



NATIONAL
FOUNDATION
FOR AUSTRALIAN
WOMEN

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THE HIDDEN IMPACT OF THE GLOBAL FINANCIAL CRISIS

Responding to the report by The Australia Institute on the hidden impact on women of the Global Financial Crisis, Marie Coleman, Chair of the Social Policy Committee of the National Foundation for Australian Women said:

“How can it be that public policy design is so gender-blind that even such a major spending initiative as the Australian response to the Global Financial crisis has failed to take account of the needs of so many Australian women?”

“The TAI Report to women’s organisations clearly shows that when we have made representations to Government we’ve been right on the money, yet we see little appropriate response”, she added.” We represent more than 2 million women- what is the Government planning to do to respond to the massive hidden unemployment, as well as the underemployment of women?”

Women who are working, or who want to work, make choices based on their access to child care, notably access to before and after school and school vacation care (OSHC) - yet there is still no clear Federal policy response to meet this need. We have made representations, we will make them again.

The Prime Minister should refer both early childhood care and OSHC to the Productivity Commission, to report on the most efficient means of financing child care so as to enhance both productivity and women’s capacity for workforce attachment.

Women’s wages annually drift lower than wages for men in equivalent jobs- around 17% lower in 2009. Strategies to deal with the gender pay gap must be reviewed and renewed. The review of the Equal Opportunity in the Workplace Act is timely. The Government must respond to the majority recommendations of the Senate Review of the Sex Discrimination Act.

Women have markedly lower levels of retirement savings than men, yet we live longer and our need for security in old age has a longer duration. We have made submissions to the Henry Review of Australia’s Future Tax System. There has been media speculation that the Review might recommend a Government managed scheme for low income earners to buy a life-time top-up to the age pension- this would benefit women.

Women constitute a large proportion of the under-employed and the hidden unemployed- yet Stimulus related programs have not had any focus on reaching these women. Women who could benefit include some in rural and

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regional Australia, women from migrant and refugee backgrounds who will need support services and English language classes beyond those short courses for newly arrived refugees, and women with disabilities. These women tell us they want to work.

These women are not eligible for the re-training programs offered through the COAG Compact with the Unemployed- and the TAFE and VET sectors run training programs often too costly as user-pays programs for hidden unemployed or under-employed women.

Labour market programs must be designed and instituted that recognise and respond to women's life-work responsibilities and experiences. Why hasn't the Government invested some of the Stimulus money into services which would employ women (such as OSHC) as well as benefit women? Why hasn't the Building the Education Revolution money been applied to school facilities which could house early childhood care and OSHC services?

Low incomes, intermittent work-force attachment, poverty in retirement, inadequate access to care for school age children, inadequate opportunities for re-training- all things which could be addressed by a re-balancing of the current Stimulus spending packages.

We call on the Prime Minister and the Cabinet to review the Government response to the GFC, and then make changes to recognise and redress the issues for women identified in the TAI report.

The NFAW, with the support of the four national alliances of women's organisations, will next hold consultations in each state and territory to explore local views on needed changes, and we will report back to Government on our findings.

The commissioning of the TAI report was made possible by a grant from Security for Women. Consultation costs will be supported through NFAW, WomenSpeak, The National Rural Women's Coalition, and the Australian Women's Coalition.

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