



Stronger Together: WA's Plan for Gender Equality

Action Plan One: Interim Report

Stronger Together: WA's Plan for Gender Equality (Stronger Together) was launched on 4 March 2020, less than two weeks before a State of Emergency was declared for Western Australia (WA). As the COVID-19 situation continues to evolve, our community is adapting and adjusting. This report is a brief snapshot of work to progress Stronger Together and support women during 2020. A more comprehensive report will follow later in 2021.

COVID-19 recovery

- Data indicates that women have been disproportionately affected by both social and economic consequences of COVID-19.
- Impacts of COVID-19 are evident across each of the four priority areas of Stronger Together: health and wellbeing, safety and justice, economic independence and leadership.
- Aboriginal women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and women living in the regions face additional challenges from the COVID-19 crisis.
- Gendered divisions in the labour market put women on the front lines of the pandemic in occupations such as child care workers, aged care workers and cleaners.
- Systemic barriers to employment see more women in casual and insecure jobs, resulting in high rates of job loss when businesses closed.
- Working from home created an additional burden for many women needing to balance work, home and in some circumstances, home-schooling responsibilities.
- Isolation measures also increased women's risk of family violence.
- Positively, COVID-19 presented opportunities for flexible work arrangements, with many organisations fast-tracking technology to accommodate social distancing requirements.

- This normalisation of flexible workplaces supports women in the workforce and promotes gender equality by empowering men to balance work with care responsibilities.
- The WA Recovery Plan recognises that action is needed to ensure the impact of COVID-19 does not reverse progress made towards gender equality.
- COVID recovery presents an opportunity to drive systemic changes to workplaces and to community culture and attitudes.

Actions under the WA Recovery Plan:

Prioritise women's economic independence by providing:

- more jobs and opportunities for women to change industries
- improved access to financial counselling services
- support to retrain and upskill for new career pathways.

Prioritise women's safety and justice by:

- investing an additional \$28.1 million in support services for victims of family and domestic violence
- strengthening the capability and capacity of family and domestic violence response teams across WA





- providing support to women in refuges to gain employment skills and access pathways to employment.

Government agencies are progressing specific COVID-19 recovery actions that support women, including:

- Low-fee or fee-free courses offered by the Department of Training and Workforce Development to engage displaced and unskilled jobseekers. These support traditionally female-dominated industries such as aged care, hospitality, retail and childcare.
- Changes allowing applications for Family Violence Restraining Orders to be made online through registered legal services which provide family violence assistance.
- Senior leaders across WA public sector agencies will continue to monitor the gendered impacts of COVID and work collaboratively to develop responses and maximise opportunities for women.

Stronger Together Action Plan One update

Governance

Implementation of Stronger Together is overseen by the Stronger Together Implementation Group – a high level inter-governmental group chaired by the Department of Communities (Communities).

Stronger Together key actions

Workforce Diversification and Inclusion Strategy 2020–2025 – Action Plan for Women (Public Sector Commission)

- Workforce diversity and inclusion is critical to advancing workplace gender equality. Research shows that leadership groups with good gender balance are more efficient and strategic in their decision making.
- The State Government released an action plan to improve WA Public Sector employment outcomes for women, including a target to increase women in the Senior Executive Services (SES) to 50 per cent.
- Representation of women in the SES increased from 32.9 per cent in 2016 to 42.4 per cent at September 2020. Gender parity has been reached for the first time in Tier 3 leadership roles at 51.3 per cent in 2020.

- Key actions underway to achieve the target include:
 - working with agencies to remove barriers and bias in recruitment processes
 - increasing the representation of women on boards and committees
 - promoting and streamlining flexible working practices.

Leading national efforts to pilot voluntary reporting of public sector gender equality data to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA)

- WGEA is an Australian Government statutory agency which supports employers to comply with reporting requirements under the Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012 (the Act).
- Public sector agencies are not currently required to report under the Act but a pilot of voluntary reporting of public sector gender equality data will open in mid-2021.
- Communities and the WA Public Sector Commission are working with WGEA to identify how WA can contribute to the WGEA pilot.

Whole-of-public sector gender equality data disclosure in procurement

- Public sector procurement presents an opportunity for Government to leverage its role as a major capital investor, asset manager and purchaser of goods and services.
- The Government is working to ensure that gender equality is considered in WA public sector procurement decisions by:
 - developing a new Social Procurement Framework, including gender equality criteria, due for release in early 2021
 - producing supporting guidelines for the public sector and organisations that supply to Government
 - working to incorporate gender procurement criteria in the panel assessment process for contracts through the Communities' \$319 million Social Housing Economic Recovery Package.

