

SAFE+EQUAL

Standing strong
against family
violence

Employment White Paper Response

November 2022

Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Safe and Equal acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the traditional and ongoing custodians of the lands on which we live and work. We pay respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge that sovereignty has never been ceded and recognise First Nations peoples' rights to self-determination and continuing connections to land, waters, community and culture.

Honouring victim survivors

Safe and Equal honours the strength and resilience of adults, children and young people who have experienced family violence and recognises that it is essential that responses to family violence are informed by their expert knowledge and advocacy. We pay respects to those who have not survived and acknowledge the lasting impacts of this preventable violence on families and communities

About Safe and Equal

Safe and Equal is the peak body for specialist family violence services that provide support to victim survivors in Victoria. Our vision is a world beyond family and gender-based violence, where women, children and people from marginalised communities are safe, thriving and respected.

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Summary Outline of Key Elements

This submission will focus on the future of work, and the implications of structural change, for the care economy, specifically the specialist family violence sector, as well as job security, pay equity and equal opportunities for women.

Safe and Equal welcomes the focus of the White Paper on a sustainable care industry alongside women's economic participation, experiences of the labour market and the challenges of ensuring women have equal opportunities and equal pay. There are two foremost components to this submission: the first is, the financial policy approaches required for a sustainable and specialised family violence workforce; and the second is, economic strategies required to tackle issues flowing from the gendered nature of the specialist family violence workforce.

Sustainable Specialist Family Violence Workforce

Responding to the following scope and themes:

- 2.1 Building a sustainable care economy in the context of an ageing population and other drivers of demand for care services.
3. Job security, fair pay and conditions, including the role of workplace relations

Building a sustainable care economy needs to include a specific focus on the specialist family violence sector through the creation of a sustainable workforce with long-term employment contracts and pay at a level commensurate with the specialist skills and qualifications required. This is evidenced in the fact that the specialist family violence sector is a highly skilled, domestic, and vital workforce. The work of specialist practitioners cannot be outsourced, nor can the value of the services provided be overstated. The sector is also responding to the long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, including increased demand for support services and impacts of vicarious trauma.¹ As outlined in research undertaken by Monash University, the pandemic has led to an increase in the frequency and severity of violence against women alongside an increase in the complexity of women's support and safety needs. Therefore, the effects of Covid-19 are a significant and ongoing driver of peak-level demand for specialist family violence services and workforce burnout and attrition.

When considering the creation of a roadmap for Australia to "*build a bigger, better-trained and more productive workforce*", it is imperative to review the impact of the short-term funding approach for specialist family violence services. Short-term funding agreements prevent employers from being able to offer employment contracts of more than 1-2 years. These short contracts diminish the size of the workforce due to inability to attract and retain workers who require job security; they reduce the expertise of the workforce through decreased participation of experienced professionals lost in contract cessation; and they reduce the productivity of the workforce through the distractions of continual hiring and inducting processes. Therefore, a key and specific focus of the White Paper should be implementing mechanisms and working with State Governments to distribute funds and secure funding options for the specialist family violence sector and allied social services. This includes ensuring services can meet all indexation increases determined by the Fair Work Commission,

¹ Pfitzner, Naomi; Fitz-Gibbon, Kate; True, Jacqui (2020): Responding to the 'shadow pandemic': practitioner views on the nature of and responses to violence against women in Victoria, Australia during the COVID-19 restrictions. Monash University. Report. <https://doi.org/10.26180/5ed9d5198497c>

to enable long-term employment contracts and salaries that can meet increasing costs of living.

The development and implementation of a national workforce strategy focused on specialist family violence and sexual assault workforces is a critical element to a broader strategy aimed at building a sustainable care economy and strengthening women's economic participation. Such a strategy must be developed in close consultation and collaboration with these specialist sectors.

Gendered Workforce

Responding to the following scope and themes:

4. Pay equity, including the gender pay gap, equal opportunities for women and the benefits of a more inclusive workforce.

5.1 Reducing barriers and disincentives to work, including the role of childcare, social security settings and employment services

Australian women were announced as front and centre of the Albanese Government's first budget, reflecting the election commitment to make Australia a world leader on gender equality. This is a necessary focus given the gender pay gap in Australia is currently 13.8 per cent, with women in full-time work earning an average of \$255.30 per week less than men. Industrial and occupational segregation explains around a quarter of the pay gap among full-time workers: over one third of women are employed in health care and social assistance, and education and training sectors, and average weekly earnings in the health care and social assistance sector are below the national average². The specialist family violence sector is a gendered workforce, therefore, uplifting the entire sector through specific economic strategies is critical to advancing women's economic empowerment.

Safe and Equal welcomes the \$3M to set up a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality and initiatives to implement paid domestic and family violence leave, increase paid parental leave and make childcare more affordable. Addressing gender inequality in workplaces via these initiatives will help the highly gendered family violence workforce to engage in meaningful employment opportunities. Moving forwards, Safe and Equal fully support and endorse the recommendations within the VCOSS submission to build upon these initiatives as important and necessary steps in continuing to pursue these aims.

However, whilst general gender equality initiatives are a positive step – more targeted financial strategies and elevation of pay for the specialist family violence sector would achieve the critical objective of actively reducing the gender pay gap by uplifting a largely female workforce, (whom have been most negatively financially affected by Covid-19). Plainly, wages at a level commensurate with the specialist skills and qualifications are imperative to maintain this experienced, critical and productive workforce, yet this approach also has a secondary benefit of promoting a move towards closing the gender pay gap.

Research continues to suggest that implicitly designating a job as “female”, such as within the care industry, can automatically diminish its authority and credibility³ – the current remuneration rates for the specialist family violence sector continue to perpetuate this myth. The existing approach to the funding of this vital work gives the impression that these services

² Source: The Australian Government the Treasury – Jobs + Skills Summit Issues Paper (17 August 2022)

³ Laura Doering and Sarah Thébaud (2017) The Effects of Gendered Occupational Roles on Men's and Women's Workplace Authority: Evidence from Microfinance ASA <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0003122417703087>

are intrinsically less valuable to society than those provided by male dominated workforces (trades etc). Specific focus on, and an elevation in wages for, the specialist family violence sector as a gendered workforce increases the perception and value, of typically female professions. Recognition through increased remuneration is essential.

Economic Strategies

Responding to the following scope and themes:

2.1 Building a sustainable care economy in the context of an ageing population and other drivers of demand for care services.

4. Pay equity, including the gender pay gap, equal opportunities for women and the benefits of a more inclusive workforce.

5.1 Reducing barriers and disincentives to work, including the role of childcare, social security settings and employment services

5.3 Skills, education and training, upskilling and reskilling, including in transitioning sectors and regions.

The increase in demand for specialist services and difficulties with workforce attraction and retention in the family violence sector are well known. Safe and Equal's Estimating Family Violence Service Demand Project sought to identify and develop data indicators for specialist family violence services to measure unmet service demand in Victoria. Two-thirds of the services involved in this research (13 of 20) were operating with case management staff vacancies during the data collection periods. Of these, one third had only 50-65% of case management positions filled. Overall, only a quarter of services were operating with 76% or higher staffing levels, including vacancies and people on leave.⁴

An identified opportunity for the elevation of support for the specialist family violence sector is through appropriately identifying specialist family violence work as a prioritised and crucial workforce that remains in shortage. This can be achieved through inclusion of specialist family violence roles in several places such as: the National Skills Needs List, Skills Priority List, and as part of programmes such as the Additional Identified Skills Shortage payment incentive, Skilling Australians Fund and Trade Support Loans. These initiatives currently focus on trades and other male dominated professions. The inclusion of family violence roles is not only appropriate given the demand and shortage, but will also provide much needed access to wider and more significant sources of funding and support for women seeking to move into employment in the specialist family violence sector. This strategy covers several policy priorities by removing barriers and disincentives for women and driving participation of women in employment, thus creating equal opportunities whilst simultaneously increasing the size of the workforce to meet the critically high demand for family violence services. Furthermore, it elevates the perception of value of the specialist family violence sector and traditionally female professions in spaces currently dominated by male industries.

In further recognition of the highly skilled nature of specialist family violence work and the critically high demand, we encourage the Commonwealth Government to include the specialist family violence workforce in initiatives such as the increase in the permanent Migration Program planning level for skilled workforces and increases in free TAFE places for industries with skills shortages to ensure that our sector and the victim survivors we support benefit from these initiatives.

⁴ Safe and Equal (March 2022) Measuring Family Violence Service Demand Project: Phase One Outcomes Report p11 https://safeandequal.org.au/wp-content/uploads/REP_Phase-One-Measuring-FV-Services-Demand-Project-Outcomes-Report_Mar22_FINAL.pdf

Finally, we urge the Commonwealth Government to align the White Paper with the National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality and the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, to ensure that these crucial policies are not operating in isolation.