Engaging Men and Boys in Gender Equality

Phase One Consultation: National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality

# Introduction

Gender equality is at the heart of the Australian Government’s vision for a better future, and the Government is committed to restoring Australia’s leadership on gender equality.

The Government will develop a National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality (the Strategy) to drive this ambition.

## What will the Strategy do?

The Strategy will guide whole of community action to help make Australia one of the best countries in the world for equality between women and men. It is an important mechanism to elevate and prioritise actions that will achieve gender equality and support men and boys to participate in a gender equal society.

The Strategy will complement other efforts across Government to achieve gender equality, including:

* the [*National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32*](https://www.dss.gov.au/women-programs-services-reducing-violence/the-national-plan-to-end-violence-against-women-and-children-2022-2032) (National Plan)
* the Government’s response to the Australian Human Rights Commission’s [Respect@Work Report](https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/respectwork-sexual-harassment-national-inquiry-report-2020)
* the[*National Women’s Health Strategy 2020–2030*](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-womens-health-strategy-2020-2030)

It will also support the work of similar state and territory plans.

## How will the Strategy be developed?

The Government will deliver the Strategy by mid-2023.

The Office for Women will develop the strategy in consultation with communities around Australia, with a focus on ensuring that diverse voices are heard and included. Engaging with men and boys is fundamental to achieving gender equality.

The Government has also established the Women’s Economic Equality Taskforce (the Taskforce) to provide independent advice to Government, ensuring gender equality is at the centre of policy and decision-making. The Taskforce will be a leading contributor to the Strategy, and as part of this will engage broadly with the Australian community to elevate and honour the voices of women in the Strategy.

The six [National Women’s Alliances](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/grants-and-funding/national-womens-alliances) will also play a key role in informing the development of the Strategy.

# Consultation

We will talk to communities across Australia to ensure their diverse voices are heard and included. Consultations will reach people with lived experience of gender inequality, people living with disability, First Nations people, people who are LGBTQIA+, migrant and refugee people, those living in regional and remote areas and people from all backgrounds and classes.

The consultation will be undertaken in **two stages.**

Starting in November 2022, the Office for Women will lead targeted national consultations to inform the early development of the Strategy. These will include discussions with a range of stakeholders, including gender experts, academics, economists, women’s alliances, the community sector, unions and business.

In early 2023, broader community consultations will provide an opportunity for people to share their views of how we achieve gender equality in Australia and how this should be reflected in the strategy.

The Strategy will also draw from a comprehensive evidence base, and reflect public commentary, recent consultations and submissions to government. It will draw from contemporary research and reports, including those prepared for the [Jobs and Skills Summit and resulting Employment White Paper](https://treasury.gov.au/employment-whitepaper/jobs-summit)

Further information on consultation will be provided on the Office for Women’s [webpage](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality) .

# Current situation

The research and evidence outlined in this paper are not intended to be exhaustive, but provide a high-level overview to facilitate consultation. According to existing evidence and data:

* Living up to the pressures of being a ‘real man’ causes harm to young men and those around them, with many young men agreeing there are social pressures on them to behave or act a certain way because of their gender.[[1]](#footnote-1)
* One in five Australians feel men have lost out as a result of feminism, with men (32 per cent) far more likely than women (11 per cent) to agree with this view. The difference in attitudes and beliefs about gender equality between men and women in Australia is larger than most other countries.[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Some cohorts of Australian men are more traditional in their gender attitudes than the global average. The share of men who agreed that gender inequality doesn’t really exist (30 per cent) was the second highest out of 29 countries, and the share that agreed that women often make up or exaggerate claims of abuse or rape (28 per cent) was the highest of any Western nation included in the survey.[[3]](#footnote-3)
* Research has shown rigid gender stereotypes and roles can cause negative health and wellbeing outcomes, affect how men seek help, and involvement in violence and bullying.[[4]](#footnote-4) Globally, the rate of male suicides is 2 to 4 times that of females, and males fare poorly on indices of substance abuse, risk taking-related injury, conduct problems, aggression and violence, which can lead to incarceration.[[5]](#footnote-5)

## Workplace culture

* Research shows attitudes towards fatherhood and working fathers have changed over the last 15 years, particularly amongst working fathers and mothers, becoming more supportive of greater father involvement in the care of children and the ability of working fathers to meet the needs of their children.[[6]](#footnote-6) This has caused significant change around young workers’ expectation of work and care policy and workplace practice, particularly for young fathers, but not all employers have kept up with these changes.
* It is commonly accepted for women to return to work in a part-time capacity and use flexible conditions to leave work and care for a sick child, but it is less so for men. A 2019 Australian survey of 6,000 parents found that 64 per cent of respondents agreed that ‘it is more acceptable for women to use family friendly work options than men.’[[7]](#footnote-7)
* The Australian Human Rights Commission found 27 per cent of fathers and partners have reported experiencing discrimination related to parental leave and return to work, despite taking very short periods of leave. Men are much more likely to have their request for flexibility denied (17.4 per cent of requests by men compared to 9.8 per cent for women). Male-dominated industries are also much more likely to employ full-time workers than part-time or casual workers.
* Long full-time working hours can disadvantage workers who have family and caring responsibilities, disability or health limitations, and affect employees’ health and work-life balance. In September 2022, 17 per cent of men report usually working in excess of 50 hours, compared to just 6 per cent of women,[[8]](#footnote-8) and when disaggregated by industry, average hours of full-time workers are highest in male-dominated industries like Mining; Agriculture, Fishing and Forestry; and Transport, Postal and Warehousing.[[9]](#footnote-9)

# Drivers of gender inequality

Research and stakeholder feedback to date suggest, but are not limited to, the following drivers of gender inequality:

* From a young age, young men receive social pressure through persistent cultural messages and social norms telling them how to be a ‘real man’, such as being strong, not showing vulnerability, always being in control and being the ‘breadwinners’ at home, while women should play the role of ‘caregivers’. Along with existing social structures and systems, this can make it difficult for fathers to be highly involved and engaged at home.
* Men’s priorities and aspirations in relation to work and care have changed significantly over recent decades, but employers have not kept up with these changes. Male dominated industries are much more likely to employ full-time workers than part-time or casual workers. Men with young children are far less likely to work flexibly – part-time, flexible working arrangement or from home – than women with young children.
* Men typically have poorer understanding of domestic and sexual violence than women, are more likely to define these narrowly, excuse the perpetrator and blame the victim. Many men agree to some extent with sexist and violence-supportive attitudes, and some have negative understandings of feminism and violence prevention.[[10]](#footnote-10)

# Discussion

We ask that you contribute your views on:

1. What aspect of Australian society impact men’s capacity to reach out for support, play a greater role at home, and/or take up parental leave?
2. What are the barriers and opportunities to achieving gender equality for men and boys?
3. How can we better promote the benefits of gender equality to men and boys?
4. What are the barriers and opportunities to increasing men’s involvement in unpaid care?
5. What can governments and employers do to shift cultural norms and encourage men to take up parental leave and flexible work?
6. What would encourage more men into the growing female-dominated care economy?
7. What are some concrete approaches that should be considered as part of this Strategy to engage men and boys in gender equality?
8. What locations or life stages (e.g. schools or workplaces) should we prioritise?
9. What will progress look like for men and boys and how can that be measured and evaluated?

We are mindful of the need to ensure the rich variety of lived experiences of people in Australia are captured during this consultation process. This includes hearing from those who:

* are living with disability;
* are First Nations people;
* are people who are part of the LGBTQIA+ community;
* are migrants and refugees;
* are people of colour;
* are living in regional and remote areas;
* are of different ages and life stages, education levels, migration status, and/or socio-economic background;
* have experience of trauma; as well as
* all other factors that may impact people’s experience of gender equality or inequality.

1. The Men’s Project and Flood M (2018) *The Man Box: A Study on Being a Young Man in Australia*, Jesuit Social Services: Melbourne. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The Global Institute for Women’s Leadership (2022) [*International Women’s Day 2022*](https://www.kcl.ac.uk/giwl/assets/iwd-survey-2022.pdf), released on March 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Our Watch (2019) [*Men in focus: unpacking masculinities and engaging men in the prevention of violence against women*](https://media-cdn.ourwatch.org.au/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2019/11/06231949/Men-in-focus-Evidence-review.pdf)*,* Our Watch, Melbourne, Australia, p 9. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rice S, Oliffe J, Seidler Z, Borschmann R, Pirkis J, Reavley N and Patton G (2021) ‘[Gender norms and the mental health of boys and young men](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpub/article/PIIS2468-2667(21)00138-9/fulltext)’, *The Lancet*, 6(8): E541-542. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Churchill B and Craig L (2022) ‘Men’s and women’s changing attitudes towards fatherhood and working fathers in Australia*’, Current Sociology*, 70(6), pp 943–963. DOI: [10.1177/00113921211012737](https://doi.org/10.1177/00113921211012737) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Peach L (2019) *National Working Families Report 2019*, Report by Parents at Work and APLEN, p 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) (2023) [*Labour force, Australia, Detailed, September 2022*](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia-detailed/sep-2022#hours-worked)*,* Table 10, accessed on 17 November 2022. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Risse L (2022) [*Submission No. 95*](https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=b48ad455-93c2-4806-8afb-b9d10cee2c0d&subId=722199)*,* Submission to Senate Select Committee on Work and Care, p 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Flood M, O’Donnell J, Brewin B and Myors B (2021) *Engaging Men: Reducing Resistance*

    *and Building Support*, Melbourne: Eastern Health, Eastern Domestic Violence Service (EDVOS),

    and Queensland University of Technology (QUT). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)