



10/10/10

## Questions for Minister Ellis

The questions have been put into broad categories as requested. The categories were numbered for ease of reading. **The numbering does not represent any form of prioritization.**

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## II. Questions for each Category:

### 1. Gender Pay Gap / Equal Representation/ Paid Maternity Leave

As Australia is a signatory to the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which places obligations on the Australian government to prevent discrimination on the basis of sex and achieve equality, will you be addressing the gender pay gap in Australia and enacting further legislative reform in this area? What specific types of reform will you be pursuing?

From Diann Rodgers-Healey, Executive Director, Australian Centre for Leadership for Women (CLW)

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 Double standards and the glass ceiling are real, and will be until both men and women respect the role women play in business and in the home. This is a reflection of our society, but rather than waiting for generations for it to change organically, as per the drink driving and smoking in pubs legislation, we have to demand that women are treated respectfully and inclusively in all facets of life through legislated inclusion strategies. I give 3 examples where I believe the Government has an opportunity to legislate, and my question to you is why this could not be implemented, as it is in other parts of the world:

1. 12 months paid maternity/paternity leave paid via Medicare/ Centrelink
2. No gender to exceed 60% of any public or private board
3. Equal representation of men's and women's sport in the media

Re: 1 Maternity Leave

I was lucky enough to have my son in Norway where I was entitled to 12 months paid maternity leave, even though I was only there on a working-holiday visa. (My leave started 3 weeks before the baby's due date. My son's father was entitled to 2 weeks leave, and it was compulsory for the mother to take the first 6 weeks. After that the mother and father could split the time as they wished eg: some people cared for the child 6 months each). As a so-called 'advanced' nation, the fact that Australia does not have a national maternity/paternity leave program that allows either parent to stay home with their children until the child can walk and talk is unacceptable. Rather than supporting our own families at home, Australia has chosen to spend billions of taxpayer dollars to destroy other families through military action overseas.

Re: 2: Women on Boards

I was involved in setting up the organisation, Women on Boards, to try to address the imbalance of female decision-makers at the board level. In Norway, it is mandatory that no board has more than 60% of either gender.

Re: 3: Women's Sport in the Media

In Norway many years ago it was agreed by all media publishers that 1 men's team sport (football – FIFA) and 1 women's sport (handball – IHF) would be given equal treatment in the media. Consequently, the Norwegian women's handball team is fully professional, and is a gold medal winning Olympic and World Championship team.

I do not believe this will change organically, but must be legislated to change. Why can't the Government introduce legislation to address these examples of injustice?

From Catherine Ordway Sport & Anti-Doping Consultant

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Next year is 100 years of women's organised global protest of misogyny i.e.. International Women's Day is 100 in March 2011 - when will Australian employers be held accountable for women being paid unequally for equal work or does this require a class action by women for backpay?

From Susanne Martain, Australian Women's Intra Network

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Will you support the principles of equal pay in the community service award case, currently in front of the Fair Work tribunal?

From Eva Cox

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What is the Minister's current position on the Pay Equity Test Case in Fair Work Australia for the Social and Community Services Sector, and if she supports a pay increase for employees is she aware of the implications for services in affording these pay increases without supplementary government funding?

From Kerriann Dear, Co-Director, Queensland Working Women's Service Inc

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What strategies does the government have to reduce the wealth gap between men and women?

From Jane Baker, President Australian Federation of Graduate Women (AFGW )

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The status of women in Australian society today is in a stronger position than ever in the past, and although there is still much work to be done, we also need to stop and recognise the efforts of those brave pioneering women in all facets of society who dared defy convention and who worked to raise the status and profile of women, making Australia what it is today.

As we set a pathway for the future, what strategies do you, Kate, as Minister for the Status of Women, plan to employ to ensure that these pioneering women are not forgotten in the history of Australian society and that their special stories, (such as those captured in the book 'First Females Above Australia' a tribute to female pioneer pilots of Australia, by Rosemary Arnold) act to inspire young women of today and tomorrow?

From Cinthia Del Grosso, Professional Development Services

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Is the Government committed to ensuring that more women receive Australian honours? There is a great discrepancy between the number of male and female recipients. Will the Government help ensure that a greater number of awards are conferred on women?

(Anonymous)

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As a professional international development consultant who is encountering ageism in job search situations I would like to ask Minister Ellis what policies and agendas will be undertaken to assist professional women who wish to remain in the workforce to counter the negative attitudes about mature women workers and older women in the workplace.

From Pamela Harris, International Development Consultant

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Women's work is underpaid and undervalued.

Given there is a growing pay gap between the sexes (the gender pay gap has worsened since the activities of the women's liberation movement in early '70's – ACTU campaign 66 days in the red), is the Federal government prepared to address

(including contributing to funding the gap closure) the issue of closing the pay gap and working towards recognizing the value of feminized jobs commonly associated with education, health, and care so that women's work has equal value to traditionally masculinized jobs such as in the highly paid mining sector?

From Lisa Fitzpatrick, State Secretary, Australian Nursing Federation (ANF), (Victorian Branch)

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Will you consider adopting a gender equity approach to legislation and policy to ensure the impact on women is taken into account? This would require tools such as a gender responsiveness framework, like the Victorian DHS Gender and Diversity Lens, and legislating gender equity requirements. For example, in the UK in 2007, the Sex Discrimination Act was amended to introduce a gender equality scheme which included a statutory duty on public authorities to 'promote equality' (see [http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_066068](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_066068)).

From Women's Health Victoria

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It is very challenging for women who have children with disabilities to be part of the work force, because it is very difficult to find a job that make allowances for their children's ongoing medical and school appointments. People With disabilities WA would like to ask the Minister to please comment on solutions to this issue, so mothers of children with disabilities can continue with their careers without sacrificing their children's care.

From People With disabilities WA

## **2. Flexible Work Practices**

Section 65 of the Fair Work Act 2009 provides that an eligible employee has a right to request of their employer access to two important new rights for employees who are either the parent of or responsible for, a child. Those rights are the right to request flexible working arrangements and the right to request extended (unpaid) parental leave, with the right to reasons for any refusal of such a request.

To ensure that employers are upholding the Fair Work Act, will the government provide an annual report on the status of section 65 of the Fair Work Act 2009 identifying areas that are impacting the development of flexible workplaces and report on:

- The reasons provided by employers for accepting or refusing to grant a request for flexibility and unpaid parental leave
- Organisations which are non-compliant and the recommendations provided to ensure compliance

From Diann Rodgers-Healey, Executive Director, Australian Centre for Leadership for Women (CLW)

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The current National Employment Standards include the right to request flexible work arrangements if an employee is caring for a child of under school age or a person with a disability under 18 years of age. Please could you outline any plans by the government to extend the right to request flexible work to include all those caring for a person with a disability, mental or chronic illness, regardless of their age?

Many women provide care for adults with a disability, mental health problem or chronic illness because there is a lack of support for these groups from formal services. This can have significant costs for women through reduced workforce participation and, in many cases, poor health outcomes. In addition to supporting the possibility of a Long Term Care and Support Scheme (currently being worked on by the Productivity Commission), what will this government be doing in the short and medium term to improve support services for these groups?

From Gill Pierce, Program Manager, Policy and Research, Carers Victoria

### **3. Pregnancy Counselling and Services /Midwifery/**

Former Senator Natasha Stott Despoja tabled a private member's bill in the Senate to ensure truth in pregnancy counselling services (as they are not subject to the trade practices Act), is there any chance you will continue her work (she organised a cross party coalition of women including Labor Senator Carol Brown and Liberal Senator Judith Adams in support of the bill)?

(Anonymous)

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As a woman who received a fatal prenatal diagnosis of my unborn baby and a genetic social worker currently undertaking a PhD in the field, I am interested in the gaps for women who receive prenatal diagnoses. In theory and based on ethical standards, counselling and psychosocial services should be offered to women after a poor or fatal diagnosis, during the decision making process and after the pregnancy to lessen the short and long term psychiatric consequences. Will you support a

national network and a national support group providing services for women who receive a prenatal diagnosis?

From Stephanie Azri, Clinical and Genetic Social Worker

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Australia is a signatory to CEDAW, (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women) including the optional protocol, also known as the Beijing Declaration. Clause 17 states

*17. The explicit recognition and reaffirmation of the right of all women to control all aspects of their health, in particular their own fertility, is basic to their empowerment;*

How can Australia meet this requirement when it has developed a legislative instrument that enables a medical practitioner to veto the practice of a midwife eligible for Medicare funding and in particular the individual decisions made by a pregnant/birthing woman? Will you guarantee childbearing women that if they make a decision that is not supported by a medical practitioner that they will still receive care and that a midwife will not be sanctioned if she supports a woman's informed consent and continues to provide care to her?

From Justine Caines

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What will your ministry do to ensure that national pregnancy support services are competitively tendered, rather than the current non-competitive process where the Department of Health and Ageing funds only one provider, despite this practice contradicting Australian Government procurement guidelines, and despite this having been drawn to the attention of the Department, with no response?

How will your ministry ensure that women at risk of suffering negative events as a result of abortion, due to a lack of information, perceived alternatives, ambivalence about their decision, or previous mental health issues, receive the necessary support, intervention, screening and counselling they are entitled to as part of any medical or surgical process?

What is your ministry planning to do to ensure there is equal access to all Australian women to freely continue a pregnancy without the need to resort to an unwanted abortion?

From Debbie Garratt RN, Executive Director, Real Choices Australia

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Women's Forum Australia questions the relative difference between adoptions in Australia (50 per annum) and terminations (~100,000). Would the new Government get behind reform of adoption processes in Australia to make adoption an easier, faster and cheaper option for women who are pregnant in difficult circumstances?

From Sara Hodgson, Women's Forum Australia

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What is the Minister prepared to do to provide real help and support to women who experience unexpected pregnancies who wish to birth and keep their child but lack that support?

What is the Minister prepared to do to provide baby safe havens for women who wish to birth their child but are unable to care for him/her but wish to leave their baby anonymously in a safe place?

From Teresa Martin, State President, Cherish Life Queensland Inc

#### **4. Abortion**

Australian women demand legal safe free on demand abortion - when can we expect the decriminalisation of abortion nationwide and inclusion of the service on Medicare?

From Susanne Martain, Australian Women's Intra Network

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What action will you take to ensure the abortion drug, RU486, will be made more easily available?

RU486 is considered a safe, legal treatment in Australia. However, distribution of RU486 remains tightly controlled by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. A young couple in Cairns are due to face court next month on charges relating to abortion because they brought RU486 into the country after obtaining the drug from relatives overseas. They were allowed through customs after declaring they had the drug.

From Lynn Muir, Women's Abortion, Action Campaign

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What is your Ministry planning to do to ensure there is equal access for all Australian women to safe, free abortion?

Will you recognise the abject failure of the States to achieve this especially in Queensland where a young woman is being prosecuted for procuring an abortion, women have to see a psychiatrist before being "allowed" to terminate a severely abnormal pregnancy and abortion services have been severely restricted due to legal concerns?

Will your Ministry take up the challenge to take on this issue as a Federal matter and obtain the consent of the States to do so ? (as was achieved for Gun laws under the Howard government)

From Dr Heather McNamee, Pro Choice Cairns

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How will you be working as Minister for Women, to increase and ensure accessibility of RU486 for all women in Australia?

Will you restore and secure Federal Government funding to organisations that advocate for women's rights?

Will you support a publicly funded feminist abortion service, with services available throughout Australia?

From Christine Smith, Women's Abortion Action Campaign

## **5. Violence Against Women**

Australian women are not truly equal before after under in or at law.  
For example - when a survivor of sexual assault

1. has the courage to report it to the police
2. it is recorded by the police
3. it is investigated by the police
4. if charges are laid and stick
5. if a court date is set and met

Then on the survivor's day in court the survivor is defined as a 'witness' and hence is by default legally represented by the DPP i.e. the state which says it must not be biased - whereas the usually male alleged perpetrator's legal representation is working in their client's best interests - therefore the survivor - usually a female - is not equally represented before after under in or at law.

If men think they have much less than half a chance of sexual assault being reported and much less than half a chance of it ending up in court - but much more than half a chance of getting off it does go to court - perhaps this goes some way to explaining the ongoing extremely low conviction rate and unacceptably high incident rate of men's sexual violence in our country today.

It is grim indeed that statistically the place where our women and children are most at risk of men's sexual and diverse forms of violence is in their own home and amongst their family and friends.

What will you do about this?

From Reclaim the Night Australia

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It is really encouraging if the Government wishes to advance its agenda to stop violence against women. Have you read the recommendations from the National Council of Women and also Amnesty International's submission to the process which calls for substantial and strategic increases that are sustained to reduce the appalling level of domestic violence and sexual assault that exists within Australia? How will the government advance the agenda?

From Annie Costin

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Can you please advise how, as Minister for the Status of Women and with key responsibility for coordinating your Government's elimination of violence against women strategy, you will:

- Work with the Federal Attorney General's office to ensure that recommendations in the Final Report of the 2010 inquiry are addressed in a timely manner and during the life of this Parliament? (This inquiry, conducted by the Australian Law Reform Commission and New South Wales Law Reform Commission is due to deliver its final report to the Attorney-General during October 2010); and
- Work with the AG to consider findings of other Family Law reviews and public inquiries (the Family Courts Violence Review by Professor Richard Chisholm; and the evaluation of Shared Parenting Family Law Reforms by the Australian Institutes of Family Studies)

From Libby Eltringham, Community Legal Worker, Domestic Violence Resource Centre Victoria (DVRCV)

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When do you plan to implement the recommendations set out in Time for Action: A National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women? Will significant funding be provided to support implementation over its ten year lifespan?

Do you plan to be a strong, feminist voice who speaks out on issues affecting women, including:

- the sexual objectification of women in media and advertising

- the prevalence of violence against women in Australia
- the pervasiveness of violence supportive attitudes and behaviours?

Health is determined by a range of factors. The Office for the Status of Women is in the unique position of sitting across a number of departments that impact on the health of women in Australia such as housing, education, transport etc. How do you plan to address the social determinants of health? Are you committed to implementing meaningful joined-up action across government departments to improve women's health?

From Women's Health Victoria

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The Armadale Domestic Violence Intervention Project Inc (ADVIP) was formed in 1993 through a recognition that agencies and community needed to work together to challenge the prevailing notion at the time, that domestic violence was a private matter and not a community concern. Over the last seventeen years we have advocated strongly that domestic and family violence is indeed a critical community concern.

ADVIP is now a collection of government and non government agencies working within the context of collective intervention and collaborative practice to enhance victim safety, offender accountability and the protection of children and young people. ADVIP agencies which now number twenty one acknowledge each have an active role in responding to the issue of domestic and family violence through regional coordination and as such we have contributed in many areas of national and international initiatives.

A recent conference we attended where Professor Marianne Hester from the University of Bristol UK was a key note speaker has seen our practice experience with children involved and exposed in domestic and family violence validated through her research work with "Children and Family Violence"

The Australian Childhood Foundation is also at the forefront of trauma research and the impact on children (our practice experience over fifteen years would also validate the current findings).

Our question is: Why do we have such a perceived contradiction in terms naming up the demonstrated behaviour of significant number of men involved in domestic and family violence as violent and totally unacceptable and not what the community is prepared to tolerate and yet we still allow him in most cases to have access to children which then suffer serious ongoing traumatic experiences by their contact with a "good father"

From Angie Wragg , Coordinator, Armadale Domestic Violence Intervention Project Inc. AND Anne Muir, Domestic Violence Advocate/Court Support, Starick Services Inc



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When will Federal Labor's National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children be finalised and implemented?

While the proposed National Plan released in August is a promising blueprint to address some forms of violence against women, will it be expanded to include all forms of violence against women (eg. sexual harassment; trafficking; forced prostitution; and traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation)?

And will the government also commit to ongoing and sustainable funding to the national plan on its release?

From Hannah Harborow, Campaign Coordinator, Amnesty International Australia

## **6. International Women's Day Australia**

International women's day Australia has been taken over by Unifem supported and generously funded by the government

- all without a word to the grassroots women who have provided the IWD national function for 15 years now
- the international gear campaign for a new UN women's body called UNWomen is supposed to work with civil society organisations not take them over
- is this a trend coming or will you review the situation and correct this outrage?

From International Women's Day Australia

## **7. Public Housing for Women**

Why is the state government selling off public housing in Queenscliff (9/10/10, 60-62 Gellibrand St, Queenscliff) when there is a shortage of public housing in the Bellarine region? Lack of adequate or appropriate housing affects all women particularly those with children and older women.

From Chris Johnson

## **8. Parliamentary Procedures**

Australia is a secular nation - when will law supersede lore - eg. when will opening a session of parliament with a christian rite be stopped?

From Susanne Martain, Australian Women's Intra Network

## 9. Overseas Aid for women and girls

How can we re-orient Australia's entire overseas aid program including providing substantial increases in aid to put women and girls at the centre of all Aus-Aid planning and program delivery?

From Annie Costin

## 10. Women and Children in Detention

How will the government ensure that no woman or women with children is forced to stay in a government detention centre whilst her claim for asylum is being processed?

From Annie Costin

## 11. Your Portfolio/ The Office for the Status of Women

What will be your priorities in the status of women part of your portfolio? How will you allocate your time between the three responsibilities?

How will this area be affected by your other responsibilities i.e. child care and employment participation?

From Eva Cox

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Is it time, not only to restore the Office for the Status of Women to PM and Cabinet, but also to replace it with an 'Office of Gender Equity'?

While many will argue that this would bring the privileged gender into the only bureaucratic space which focuses on women's disadvantage, this is my reasoning for this proposition:

1) the Office should be staffed with women and men who are TRAINED in gender equity issues: either at university or on the job, ideally both (there has been a move away from appointing 'femocrats' to the offices of women in recent years, i.e. trained feminists in positions of power).

2) The relations between women and men reproduce inequality in Australian society. Men must take on more childcare if women are to take on more boardroom positions. Masculinity and femininity are understood as different to each other,

rather than as largely overlapping categories. An office of gender equity would focus on those relations and improving them.

3) After a decade of a conservative government, bolstered by a conservative press, many Australians now see feminists as 'whingeing victims' who do not realise how lucky they are. By contrast, there is continued sympathy for men's disadvantage (e.g. as claimed in custody cases) and boys' disadvantage (e.g. as claimed in schooling). A gender equity office would explore WHICH men and WHICH women are disadvantaged (as well as which ones are advantaged) and why, and seek to redress the causes of disadvantage for both genders, including those that intersect also with socio-economic status, ethnicity and so on.

4) Related to the above, the intersections of gender, race, class are complex and make it difficult to discern why women as a group still have less power, resources and prestige than men as a group. A gender equity office would develop policies which respond to the less visible structures of inequality in society today, now that there is almost no legislative discrimination against women.

From Chilla Bulbeck, Professor Emerita, (previously Professor of Women's Studies), University of Adelaide

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Do you and the Prime Minister support the current structure of the Women's Alliances?

Will you and the PM continue to see the role of the Alliances as providing policy advice as well as conducting projects?

Will the level of funding for the Office for Women and the Alliances be maintained or even, dare we say it, increased?

From Jane Baker, President Australian Federation of Graduate Women (AFGW )

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I am writing on behalf of the National Working Women's Centres (NWWC).

Since 1977 in South Australia, 1994 in Queensland and 1994 in the Northern Territory, the Working Women's Centres (WWC)s have provided advice, information, support and advocacy to women on all workplace matters. The centres develop resources and initiate and implement training programs on issues facing women in the workplace, respond to issues related to cultural diversity at work and actively promote equal employment opportunity for women through policy development. The WWCs also provides advocacy and advice to women in the various anti-discrimination and industrial relations jurisdictions and assist clients with direct resolution of employment issues with their employers. The women who contact the WWCs are often in precarious employment and in vulnerable financial situations.

They are not union members and generally have limited negotiating power.

In the 2009-2010 financial year, the WWCs provided assistance to 5500 women. Since foundation, the WWCs have been funded by the Federal Department of Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and its predecessors. All centres are also in receipt of some state funding. This funding has allowed us to assist vulnerable working women, to provide support for those most affected by the recent global economic crisis, to provide training on work-related matters to the community and to provide a voice in the formulation of policy and law that may affect working women. The centres have however experienced an inconsistent funding approach by the Federal Government with funding not guaranteed or ongoing from year to year. A recent Federal Government Review and communications from the then Minister the Hon Julia Gillard resulted in a formal commitment from the Government to provide more sustainable funding in partnership with the states and by way of a triennial agreement. However we have currently been offered a two year contract with the highest amount for the Centres being \$136,300 each year. With budgets considerably higher than this required to deliver services the Federal funding component remains small despite referral of legislative powers from the states to the Federal Government in the jurisdiction in which we most commonly work.

The previous Minister the Hon Tanya Plibersek was aware of our situation and lent considerable support to assisting us in achieving more sustainable funding.

We would like to ask the incoming Minister for Women the Hon Kate Ellis the following questions:

Is the Minister aware of the work of the WWC's and the issues surrounding our funding?

Would the Minister be prepared to assist in initiating discussions with the Federal Minister for Workplace Relations to address our ongoing funding issues?

From Kerriann Dear, Co-Director, Queensland Working Women's Service Inc

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To date what has been the greatest obstacle you've had to overcome in your working life, why and how will it influence your role?

From Helen Redhead, Tebu Teambuilding

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Are you proceeding to set up a panel of gender experts in OfW as announced early in 2010? If so what is the timing of this?

This is a very important low cost initiative to improve the quality of gender analysis in Government policy development and implementation.

From Helen L'Orange

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For years women and children have been the major 'collateral damage' in wars, natural disasters as well as in relation to education and health opportunities. After many years of conferences, meetings, seminars, petitions the United Nations established UN Women, an entity to address these issues and which will formally start on 1 January 2011. What is the Australian Minister for the Status of Women doing to ensure Australia plays a significant part in this important international initiative?

From Virginia Balmain, President UNAA Qld, Vice President UNAA

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The need for the Australian Government to develop a National Action Plan (in consultation with NGOs) to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 was included in the top 10 national issues for women which went forward to the last Labor government for consideration. We understand that considerable work has been done to progress such a National Action Plan.

Question: We seek your commitment to finalise an Australian National Action Plan for UNSCR1325 and other related later resolutions.

From Ruth Russell, Joint National Coordinator, Women's International League for Peace & Freedom - Australian Section

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The current Office for Women is part of FaHCSIA, it was moved during the Howard years from the Department of PM and Cabinet much to the dismay of women's groups because a) it sent out a very strong message about what policy makers at that time saw as the role of women and b) the move to a line department meant that the potential influence of OFW was diminished in terms of being consulted on cabinet and budget issues. If OFW is to fulfil its role of "influencing policy, Cabinet and Budget decision-making to ensure women's interests are considered", it MUST be moved back to the Department of PM and Cabinet. *To what extent is there a commitment to shift OFW back to Department of PM and Cabinet. If such a move is not being considered, what steps will the government (and the opposition) take to ensure that a gendered approach informs decisions made by policy makers?*

Australia is one of the countries credited with pioneering gender-responsive budgeting in the 1980's and AusAID (Australian Government Overseas Aid Program) actively promotes gender responsive budgeting in emerging nations. However, gender responsive budgeting is NOT just about releasing a Women's Budget Statement. In fact as Rhonda Sharp, a leading feminist economist from Australia puts it, gender responsive budgeting is not about separate budgets for men and women or about budgets being equally divided between men and women. It is about undertaking an analysis of the needs of men and women and where needs are different allocations also need to be different. The government's Women's Budget Statements tend to focus only on public expenditure (and that too mainly on specifically targeted expenditures to women to meet that particular needs - in reality this forms a very small percentage of the total budget of a government). Adopting and integrating a gender perspective in the budget requires attention to the total budget. *What steps will the government (and the opposition) take to ensure that while making decisions regarding budgetary allocations a gender responsive budgeting approach is adopted - one that looks both revenue (the way policies are financed) and expenditure (across all three categories of public expenditure - i.e. specific expenditure targeted at men and women to address their particular needs for example women's health programs or domestic violence services; equal employment opportunity expenditure by government agencies on their employees for example paid parental leave; and general or mainstream budget expenditures by government agencies which make good and services available to the whole community but which are assessed for the gender impact for example transport or agricultural support services?*

October 2010 marks the 10th anniversary of the United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1325 which for the first time recognised a) the impact of conflict on women and girls b) the significant and proactive role that women play in brining about peace and security and c) their systematic exclusion from peace negotiations and post conflict reconstruction. As Australia moves towards bidding for a seat on the United Nations Security Council in 2012 (as announced recently by Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd) it is imperative that as per the requirements of being a member state of the United Nations, a National Action Plan is adopted and implemented. *What steps will the government (and the opposition) take to ensure that (A) a National Action Plan on 1325 is developed, adopted and implemented (B) the National Action Plan on 1325 is developed adopted and implemented in consultation with women's organisations (C) the National Action Plan on 1325 is well resourced (in terms of financial and personnel resources) (D) ownership of the National Action Plan on 1325 rests with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Defence with OFW playing a significant supportive role?*

From Dr Anuradha Mundkur, (on behalf of the UNIFEM Australia Adelaide Chapter), Associate Director Gender Consortium Centre for Development Studies Flinders University

## 12. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Children in the Territory

Women's Alliance – how will this represent the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women in the Territory with only 1 person appointed to this group of Women and based in Alice Springs?

How will consultation be conducted in the Top End and who will be coordinating this?

Is there any evidence that the Top End and Remote Communities of the Northern Territory voices will be heard through the Women's Alliance Group?

Most importantly, what will happen to NATSIWG?

Will you take time to look at the Person Register to see if there are other Women here in the Territory who can speak for their country, and the issues and concerns which they face in the everyday lives?

It would be good to see you seek new Blood into decision making regarding the care and protection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Will there be any funding available to assist in the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Centre in Darwin?

From Joy Cardona, Aboriginal Heritage, Co-ordinator NT Government

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 What is the state or Commonwealth government doing about reducing the numbers of Aboriginal children going into care?

What is the state or Commonwealth government doing to reduce the gap between Aboriginal and other Australians in life expectancy?

What is the state or Commonwealth government doing to ensure affordable child care for Aboriginal children to assist them in their school years?

If we are going to close the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people these issues have to be addressed.

From Millie Ingram

### 13. Child Care

How will you contain the costs of child care without any controls over the fees that centres can charge?

From Eva Cox

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Will you be reviewing the suggestion that pre-school centres are located on the site of primary schools and reconsidering funding for such centres?

From Jane Baker, President Australian Federation of Graduate Women (AFGW )

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I own a manufacturing business with my partner. I work, am studying for a degree and we also have 3 small children. My question is when will there be support for women in business to assist with childcare costs (I have 2 in childcare), to assist with women in business who want to further their education and opportunities by studying. I do not have access to affordable childcare and have the added expense of supporting my study expenses.

From Melissa Fitzgerald

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My question is about childcare and is a huge concern to many carers in this industry:

Regarding 3-5 year old ratio in child care :

I am aware of the ratio changes in this age group being implemented in 2016 ( 6 years away ...) but my concern is that the staff in the 3-5 year old room are always alone with any amount of children regardless of ratio. I feel that this is a huge responsibility and is causing a lot of stress.

Eg. if there is a serious incidence in the room concerning a child or staff member, you have no second witness to what happened. If a staff member is falsely accused of something eg. smacking a child - this can lead to unfair dismissal, court case etc. These are just a couple of examples of what could happen. All other age groups have 2 or more staff members in the room.

From Pia Pedersen

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Is the Federal government prepared to commit to affordable and accessible child care arrangements, including funding on-site care in public sector workplaces, which would include making funding available to State and Territory governments?

From Lisa Fitzpatrick, State Secretary, Australian Nursing Federation (ANF), (Victorian Branch)

## 14. Single Parent Families

Will the government eliminate HECS debts for LSES single parent families?

When and how is the federal government planning to address inequity and poverty traps and education inequities for women in particular low income and single parent families and mature age students?

When and how will the government address female poverty over a life time and address the impacts this has on the next generation?

When will the government address the failure of equity policies to address the social exclusion of LSES kids and families in public schools, TAFE and university education?

Single parents and HECS repayments:

- Currently according to research (“What Price the clever Country NATSEM 2008):
- A typical single female parent with two children will never clear their HECS debt
- A male single parent with two children in comparison will take 14 years clear their HECS debt
- HECS repayments kick in at a low salary threshold regardless of circumstances or number of dependent children and/or young adults in the family who are dependent on youth allowance ( which is based in large part on parental means tests)
- If you are a single parent on a Low income, this reduction of take home pay as a result of automatic HECS repayment is not included in income calculations by housing authorities or Centrelink and kicks in often when children are in school and the parent is least able to afford it.
- It is a big disincentive for the most impoverished and low income families to return to study to improve employment prospects and this contributes to the poverty trap faced by many poor families. It compounds issues surrounding affordable housing and low or no superannuation for women in particular heading towards “retirement” age.
- The education tax benefit for computer expenses is only payable to those who have sufficient income to earn enough taxable income to purchase

computers for school age children and thereby claim the benefit. This group is arguably the group with highest need of home computers to aid education.

- Single parents are unable to escape the financial responsibility of their young adult children until the age of 25 ( currently being slowly reduced to 22 years of age).
- This has a particularly big impact on LSES families who have no assets or home ownership. Single parents who are in the poorest households have no chance to build assets or create financial security for old age or family security but rather operate on a survival basis.
- Currently whilst State governments have equity policies on paper, public schools are unable to subsidize extracurricular activities for kids and families who are unable to afford them creating a self selecting system of social exclusion that begins as soon as school activities become cost based. This includes excursions, school choirs and bands and other similar user pay activities. It reinforces class differences and limits aspiration of LSES children from kindergarten.

From Clare Ellis

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Is the government going to look at improving the system for separated couples by enabling fathers to pay the correct amount of regular maintenance to their female spouses and children after the couple have separated or divorced?

Many separated women are struggling financially to make ends meet, whilst the fathers are getting it easy by not paying the correct amount of child support?

Some of these women are on disability and single parent pensions.

Can the government impose much more severe penalties if fathers are in breach of their responsibilities towards paying or neglecting to pay maintenance for their children after they have left the home they all once shared?

I don't seem to think it's fair that women have to pay for all the children's expenses if their ex-partner decides to declare whatever income they feel like to the child support agencies...

Do you think the current laws are protecting women from this type of activity and if not, what can be done to make this a more fairer system for women in this country?

From Dianne Zebic, Professional Counsellor

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Could you please explain the government's position and rationale for setting the rate of Parenting Payment (single) so far below that of other pensions, in spite of evidence that this will have an impact on child poverty?

From Gill Pierce, Program Manager, Policy and Research, Carers Victoria

## **15. Counselling for Women and Children**

Will the government recognise Counselling as a profession to enable women with children in our country to have access to a counsellor of their own choice and one that specialises in the specific area of counselling the woman or their child is needing? eg marriage counsellor, pregnancy counsellor, careers counsellor, abuse counsellor, family counsellor, children's counsellor etc.....

This would also help prevent many women and children from developing early signs of mental illness like depression or anxiety issues. These symptoms can occur especially after a family breakdown or if there are any domestic violence issues.

Many single female parents struggle with parenting issues, and they cannot simply afford to pay a professional counsellor to do children's behaviour modification programs, because the mother is usually on a pension or she is not earning enough money to afford any extra out of pocket expenses. In most cases the mother may not even receive maintenance money from the father. This means she is on a very tight budget.

So many women feel stuck and overwhelmed in these situations where there is no job, no support networks. Full-time parenting for a woman on her own with children can cause the woman's world to fall apart in some cases, especially if the woman has no family of her own or friends to offer her any support. Women can feel very isolated and they can get depressed.

If Counselling was rebateable for women with children, this would fill in this gap, and possibly enable women to focus more on positive parenting and encouraging women to return back to the workforce when it was possible to do so.

Many women today are forced to go to their GP and are prescribed anti-depressant drugs to help them cope with these everyday issues that they cannot talk to anybody about.

Being a mother and parenting can be very challenging and some mothers get depressed because they simply cannot cope with all the demands, especially if there has been a family breakdown or any domestic violence issues.

Women who are parents have extra stress in their lives as parenting is not an easy task. This is why the government needs to provide every woman with access to a counsellor of the woman's choice, rather than somebody making that choice for her.

It's the women and children suffering, and counselling can help make that bridge from the impossible to the possible. The Government needs to carefully consider that the children in these households hold the key to Australia's future.

From Dianne Zebic, Professional Counsellor

## **16. Pensions / Superannuation**

What is the state or Commonwealth government doing to stop the erosion of pensioners rise by community housing companies?

From Millie Ingram

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My question concerns the large group of women in the Community who are self-funded retirees. These women because of the previous nature of superannuation may not have large super savings, but are still not entitled to a government pension- usually due to some family assets, but are low paid members of the community. The syndrome of large family home poor cash-flow is very common in SA.

Why are they the forgotten people by Governments of either political party

When can they expect some considerations from the Government?

From Millicent Hughes, Treasurer, National Council of Women South Australia (NCWSA)

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Financial literacy and Investment IQ amongst women is an issue of concern specifically within the context of status of women. We at The Women's Investment Club would like to see a greater participation from the private sector to promote competence in money management and investing amongst women.

How does the Minister view this issue and how can private financial sector players be approached to contribute visibly in this matter.

From Meena Wahi, Director, The Women's Investment Club

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How is the government redressing the disparity between women and men's Superannuation savings, acknowledging that women are often out of the workforce for extended periods of time caring for their children?

Many of the jobs for women today are part-time and contract which greatly impacts on their ability to obtain finance to purchase their own home (especially now with banks etc tightening up their rules), particularly if they are sole parenting. This further decreases their longer term financial stability. What is the government doing to help support women, particularly sole parents, move towards purchasing their own homes?

By Robyn Bishop

Women of workforce age who care in the long term for family members with a disabilities are known to have diminished or negligible superannuation, resulting in continued social exclusion and poverty. Could you describe how the government intends to address this issue?

From Gill Pierce, Program Manager, Policy and Research, Carers Victoria

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Pursuing employers who do not pay compulsory superannuation payments

Is the Federal Government prepared to properly resource the ATO Recovery Unit to act promptly when notified that an unscrupulous employer (e.g. aged care sector proprietor) has defaulted on compulsory superannuation payments to employees, who are predominantly low paid women?

From Lisa Fitzpatrick, State Secretary, Australian Nursing Federation (ANF), (Victorian Branch)

## **17. Your Programs for Regional, Rural and Remote Australians / Childcare in rural area**

One third of our population lives in regional, rural or remote Australia. In the past, we have seen a metropolitan mindset dominate our political decision making, and hence we have many worthwhile initiatives which have not worked to their best capacity for rural, regional and remote Australians.

As Minister, are you willing to undertake a rural proofing process with policies or programs your office may implement?

Is your office prepared to check that impact that all policies and programs might have on rural communities, prior to endorsement at a political level?

From Karen Tully, National Rural Women's Coalition and Network

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In your bio, you indicate that you are 'committed to ensuring that Australian families have access to high quality, stable and affordable child-care - which is critical to help parents juggle their work and responsibilities as well as to aid our children's early development.'

While the ongoing costs of child-care are significantly mitigated by government funded subsidies, the cost of providing adequate infrastructure is beyond the capacity of an average rural Council.

For rural councils there is no choice for many families as the closest alternative centre will be too great a distance to make it a feasible option (in Mansfield's case this is a 90 minute or 130kms round trip).

As a small rural Shire, we have a 33 place child-care centre with waiting lists of between 50 and 70 over the past 2 - 3 years. Many families have removed names from the waiting lists as they see it as a 'pointless exercise'.

The local hospital has identified the lack of child-care as having a significant impact on the recruitment and retention of staff; Mansfield Shire council has also faced this issue and lost staff as a consequence. In most cases, the impact is greatest on women.

We have undertaken significant work in identifying the current and future child-care needs in Mansfield including a survey which indicated that the lack of child-care affected their decision regarding when they would return to work following the birth of a child for over 70% of respondents.

We have undertaken a business case and costings for an integrated Family and Children's Centre and the costs come to between \$2.5million and \$4million for a 50 to 84 place facility which includes our family and children's services.

While there is currently up to \$1million available via the Victorian Government, the termination of the Federal Government's Early Learning and Care Centres Program has left a number of councils with well developed plans and no opportunity to fulfil them.

Considering that the funding of infrastructure is such a large factor in the provision of community facilities including child-care, and even a relatively modest centre is beyond the financial capacity of small councils, will you reconsider the allocation of funds into the Early Learning and Care Centre program to supplement state

government funding opportunities and enable a sufficient number of quality facilities to be built allowing a greater equity of workplace participation for rural women?

From Kaaren Smethurst, Community Services Manager, Mansfield Shire Council

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What initiatives can be put in place to allow rural women entering/setting up a small business financial assistance for an in home nanny system? When the husband of the house works away in order to make ends meet, and there are no family members to assist - this set up process can be debilitating to even the best laid business plans.

What considerations are being made in reference to women that strongly oppose the current 'out of home' day care system, either philosophically or in relation to the system being used in such care environments?

From Jessie Hodgson

## **18. Education/ Mental and Sexual Health of Children**

Most sex education in school's targets those adolescents who are already sexually active, and/or makes a judgement that they are likely to be. This contradicts that evidence that more than 50% of secondary school graduates have not had sexual intercourse at the time of graduating. What will your ministry do to ensure that young people have access to sex and relationship education which encourages and supports a delay in sexual activity? and How will your ministry ensure that the providers of such education are enabled access to competitive processes of funding?

From Debbie Garratt RN, Executive Director, Real Choices Australia

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Considering the progress on the development of the Australian Curriculum, what emphasis will be placed on ensuring that:

- comprehensive, age appropriate, respectful relationships and sexual health education programs
- delivered by trained and trusted teachers in the class room
- beginning before children and young people become sexually active

will be a part of the Health and Physical Education learning area that has been identified as a phase 3 focus?

From Kaisu Vartto, CEO, Sexual Health information networking & education SA Inc (SHine SA)

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Australia's greatest natural resource is the minds of our children. What help can the government give towards encouraging primary schools to provide emotional support for pupils using proven interventions such as play and creative arts therapies? Will the government fund research to establish the mental health of Australian children?

From Monika Jephcott -Chief Executive Play Therapy Australasia

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The proposed national reforms to early childhood education and care are viewed by many as a very positive step towards continually improving the quality of early childhood education and care for young children.

In particular the Early Years Learning Framework which was endorsed by COAG in July 2009 provides educators and parents with very useful and consistent information about the design and delivery of quality early childhood education programs.

An undertaking was given to release the supporting Educators Guide in October 2009, can you provide an update on the progress towards releasing the Guide?

From Anne Livingstone, Global Community Resourcing Pty Ltd

## **19. Women in Adult and Vocational Training & Education**

In 2009 the National Vocational Equity Advisory Council was established to provide high level advice to the Ministerial Council for Tertiary Education and Employment (MCTEE) to guide equity reform in the national training system. WAVE (Women in Adult and Vocational Education) as the peak national women's body re: education and work related training, and other peak women's bodies, are alarmed by the total erasure of anything to do with women, at all, in NVEAC's charter and their recently released draft Equity Blueprint. We are very concerned that this omission will impact negatively on Australian women and girls.

How will you respond to these concerns, and ensure that outcomes for girls and women are included and made explicit in national VET policy into the future?

From Helaine Costello, SA Co - Convenor Women in Adult and Vocational Education (WAVE)



## 20. Women's Health

When can we expect to see a new National Women's Health Policy, as promised prior to the 2007 election?

We would also like information about the new National Women's Health Program, which will be necessary to implement the aims of the Policy. Without a Program, the Policy will be words on a piece of paper, without tangible benefits for women.

We would like to know when the women's health services sector can expect to see a meaningful funding increase, after almost 15 years of neglect?

By way of background, AWHN produced a *New National Agenda Position Paper* in 2007 and held a Summit at Parliament House, Canberra, as part of a project to put women's health back on the Australian political agenda. A few weeks later, the Labor Party announced that, if elected, it would develop a new national women's health policy. AWHN had been working for that commitment since 1995.

However, the women's health movement has been bitterly disappointed. Despite a submission process involving approximately 100 major submissions, a consultation process and numerous communications between AWHN and ministers in the Rudd government, no women's health policy was announced, much less implemented. The health reform that was announced had a strong focus on hospitals and medical services and community-based, preventive, primary health services, including women's health services, were seriously sidelined. The focus on hospital and doctors contravened myriad Commonwealth pronouncements about the importance of prevention and population health.

The women's health services sector is important because it is the only sector providing holistic, prevention focused care for women. Together with State-run community health centres, of which only a few remain, and Aboriginal community controlled health centres, a comprehensive range of services is provided, with a focus on those groups most at risk. It is in the community health sector that the multiple social determinants of health outcomes are recognised and that preventive programs are devised in response. It is here that equity in access to care is taken seriously, that community members participate in the shaping of services and that the focus on health promotion and disease prevention is strong. International research shows clearly that strong primary health care services are an essential component of improved population health.

As well as the absence of a National Women's Health Policy and Program, funding for women's health and other women's services was completely neglected, as it had been throughout the Howard years. The women's health services sector has always been poorly funded and the situation has become critical. Under the Rudd government, the contributions of low paid women workers continued to be grossly undervalued, resulting in high levels of frustration and cynicism among women working at the coalface because they cannot provide services for which there is a

patent need. Forward planning is impossible and even simple matters, like leasing premises, has become a major problem.

The services that support women and children who have experienced violence are also poorly funded and staff underpaid. Almost 40 years after women were forced to set up their own services, data shows that *one in every two* women escaping violence and looking for accommodation is still turned away.

AWHN is aware that the Minister for Health is primarily responsible for innovations in health policy. However, as Minister for the Status of Women, we anticipate that Minister Ellis will want to be well briefed and will want to work hard on this extremely important issue for women's well-being. We look forward to answers to our three questions.

From Dr Gwendolyn Gray, Convenor, Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN)

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Australia has increasing rates of earlier sexual activity coupled with a rise in binge-drinking among young people. We also have concerning rates of childhood and adult abuse and associated rates of unwanted and unplanned pregnancy, high rates of abortions especially among teenage women, sexually transmissible diseases, coupled with inadequate knowledge of and access to contraception. Australia can do much better to improve the sexual health and wellbeing of Australian women and men, whatever their age or genders.

With our partners Sexual Health and Family Planning Australia and Australian Reproductive Health Alliance, the Public Health Association has developed a Framework and Action Plan for a national Sexual and Reproductive Health Strategy for Australia on our website [www.phaa.net.au](http://www.phaa.net.au). We strongly urge the government to take a coordinated approach to these issues and are happy to be involved and support it. We do not believe that separate Men's and Women's Health Strategies adequately address how this could best be coordinated at the moment.

From Angela Taft for PHAA

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As a Gyn Cancer survivor and knowing very little about Gyn health issues, I soon discovered this whole new world of women suffering in silence, with a lack of understanding, knowledge, stigma, embarrassment, who lacked the risks and symptoms causing a lack of power with women when it comes to Gyn/sexual health.

Many professionals labelling Gyn health under Reproductive health, however as 600,000 Australian women have Endometriosis, 10% Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, unknown numbers with sexual transmitted infections, approx. 4,500 Gyn cancers which don't include the pre cancerous conditions, hysterectomies, vulval conditions,

menopause without a voice it is very clear this is not about having babies but women's conditions that dont only affect women but men/families of these women. This lack of voice in the community is cause a huge cost to the government. There is a huge support network and acceptance for women with breast cancer - the time has come for all Gyn health conditions to have a voice.

I offer you a quick solution for the government to support my vision with my not for profit organisation for the International GYN Awareness Day.

Could you please explain what is being done for the future of Gyn Health and if you could take a closer look at the vision. How can you educate the Australian community about this imperative issue in an effort to break down some of the barriers and prevent the women suffering in silence that still exist to day with GYN/Sexual Health?

From Kath Mazzella, Gynaecological Awareness Information Network Inc. (GAIN)

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Health is determined by a range of factors. The Office for the Status of Women is in the unique position of sitting across a number of departments that impact on the health of women in Australia such as housing, education, transport etc. How do you plan to address the social determinants of health? Are you committed to implementing meaningful joined-up action across government departments to improve women's health?

From Women's Health Victoria

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Many women's services are currently operating without the supportive framework of a current National Women's Health Policy. When will this policy be released?

Will the federal government commit to quarantining monies provided to the state and territory governments to continue to fund women's services?

Primary Health Care considers health from a social determinants perspective and includes prevention. However, when federal politicians mention "primary health care" they seem to be referring to primary medical care. With primary health care being presented as a major part of the National Health and Hospital Reforms will the federal government commit to this broader and more accurate interpretation of the term?

Many women's health services work collaboratively with government, non-government services and general practitioners. The National and Health and Hospital Reform documents do not mention where women's health services will sit in this

new model. Will the federal government commit to ensuring that women's health services continue to receive funding under these reforms?

Each state and territory has a range of women's services operating on a local and state-wide basis. However, many national initiatives are based out of Victoria – leading to difficulties in service access from other states. Will the federal government commit to funding conditions for these national organisations that ensure that these organisations work with relevant state or territory services? Additionally, will reporting requirements for these national services include measurements to ensure that this happens?

From Kathy Faulkner, Manager, Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc (Women's Health)

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When the Howard government introduced the GST, the Labor Opposition indicated that it particularly disagreed with the tax being imposed on women's sanitary products. Now into the second term of a Labor government, however, we still see the GST being imposed on goods that are \*necessities\* not luxuries - and not a peep from Health or Status of Women! My analysis of Treasury documents indicates that the loss of revenue would be relatively minimal - and for a gain that would benefit all women of menstrual age, both financially and symbolically. When do you plan to make good on your earlier opposition to this discriminatory tax, and take action to remove it?

From Michelle Imison Australian Federation of Graduate Women (NSW)

## **21. Trafficking of Women**

The CEDAW Committee, in the July 30 2010 report called upon the Australian Government, to review the provision of accommodation for trafficked women into Australia with a view to offering more options and reduce stress on their victims. (Recommendation No 31) What steps will the Government be taking in response to this recommendation?

From Joan Kennedy PBVM, Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH)

## **22. Commercial Fishery in NSW**

I participate in the commercial fishing industry, the industry in NSW is a managed and regulated industry. It has over the past three decades been restructured and restructured and is again undergoing restructure. Employment is affected across all sectors from getting the fish from the water to the final product on the table.

Marine Parks, area restrictions for recreational fishing and just incidental closures continue to eat into the area available to commercial fishers - many who are second and third generation fishers. The Commercial fishery in NSW is classified as a designated fishery and must have Environmental impact assessments and Management Strategies.

Can you assist this industry to address the concerns that they have with the apparent disregard by community, government and their agencies to provide and respect the necessary connectivity required to maintain a viable commercial fishery so as to ensure employment remains onshore as well for co-operatives, markets and local fish outlets?

Protecting the availability of commercial caught local fish is important to our communities health, economic well being and food security. We have been risking and loosing generations of fishing knowledge and historic sustainable fishing practices due to the systems of management regimes applied.

From Mary Howard