

Media Release

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Australia's gender equality will continue to slump without focused investment post COVID-19

A new report reveals key areas that urgently require increased investment in order to ensure women's economic security, safety and wellbeing in the pandemic recovery.

The impact of the Summer 2019/2020 bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic on Australian women and girls has been more severe and sustained compared to their male counterparts.

The timely report commissioned by Australians Investing in Women (AIW) identifies crucial investment focus is needed on employment and relevant skills-matching, domestic violence services, accessible mental health care, and homelessness support.

CEO of Australians Investing in Women, Julie Reilly, says Australia is now at serious risk of going backwards in gender equality.

"We were already lagging, and this research confirms that the impacts of the past year have been felt most severely by Australian women."

Australia's fragile progress on gender equity has recently slowed or slid backwards. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index now ranks the nation – which was 14th in 2006 – 50th in 2021, behind countries including New Zealand, Rwanda, Nicaragua and the Philippines.

Key findings of the report – *Gender-wise Investing: A Springboard for Australia's Recovery* – produced for AIW by Equity Economics include:

- Job losses were increasingly felt by younger women, potentially leading to long-term 'scarring effects' from unemployment during the formative years of their career. The upshot is these women may not reach their true earning potential over their lifetime;
- Throughout Victoria's extended lockdowns, 67 per cent of women took responsibility for home-schooling their children, and 60,000 fewer women over the age of 25 were enrolled in university in May 2020 compared to the same time in 2019;
- By December 2020, 25 per cent of women were experiencing high or very high levels of psychological stress, compared to 16 per cent of men, indicating a greater need for accessible, quality mental health care particularly for front line staff such as nurses, teachers and childcare workers;
- Australia saw a 9 per cent annual increase in domestic violence reports, with Queensland seeing a 20 per cent rise in court orders pertaining to domestic violence incidents in 2020; and,
- Older women are among the fastest growing cohort seeking housing assistance, with domestic and family violence being the most common reason that women seek homelessness services.

"We know women are more vulnerable to economic crisis because they typically earn less, have lower savings and often work in less secure roles and industries. This report confirms that women have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic," Ms Reilly said.

“And, we know it is even harder for women in vulnerable cohorts, including women with a disability, Indigenous women, women from migrant, refugee and culturally diverse backgrounds, women from the LGBTIQ community, and women from geographically remote regions of Australia.”

Australians Investing in Women urges the nations’ leaders, including corporate leaders and philanthropists, to recognise that making investments into women’s economic independence is essential for Australia’s future prosperity.

“We need to factor in the very specific experiences of women and girls in responding to the economic crisis we find ourselves in. If not, we will inadvertently widen gender gaps in economic outcomes and exacerbate gender inequality,” Ms Reilly said.

“Applying a gender lens to policy and investment – whether philanthropic, commercial, or by government – is vital.”

“Women were behind when the pandemic began, and have been hit harder by many of its economic and social impacts. If we take a gender-neutral approach to recovery, women will not only remain behind, they will fall further behind. This will not be a one-year impact, but a decade-long drag on opportunities for women,” Ms Reilly said.

The *Gender-wise Investing: A Springboard for Australia’s Recovery* report has been enabled through the generous support of the Erdi Foundation and the Besen Family Foundation.

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For media enquiries, please contact Julie Reilly info@aiiw.org.au

About Australians Investing in Women (AIIW)

Established in 2009, Australians Investing in Women (AIIW) is a not-for-profit organisation that advocates for gender-wise philanthropy. AIIW encourages, educates, and enables individuals, businesses and not-for profit organisations to consistently apply a gender-lens to their philanthropy and empower their giving for a fairer and more inclusive society. For more information, visit aiiw.org.au

About Equity Economics

Equity Economics was established in 2013 as an Australian based economic consultancy committed to providing quality economic analysis and policy advice to the not for profit, corporate and government sectors. For more information, visit equityeconomics.com.au