

# National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality: Consultation – Youth Roundtable Summary

14 DECEMBER 2022

*The government is developing a new* [National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality](https://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/national-strategy-achieve-gender-equality)*. The National 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.*

*Consultation with diverse stakeholders is key to developing a strategy that speaks to the experiences and ambitions of women and girls around Australia. The first phase of consultation took place in late 2022 and summaries of these discussions are shared to support further consultation and input into the development of the National Strategy.*

*This note summarises a consultation meeting held on 14 December 2022 focused on youth, which included representatives from this cohort. The consultation drew on a* [*discussion paper*](https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/2023-02/Roundtable-Discussion-Paper_Youth.docx) *prepared by the Office for Women. This summary note reflects the discussion amongst the participants. These are not the views of Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.*

### Summary of key points raised by participants:

* 1. Gender inequalities are embedded early in people’s lives and perpetuated throughout systems, culture and families. They are exacerbated through intersectional characteristics, such as being from regional and rural communities, ethnic and cultural backgrounds, family and religious traditions and beliefs, disability, gender diversity and sexuality.
	2. There is a strong role for governments in implementing gender responsive budgeting, modelling gender equality, and in delivering programs and funding assistance to support young people, particularly in health, education, employment, and housing services.
	3. There is a need for clearer, structurally embedded promotion of women role models and career opportunities to break down gender stereotypes. For example, the promotion of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs, and more broadly to ensure that everyone has opportunities to reshape cultural gender ‘norms’.

### Discussion at this roundtable focused on four questions.

### What are the drivers of gender inequality for youth in Australia? What are the barriers to achieve gender equality?

Participants discussed cultural norms and their reinforcement through systemic practices and beliefs as key barriers. Families play an important role in setting and supporting the norms, which are often influenced by religious and/or cultural beliefs. A key example is how families and/or communities can expect women to succeed, but also to raise children and manage home life, often without receiving any support. Participants highlighted generational expectations both of and from older women – especially around traditional caring roles.

Restrictive gendered practices and expectations were also identified in schooling and education, not only in examples like the portrayal of girls in children’s books but also the lack of encouragement (or active discouragement) in school environments for subject choices. This was influencing women and girls’ understanding and take-up of learning opportunities, with flow-on effects for further education and job choices. Examples were given of how there are still few girls there were in physics and higher mathematics classes and a strong perception that schools were not actively trying to change these perceptions. School and peer group cultures (for example ‘macho culture’), were also identified as limiting choices of boys in subjects like home economics or the creative subjects.

Access to essential services is a significant barrier for young people and that this has a disproportionate effect on young women – especially regarding health and mental health. An example given was the recent decision to reduce Medicare funded psychology services from 20 back to ten sessions and how this will impact young women disproportionately.

Young people are often excluded from decisions about essential services, healthcare, mental health care, social service payments and secure housing and how to make them effective, meaningful and useful for young people. The implications of low access to essential services damages health and wellbeing, educational outcomes and career prospects of young people, often with inequitable gendered impacts.

### What are some concrete policy options that the Government should consider to enable better outcomes for youth?

Participants identified better promotion and support for girls to take up educational and career opportunities. For example, participants suggested national programs to support women and girls in STEM, noting these needed to address the transition spaces from schools to tertiary to employment, and/or campaigns to change perceptions of ‘gendered’ industries for women and men.

There was support for greater data collection and analysis, and publicising the gendered outcomes of programs and policies across the full suite of government agencies and responsibilities. It was raised that all agencies must have gender analysis and evaluation, including the intersectional characteristics to move beyond ‘women’ being one homogenous grouping. There was acknowledgement of the complexity of government services and a need to work with the state and territory governments to overhaul social services, mental health and policing intersections to address gendered violence, sexual assault and harassment responsibility and actions.

Practical policy suggestions included developing dedicated support for women experiencing disadvantage and facing intersectional barriers to complete the degrees with higher paying job outcomes, reviewing Centrelink services and financial assistance, including lowering the age of independence to assist young women.

Participants wanted to see policies or programs developed that help young people to interact with government and non-government services. For example, to support young renters to secure safe housing, then advocate for better long term policies. Participants wanted governments to better engage with young people in the conversations and services that impact them. Participants noted that despite stereotypes, many young people are very engaged with government services and they want to be included in conversations (such as this one).

Participants reflected on deeply embedded stereotypes and practices, and gender impact within the health services, especially with regard to sexual and reproductive health and mental health support constraints. For example, hospitals that receive public funding should not be allowed to rule out carrying out sexual health treatments as this has a disproportionate effect on women and embeds damaging control and self-responsibility for reproductive health at the behest of a patriarchal system.

Participants also suggested that the government support better access to financial services, business mentoring and support, access to international education opportunities for women in non-traditional subjects, mandatory and equal childcare leave and pay.

### What will success look like and how can it be measured and evaluated?

Participants were clear that the government has a role to collect and disseminate statistical information about policies and programs outcomes through a gender lens. Participants expect governments to review surveys and data (for example, for outcomes of STEM) and clearly link policy development, implementation and evaluation in response to evidence in the data.

Suggested solutions included measuring and improving work life balance satisfaction, women in leadership roles, higher rates of women in Parliament and young women in politics, higher rates of young people’s home ownership, decreasing rates of women living in poverty, improving workplace gender balance in highly segregated industries, including gender studies in schools to undo stereotype learning, improvements in civil society inclusivity and kindness, and that Australia become the world leader in gender equality and use our influence to help other countries to achieve gender equality.