

## Federal budget a missed opportunity to increase safety and equality

Budgets are about people and the choices the Government makes about the kind of society we want to live in.

For women and children to be safe, the Australian Government must use all the levers at its disposal to transform the social, political and economic factors that drive violence.

In this budget, the government could have chosen investment in social housing, so women escaping violent relationships have somewhere to go.

The government could have chosen investing in high quality, affordable – or free – childcare, so mothers who want to work can earn an income.

The government could have chosen increasing income support payments, so they reflect the true value of unpaid caring roles, which are predominantly done by women.

These choices would have made women and children demonstrably safer and more equal.

Instead, the government chose one-off, short-term giveaways.

Women have borne the brunt of the socio-economic impacts of the pandemic. The care economy that carried Australia through the pandemic is powered by women. Throughout the pandemic, women took on even more of the already disproportionate share of unpaid work. The frequency and severity of intimate partner violence worsened during the pandemic. And with rates of family violence known to increase in the wake of natural disasters, the worst impacts on women's safety may be yet to come.

The *Draft National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032* failed to propose substantive legislative and policy reform that would improve the safety of women and children and work towards the elimination of gendered violence. The budget reflects this approach. It lacks vision, is piecemeal, and the Australian Government missed opportunities to invest in structural policy measures to move us closer to achieving gender equality and ending violence.

### The budget does not demonstrate a commitment to women's safety and gender equality

- We welcome the announcement of \$87.9m over 4 years for the national expansion of the [Lighthouse Project](#), to enhance the ability of the Federal Circuit and Family Court to respond to family violence. However, the budget fails to provide further investment in the [specialist legal assistance](#) women need when recovering from family violence, so they can get legal help to rebuild their lives.
- While [shareable Paid Parental Leave](#) begins to challenge the notion of primary and secondary carers, we will not see real change in women's overwhelming responsibility for the care of young children unless it is expanded and there are meaningful efforts to rectify the disparity in women and men's incomes.
- While there is some investment in initiatives to respond to [sexual harassment](#), the commitments are piecemeal and the budget contains no commitment to implement all recommendations from [Respect@Work](#) that will prevent it.
- There is no new investment in an [income support system](#) that values unpaid caring and provides the financial security women need to escape and recover from violence, including for [women on temporary visas](#).
- Missing from the budget are measures to improve universal access to affordable, high quality [early childhood education and care](#), which would make a real difference to women's financial independence and the lived impact of women's disproportionate share of unpaid work.

- The Budget contains no commitment to [superannuation on paid parental leave](#), which would go some way to rectify the significant gender gap in retirement incomes.
- While funding for emergency accommodation and extending (but not increasing) the Escaping Violence Payment are welcome, these investments do not increase the availability of [safe and secure housing](#). Housing inaccessibility is a main reason women and children return to violent homes.
- The budget commits \$4.1m over 5 years to deliver training for law enforcement on supporting people affected by family, domestic and sexual violence. Policing is the responsibility of states and territories, and the initiative must not obscure the need for consistent application of an evidence-based safety lens across [policy areas within the jurisdiction of the Commonwealth](#).