

Gender Mainstreaming in Australia

The Australian Government is strongly committed to advancing opportunities and choices for women in Australia to ensure they reach their full potential and participate fully in economic, political and community spheres of life.

Australia has a comprehensive range of social, economic, political and legal frameworks, as well as policies, programmes and services, to advance the status of women and eliminate discrimination and violence against women and girls. These are outlined in detail in *Australia's Implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action* (2000). (www.osw.dpmc.gov.au)

Women and girls in Australia have made steady progress in their participation in health, education, training and employment and decision-making and leadership over the last five years. In some of these areas, women have had major gains. Some examples include:

- Apprenticeship and trainee commencements for women increased from 34 per cent of all commencements over the 12 month period ending June 1997, to 43 per cent of all apprentice and training commencements in the 12 months to June 2002.
- a general upward trend in the labour force participation rate of all women (15 years and over), which was 56.2 per cent in April 2003;
- women made up 57 per cent of higher education students commencing an undergraduate qualification in 2002 and 52 per cent of post-graduate students;
- women comprised 33.9 per cent of Commonwealth Board positions in 2002;
- women made up 29 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Regional Councillors in February 2002; and
- women comprised 26.5 per cent of Federal parliamentarians (April 2003).

POLICY AND PRIORITY AREAS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

Strengthening the national machineries for the promotion of gender equality

The Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women (OSW) is located within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The central responsibility of OSW is to inform government policy. OSW is a strategic policy division advising the Prime Minister and the Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women on issues affecting women. OSW has a central role in considering current and prospective government policy and its impact on women. As part of the Prime Minister's department, OSW has early access to government policy-making processes, including relevant Cabinet and Budget matters. OSW works bilaterally with policy analysts and advisers across the Australian Government to identify, at an early stage, policies with possible gender impacts and to ensure that women's issues are taken into account in the policy development process.

OSW is also the lead government agency for a number of significant programmes for women. These include: *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*, the *Women's Development Programme*, *National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault*, *Women's National Leadership Initiative* and the *Informed Choices for Australian Women*

Initiative. OSW is also responsible for the development and implementation of strategies to increase the representation of women in decision-making positions on Commonwealth bodies, working closely with relevant portfolio agencies. The Office also supports the Indigenous Women's Advisory Group and the Asia Pacific and Economic Co-operation Women's Leaders Network (Australia).

Since 1997, OSW has strengthened its role to advise and effectively influence public policies affecting women. OSW works across the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to ensure that advice on the effects of proposed policies on women are fully reflected and integrated in the department's Cabinet briefing materials. OSW also encourages departments to integrate the consideration of gender issues at all stages of policy development, implementation and evaluation.

In 2000, the Office developed a plan of strategic directions for women, entitled *Working for Women: Office of the Status of Women Strategic Directions 2001-2003*. The key goal areas identified in the plan include: economic self-sufficiency and security for women throughout their lives; optimal status and position for women; the elimination of violence in the lives of women; and the maintenance of optimal health and well-being throughout women's lives.

Capacity Building for Gender Mainstreaming

The Government is committed to the implementation of the Outcomes from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and the subsequent 2000 Beijing +5 Action Plan. In 2000, the Government developed Australia's *Beijing +5 Action Plan 2001-2005* to advance the outcomes of Beijing +5 and implement them through a strategy of gender mainstreaming across government agencies.

The Australian Government developed a *Beijing Plus Five Action Plan 2001-2005* to take forward the outcomes of Beijing Plus Five, in close consultation with women in the community and other key stakeholders. The *Action Plan* identifies several key areas of potential collaborative work across government agencies, businesses and the community. Some of the key areas include: women's economic self-sufficiency; status and leadership, elimination of violence against women and girls; health and well being; and gender mainstreaming. OSW conducted a Beijing Plus Five Roundtable with government agencies in 2001 and meetings with secretaries of government departments during 2002 on their responsibilities under the *Action Plan*. A *Beijing Plus Five Action Plan Kit* (with gender mainstreaming practical guides) and a gender mainstreaming telephone advisory service have been put in place to assist departments in using the *Action Plan* and to incorporate gender into their work.

The Australian Government is strongly committed to consulting migrant and refugee women about government programmes and services. OSW (with assistance from the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs) conducted consultations with migrant and refugee women around Australia from May to July 2001. A series of forums were held in every State and Territory to seek the views of migrant and refugee women on a number of areas including economic security, violence, health and leadership. These women contributed ideas and proposed solutions to a range of issues that are important to their lives. A report (entitled *State and Territory Consultations with Migrant and Refugee Women*) has been produced

outlining the individual and collective priorities of women during the forums. The report provides a useful resource for developing and shaping future policy.

The Government has taken a lead role in the development of gender mainstreaming into Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) policies and programmes. For the past two years, Australia has been the Chair of the APEC Ad Hoc Advisory Group on Gender Integration, which will complete its mandate at the end of 2002. The key aims of this Group are to assist in the implementation of *a Framework for Gender Integration in APEC* developed by member economy Women's Ministers in 1998. Under Australia's lead, the Group established a sustainable mechanism for the continued integration of gender in APEC beyond 2002. This is expected to enhance opportunities for women in trade and economic development.

Australia's APEC Women Leaders' Network (WLN) was established in 1996 to promote women's involvement in APEC and trade. In 2001, OSW expanded the WLN's (Australia) role and capacity. Some of the key objectives of the WLN (Australia) include: to promote greater awareness among Australian women of trade opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region; facilitate increased contacts and trade for women; and support mentoring for women.

OSW hosted an annual National Women's Conference, *Australian Women Speak*, since August 2001. The Conference brings women, community organisations, women in government and commerce and academics together from all over Australia to share knowledge and experience and celebrate diversity through plenaries and workshops. The Conference sessions cover a wide range of issues including work and family, economic self-sufficiency for women, eliminating violence against women and leadership and development.

Data Based Policy-Making and Programme Information

The Australian Bureau of Statistics provides publications specific to women's issues, and general publications that have sex dis-aggregated statistical data. The Bureau publishes *Australian Social Trends* yearly which details contemporary social issues, and issues of interest to women. The Bureau intends to include a question on unpaid work in the 2006 National Population Census.

The *Women in Australia* publication is a biennial publication of the Bureau in collaboration with OSW. The publication lists information and data on women's activities in Australia, comprehensive collection of statistical data, highlights trends in activities that effect women's lives, enhances understanding of women's contribution to society, lists women's achievements, and provides a profile of Australian women.

The Australian Government's *Informed Choices for Australian Women* initiative provides funding for a website that will provide a single coordinated point of access to online government information, research, services and resources that are targeted at women or of specific relevance to women. The website will be operational in early 2003.

The initiative also provides funding for a unique online women's data warehouse, an initiative designed to provide internet-based access to integrated government held

statistical data about women in key social areas. The site will support and encourage the accurate use of relevant data to inform discussion and development of women's policy issues within government and between government agencies and non-government sectors. The data warehouse website, *Window on Women*, will be launched in early 2003.

Enhancing Partnerships with NGOs

The Australian Government assists national women's NGOs to provide advice and information to government through the *Women's Development Programme* established in 2001. The programme funds targeted research, policy and service development projects responsive to women's needs and circumstances, and will encourage and support women's contributions to government policy formulation. The programme also supports women's capacity building and mentoring activities. The programme provides funding for four national women's secretariats. Some of the activities of the secretariats have included: a national conference that brought business and professional women together from around Australia and overseas countries; networking with government agencies; and development of women's health initiatives including seminars around Australia on gene technology, mental health and menopause.

OSW consults regularly with women and women's groups on issues affecting women. This provides women with opportunities to consider and contribute to the formulation and implementation of various policies, programmes and services.

During 2001 the Commonwealth Government convened meetings in every state and territory with migrant and refugee women and these meetings were hosted by the state and territory members of the Minister's Parliamentary Advisory Group. The consultations provided the opportunity for the participants to raise issues of priority concern against OSW's four policy goals and for strategies to be discussed to inform future policy. A publication was produced documenting the issues raised and strategies suggested by the migrant and refugee women.

In 1999, OSW implemented a program to contract three women's non-government organisations to provide Secretariat services to Government. The aim of this initiative was to strengthen the input of national women's NGOs to government advisory and decision making arrangements.

Three organisations were originally funded to work collaboratively with their members and Government to represent the diverse views of women and to inform mainstream policy formulation in the Government's key policy priority areas for women. A fourth Secretariat was added in 2002 to represent specifically, the needs of women rural communities.

Formulation and implementation of gender-responsive policies for the protection of women workers

The Australia Government is committed to promoting greater choice for workers with family responsibilities. In November 2002, an inter-departmental Taskforce was established, chaired by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. The aim of

the Taskforce is to review the full range of options that might better facilitate choice for families in balancing their work and family lives. A report will be produced in 2003 and consultations will be conducted with the community to progress work and family issues.

Elimination of violence against women through legislation and policy implementation

Domestic Violence

The Australian Government has taken a national leadership role in working with States and Territories and the community to prevent domestic violence across Australia. The *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (Partnerships)* initiative was launched by Heads of Government at the National Domestic Violence Summit convened by the Prime Minister in November 1997. The Commonwealth has committed \$50 million over to *Partnerships* to enhance knowledge, develop good practice and find better ways of responding to and preventing domestic violence.

Partnerships is a collaborative effort between the Australian Government and the States and Territories (\$50 million over five and half years). *Partnerships* aims to achieve more effective ways of preventing and responding to domestic violence across Australia through testing new approaches, identifying good practice and sharing knowledge. Key projects include: indigenous family violence programmes; community education campaigns; national competency standards for workers dealing with domestic violence; prevention workshops for young people; show casing key learning to encourage best practices; a clearinghouse for information and best practices; and perpetrator programmes.

The *Partnerships* model has received international recognition and reports on progress made under this initiative indicate significant progress in testing innovative preventative measures and best practice to prevent and address domestic violence.

Over 120 projects were funded under the first phase of *Partnerships* across Commonwealth and State jurisdictions. Key priorities included:

- helping adults to break patterns of violence;
- helping children and young people to break the cycle of violence between generations;
- working with the community to educate against violence;
- protection of people at risk;
- information and best practice on what works in responding to and preventing domestic violence; and
- helping people in rural and remote communities.

Under the second phase, priorities included:

- working with children living with domestic violence;
- working with perpetrators;
- community awareness;
- the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse;
- the Indigenous Family Violence Grants Programme; and

- services for women.

Working with perpetrators is also a key priority with a focus on changing behaviours and getting users of violence to accept responsibility for their actions. Projects commenced in 2002 include: a review of programmes and training available for services for people who perpetrate violence; comparative assessment of good practices in services; a review of integrated approaches involving men, women and children; strategies to assist women to remain safely in their own homes; developing national competency standards for workers in this field; and developing effective ways of working with offenders of family violence in Indigenous communities in metropolitan and regional centres.

Another priority area is examining the needs of women who experience domestic violence and these projects will focus on early intervention and preventative measures, support required for women who remain in the home, including outreach options and looking at a range of accommodation options for women.

Commonwealth, State and Territory governments support a National Strategy on Indigenous Family Violence. This recognises the complex nature of family and community violence in Indigenous communities, including the importance of involving and targeting women, children and men in developing long-term, sustainable solutions. It focuses on better targeting of existing resources to support community driven initiatives. In July 2001, jurisdictions agreed to seek to achieve outcomes in 7 key areas: child safety and well being, reducing alcohol and substance abuse; improving the justice system, creating safe places; improving relationships and well being; promoting shared leadership; and building community capacity.

Further information on the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative is available on the following web sites: www.padv.gov.au and www.austdvclearinghouse.unsw.edu.au.

Sexual Assault

In response to concerns about the increasing incidence of sexual assault, the Australian Government announced a *National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault* in the 2001-02 Federal Budget. The Initiative represents the Commonwealth's commitment to eliminating sexual assault and aims to foster the development of an Australian culture that will not tolerate violence. The key objectives of the Initiative are:

- to promote cultural change in attitudes and behaviours to reduce the incidence of sexual assault.
- to identify and address the immediate and long-term impacts of sexual assault on women, and the social and financial costs to the community.
- to establish a consistent and coordinated framework for sexual assault reduction, prevention and interventions across all levels of government and the wider community; and
- to develop an information strategy to:
 - facilitate access to national, policy-relevant data to inform strategies to more effectively prevent and respond to sexual assault.

- establish a comprehensive evidence base incorporating both research and practice.

Women in Leadership and Decision Making

The Australian Government is committed to the advancement of women and to an Australia where women are full and active participants in all spheres of public and private life, across a wide range of decision making positions. In August 2002, 27% of Senators and Members of the House of Representatives were women. This is a significant increase from 14% in 1995 and more than double the international average of 13.8% as at July 2001. The growth in women's participation in government reflects broader social trends as well as the success of strategic leadership initiatives.

A Government's *National Women's Leadership Initiative* aims to increase women's participation in leadership positions. Key strategies include :

- measures to assist government with the appointment of highly skilled women to Commonwealth boards and decision-making bodies;
- the *Honouring Women* initiative which aims to encourage the community to nominate more women for awards and honours; and
- initiatives to enhance the skills of young women, Indigenous women and women in local government to increase their participation in decision-making forums.

The Commonwealth Government also funds a number of initiatives to assist women participate in the development of national policies and programs. Key strategies include:

- the *Women's Development Programme* which funds activities by national non-government women's groups to strengthen their contribution to policy;
- funding four Women's National Secretariats to work collaboratively to represent the diverse views of women by consulting the women's sector and other stakeholders; and
- the Indigenous Women's Advisory Group, established in 2002, which provides national forum to ensure that Government programs and policies consider the needs and aspirations of Indigenous women. The group comprises indigenous women who have been selected from around Australia for their individual skills, expertise, and knowledge of indigenous issues and participation in their local community.

Women in Education

Women have improved their access to, and participation in, higher education generally and have made significant inroads into non-traditional areas of study. For example, more females than male students complete the final years of secondary education and university degrees. The number of women in apprenticeships and traineeships increased by more than 150% since 1996. In 2001, women made up 56% of university students and 48% of vocational education and training students. The pattern of women's participation in higher education has changed to such an extent that their representation remains low only in Engineering and some areas of Science,

such as Computing Science. For example, in 1999, women commencing degrees in medicine outnumbered men for the first time.

Women's Health

The Australian Government is facilitating research and effective partnerships between women's organisations, OSW and departments and research bodies to ensure that key issues on health and wellbeing are addressed.

In 2001, a Commonwealth-State/Territory working party (Body Image Working Party) explored issues relating to women's body image. A discussion paper was produced on risk-taking behaviours of young women.

In 2001, Australia hosted the World Health Organisation Centre for Health Development (WHO Kobe Centre) Second International Meeting on Women and Health. Women academics, health practitioners, policy makers and government officials attended the meeting from 16 countries. The meeting focused on maximising women's capacities and leadership in the health system, and produced a statement calling for governments to support leadership development for women and to facilitate the integration of women's perspective's into decision-making at all levels.

Indigenous women and reconciliation

In 2001, the Ministerial Conference on the Status of Women (women's Ministers from Australia and New Zealand) agreed to work with Indigenous women to develop an Action Plan that reflected Indigenous women's priorities. Women's Ministers identified three key areas that corresponded to Council of Australian Governments' advancement of reconciliation priority themes: Women and Leadership; Women and Safety; and Women and Economic Status. In developing and reporting against the Action Plan, Women's Ministers also agreed that National Gatherings of Indigenous Women would be held annually.

In 2001 and 2002 gatherings were held in each state and territory which were attended by around 200 Indigenous women to address the priority areas. In June 2002, the National Gathering (comprising 45 Indigenous women from Australia and New Zealand) presented women's ministers with a Declaration which identified key principles and actions. The next gathering is anticipated for August 2003.

The Ministerial Conference has developed a draft National Action Plan on Women and Reconciliation and this is expected to be finalised in 2003. The Action Plan comprises Each State and Territory has also developed their own action plans.

The jurisdictional and national action plans cover a wide range of strategies including measures to promote general health and well being and education and employment opportunities for Indigenous women.