

MEDIA RELEASE

+ WOMEN'S HEALTH GOULBURN NORTH EAST

(03) 5722 3009

whealth@whealth.com.au



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday 12 May, 2021

Federal budget lacks broader vision for equality

While the federal budget, delivered on Tuesday, provided long-awaited investment in the domestic violence, childcare, and women's economic security spaces, these investments were not accompanied by a comprehensive, well-conceived plan for achieving gender equality in Australia, according to a local women's health organisation.

Women's Health Goulburn North East chief executive Amanda Kelly said the 2021-22 budget delivered more for women than the 2020-21 budget did, however its omissions were troubling.

"What we had hoped to see in this year's federal budget was evidence of a cultural shift towards an economy that valued care, community wellbeing, equality and climate restoration, all things that have been spotlighted as so crucial to our communities throughout both the bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic," Ms Kelly said.

"What we got was slightly greater spending on several initiatives specifically targeted at women – 0.6% of the total budget this year, as opposed to 0.03% last year – but still not the structurally transformative, gender responsive budget that our communities need."

Ms Kelly said her attention was immediately drawn the investment in ending gendered violence, including \$261.4 million over two years from 2021-22 under a new National Partnership Agreement with states and territories; \$9.3 million for preventing violence against women with disabilities and \$57.6 million for Aboriginal family violence initiatives, which she hoped would be directed towards place-based, Aboriginal-owned projects and action.

"Suffice it to say, we're disappointed that there has not been greater investment in domestic violence prevention initiatives, particularly evidence-led, community-based collective impact work, like the work that organisations such as ours do around the national Change the Story prevention framework," she said.

However, she said the \$164.8 million investment over three years in financial assistance packages and support to women affected by domestic violence was a positive move, and one that was sorely needed.

“We’re worried about how far this support will go, though, particularly when it comes to enabling women to access safe, affordable, appropriate housing when they are escaping violence in regional areas like ours – there is already a critical shortage of such housing in towns such as Wangaratta,” Ms Kelly said.

The \$3.7 million investment over four years to strengthen disaster relief and recovery responses for women and children experiencing gendered violence was a move welcomed by the women’s health organisation, which is a national leader in this field.

“This is investment in work that is close to our hearts at WHGNE, as we were partners in pioneering Australian research that exposed the links between natural disaster and family and domestic violence,” Ms Kelly said.

“With climate change making its impact felt in our communities, this is work that will only become more important in Australia.”

Ms Kelly said her organisation was also pleased to see the removal of the \$450 per month earning threshold on superannuation payments.

“This is somewhere that women, in particular, will benefit, because they are disproportionately represented among the casual and part-time workforce, mainly because gender stereotypes also see them undertaking most of a family’s unpaid domestic and care work,” she said.

“Because of this, women may not have been able to meet the threshold, creating a gendered super gap. Removing this threshold is a small step towards ensuring women are not disadvantaged by our national superannuation policy.

“However, what we, and other organisations around Australia, were really wanting to see was the inclusion of superannuation with the government’s paid parental leave scheme, which would have had a real impact on closing the gender gap in retirement savings.”

Ms Kelly said the \$1.7 billion investment over three years in early childhood education was good news, however she was yet to see evidence that it would go to where it was needed most.

“This investment will certainly support more unpaid carers, whatever their gender, to re-enter the workforce if they choose to and it will provide a solid start for children in our communities.

“It’s important to note that this investment doesn’t kick in until 2022, and that it provides no additional funding for addressing the low levels of staffing and pay inequity of the early childcare workforce, which is comprised predominantly of women.

“What we do want to make clear, is that we need to see a narrative change in the way we talk about childcare.

“As a community we need to recognise that a national conversation about childcare is as much about ensuring that care for children is a responsibility that is shared among women and men, as it is about ensuring that care is valued as a social good.”

Ms Kelly said her organisation was particularly concerned at the lack of significant funding to mitigate or adapt to climate change and the large investment package that was being allocated to gas projects, which recent research has demonstrated come with public health costs, environmental damage and very little in the way of gender equal economic benefit.

“This was a glaring contradiction, from our point of view, and one that is so troubling for our community, as we look towards a future of increased bushfire risk, heatwaves, flooding, and the social costs of these events,” she said.

“We at WHGNE know that climate change is exacerbating, and will continue to exacerbate, the inequalities and disadvantage we already see in our communities.

“Women, low-income households and people living in social housing, people living with disability, Indigenous people and the LGBTIQ+ community are and will be most vulnerable to the health, economic and social impacts of climate change.

“It’s distressing this year’s budget is another missed opportunity for transforming our economy into one that genuinely cares for people and communities, a missed opportunity when it comes to eliminating the root causes of the inequality we have seen highlighted during the pandemic, and a missed opportunity for doing this in a way that respects the natural world and planetary boundaries.”

ENDS

For more information or further comment contact:

Amanda Kelly

WHGNE chief executive officer

0418 856 345

a.kelly@whealth.com.au