and underemployment
2. Increased pressure at work and home
3. Long term economic impacts

1. **Loss of Work, Unemployment, and Underemployment**

Our survey results found that:

* **42% of young women had lost their job or had their hours or pay reduced** since March 2020.
* **49% indicated that they were very worried or anxious about money** since March 2020.
* **26% of respondents** to our survey were, at the time of filling out the survey, **either unemployed or not getting enough hours**.

Significant job loss has occurred in sectors most immediately impacted by COVID-19, such as hospitality, retail, and travel. Women make up the slight majority within these sectors (Cassells *et al.*2020, p. 1). Government wage support such as JobKeeper was nationally implemented to alleviate loss of work for employees; however, an estimated 950,000 casual workers were not eligible for this support, coming mostly from casual work sectors where most employees are women (Cassells & Duncan 2020, p. 1).

Young women are further disadvantaged, as young people are also more likely to occupy precarious employment and not be eligible for JobKeeper (Atkins *et al.*2020, p. 2). Women make up the majority of workers reliant on awards as well as the majority of workers without leave entitlements (ABS 2018).

Young women in casual work were also less likely to have adequate funds saved up to financially support themselves during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dados & Taksa 2020).

Unemployment and underemployment rates for young women remain high. Women on temporary visas have been particularly impacted by job losses, financial stress and homelessness due to COVID-19 (Berg & Farbenblum 2020).

1. **Increased pressure at work and home**

Our survey results found that:

* **40% of respondents said they had concerns about getting** **COVID-19 because of their work**, which we believe is reflective of how young women were and are expected to work in frontline or community-facing roles which pose a greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

* **75% of respondents said they became more anxious, sad or depressed** since March 2020.

Women make up 70% of workers in the health and social sectors – sectors where providing emotional care and support is crucial (WGEA 2020, p. 2). The prevalence of women in these sectors not only puts them at a higher risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the high levels of interaction with others on the frontlines and in essential positions, but also means women have often faced the brunt of the stress and emotional reactions to this pandemic from others (Dwyer 2020, p. 6).

Beyond this, women also are more likely to perform unpaid care for sick family members and fulfil the bulk of domestic labour such as household chores and childcare (WGEA 2020, p. 2). With schools offering at-home learning and many parents working from home, women have had more distractions from work than men in the form of this domestic labour, affecting productivity (Chung 2020). All of these are incredibly stress-inducing on top of the fear and uncertainty the pandemic already brought, and young women have experienced more stress and mental health concerns than their older counterparts (Loxton *et al.* 2020, p. 3).

1. **Long Term Economic Impacts**

Our survey results found that:

* **27% of respondents became more afraid of losing their job.**

* **53% of respondents** **became more** **discouraged** about the prospect of finding work in the future.

Young women have reason to be fearful about the impact of COVID-19 on their future financial security. Full-time working women earned less than full-time working men prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Australian gender pay gap standing at 13.9% (WGEA 2020, p. 4). This gap extends to superannuation, with women aged 25-34 having approximately 21% less superannuation than men of the same age before the pandemic (Dawson & Casey 2020, p. 38).

Women were already disadvantaged compared to their male counterparts before COVID-19; the pandemic has furthered this with unemployment, underemployment and early withdrawal of super. Women have withdrawn a greater proportion of their super through the scheme than men (AMP, 2020). The superannuation gap for women aged 25-34 has doubled, and the long-term effects of having less superannuation and less income will see women being affected more significantly by economic insecurity and poverty in their later years (WGEA 2020, p. 4).

The disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women must be considered if we are to have a full COVID-19 recovery. It is for this reason that economic gender equality must be a high priority in the 2021-22 budget.

Thank you for considering our submission.



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