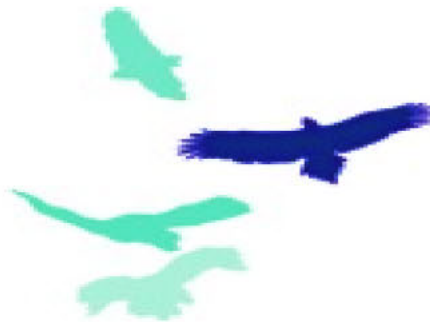


***Changing the Narrative***

***Intergenerational Welfare Dependence***

**September 2018**

**The National Council  
& of Single Mothers  
Their Children Inc.**



council of  
**single mothers**  
and their  
**children**

**(** [www.ncsmc.org.au](http://www.ncsmc.org.au) **)**  
[ncsmc@ncsmc.com.au](mailto:ncsmc@ncsmc.com.au)



## Who we are

**The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Incorporated (NCSMC)** is an organisation dedicated to single mothers. The Council has become a platform whereby both the community and the Government can communicate. NCSMC can comment on policy and legislation and ensure that the *lived experience* is heard. NCSMC provides information, referrals and assistance to single mothers through our electronic platforms. In the past year we have responded to tens of thousands individual requests whilst our information post can reach up to 100,000+ per week. One of our greatest strengths is our expertise and commitment in working with and for the advancement of women and children who are affected by poverty, hardship and/or domestic violence.

**The Council of Single Mothers and their Children Victoria (CSMC)** is a non-profit organisation founded in 1969 by single mothers to improve their lives and that of their children. We achieve change by championing the voices and needs of single mother families and providing specialist support services. Each year CSMC receives over 2000 contacts from single mother families seeking support, information and referral to assist them to secure basic human rights such as financial security; affordable housing; flexible work and education opportunities; legal protection; and health and wellbeing for themselves and their children. CSMC envisions a society where single mother families are valued and treated equally and fairly.

## Poverty

We welcome a Government Inquiry into matters that can shine a spotlight on financial insecurity, hardship and poverty and how this can affect future generations and our nation. We know first-hand the toxic harm of hardship as well as some of the key contributors, such as a safety net of government benefits which is out-of-step with the reality and needs of Australians; and a broken child support system with a stated child support debt of \$1.5 billion, which is an airbrushed figure as it only represents debt in child support collect cases and not child support private cases which is the most used form of collection. Government policy is silent on the contribution and individual cost of the provision of unpaid care which is overwhelmingly undertaken by women. (Reference: White Paper from Economic Security 4 Women) Furthermore, we are yet to comprehend the critical importance of access to income for women who are desperately seeking safety and trying to protect their children, which remains a sidelined need in the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. Notwithstanding systemic flaws and the raft of corrective actions that could be employed by the Federal Government, the narrative and the discourse place the burden and blame of poverty on the individual.

Despite access to the Henderson Poverty Line since the 1970's, as a nation we have abrogated our responsibility to measure and understand the implications of poverty; its associated loss of productivity; the structural contributors; and how it increases inequality and fractures our community. Furthermore, we have failed to recognise that some population groups such as single mother families are over represented in the areas of poverty,

*If you're born  
poor, it takes until  
your great-great  
grandchildren to  
overcome it.*

hardship, deprivation, violence and inequality. This over representation has occurred throughout our prosperous periods, indicating that we have the policy settings wrong. The trending of this issue has serious ramifications for our current health and wellbeing as well as our nation's future and it is time to end the harm. If born into a poor family in Australia, new [analysis](#) suggests it would take four generations before your descendants approach the average wage.

Our expertise is derived from our own research, collaboration with others and steeped in the rich but often tragic experience of women who have sought our service. It is from this unique but clear vantage point that we present our submission and recommendations.

## *Our Recommendations*

1. Restore access to the Parenting Payment Single for families until their youngest child turn 16 years. The current policy of denying access to Parenting Payment Single when the youngest child turns eight has had dire consequences. The harm can be quantified, as demonstrated by 40% of children raised in a sole parent household living in poverty.
2. Immediately implement a mutual obligation exemption for women affected by domestic violence so that they can retain the equivalent of Parenting Payment Single regardless of the age of their youngest child. On 20th August 2018, Andrew Willkie MP brought in a Private Member Bill to review the effects of denying access to the parenting payment. The review would illuminate that Newstart is so low that it forces women to return to the place of abuse and to the hands of their abuser.
3. Trial a State Guaranteed Child Support Payment, as recommended by the 2015 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Child Support Program. The stated debt of 1.5 billion indicates that the current child support system is not fulfilling its role, to detriment of the Australian children.
4. Australians with an enforceable child support liability must lodge an annual tax return as per prescribed dates. Currently there are over 200,000 child support payers who breach this requirement, committing both tax and child support avoidance or minimisation.

5. Replace the Crisis Payment with an upfront payment, between \$6,000 to \$9,000, to those affected by domestic violence. This better reflects the financial needs of women as they seek to establish a life for themselves and their children which is free from violence. This amount is aligned to the “Relocation Assistance to Take Up a Job” as well as the \$7000 assistance provided by the Victorian Government which supports women to afford to create a safer, more stable live for themselves and their children.
6. The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children must include women living in financial hardship as a priority category. Women who reported that their household would had difficulty “suddenly raising \$2000 within a week for something important” had experienced violence from a partner at a rate of 5.8% compared to 2.1% of women who reported that this amount could be raised<sup>1</sup>.
7. Establish an Independent Social Security Commission to assess social welfare payments. Federal Independent Member for Indi, Cathy McGowan, introduced the Social Security Commission [Bill](#) 2018 on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> August 2018 and we seek that the government ensures that this bill becomes legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Social Services, 24th of August 2018, PP 21 (Draft) *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children - Fourth Action Plan (2019 to 22) Background and Evidence*, the Australian Government.



her journey into hardship  
began at birth

Her earnings will be about 20% less than a male and that's if she is in full-time paid work. However, she will most likely be employed part-time which drops her to an average of 33% less. If we then include interrupted paid work to undertake care, her wage is further lowered.

We then further increase the dollar divide through a superannuation system where we reserve the greatest tax concessions to the biggest earners and do not pay contributions if earnings are less than \$450 per month.

The contribution of unpaid care is absent in policy, even in child support, when it was 'equalised' in 2008.

Our policy response to child support is stagnant and it appears that we accept \$1.5 billion owed to children as we fail to remedy the alarm that children are missing out.

Australia provides a 'superannuation haven' which enables child support avoidance.

## Poverty has a woman`s face

Research undertaken by Right Lane Consultancy and presented at the Women's financial Security Forum outlined the systemic disadvantages which threaten women's financial security. It was noted that one or more 'bumps in the road' can be enough to push them into financial hardship. The research identified four key triggers.



Sole parent families have borne the brunt of harsh cuts in successive budgets. The findings of the ACOSS Poverty Report (2016) is disturbing, but for NCMSC it was predictable. The report found that child poverty is on the rise with 731,300 children under the age of 15, which equates to 17.4% of all Australian children, living below the poverty line.

Our greatest alarm is for sole parent families as the report found that 40% of children raised in a sole parent family are living in poverty. The clear majority (82%) of one parent families with children or dependent students were headed by a single mother and again these families will be over-represented on the 'loss side' of the ledger. It is important to note that child poverty has increased despite 25 years of economic growth, thus indicating a failure in our policy settings.

[Research](#) by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods has examined the cumulative impacts of cuts made since 2005. The main policy of the welfare-to-work program reforms was to move single parents from the Parenting Payment to the Newstart Allowance. This change meant a lower payment rate and a lower rate of indexation where the youngest child was 8 years of age or older.

- For a family with no private income and two children over the age of 8, policy changes since 2005 have left them around \$5,750 a year worse off or about 17.2% by 2018.
- A single parent who works three days per week on the minimum wage will be \$6,391 worse off or 14.8% after the move from Parenting Payment to Newstart.

*40% of children  
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poverty.*

Overall, due to lower government benefits and lower payment indexation, many single parent families are considerably worse off as a direct result of policy change enacted by various Governments since 2005. The modelling used a rental amount of \$250 per week (a very conservative amount). The task for women to enter paid work and to grind a way out of poverty is severely hampered due to Government decisions. It is parents in employment that are the most financially disadvantaged by these 'reforms' as revealed by the ANU modelling. Financial returns from paid work are much less on Newstart due to lower thresholds; for example, a sole parent with three children can earn and retain \$118.00 per week on Parenting Payment Single but when on Newstart it reduces to \$52 per week.

## Breach of Human Rights

The National Council for Single Mothers and their Children have taken the unprecedented steps of deferring to the international human rights convention system, as all of the domestic avenues had been exhausted. It's a blight on the Australian Parliament that a small NGO joined forces with a single mother to lodge the first Individual Complaint of the Optional Protocol of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women in 2017. Testimonial to the 22-page communication is the United Nations response in January 2018. The United Nations contacted NCSMC and informed us that they have 'registered the complaint and writing to the State'. Media [Report](#)

It was a timely complaint as the United Nations Committee on the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women was undertaking its four-year review in Geneva, July 2018. The Committee is made up of a panel of experts on women's rights. The Committee release an advance copy and among their various statements, single mothers were featured in the recommendations to:

(a) Take immediate measures to mitigate the effects of recent budget cuts to social, health, education and justice budgets, undertake a gender-analysis of these cuts and implement gender-responsive budgeting in the allocation of public resources;

(d) Adopt targeted measures and programmes to economically empower single mothers, including measures allowing them to complete higher education, and restore access to Child Care Subsidies for women who are not employed.

## Reject the spin

NCSMC is typically confronted with a superficial response: “The best way out of poverty is to get a job”. This only serves to provide comfort to those who do not wish to make real policy solutions and hide the lack of focus upon Australians whose daily life is about housing stress, hunger and hardship. There is a policy gap between this simplistic statement and the lived reality of single mother families. Put simply, you can’t work your way out of poverty if there are not available jobs. A further mockery of this statement is that the un-recoupable losses due to the “welfare to work reforms” were most harshly felt by mothers who were in part-time, low paid and/or casual work. National Welfare Rights stated that a mother in receipt of Parenting Payment Single (PPS) and working 15 hours per week on minimal wage would need to work 28 hours per week to retain the same earnings once forced across to Newstart. Furthermore, and as intuitively known, employment of parents in one parent families generally increased with the age of the youngest dependent, from 40% (youngest dependent under 5 years ) to 72% (youngest dependent 15–24 years old) as found by the [Australian Bureau of Statistics](#). It’s a capacity matter not a lifestyle choice. No family takes comfort from financial hardship which is often a slippery step away from homelessness. Furthermore, sole parents whilst meeting their parenting demands needs to compete against more than 748,000 unemployed and 1.1 million underemployed Australians.

### For the sake of our children, reject the spin





## Real Solutions

### It can be done

The National Council Single Mothers and their Children Inc. were in attendance and partnered with the ACOSS at the launch of Anti-Poverty Week in 2017. It was an auspicious event as it was the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the then Prime Minister Bob Hawke made his infamous pledge that 'no Australian child would live in poverty'. This was a nation-shaping statement that no other government has eclipsed. The statement still resonates and is renowned, but what is less known is the achievements that accompanied this [statement](#), demonstrating that real solutions and outcomes can be achieved.

The measures announced by Hawke in 1987 immediately cut the significant number of children in poverty, estimated to be between 33 and 36 per cent. Over a longer timeframe between 1984 and 1994, child poverty was deemed to have fallen 50 per cent among non-working single parents and 80 per cent among non-working couples with children. The measures that were introduced by Hawke included a family allowance supplement which was linked to wage growth. Furthermore, a uniform rent assistance for social security recipients with children was instituted along with a new child disability allowance and the establishment of the Child Support Agency. At that time, the child support agency was based in the Australian Tax Office and for the first time used the tax system to collect child support payments from non-custodial parents.



In the three years after Hawke's speech, government spending per child in low income families jumped 61 per cent in real terms for children aged 0 to 12 years and 124 per cent for children aged 13 to 15 years. To ensure the benefits were taken up, the Hawke Government pioneered data matching and launched a public advertising campaign. An outstanding measure of the success of the pledge in 1986 was through the take-up of the family income supplement payment; initially only 16 per cent of the family income supplement payments due were paid, however by 1990 it was 58 per cent. The take-up rate grew to 80 per cent by 1999.

Sadly, many of these measures have been reduced and more disturbing is that it has taken strong collective efforts to mitigate some of the harshest elements of proposed reductions. Clearly, through vision and resolve child poverty can be reduced and we can draw upon inspiration across the Tasman to the New Zealand government.

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern says her Government will aim to make a "historic dent" in child poverty over the next 10 years with stated targets.

The [targets](#) are:

- Reduce the proportion of children in low income households (before housing costs) from roughly 15 per cent of all children to 5 percent. This reduces the number by more than half from 160,000 to 60,000.
- Reduce the proportion of children in low income households (after housing costs) from approximately 20 per cent to 10 per cent. This is a reduction of 90,000 children from 210,000 now to 120,000.
- Reduce the proportion of children in material hardship from between 13 and 15 per cent now to 7 per cent this reduces the number of children in this group from 150,000 to 80,000.

The government stated that it would also announce three-year targets at a later date.

## Family and Domestic Violence

### Financial Hardship

We are starting to learn that a woman cannot ‘just leave’. Women speak about feeling ‘trapped’, they fear that they won’t be believed or that her experience will be trivialised. Women speak about concerns that they won’t get the help and support that they so desperately need. After many years of verbal abuse, they may start to believe the words and that, somehow, they are responsible or worthless. Women talk about their sense of isolation due to the violence and the image others may hold of the abuser, that he is ‘a really good guy’ or that he holds a ‘position of influence’ within their community. Furthermore, it is possible that she will not have any money, or have limited access to money, and/or she will feel such paralysing fear she will be unable to leave or even be able to see a way to be safe. Statistics tell us that separation is the most dangerous time for women and children fleeing violence and that separation in itself is not a guarantee of safety. The NSW Coroner Michael Barnes reported that:

“Separation, in fact, can be the most dangerous time, because it seems to be based on a need for the perpetrator to control his intimate partner. That can go quite quickly from controlling, jealous behaviour to fatal violence.”

We work with women who endure hardship which can span a lifetime because of the effect of domestic violence. The harsh reality of what lies ahead for these women is struggling on Newstart to keep a roof over their head and food on the table, let alone cover expenses for clothing and education that all children require. NCSMC is in awe of every mum who has spoken, reached Out and ‘done her darnedest’ to protect herself and her children, often against the collective power of a naïve culture and a failed system. Even with such incredible resolve, the reality of poverty will impact greatly on her and her children.

As a country, we fail these women on so many levels. If her youngest child is eight years or older her income support will be the Newstart Allowance, an unemployment payment, which is below the poverty line and has not been increased for over 21 years. It is beyond comprehension that any women and their children, let alone those escaping violence, are expected to survive and provide for themselves and their children on this payment. Background evidence to support the consultations on the fourth action plan (2019 - 22) to reduce violence against women and their children stated,

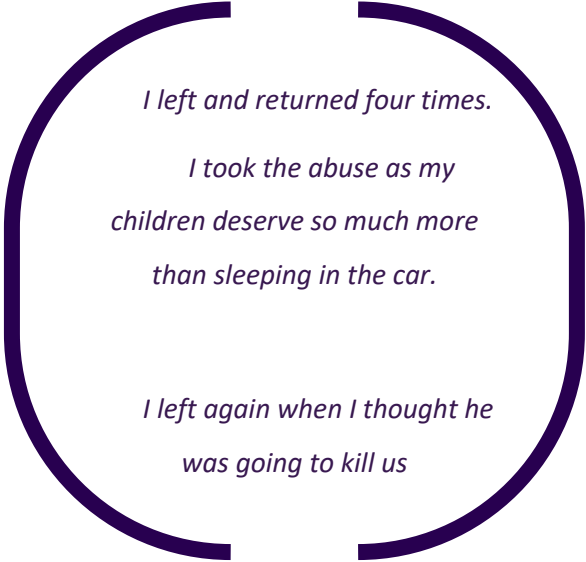
“It’s not enough to simply focus on prevention and crisis response. Family and domestic violence can have a range of significant negative consequences for women’s long-term recovery and ability to sustain social and economic participation”

Supporting evidence found that women who reported that their household would had difficulty “suddenly raising \$2000 within a week for something important” had experienced violence from a partner at a rate of 5.8% compared to 2.1% of women who reported that this amount could be raised<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Department of Social Services, 24th of August 2018, PP 21 (Draft) *National plan to reduce violence against women and their children - Fourth Action Plan (2019 to 22) Background and Evidence*, the Australian Government.

The National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc. brings to the Committee's attention the fact that women affected by family and domestic violence do not have an exemption, despite a range of exemptions granted to Single Principal Carers who are foster caring, non-parent relative caring under a court order, home schooling, distance education or have a large family. The exemptions also enable Single Principal Carers to retain the same amount as the Single Parenting Payment, which is currently \$762.40 per fortnight. These exemptions are sensible and most welcomed. Excluded from exemption, Single Parenting Carers affected by family and domestic violence languish on Newstart which is \$590.40 per fortnight. In May 2017, NCMSC wrote a submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into a better family law system to support and protect those affected by family violence. This engagement included a national online survey known as Domestic Violence and Economic Security. The survey found that 22% of respondents had returned to their place of abuse and to the hands of their abuser because they did not have access to adequate financial support. Every woman and child deserve to live free from violence and with dignity. We must do more than to force women to make the unthinkable choice of accepting abuse or not been able to provide the basics for their children.



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*Imagine packing your twin girls aged 7 into a car and fleeing*

*A new life begins, built out of stoic determination; resolve to be free from the violence, the yelling, the threats and the fear.*

*A small but safe home was their shelter, their sanctuary, the girls could sing and laugh, and it was never too loud.*

*Goodnight meant a good night.*

*Mum was not yet in paid work, she needed to be nearby and did volunteer work at the school. It kept them close and for these girls this meant safe.*

*Imagine losing it all because the girls celebrated their eighth birthday and mum was denied the parenting payment. She could not afford to keep her house.*

## Child-support

### In the best interest of the children

The current child support system in Australia is enabling the non-payment, part-payment and late payment of owed child support, leaving many single mother households struggling to cover the full or majority of the costs of raising their children. Inarguably, these costs should reside with both parents, as they would if the family were together.

- **Child Support Collect:** Department of Human Services - Child Support determines the child support amount using the statement formula that requires the income of the payee and payer, the ages of children and the percent of care. It is the role of the DHS to transfer the payment between parents for the benefit of the care and wellbeing of the children.
- **Private Agreement:** Department of Human Services Child Support determined the amount of child support using the statement formula, but the transfer is completed privately between parents. Child Support Agency actively encourage the Private Agreement, which now exceeds child support collect (52% Private Agreement versus 48% Child Support Collect) [See page 67 of DHS Annual Report 2015-2016](#). NCSMC always advises women to use child support collect as there are too many hazards associated with Private Agreement.

Department of Human Services in their submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs stated that 37% of cases (271,775 cases) of Child Support transferred was in the 0 to \$500 per annum bracket. It further reported that the Department was responsible for collection in 138,359 of these cases (Child Support Collect), while 133,416 are Private Collect. Of the 138,359 Child Support collect cases which means that it is the responsibility of Department of Human Services - Child Support to transfer money, 60,839 cases (46%) are in arrears.

Debt as at August 2014:

- \$977 million of the total debt is associated with domestic cases;
- \$388.6 million is associated with international cases;
- \$178.1 million of debt is less than 1 year old;
- \$608.9 million is between 1 year and 5 years old;
- \$375.2 million is between 5 years and 10 years old; and
- \$203.3 million is older than 10 years.

It is important to note that commentators do not accept the stated debt figures as correct and describe the statistics as 'air brushed'. The Department only records and report on the debts that arise from a Child Support Collect agreement which is 48% of their cases and not debt from Private Collect (52%), as the Department assumes that payments within Private Collect are transferred in full and on time.

**State Guaranteed Payment:** The Child Support Agency should ensure that the enforceable child support liability is paid to each payee whilst the Agency collects the payments from the payer. This payment would then occur on time and in full irrespective of the payer's approach. This would immediately remove the financial impact of non-payment, late or sporadic payments upon the resident mother and their children. Furthermore, it would sever the use of child support as an avenue

to practice abusive and controlling behaviour (as the payment is guaranteed). We note that mothers who have left violent men state that high levels of unpaid child support can be an intended outcome from abusive and controlling ex-partners. This policy was a recommendation from the Inquiry and can be found in the Committees report, 'From Conflict to Cooperation – Inquiry into the Child Support Program'. The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- examine the social and economic impacts in other jurisdictions of a limited child support guarantee system, conduct modelling to assess if there is capacity to apply such a limited guarantee to the Australian context, and then consider the feasibility of conducting a trial of a limited guarantee for either vulnerable families or for a random sample of Child Support Program clients. [Recommendation 25](#) (pg14)

**Non-lodgement of tax returns:** Australians with an enforceable child support liability must lodge an annual tax return as per prescribed dates or use the DHS portal to confirm non-requirement to lodge. The lodgement of a tax return should not be negotiable and have no legal recourse. The perennial issue of not having an accurate and timely assessment of income corrodes the overall effectiveness of the Child Support Scheme. We note the default assessment ( $\frac{2}{3}$ rd MATWE or the last known lodgement) acknowledges these concerns as it attempts to address this matter but is inadequate, and the practice erodes the efficacy of the scheme. Furthermore, a debt to the government, mostly from payees (receiving mothers) can be an outcome of reconciling a 'self-assessment' against the actual income. This matter featured in the '**From Conflict to Cooperation – Inquiry into the Child Support Program' report:**

*The Committee recommends the Australian Government amend current policy to ensure that the penalties applicable to the non-lodgement or late lodgement of tax returns are enforced for all clients of the Child Support Program. The penalty should allow for defences where the individual has a reasonable excuse for non-lodgement, such as circumstances outside their control. Consideration should also be given to the annual indexation of the penalty. A working group comprising representatives of the Australian Taxation Office, the Department of Social Services and Department of Human Services should be established to recommend the size of the penalty. Recommendation 7 (page 5)*

The Australian Government stated that they 'agree in-principle with this recommendation'.

*The Government will investigate the best ways to ensure the lodgement of tax returns as part of the support of the Child Support Program. This will include an examination of the way in which the current penalty regime is enforced and how it could be improved, including the regularity of enforcement, and the nature and size of the penalty. The Government will also examine other measures aside from penalties that may encourage compliance.*

NCSMC attended the national plan to reduce violence against women and their children consultations in Adelaide on 17 September 2018. There is a nexus between the postseparation violence abuse and or control and the flaws in the current child support scheme. It is manifested within sporadic, partial and/or non-payment of child-support. The current child support scheme will allow a payer to hide their actual income through accepting a 'provisional income' which can span years and not enforcing the lodging of an annual tax return.

**Tell it like it is**

**Financial hardship and children**

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) [analysis](#) finds that if you are born into a poor family in Australia, it would take four generations before your descendants approach the average wage. The OECD concludes that social mobility is 'stalled' and pins the blame largely on rising inequality. The analysis also included three recommendations with the third stating:

'Maintain the investment approach to welfare policy that focuses on vulnerable groups, including income support access to social and employment assistance'.

This finding echoes the concerns and distress from mothers when they cannot quarantine their children from financial hardship and they are fearful of the future impacts. The most acute distress is felt by mothers when they witness harm to their children.

In preparation for this Inquiry and to enrich our efforts and current understanding, NCSMC facilitated a national online survey, *Financial Hardship and Children* and we have included the responses to two critical questions along with unsolicited statements from the respondents. It is worthy to note that 20% of the respondents estimated that their income was \$20,000 per annum or less, whilst a further 35% stated that their annual income was between \$20,000 and \$30,000. This financial hardship is gendered, with 99% of the survey respondents were women, of whom 95% had dependent children under the age of 16 years. Furthermore, 56% of the respondents stated that their child had needs or disabilities that require substantial extra parenting time and attention either all of the time (21%) or sometimes (35%).

Which of these have you child/ren experienced in the last 12 months due to financial distress?	
None	9%
Limited or reduced engagement in preschool care	9%
Went to school with non-nutritious or unsatisfying lunches or recess due to cost, eg not having a filling for sandwich	36%
Did not go to school because of the cost of bus fare, lunch etc	14%
No longer participate in sport or activity due to inability to pay the uniform, equipment, fees ect	60%
Did not attend school camps or other out-of-school activities	34%
Spoken about, or is thinking about, dropping out of school due to cost	13%
Hidden school notes that require money	23%
Declined invitations such as birthday parties, sleepovers, or sport evening events ect	38%
Limit or don't have visitors to our house	66%
Reduced contact with extended family members due to cost	43%
Reduced or had periods of no heating or cooling	48%
Reduced access to Internet despite education needs	20%
Reduced or ceased mobile phone (age appropriate) despite safety concerns	27%
Missed medical appointments or other healthcare/therapeutic needs	49%
Experience increased conflict in the house because of financial hardship	46%
Exposed to conflict over the non-payment, the minimising and/or the sporadic payment of child support	47%
Poorly fitted or inadequate weather protective items (example warm coat for winter/sunblock for summer)	30%
Miss events as we don't have a car or limit use due to cost	38%
Have given up or can't have a family pet	24%
Lived in insecure, unsafe housing or and suitable housing	34%
Moved away from friends and family due to housing cost	19%
Homelessness	13%
Gone hungry, forced to skip meals	22%
Exposed to domestic violence, not having enough money to leave and or forced to return	17%



## What women said

We are terribly isolated, and I live with my elderly father so when I can't buy all we need I need to choose between food, medicines and bills. We never have extra money to invite our friends over. My elderly father covers some costs out of his little pension that I need. I want to give it back as he starts cutting his activities and then he gets a bit depressed, but I just cannot give him any extra money to assist him. It's little things like petrol or money for an activity, it's really sad. Though I am always thankful my situations not at desperate as many of my other single parents.

I can survive but live pay check to pay check and have accumulated debt, much of which was accumulated when I was in a relationship but is now all mine since separating. We have been forced to move five times in five years.

Suffer financial hardship and cannot afford the necessary medical expenses. I have delayed the recommended medical investigation due to expense and fearful of the consequences.

Eight court appearances for DVO which all were contested by the perpetrator and then granted, this occurred over eight months. It restricted my work and I was forced to leave university to deal with the continued court appearances. The trauma of the court system has impacted the children immensely as they feel helpless. They need to take time off school and to be cared for when I'm forced to attend court. They witness me being controlled physically and financially and they now live the effects of that financial control.

A promised Christmas gift became a June birthday present because of pressing essential costs.

I, the mum, skip meals and blame it on a diet but make sure my kids don't go without a meal.

Unable to pay school fees due to loss of job from injuries from a domestic violence attack.

My children were exposed to domestic violence and abused but we were the lucky ones as we could leave.

What is the consequence of the financial hardship as experienced by your child/ren?	
No outcome	7%
It will limit their education outcomes	32%
It prohibits them from pursuing their talents and passions	65%
Their social development is restricted due to our finances	56%
Negative effect on their health and wellbeing	47%
They feel poor and have self-esteem issues	48%
They take on the stresses of living with hardship	49%
They have learnt to fudge the truth with their peers	31%
They have learnt to lie or hide their feelings of sadness from me	40%
There is increased conflict in the house due to financial hardship	35%
They have experienced insecure, unsafe or unsuitable housing	33%
They have been forced to move due to housing cost	13%
They have experienced homelessness	14%
They have less capacity to forge strong friendships with peers	33%
They miss out on small but expected childhood events such as sleepover, birthday parties and are more socially isolated due to financial hardship	47%
They are conscious that they look poor, clothing is always or mostly second-hand, and they limit their own social engagements	29%
They miss out on parenting time and nurturing because of my need to be in more paid work than is good for our family	50%
They experience sadness due to financial hardship	48%
They experience anxiety and/or depression due to financial hardship	47%
They have been bullied due to financial hardship	20%

## What women said

Cold due to the cost of heating our home.

They miss out on parenting time due to study commitments (to hopefully gain employment).

My children are alone FAR too often because I need to work. My eldest is only 12 years old and my youngest is 8 years but he can't even go to after school care because as a high school student he is not able. So, he sits at home, alone, for hours a day. When I eventually get home from work, exhausted, and having to then do household chores, help with homework and run errands I have no time left to just be with my children. We miss out as I cannot spend quality time loving them. The guilt I feel about this brings me to tears. But I have to work. Someone had to pay rent and bills. With NO financial or physical support from their father. I'm just at a loss on how to do it all alone?

Financial hardship has been largely due to excessive legal fees, over \$100k and several years. We frequently move to a new house for safety reasons as our family was affected by family violence. It's hard to separate the impacts of the financial with the other impacts of family violence.

My youngest child is autistic, and I can't afford to pay for his psychiatrist or the medical reports to give to his school. Because the school hasn't received the reports they refuse to acknowledge his autism and he doesn't receive the proper assistance at school. As a result, he only attends school for 2 hours per day.

They have learnt not to ask for stuff, they go long periods of time without any new clothing, takeaways or family outings

May limit their education outcomes. We have no \$ to fix broken window in kids' room and it is boarded up. Our car has also died.

In the shadow of these very real and harrowing illustrations the National Council of Single Mothers and their Children Inc have been buoyed by the statements, efforts and endeavours of others. Most recently Andrew Willkie MP introduced a Private Members Bill to review the effects of denying access to the parenting payment on 20th August 2018. The Bill was second by Rebekha Sharkie. The speeches that accompanied this Bill demonstrated understanding, empathy and a quest for action from both Members of Parliament, and we trust that it will be supported by the Government. The speech can be located [here](#).

Furthermore, on Thursday, 13 September 2018, [Right Lane consultancy](#) facilitated a Women's Financial Security Forum. Supporting a panel of three single mothers all of whom were affected by hardship, their compelling voices spoke about the consequence of a child support debt, living on Newstart and/or domestic violence. The forum is the start of a conversation driving progressive change to alleviate the overwhelming levels of hardship experienced by women in Australia. Attached is the research that guided forum.

In closing both the National and Victorian Councils of Single Mothers and their Children heartily welcome an inquiry to shine a spotlight on financial insecurity, hardship and poverty and how this harms our children and hurts our nation. This submission not only brings families' lived reality of hardship but a raft of evidence-based recommendations that have the potential to make significant advancement in addressing child poverty in Australia, and also rewrite the future of the following generations.

It is always a privilege to appear before the Senate Committee and to speak to our submission. This matter is close to our hearts and we trust that we may be provided the opportunity to further enrich the Committee's deliberations. Please do not hesitate to contact us.

We wish the Committee well with their deliberations.

Warm regards,

Terese Edwards

Jenny Davidson

Chief Executive Officer

Chief Executive Officer

Proudly hosted and presented by



# women's **financialsecurity**forum

Lifting women in Australia out of financial hardship



## Participants' briefing pack

September 2018



## Introduction

On Thursday 13 September, Right Lane Consulting will be hosting the Women's Financial Security Forum. This forum will bring together passionate and like-minded individuals and organisations with an aim to develop an agenda and work program to promote and improve the financial security of women in Australia – particularly women facing financial hardship.

To build context and help with discussions on the day, we have developed a briefing pack which will explore the current state of women's financial security in Australia and Right Lane's theory of change.

**This briefing pack is structured into four sections:**

1	<b>Reviewing the situation all women face</b>	This section outlines the systemic disadvantages that all women face in their lives.
2	<b>Exploring the potential triggers of financial hardship</b>	Here we will explore some of the triggers that can push women already facing systemic disadvantages into financial hardship.
3	<b>Sharing lived experiences</b>	By sharing the real lived experiences of women facing financial hardship, this section will bring to life these systemic disadvantages and financial triggers.
4	<b>Outlining Right Lane's theory of change</b>	We will deep dive into the five elements we believe can drive change for women who are facing, or vulnerable to, financial hardship.



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## Women face systemic disadvantages in society, which act as headwinds to achieving financial security

All women face a number of systemic disadvantages in society which adversely impacts their ability to achieve and maintain financial security. Through our research and interviews, we identified **five obstacles women face throughout their life.**

1

Women are more likely to play the primary role in household duties and caring for children and family members

2

Women represent a higher proportion of the part-time and casual workforce

3

Lower average financial literacy scores impact on women's financial resilience

4

There is a 22% gap between women and men in total remuneration for full-time employees

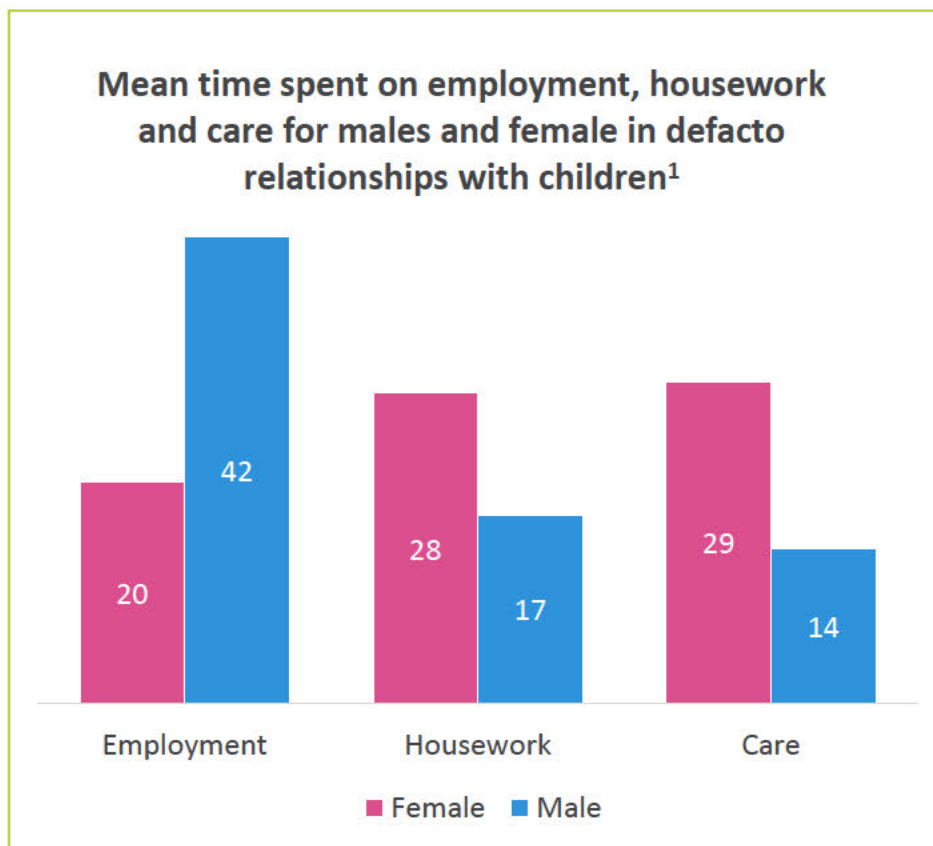
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At retirement age, the average super balance for women is half that of men





## Women play the primary role in household duties and caring for children and family members



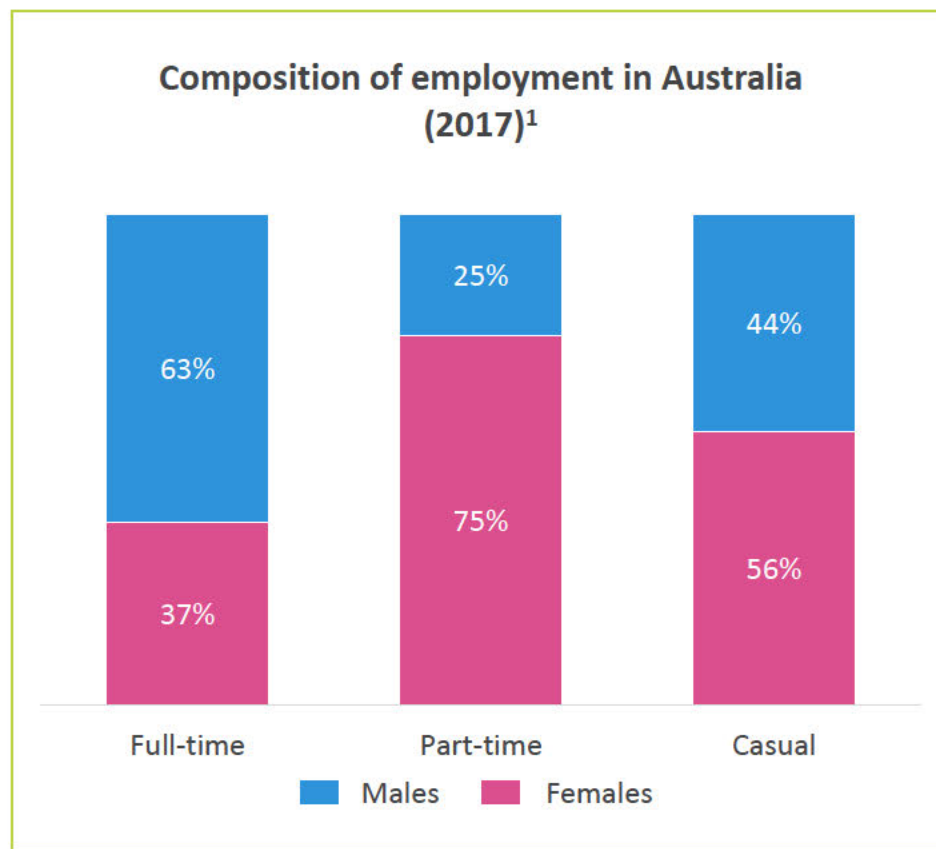
- In households with children, women will, on average, spend 26 hours more per week than men in performing household and care work – resulting in a 22 hour gap in average time spent in paid employment.
- The responsibilities of caring for a newborn greatly impact women's engagement in paid work:
  - Mothers take, on average, **32 weeks maternity** leave from work (paid and unpaid) for their child's birth and subsequent care<sup>2</sup>.
  - For mothers with a child under two years, **34% have not returned to work and are not on paid or unpaid maternity leave** – the primary reason being mothers choosing to stay home to care for their child<sup>2</sup>.

The combined responsibilities of household duties and childcare limits women's engagement in the workforce, **adversely impacting their earnings, career progression, and opportunities.**

Source: 1 – Melbourne Institute Applied Economic and Social Research, 2018: The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 16; note that data is for de facto households – the time allocation for married households with children is similar  
2 – ABS: 4102.0 – Australian Social Trends, November 2013



## Women represent a higher proportion of the part-time and casual workforce



Whilst overall employment rates are similar for men and women, women are make up 75% of the part-time workforce and 56% of the casual workforce. Women make up only 37% of the full-time employed workforce.

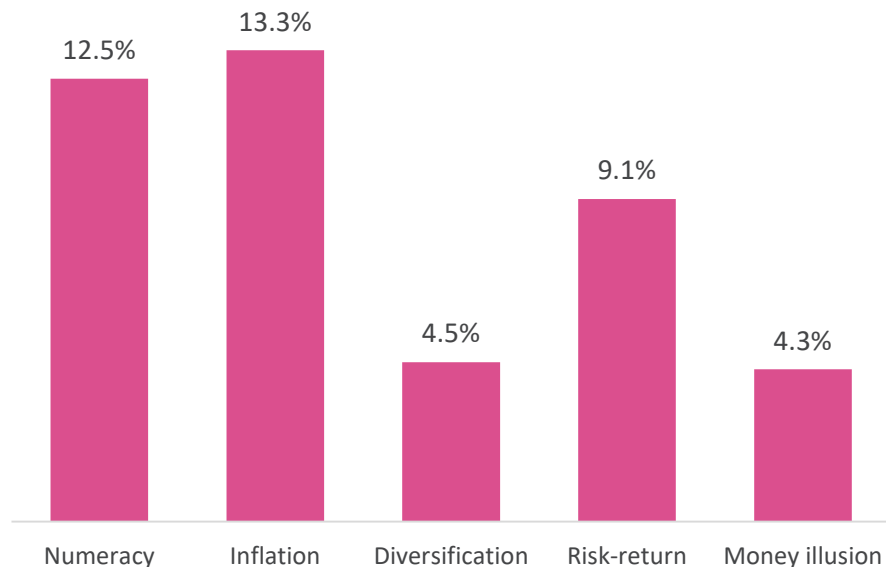
On average, **women spend 10 hours less than men in paid work per week<sup>2</sup>.**

Source: 1 – Melbourne Institute Applied Economic and Social Research, 2018: The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey: Selected Findings from Waves 1 to 16  
2 – Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018. Viewed at: [http://data.wgea.gov.au/industries/1#pay\\_equity\\_content](http://data.wgea.gov.au/industries/1#pay_equity_content);



## Lower average financial literacy scores impact on women's financial resilience

Difference in financial literacy scores between men and women  
(positive values indicate men scored higher)<sup>1</sup>



The 2018 HILDA survey found a gender divide in financial literacy over five key categories, with the average score for women lower across the board.

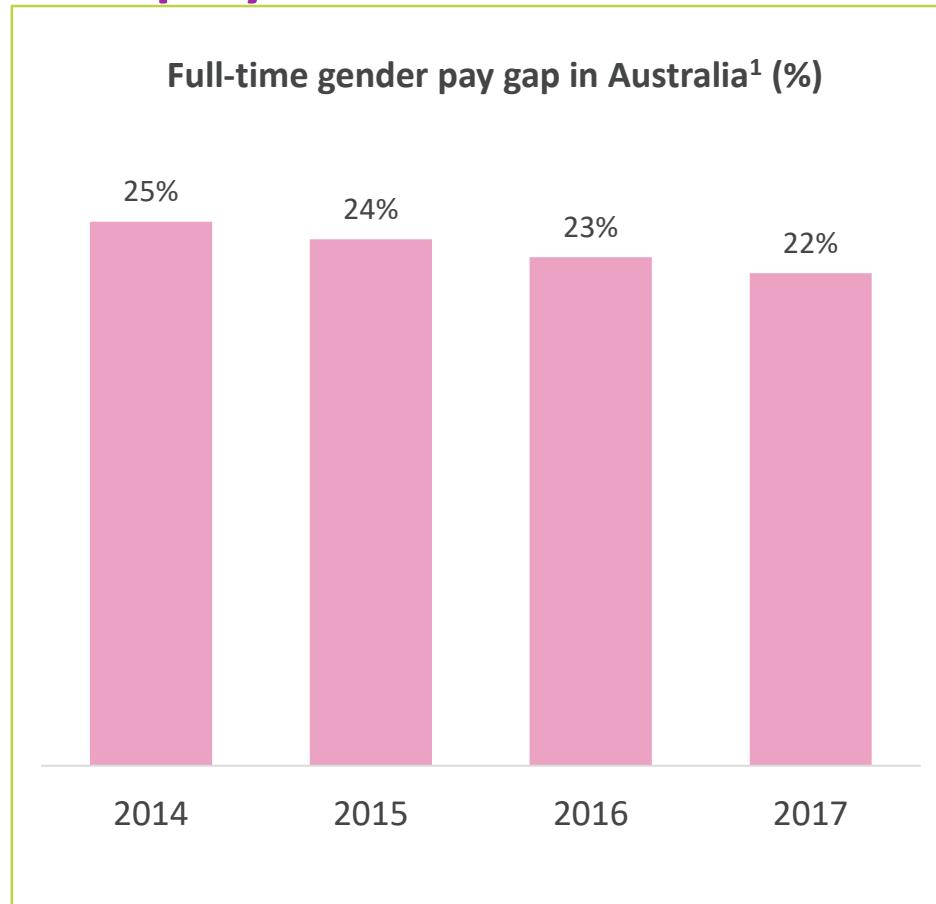
The survey recognised that lower literacy rates affected financial behaviours, resulting in lower:

- **willingness to take financial risk** – which may negatively impact investment decisions (such as purchasing a home)
- **involvement in household finances** – reducing awareness of day to day costs
- **propensity to save regularly** – limiting the amount of cash available to meet unexpected costs
- **likelihood to hold a credit card** – reducing access to emergency funding.

This literacy gap, and the associated financial behaviours, **has a negative impact on women's financial resilience.**



## There is a 22% gap between women and men in total remuneration for full-time employees



Despite awareness and advocacy for pay equality, the gender pay gap has only reduced by 3% in the past three years.

The gender pay gap is influenced by a number of factors, including:

- bias in hiring and remuneration decisions
- women's disproportionate share of unpaid caring and household work
- women's disproportionate representation in lower paid 'caring' professions – e.g. childcare, personal care
- lack of flexible workplaces that accommodate caring and other responsibilities, particularly in senior roles
- women's greater time out of the workforce impacting career progression and opportunities.

With a total remuneration gap of 22% in 2017, **women typically take home \$500 less than men per week** in total remuneration.

Note: Total remuneration includes all forms of benefits received through employment (base salary, bonus, other benefits etc.)  
Source: 1 – Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2018: Gender Equity Insights 2018.



## At retirement, women typically have only accrued 42% of the super balance of men

On average, the super balance at retirement<sup>1</sup> is ...

**\$270k**

for men

**\$157k**

for women

... reflecting a **super balance gap** of

**\$113k** or **42%**

Women accrue a lower super balance during their working life to support themselves in retirement, driven by the cumulative effect of:

- spending less time in paid work per week;
- receiving lower total remuneration; and
- being out of the workforce for maternity or carer's leave.

The combined effect of these headwinds is that women have **\$113k less in super savings than men** at retirement age.



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## In this situation of systemic disadvantage, one or more triggers can push women into financial hardship

With all the systemic disadvantages which threaten women's financial security, one or more bumps in the road can be enough to push them into financial hardship.

Our research has identified **four key triggers** which can push women into financial hardship.

1

Women facing financial hardship are vulnerable to sudden changes to income

2

Separation and divorce can leave women in a precarious financial situation

3

Violent domestic situations often result in women and children leaving the family home

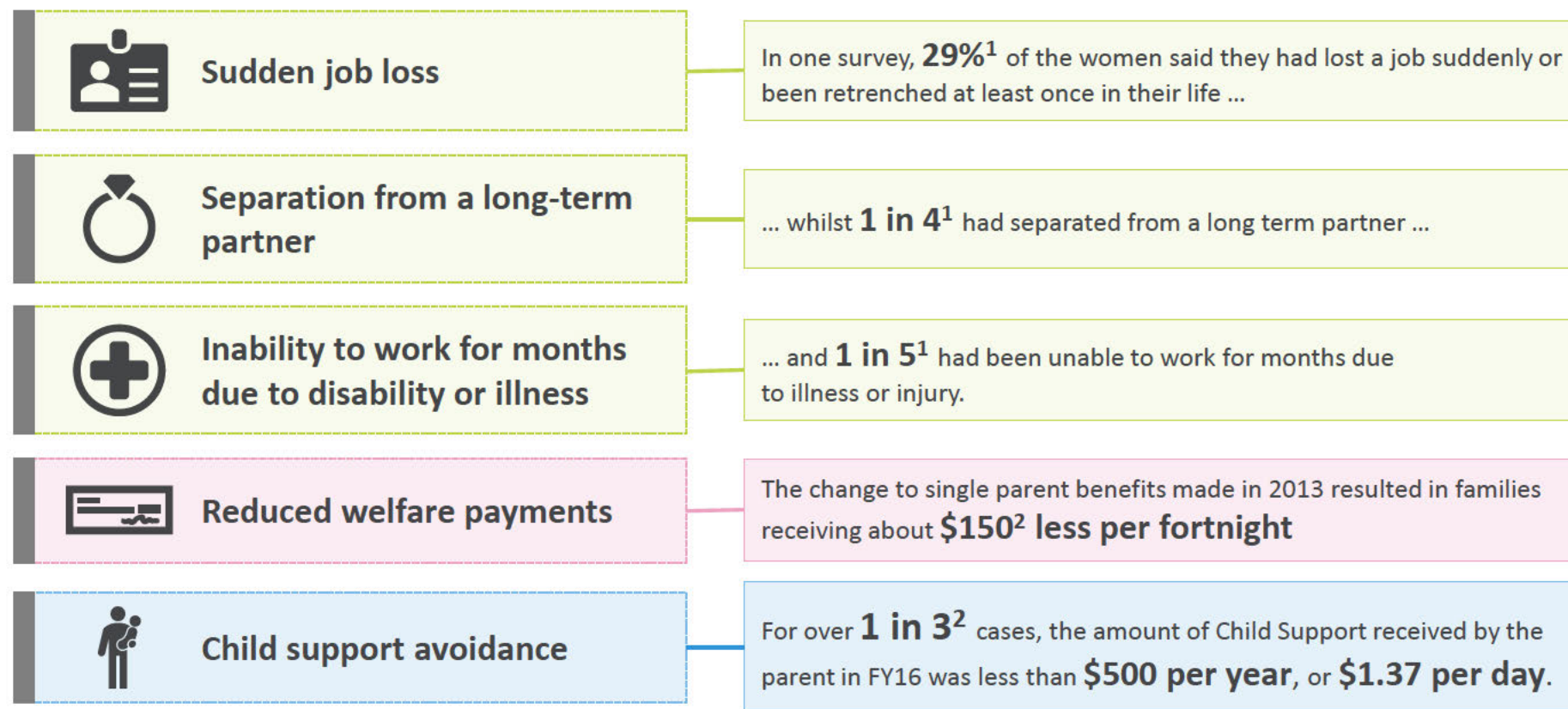
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A culture of victim blaming hinders women from receiving the help they need



## Women facing financial hardship are vulnerable to sudden changes to income

Financial shocks can come in many forms:



A survey conducted by the Commonwealth Bank of Australia shows the effects these financial shocks have on women today

**1 in 4<sup>1</sup>** women said they had been in **significant financial difficulty at least once in their lives**

Over **3 in 5<sup>1</sup>** of women surveyed felt unsure they had the resources to **withstand a financial shock**

Note:

Changes in single parent benefits is based on the base rate.

Source:

1 – Commonwealth Bank of Australia 2017, 'Enabling change: a fresh perspective on women's financial security'; National Council of Single Mothers 2017, 'Budget Submission'.

2 – National Council of Single Mothers and Their Children Inc, 2017: Budget Submission.





## Separation and divorce can leave women in a precarious financial situation

**1 in 3** marriages in Australia is likely to end in divorce. The impacts of separation on women are severe, and enduring. Women who are divorced will experience different impacts based on whether they have dependent children.

- Women are often the primary care giver to their children in a divorce.
- The additional responsibilities of being the sole caregiver adds severe direct and indirect costs.
- Despite having higher costs to meet after separation, women typically receive lower total remuneration, exacerbating the financial situation.

### Impacts of divorce for women **WITH** children

- Spend 21% more on basic items such as groceries, transport, and food than fathers
- 3 times more likely to rent rather than own
- 37% less assets immediately after divorce
- 68% less superannuation

### Impacts of divorce for women **WITHOUT** children

- 10% lower earnings per hour
- 15% lower home ownership
- 90% less total assets
- 29% less financial assets

Mothers who have been divorced for less than five years spend **two thirds** of their household budget on necessities

Nearly **one third** of separated or divorced mothers report that the costs of child care over the previous year were difficult for them.

**1 in 5** divorced mothers cannot afford school clothing, leisure activities or school trips for their children



## Violent domestic situations often result in women and children leaving the family home

Domestic violence is prevalent throughout our society and inflicts a severe price on the victims.

**1 in 3<sup>1</sup>** women will experience physical violence

- Women are most likely to experience physical and sexual violence in their home, at the hands of a male **current or ex-partner<sup>1</sup>**
- **73%<sup>1</sup>** experienced violence on **more than one occasion**
- **61%<sup>1</sup>** had children in their care when the violence occurred

Domestic violence is the **#1<sup>2</sup>** cause of homelessness and housing instability in Australia<sup>2</sup>

- **3 of 5<sup>2</sup>** people who engaged homelessness services were women, **1 in 4<sup>2</sup>** of these women do so because they're fleeing family violence
- **94%<sup>2</sup>** of clients of specialist homelessness services who were experiencing domestic and family violence were females and children
- Women and children form the majority of this vulnerable group

**45,813<sup>3</sup>** women were experiencing homelessness on census night in 2011<sup>3</sup>

In the same year...

- **85,000<sup>3</sup>** women were supported by homelessness services
- **17,845<sup>4</sup>** children were counted homeless

Note: Statistics on women who experience physical violence are based on ages 15 and above.

Source: 1 – ANROWS: 'Violence against women: key statistics'  
2 – Australian Government, 2008: 'The Road Home: A national approach to reducing homelessness'  
3 – Homelessness Australia, 2016: 'Homelessness and Women'  
4 – Homelessness Australia, 2016: 'Homelessness and Children'



## A culture of victim blaming stops women from receiving the help they need

Based on the 2016 Personal Safety Survey<sup>1</sup>...

**46%**

... of women who experienced current partner violence and ....

**37%**

... of women who experienced previous partner violence **did not** seek advice or support after the incident.

In 2016, nearly half of women who experienced violence from a current partner, and one third from a previous partner, chose not to seek support or advice.

Of these women, the main reasons included:

- **believing they could deal with the issue** themselves (50%)
- believing the incident **wasn't serious enough** (36%)
- feeling **shame or embarrassment** (11%)

Roughly **634,000** women chose not to seek advice or support after suffering domestic violence in 2016.

Attitudes that condone or tolerate violence play 'a central role in shaping the way individuals, organisations and communities respond to violence' (VicHealth 2014)<sup>2</sup>.



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## This woman faces extreme difficulty in caring for her child whilst meeting the increasing costs of living

- I am a single mum of one almost 15-year-old.
- I have been in and out of work for most of her life. I am currently working. On call and in a call centre.
- This is my state of play: I am almost \$900 behind in rent, \$700 behind in electricity, and my car rego is looming. I have next to no food in the house. These debts were incurred when I was out of employment.
- I cannot afford a new pair of work shoes at \$12 a pair. I wear two pairs of socks, always remembering to put the dark pair on top so the small holes in the canvas of the shoes will not be so obvious. That is my dream: brand-new shoes from Kmart.
- How can a single parent survive each week as it is, as well as play catch up on bills, when we can't get a fair go? The income free threshold is stupidly low on Newstart. I get furious when I hear 'the best way out of poverty is a job'.
- Newstart is hell and it really needs an increase more than anything. Even if they set it at a higher rate for a certain period of time to give people a chance to get a leg up when starting work- say 4-6 months- then drop it- even that would help.
- These days people need at least \$1000 minimum per week in their pocket to survive comfortably. The cost of living is so high.
- If people could feel comfortable knowing their finances were good a lot less people would suffer anxiety and depression.

### Key challenges faced in this case:

High cost of living

Solely responsible for her daughter

Inadequate government support

Income isn't meeting basic needs



## This woman struggles to find and keep work that fits in with her parenting responsibilities

- I have raised 3 kids on my own for past 9 years.
- As they are getting older and have more needs it's getting tougher for us all.
- They are now aged 12, 13, and 15. I need to take them to school, pick them up, take them to extracurricular activities, and ensure their health and wellbeing is monitored as they have been through so much hardship - so much pain.
- I feel we on Newstart are disadvantaged beyond what anyone in Australia would think was fair. Although I had an agency assigned through Centrelink to assist me in finding work it's difficult when I have 3 dependants and really at times their services were so poor.
- I ended up searching on my own when I was able to and found a contract job. I had three-months when my head wasn't whirling at each night. I've forgotten what it was like to lay in the dark and not fear what was going to happen in the morning.
- I had the ultimate joy of knowing that if my car needed petrol, we could go to the service station and fill up. The first pay came in and we celebrated. Big time, we bought fish and chips. Not the cheap black and gold option but the real deal, from a fish and chip shop.
- The contract is coming to an end, I've made a dent in my debt but no savings. I'm in a dark place and hang in for my three precious children.

### Key challenges faced in this case:

High cost of living

Solely responsible for her children

Inadequate government support

Difficulty in finding flexible work which allows her to care for her children



## Meeting the daily costs of raising twins becomes a desperate situation when the father abandons his responsibilities

- I'm so humiliated. I've just phoned the bank to tell them that I'm officially "in hardship" and that I need help just to keep the roof over our heads.
- I have twin boys aged nine. I've not been able to fix a broken window, fortunately it's at the back, and so the black plastic and sticky tape is working and not causing too much public shame.
- I've now got to go to Centrelink and talk about superannuation in hardship. I think I have about \$8000. I don't want to do it, I really don't want to do it.
- Every time I have to, I'm reminded of how much of a failure I am.
- I supported (my ex partner) while he went to university, while he went on field trips, and while he met someone else. I thought my heartache was bad but nothing surpasses the humiliation of not providing the basics, just the basics, for my boys.

### Key challenges faced in this case:

High cost of living

Solely responsible for her children

Inadequate government support

Shame from her situation

Difficulty in finding flexible work which allows her to care for her children



## Having to jump through time-consuming and unnecessary hoops has stopped this woman from getting the help she needed

- I've just sent my seven-year-old boy to school with a can of tuna and a stick of celery.
- I have half a tank of petrol, no money, and the cupboards are bare.
- I've had a well-paying job (compared to so many), but I was retrenched.
- I thought I would bounce back into work really quickly, but it hasn't happened.
- I contacted Centrelink to apply for the parenting payment but told I couldn't until I took out a child-support claim. This is going to take several weeks, possibly months.
- I couldn't believe it, I contacted my local MP, they checked and said this was correct.
- This is madness, it's like we are living in the 18th century, where we just throw the women who are doing the toughest gig to the wolves and see who survives.

### Key challenges faced in this case:

High cost of living

Solely responsible for her children

Inability to access basic government support due to red tape

Difficulty in finding work whilst supporting her child





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## Right Lane's theory of change identifies five levers that influence women's financial security





## Lever of change: Financial resilience





## Financial resilience enables women to cope with adverse events and experiences, adapt to changing circumstances, and manage financial demands

We have identified an individual's financial resilience to come from two areas<sup>1</sup>:

1. The **RESOURCES** that a person has– this is primarily driven by their financial resources and their access to social capital
2. The **CAPABILITIES** of an individual to use their resources – this is primarily driven by their knowledge and behaviour, and their access to financial solutions.

### Resources

#### Financial resources

- Income
- Savings
- Debt
- Ability to raise money in an emergency
- Ability to meet day-to-day expenses

#### Social capital

- Access to a family or social support in times of crisis
- Social and familial connections
- Access to community and government support

### Capabilities

#### Knowledge and behaviour

- Knowledge of financial solutions
- Confidence in using financial solutions
- Prudent financial decision making
- Willingness to seek, and access to advice

#### Access to financial solutions

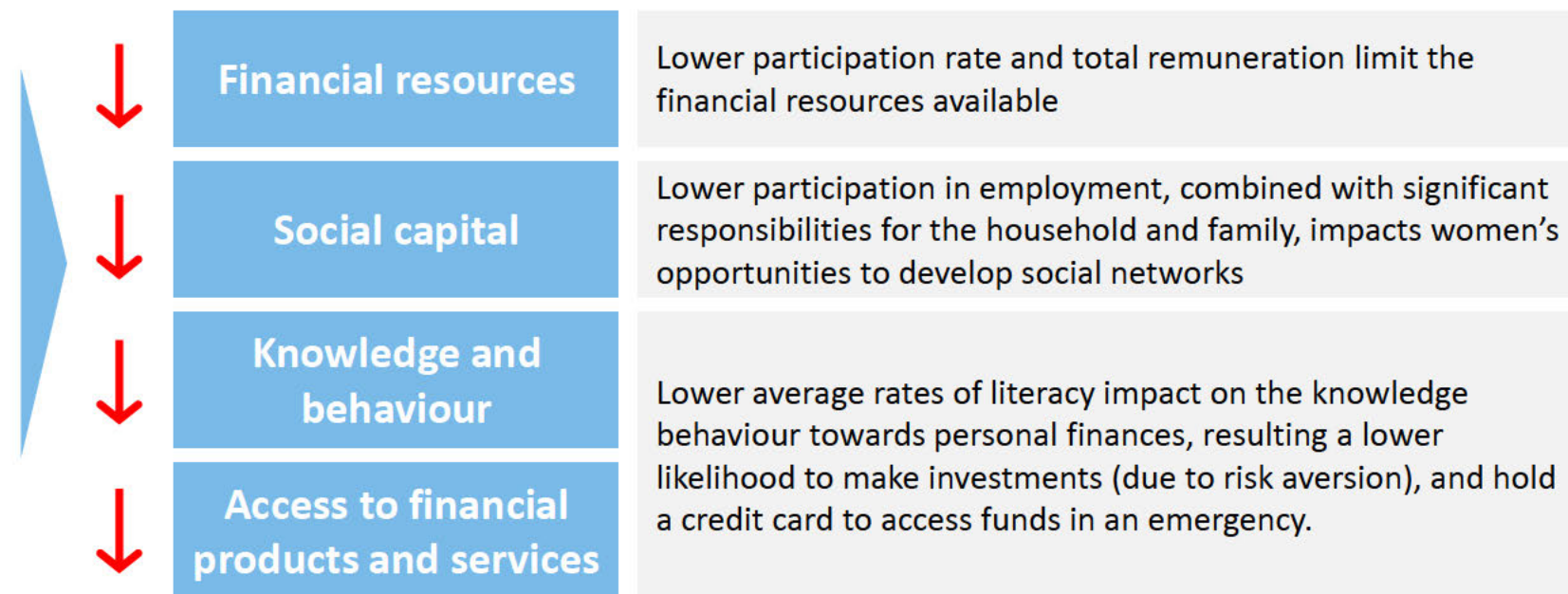
- Access to a bank account
- Access to credit for expenses and emergencies
- Access to insurance



## Women suffer from systemic disadvantages which reduces their financial resilience

Due to the systemic challenges addressed in the first section of this pack, women are short changed across the elements of financial resilience. This in turn impacts their ability deal with financial shocks.

### Systemic challenges





Many organisations advocate for greater equality in resources and financial knowledge, but a gap remains to see the change we want



### The change we want to see:

- Confidence in, knowledge of, and access to financial solutions to help women experiencing financial difficulties face adverse events and experiences.
- Equality of financial resources, supported by government and community initiatives to support women facing financial hardship.

Note: This is not an exhaustive list.



## Lever of change: Social and economic participation





## Social and economic participation refers to the ways in which women are engaged in their communities

### Economic participation

- Paid employment
- Training and education
- Self-employment

Paid employment equips women with the financial resources required to endure 'bumps on the road'

### Social participation

- Social engagement (sporting and community events, meals with non-household members)
- Civic engagement (leadership and participation in local communities)
- Accessing services (child care, parent education, and health or welfare services)

- Active engagement in the community provides a network of social support that is crucial for achieving financial stability
- Active engagement in the community builds on two of the four key aspects of financial resilience which enables women to tackle the day to day costs of life, as well as adverse events and experiences





## The significant role women play in household duties and caring for family limits their participation in paid work and the community

**Responsibilities  
for the household  
and family**



**Paid employment**

Meeting the significant demands of family care and the household can leave less time available for paid employment than men. This adversely impacts their long-term earnings, career progression, and opportunities.

**Social and civic  
engagement**

Women facing financial hardship can be so overwhelmed from the constant demands of working and supporting their family, that they have little to no social engagement outside their daily responsibilities



## Advocacy groups promote equality in participation, whilst some commercial organisations take affirmative action to address issues such as the pay gap



### Equality of opportunity for men and women in:

- distribution of household and caring duties
- rates of full- and part-time employment
- rates of pay
- involvement in the community
- access to a social support network.



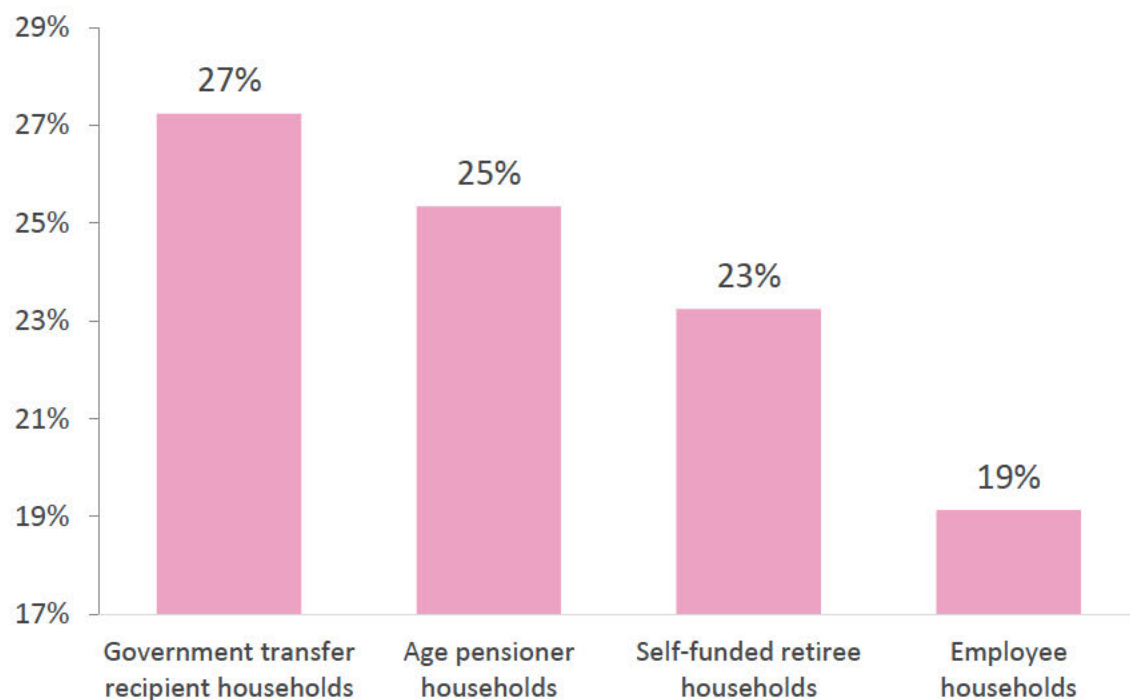
## Lever of change: Cost of living





## The cost of living lever captures the day-to-day expenses women must meet to get by

**Cost of living growth for households in Australia over the past 10 years by source of primary income<sup>1</sup>**



- Over the past 10 years, households depending on government support to meeting daily expenses have experienced the fastest growing cost of living compared to all other household categories.
- This is a persistent problem – the cost of living for households receiving government benefits has seen the fastest growth for the past 3, 10, and 20 years – indicating a systemic issue that isn't likely to change without action.
- Women who are facing, or are vulnerable to, financial hardship are more likely to depend on government benefits to meet their daily expenses.
- Furthermore, older women who have left the workforce are highly dependent on the age pension to meet their daily expenses.

Women who primarily rely on government support – or the aged pension – for meeting their daily expenses, are faced with the fastest growing cost of living.



## Several organisations offer services to individuals facing financial hardship, while others advocate for political and social change



### The change we want to see:

- A network of support services to meet the basic living requirements of women facing financial hardship.
- Access to financial hardship initiatives offered by organisations who are delivering relevant services (e.g. utilities)



## Lever of change: **Government policies**





## A range of policies are inhibiting women's ability to achieve financial security

<b>Changes to income support payments</b>	In 2013, policy was reformed to move single parents from Parenting Payment Single to Newstart once their youngest child turned 8. This has left single parent families considerably worse off and under pressure to meet Newstart requirements that do not support their parenting responsibilities.	<p>Women heading single parent families are under severe financial pressure and stress.</p> <p>Low female workforce participation. Australia is among the bottom third of OECD countries for labour force participation of mothers.</p> <p>Insufficient savings over the life course, leading to financial hardship later in life.</p> <p>Women and children have to leave the family home, losing the security of housing and disruption to work.</p>
<b>Insufficient Paid Parental Leave</b>	Australia's 18 weeks of minimum wage payments works out to 7.6 weeks of average full-time pay. This is the second worst rate in the world. Superannuation contributions are not paid for Paid Parental Leave.	
<b>Costs of childcare</b>	The cost of paid childcare remains prohibitively high. The interaction of childcare costs and the income tax system means that many women, who are predominantly the second income earners in households, get less take home pay. They therefore choose to work less.	
<b>Failure to address family violence at a national level</b>	While Victoria is moving ahead, the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children received no funding in the 2018 Budget. Nearly one woman a week dies in Australia from violence against them.	

Source: OECD (2015) Family Database, cited by Irvine, J "Paid Parental Leave: Australian Parents will become the Worst Off in the Developed World," Sydney Morning Herald, 27 October 2016; Miranda Stewart (ed), Tax, Social Policy and Gender: Rethinking Equality and Efficiency (Canberra: ANU Press, 2017); Our Watch: [www.ourwatch.com.au](http://www.ourwatch.com.au).



## Policy advocacy is needed to drive policies that ensure women are more financially secure



### Policies which:

- Encourage women to work, and to do the hours of work they would like to do.
- Help women to accumulate assets over their lifetime, for example superannuation on Paid Parental Leave.
- Protect women from family violence, and give them the resources they need to deal with it.





## Lever of change: Community attitudes





## Changing community attitudes is key to achieving financial security in women

- Community attitudes are the beliefs, feelings, and values held by society which predispose them to act in a certain way.
- Changes in the attitudes held by the community will permeate into the other levers and drive actions.
- We have identified three attitudes which have significant impact on the financial security of women facing hardship.

1

### The devaluing of 'women's work'

- Women typically hold the primary responsibilities for caring of the young and elderly; in households with children, women typically contribute 57 hours of unpaid work a week towards these duties. This work is not seen as contributing to a shared, greater good and is unpaid.
- There is a correlation between paid work that has traditionally been seen as 'women's work' (childcare, nursing etc.) and lower rates of pay.

2

### Attitudes towards domestic violence

- Volatile domestic situations remains a key driver of women and children leaving the family home, leading to social housing or homelessness, cost of living increases and entry to a cycle of poverty that becomes increasingly difficult to break
- While community attitudes towards domestic violence have dramatically shifted, misconceptions persist about women's actions and responses when faced with domestic violence

3

### A culture of victim blaming

- A culture of victim blaming persists in our community that blinds us from attributing the situation to the underlying causes of financial hardship
- Without community support, decision makers in Australia who can have serious impact on women's financial security (e.g. policy makers, corporate and government leaders) are removed from the reality of women who are facing financial hardship and are unlikely to create the change required



A number of organisations are active in advocating for change in community attitudes however more organisations and individuals need to help drive this change

economic  
**S4W** Lifelong  
Economic  
Wellbeing  
for Women

 **MELBOURNE**  
*A Giving Circle*  
**WOMEN'S FUND**

  
**VCOSS**  
Victorian Council  
of Social Service

 **VicHealth**



**The change we want to see:**

- A caring and fair community that actively pursues change to achieve social equality
- A fair distribution of work and responsibilities between men and women
- Community attitudes that completely reject domestic violence, whilst offering empathy and understanding towards victims



## Right Lane's theory of change identifies five levers that influence women's financial security



We believe that the most effective change initiatives will have an awareness of **multiple levers** across financial resilience, cost of living, economic and social participation, government policies, and community attitudes.

We are looking forward to engaging you in this thinking at our Women's Financial Security Forum on Thursday 13 September 2018, where we aim to use our collective skills to develop ideas to create this change.