

Women's Futures

Beyond 2005...

Directions for the
Office for Women

Mechanisms within the
government sector for
achieving gender equality

CONTEXT PAPER

Women's Futures
Reference Group



An Initiative of
Government
of South Australia

Women's Futures

Beyond 2005...

Directions for the Office for Women



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An Initiative of
**Government
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Women's Futures: New Directions for the Office for Women.

The Women's Futures Reference Group will be consulting with a range of peak bodies, representative groups and key individuals during April-June '05. This Context Paper explores what has been identified internationally as best practice in gender equality work in government systems and also provides a national snapshot of current approaches.

We are keen to hear your ideas on ways in which the current arrangements within the government sector for progressing gender equality for South Australian women can be strengthened, including the role that the Office for Women might play in the future.

I encourage you to use this Context Paper and the accompanying Summary Paper (available: <http://www.familiesandcommunities.sa.gov.au/>) as a stimulus to your thinking and look forward to hearing your ideas.

We will present our report to the Hon Stephanie Key MP, Minister for the Status of Women, by the end of June, including recommendations about how the State Government might further strengthen its focus on improving women's lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Maria Hagias', with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Maria Hagias

Chairperson

April 2005

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide a context for thinking and a starting point for discussion during the consultation about the best way forward for the South Australian Office for Women, in terms of an effective whole of government approach to the achievement of greater gender equality for women in the State, by:

- Giving a snapshot of the current arrangements in South Australia, in other parts of Australia, and in a handful of other countries identified by international experts as having best practice approaches to gender equality mechanisms within government
- Identifying common characteristics of arrangements across Australia as a basis for comparison, and highlighting factors regarded internationally as elements of best practice for consideration of their relevance and applicability to the South Australian context

Common elements of government mechanisms for gender equality¹ within Australia (and New Zealand)²

The following section briefly indicates the structural and functional characteristics of the gender equality machinery established by the state, territory and federal governments of Australia, and by New Zealand, to identify common features and differences. It focuses mainly on the central offices for women's policy and related services but touches also on their relationships with other key components of gender equality work.

Specialist women's policy offices similar to the South Australian Office for Women are located in every state and territory in Australia, as well as federally. These offices can be conceptualised as the central cogs in the wider government machinery for achieving gender equality, which generally includes some other key components which complement and enhance their work. The broad characteristics of these offices and related mechanisms are briefly summarised below, with any significant variations noted.

a) Role of the offices for women

In the Beijing Platform of Action, the United Nations defined the role of such offices as supporting government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspectives in all policy areas. In Australia, all of the specialist offices for women have a responsibility to advocate for and advise on policies and programs for progressing women's status, and many of them are also responsible for monitoring and reporting to the government, and sometimes to the parliament, on the implementation of the government's priorities (if these are clearly expressed and understood) across government agencies and departments. The role of some of the offices is confined to specialist policy advice, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation, while others are also responsible for service delivery, directly or indirectly, particularly through women's information and referral services.

There is disagreement about whether it is important to separate policy from service

delivery or whether an integration of the two is mutually enhancing, and good arguments are put forward for both models. For example, whereas Tasmania and WA argue for an integrated model so that the delivery of services informs policy advice and advocacy to government, New Zealand argues strongly for a clear and structural separation of strategic and policy advice from service delivery to women, not least because otherwise women in the wider community have unrealistic expectations of what the women's office can do for them. On the other hand, the policy offices in Queensland and Victoria which, as in New Zealand are separated from their information services, all give a high priority and much time and many resources to ensuring close and frequent contact with a wide range of non-government women's organisations and networks, rather than relying on their women's information services for this aspect of their work.

The South Australian Office for Women

exists to pursue the full and equal participation of women in the State, both socially and economically, by means of:

- Policy advice to government on the interests and concerns of South Australian women
- Innovative approaches to public policy using gender based analysis
- Statewide information and referral services through the Women's Information Service

The policy section of the Office for Women fulfills the first two of these functions and the Women's Information Service the third.

See Attachment 3 for information about current and recent examples of the Office for Women's work

b) Ministerial relationship

Every Australian state, the ACT, the Commonwealth and New Zealand have ministers with specialist responsibilities for women (in South Australia, the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Stephanie Key MP), and the offices for women in these locations report directly to these ministers as well as to the chief executives of the departments in which they are located. The Northern Territory

is the exception, where the reporting relationship is to the Chief Minister. In many parts of Australia, the women's office also relates to the premier/chief minister/prime minister, often through a ministerial or premier's advisory council.

Having these two points of access into the cabinet is generally seen as an advantage rather than a complication. The UN has always recommended that the specialist women's policy offices report to the highest level of the government (that is, the premier, chief minister or prime minister in the Australian context) and there are clearly advantages to this model in terms of status and influence across government. On the other hand, the responsibilities of heads of government often mean that they are unable to give the necessary time and ongoing attention to gender equality matters, and as chair of the cabinet their advocacy may be constrained. In addition, the ministers chosen to fulfil these specialist responsibilities are likely to be the members of cabinet with the most extensive knowledge, experience and commitment to the area.

The Australian and New Zealand ministers for women together form the Commonwealth/State Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women (MINCO) which meets annually to report against agreed national priorities, including preparing the national reports to the UN on progress in implementing the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW).³

In South Australia the Director of the Office for Women reports to both the Chief Executive of the Department for Families and Communities, Sue Vardon, and to the Minister for the Status of Women, the Hon Stephanie Key MP. The Premier's Council for Women provides advice and recommendations to both the Premier and the Minister for the Status of Women. There is inevitably some overlap in the roles and responsibilities of the Office and the Council. Attendance at the Council's meetings by the Director of the Office is intended to ensure that their priorities and activities are mutually enhancing and collaborative, and to avoid duplication and

strategic confusion. Some more formal clarification of the intersection between their roles and working relationships may be required.

See Attachments 3 & 4 for the role of the Office for Women and the Terms of Reference of the Premier's Council for Women as well as examples of their recent initiatives and achievements

Best practice gender equality work across government involves a complementary strategy of specialist women's policy and targeted services within the context of whole of government responsibility and accountability for their government's priorities in this area.

c) Location

Just over half of the women's policy offices are located in line departments, all but one of them responsible for families and communities as in SA, the others being in the office of the chief minister (ACT and NT) or the premier's department (NSW and Tasmania). In several cases the office has resided in each of these locations at different times. Both the NSW and the Commonwealth offices have been significantly reduced in size and structurally relocated in recent times, the office in NSW before these changes having been a separate department. The changes at the Commonwealth level are the most recent, including a change in name and location (from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to Families and Communities).

As with the reporting relationship into the cabinet, the UN has recommended that such offices be structurally located at the highest point of the government apparatus.⁴ There are clearly advantages in being co-located with the cabinet office and the staff of the head of the government in terms of information, access and influence, both formal and informal. It is also acknowledged that the backing of the head of government and location in their office or portfolio is often the only way to ensure access to top-level decision-making.⁵ Benefits are identified from each of these arrangements by different offices for women.

Common elements of government mechanisms for gender equality¹ within Australia (and New Zealand)²

For example, the New Zealand office advocates strongly for the advantages of being itself a Ministry for Women, close to the Cabinet Office. On the other hand, the Queensland office (previously in the Department of the Premier and now in a line department) argues that these advantages are outweighed by the more complex approval requirements, and other formalities, which slow down action and impede the effectiveness of their working relationships with other government agencies and departments. In New Zealand, Victoria and the ACT the offices for women are co-located with other so-called population agencies, such as youth, ageing, multicultural

located in the Minister's Office to provide administrative and executive officer support to the Premier's Council for Women.

d) Policy priorities/framework for action

Almost every state and territory has adopted a formal and public statement of its government's priority areas for women's advancement, often after extensive community consultation. In NSW the priorities were determined by the Government's election platform and in Queensland a rigorous process of needs analysis was undertaken – using the three criteria of women's disadvantage, women's under-representation, and women's needs – in concert with consultation. These statements of government priorities for gender equality work are variously called action or forward plans (ACT, NSW, Victoria, and NZ), a framework for action (NT), a directions statement (Queensland,) or a report card (WA). Many include performance indicators and formal reporting requirements to government as well as annual report cards to the wider community.

Tasmania and South Australia are the exceptions, with the Tasmanian office planning to develop and disseminate a strategic plan with benchmarks for gender equality priorities in the near future.

While these overarching statements of priorities, directions and commitments vary somewhat in status and intention, they are generally seen as powerful and significant documents and important reporting, evaluation and accountability mechanisms for the work of the whole government, not just of the women's policy offices. They are recognised as giving the specialist women's policy offices considerable leverage in terms of getting whole of government effort, resources and accountability in the implementation of their government's priorities for women.

Some of these overarching documents have been endorsed by cabinet, and are generally the means by which responsibilities are publicly and formally allocated through relevant ministers to various government agencies and departments with implementation

Almost every state and territory has adopted a formal and public statement of its government's priority areas for women's advancement, which are generally powerful and significant documents and important reporting, evaluation and accountability mechanisms for the work of the whole government.

and Indigenous affairs, and all of them report advantages from the shared nature of their cross-portfolio responsibilities and from enhanced opportunities to collaborate.

The South Australian Office for Women

has at various times and in earlier iterations been part of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and co-located in the State Administration Building on Victoria Square. Currently it is structurally part of the Department for Families and Communities although it is physically quite separate from other parts of that Department. The policy section of the Office is on the third floor and the Information Service is on the ground floor of Dame Roma Mitchell House, in the busy pedestrians thoroughfare to the Railway Station between Hindley Street and North Terrace. While the Manager of the Women's Information Service reports to the Director of the Office for Women, and attends staff meetings of the policy staff of the Office for Women, the two operate their specialist functions relatively separately. In addition, two staff from the Office for Women are currently

responsibilities. For example, responsibility for only a small number of specific actions rests with the offices for women in Victoria (4) and New Zealand (1), with responsibility for all of the rest allocated to line departments. In many places they are also important in communicating with the women's sector and the wider community about the government's efforts to progress gender equality, often in the form of a widely distributed report card. Some also have provision for ongoing updating and further development as existing issues evolve or new ones emerge over time.

In South Australia there is not at the moment an overarching whole of government formal statement, forward plan or framework for action identifying the Government's priorities for addressing issues for women. The South Australian Strategic Plan includes a large number of measurable targets, three of which relate specifically to women (regarding women's representation on government boards, committees, and in the Parliament). Two significant policies are the recently released Women's Health Policy⁶ and the women's safety strategy, *Our Commitment to Women's Safety in South Australia*.⁷

Attachment 1 on "Issues for Women in South Australia" identifies current work priorities of both the Office for Women and the Premier's Council for Women, in the context of international and national agendas, and gives some snapshot information and background data.

e) Approach to whole of government responsibility and accountability for implementing government gender equality priorities

The use of the term "mainstreaming" within the context of equality work has had a mixed history in Australia. Its earlier use in this country was generally suspected (often with good reasons) of being a cover for attempts to dismantle, de-fund and derail efforts to create greater equality of opportunity.

Internationally the term has widespread currency and is used to refer to the principles and processes which recognise that implementing the government's equality priorities (in this case for women) should be

the everyday responsibility of the entire government and its agencies, rather than marginal to their core work and principally left to the efforts of the small specialist units which are advocates for and experts in what is required. The UN and European proponents of contemporary approaches to mainstreaming consistently identify the crucial role of specialist women's policy units to underpin and guide the work of the mainstream agencies which carry the primary responsibility for achieving the outcomes identified in their government's statement of priorities for women's advancement.

While the various Australian and New Zealand offices for women recognise that the achievement of real and lasting improvements in the status of women require efforts across the entire government apparatus, the reporting, monitoring and accountability requirements for this to occur are not universally in place. Without the latter, and the political will or legislative base to ensure that they are taken seriously, the mainstreaming approach can degenerate into a rhetorical smokescreen for inactivity.

Nevertheless in some parts of Australia (and certainly in New Zealand) there are transparent and robust processes for the allocation of responsibilities across key government agencies and departments for taking action to implement the government's priorities for women, and explicit reporting, monitoring and accountability mechanisms at the highest levels. These typically involve agencies reporting to an inter-departmental committee composed of chief executives of relevant agencies as well as consolidated reports to the cabinet (or in one state, to the parliament) containing evaluation and analysis of agencies' performance against expectations and intentions.

In a couple of the states and territories, it is clear that the inter-departmental committee has also proved valuable in terms of information exchange on gender equality work and priorities, generating inter-agency collaboration on areas of overlapping responsibilities and building partnerships across government. Joint budget bids have proved to

Common elements of government mechanisms for gender equality¹ within Australia (and New Zealand)²

be an effective means to generate collaborative cross-agency programs in, for example, Queensland and Victoria. In New Zealand, agencies' budgets are framed around their annual commitments with respect to implementation of the Action Plan for New Zealand Women, identifying and costing their outputs for the coming year as part of the annual budget process, and subsequently reporting achievements to their own Ministers. The Ministry for Women then collates all agency specific information on achievements into a whole of government report to the Parliament.

There is widespread acknowledgement of the significance of gender disaggregated data to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of evidence based policy development, reporting and monitoring.

Other approaches to reporting and accountability include analysis by the women's offices of agencies' annual reports and the intention in a range of locations to introduce the use of gendered performance indicators for this purpose. There is widespread acknowledgement of the significance of gender disaggregated data to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of evidence based policy development, reporting and monitoring. Gender Impact Statements have been a required and integral part of all New Zealand cabinet papers for some time, supported by a well designed gender analysis framework and training in its use. At the time of its introduction, this process was seen as a large step forward in terms of whole of government awareness and accountability with respect to gender equality issues. However over time it has been in danger of degenerating into formulaic compliance, and in-depth and collaborative gender analysis work with specific agencies around key programs and priorities is currently yielding more meaningful outcomes for New Zealand.

In South Australia there is currently no overall statement of the Government's priorities for women (as noted above) and nor is there an overarching whole of government process to

measure achievements in terms of the specific policies and commitments which do exist. Previously a process was in place, introduced during the late 1980s, which required all government agencies to report on their programs and services for women through the budget process. At the time this was regarded as a significant mechanism supporting the Government's efforts to enhance the status of women and girls, however this practice ceased in 1994.

Existing South Australian reporting and monitoring strategies are listed below, as they may provide useful starting points for a more comprehensive framework for sector-wide responsibility and accountability for the Government's priorities for women:

- The Office for Women has access to Cabinet papers and can, and at times does, provide comment on their gender impact (as relevant) as well as occasionally advising other agencies on implications for women during the preparation of their Cabinet submissions (when invited to do so)
- The Premier's Council for Women has a widely flung responsibility (from its terms of reference) to monitor all government policies and programs related to women and to measure progress against set indicators, but there are currently no specific structures or processes in place to enable it to fulfill this comprehensive role except through the South Australian Strategic Plan processes outlined below
- Two very recent initiatives will make a significant contribution to enabling access to the gender disaggregated data and analytical tools which are necessary for effective reporting, monitoring and accountability of gender equality work across government:
 - the Office for Women has established and gained federal funding for a collaborative project⁸ to develop a gender impact assessment tool, aimed at integrating gender considerations into every stage of government policy development and analysis, and to be trialed by selected government agencies in both SA and WA
 - the Premier's Council for Women commissioned a report on the establishment

of the gender data on-line project to provide up-to-date gender disaggregated data on a wide range of indicators relevant to the quality of life of the South Australian community, and which is shortly to be implemented as a central government initiative intended to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of all government policy and program development, service delivery, reporting and monitoring of outcomes across the State

- Outcomes from the South Australian Strategic Plan are monitored by the Audit Committee and overseen and evaluated by the Implementation Committee, and as gender disaggregated data becomes available this will enable gender specific outcomes to be identified from a broad range of the Plan's priorities. Two members of the Premier's Council for Women are represented on the Audit Committee and the Council's Chair is a member of the four person Implementation Committee
- The State's innovative and relatively new bilateral and multilateral budget process, and related monitoring mechanisms (such as the establishment of inter-ministerial councils) offer a potentially useful approach to fund, allocate responsibilities, report, monitor, and evaluate cross-agency initiatives targeting priorities for women
- Specific government policies and other commitments often have their own reporting, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms, for example:
 - Implementation of the Women's Health Policy will be monitored by the Department for Health by means of annual reports by each Region and Health Service, an annual Departmental Report Card, and monitoring and evaluation of outcomes by the Women's Health Ministerial Advisory Council
 - The Women's Safety Strategy recognises that professional performance and accountability are critical to the success of the strategy and states that it will be regularly monitored and evaluated.⁹ Mechanisms for reporting, monitoring and evaluating outcomes from the strategy for women and children are currently under consideration

- The three women-specific targets in the South Australian Strategic Plan are monitored by regular reports (to the Office for Women and to the Premier's Council for Women) about the numbers and proportions of women who serve as members and chairs of government boards and committees

f) Relationships with other key players in gender equality work

While acknowledged as pivotal to gender equality machinery, experience throughout the world has shown that specialist women's policy offices have been the most effective when they work in concert with other components of an integrated overall gender equality system, with clearly defined responsibilities and relationships between its different component parts.

The other components which are common within Australia are as follows:

- **Women's information service**

Most parts of Australia have a telephone-based women's information service, although a couple of the smaller and less populated areas have shop-front information and resource centres in outer suburban and regional locations instead. The role and nature of these telephone-based services have changed and they are clearly still in a state of transition, not least because of developments in information and communication technologies which are changing women's access to information in fundamental ways. At the same time, the nature of information services across other parts of government has expanded dramatically in extent and sophistication since these women-specific services were first introduced.

As a result, in some places they are expected to be integrated with mainstream information provision, or have been outsourced with another service, co-funded on a contractual basis with other human service agencies, or transferred to a separate department. While these changes are

Common elements of government mechanisms for gender equality¹ within Australia (and New Zealand)²

generally accepted, recommended or foreshadowed as a positive development by the women's policy offices,¹⁰ and are certainly expected to increase the reach and scope of current services, in two states¹¹ the women's information service is seen as a crucial link to women's voices and concerns and so underpinning the policy role of the

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women's office.

South Australia has the telephone based Women's Information Service which is structurally part of the Office for Women although physically separate from it. Currently the Service relies on voluntary as well as paid staff and is open six days a week. It provides a telephone service and a co-located shop front, and free legal advice is available twice a week in conjunction with the Women's Legal Service. Free internet access and training and an interpreter service are also available.

See Attachment 3 for further information about the current activities and services provided by the Service

- **Anti-discrimination and equal opportunity commissions**

A framework of legislation is in place across Australia to eliminate discrimination and achieve equal opportunities (regardless of characteristics such as sex, race, age, marital status and sexuality) in key areas of public life (such as education, employment, accommodation, and the delivery of goods and services). The commissions established and the commissioners appointed to administer the relevant legislation and to receive, investigate and resolve complaints of discrimination often also have an educative and advocacy role. The

community education and complaint-handling functions give these commissions extensive reach into the community. And their relative independence from government means that they can and sometimes do exert a more powerful public voice than staff in the offices for women, who are constrained by their position within the public service.

They are significant "gender equality focal points" (in the sense outlined immediately below), and potentially powerful collaborators for offices for women's policy. However only the ACT women's policy office specifically referred to the significance of its relationship with the federal Human Rights Commission during the information gathering process for this paper.

In South Australia the Equal Opportunity Commission administers the SA Equal Opportunity Act and the federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act. While there have not been any collaborative projects or initiatives established jointly by the Office for Women and the Commission, they have from time to time worked together closely as members of specific purpose working groups (such as those established to review the State's legislation as it relates to same sex relationships and to recommend amendments to the Equal Opportunity Act more broadly). The SA Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs Commission, and its Women's Advisory Committee, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, the Social Inclusion Unit, and the Department for Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation work closely on many projects with the Office for Women. Relationships with Local Government, the Commonwealth Government, and with other states and territories are maintained through the Ministerial Women's Council and the related national meetings of women's officers.

- **Other gender focal points in government agencies and departments**

Internationally the term "gender focal points" is used to refer to other specialist officers or units in government agencies which provide sector-specific policy advice

about or services targeting women and girls. At various times such officers and units have existed within a range of government departments and authorities throughout Australia, including those responsible for school education, technical and vocational education, health, youth affairs, labour and industrial relations, multicultural and ethnic affairs, community welfare/families and communities, agriculture, recreation and sport, Indigenous affairs, and housing. Many of these also developed and maintained their own networks amongst women employees and service providers within their own sector at the state and territory level, and to some extent nationally and internationally.

While there are still a range of sector specific officers and units within government agencies across Australia, their numbers are fewer now (certainly than in the 1980s) and their relationships with the central women's policy units are uneven and in many places under-developed.

Currently **in South Australia** there is not an accurate picture of the number, locations and roles of other gender focal points across government agencies with which the Office for Women could form collaborative links. Nevertheless the Office for Women works in collaboration with a number of key people, groups and organisations. Communication, consultation and other outreach activities with Indigenous women throughout the State have been a high priority in recent years, and a number of statewide and regional gatherings have been coordinated by the Office. It also has relationships and conducts joint projects with the peak organisations of women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including newly arrived immigrants and refugees.

The following people and organisations were identified recently by the Office as key to its work:

- Women of South Australia
- The Minister for the Status of Women;
- Non-government and community organisations including advocacy groups, peak bodies and service organisations

- Government agencies (state, federal and local)
- Other women's offices and information services across Australia
- Premier's Council for Women
- Women in business

- **Women-specific service providers**

The providers of women-specific services within both government and non-government organisations and agencies are in a strong position to be well informed about and in touch with current, new and emerging issues for different groups of women in the wider community. These service providers often put into place networks across their areas of interest and services, to facilitate the exchange of information and support, as a basis for collaborative projects and action, to strengthen their advocacy voices and capacities, and to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of services to their clients.

In South Australia the Office for Women assisted with the establishment of a formal network of the range of organisations which provide services to women throughout the State, the Women's Services Network, which includes over 60 government and non-government service providers, peak bodies and regional groups.

- **High level women's advisory body**

Many parts of Australia have a ministerial or premier's women's advisory council made up of women who reflect but do not formally represent various dimensions of Australian women's diverse characteristics. One state also has a corresponding Indigenous women's council¹² and another has a multicultural women's forum, but not an overarching women's council.¹³

The Northern Territory conducts women's forums in concert with community cabinets; Victoria¹⁴ has an extensive and multi-layered program of community engagement and consultation consisting of women's forums for peak organisations on specific policy and service issues (usually in partnership with the relevant department or agency), regional and suburban round tables (at least ten a

Common elements of government mechanisms for gender equality¹ within Australia (and New Zealand)²

year), and the annual Premier's Women's Summit, all of which feed into the policy processes of the Government; and both Queensland and New Zealand design and conduct specific community engagement and consultation strategies as an integral part of all major policy and service initiatives rather than relying on the more generic advice available from a single advisory body.

Nevertheless experts note that these high level women's advisory councils can play a significant and complementary role, for example by commissioning research which might be too sensitive to be commissioned directly from within government; acting as a public voice on policy issues of concern; promoting broader community understanding of the value of women's offices and their work; providing an interface between women's policy units and the wider women's sector; and protecting women's policy machinery within government, especially powerful if they include members from a wide political spectrum.¹⁵

South Australia has the Premier's Council for Women which provides advice and recommendations directly to both the Premier and the Minister for the Status of Women. The membership of the Council has recently been renewed and expanded to increase the representation of Indigenous women and the cultural and linguistic diversity of South Australian women.

See Attachment 4 for further information about the Council's role, and some current and recent examples of its work

● Non-government women's sector

The wider women's movement, including the many organisations, networks and peak bodies through which its voice is expressed, is recognised worldwide as an essential part of the gender equality capacity of governments at national, regional and local levels. Without it there would have been (and is) no political will to address women's inequality of opportunity and the many ways in which our lives are disadvantaged in comparison to men's, either worldwide or within Australia, nor informed

understanding of the issues to be addressed to progress towards gender equality in all spheres of women's and men's lives.

Establishing a supportive and consultative relationship between the government and the women's movement was central to the work of early women's policy offices in Australia, one important outcome of which was that this opened up new avenues of consultation and gave women's previously silenced voices access to the policy process.¹⁶ This remains as true today as in the mid 1970s when the current international framework for gender equality work was being articulated and established.

Although the significance of this relationship is recognised throughout Australia, throughout the last decade the federal Government has been increasingly distrustful of non-government organisations and has de-funded those it regards as outside the mainstream or critical of government.¹⁷ This has included many influential national women's organisations, such as the long-standing Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), which have been financially disabled and derailed organisationally by these moves.¹⁸ Efforts to build the capacity and influence of women's organisations at the state and territory level assume an even greater significance in this context.

Each of the offices for women's policy directs some attention and effort towards finding effective ways to consult, engage and build the capacity of the wider women's movement, in all of its diversity. Most of the women's advisory councils also conduct their own consultative processes, albeit limited in extent and nature given the part-time and voluntary nature of their membership. Women's forums in combination with community cabinets, targeted community engagement strategies and using community grants programs to build the capacity of women's community groups, non-government organisations and networks are key strategies used by the New Zealand office and in those Australian states¹⁹ which give a high priority to this aspect of their role. For example, after its recent review, the Western Australian office

was restructured into two teams, one of which is dedicated to Community Engagement and the other to Policy and Planning.

South Australia has a very large number of active and engaged non-government women's organisations, many of them represented in peak bodies and part of wider state, national and international networks. The State also has a long although largely unrecorded history of (generally unsupported) activism and intervention by Indigenous women targeting the multitude of long neglected issues which affect the Indigenous community. Similarly there are some very active and effective organisations established by and working with newly arrived immigrant and refugee women. The Office for Women endeavours to maintain relationships with this wider women's community through its participation in their meetings and events, and by coordinating activities and publicity for International Women's Day each year.

- **Women in trade unions**

Many trade unions have women's officers responsible for improving women's working conditions, including with respect to work-life balance issues, and often also for changing the structures and culture of their unions to increase the numbers and impact of their women members. Women teachers unions throughout Australia appointed specialist women's officers at the same time and within the same international context as those appointed by our governments, and their work over the last three decades has made a significant contribution to progress towards equal employment opportunities for women teachers and increased educational opportunities and outcomes for their students. Similar developments followed soon after in other large public sector unions which cover employment areas in which women predominate, and in state and territory peak union bodies (such as SA Unions, previously the UTLC).

In South Australia a network of women in trade unions was established in the early 1980s to support collaboration between

women's officers and women activists in the trade union movement. Large public sector unions (eg the PSA and the AEU) have officers with responsibility for women members' issues although the only dedicated specialist women's officer remaining is in the teachers' union, and the peak union body, SA Unions, has a Women's Standing Committee.

- **Business and professional women**

There are a range of industry specific networks of professional women which operate on a national and sometimes international level, as well as peak bodies of women in business and at senior levels of private companies.

The **South Australian** Office for Women participates in the local networks which have been established by women in particular professions and industries

- **Research community**

Since their establishment in the second half of the 1970s, research to uncover new understandings of the causes, impact and remedies to women's inequality has been seen as an important part of the role of the specialist offices for women. More recently, some states have used the expertise of academics in universities and other researchers to undertake this work, on contract for specific projects or by means of other more enduring partnership arrangements. For example, the Queensland office has established a think tank of academics who contribute to the identification and analysis of new and emerging issues. Feminist academics are also recognised as part of the wider community engagement work referred to above, and as a source of expertise and analysis particularly with respect to developments internationally.

In South Australia the Office for Women and the Premier's Council have established working relationships with key academics and centres in the three universities, occasionally commissioning research and other significant projects, and collaborating on issues of joint interest.

International best practice in gender equality within government

This section identifies key dimensions of international best practice in gender equality machinery within government, to inform consideration of the way forward in the South Australian context.

As defined by the Beijing Platform of Action, the main role of centralised gender equality machinery within government is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas (para. 201), building equality **in** as a mainstream activity rather than trying to add it **on** later. The strategy of gender mainstreaming is supported not only by the United Nations, but by the European Union, the Commonwealth Secretariat,²⁰ the Council of Europe and many governments throughout the world as an effective approach to whole of government action to remove the causes and remedy the outcomes of gender inequality. The European Commission has provided funding to support gender mainstreaming projects across Europe, many of them recognised as achieving best practice outcomes.

The concept of gender mainstreaming was not new when it was formally adopted by the Beijing Platform at the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995, but built upon years of experience in various places to bring gender perspectives to the centre of attention in government policies and programs. Many lessons and insights have been gained from this international gender equality work, as briefly summarised below.

See Attachment 2 for further information about the history and global context of gender equality work

a) Some international examples of best practice in whole of government gender equality work

A number of countries are recognised as having put into place approaches to gender equality work across government which exemplify best practice (as identified by the Beijing Platform, other UN commentary, and the most recent international expert opinion); that is, a complementary strategy of specialist women's policy and targeted services within

the context of whole-of-government responsibility and accountability for their government's priorities for women. The Nordic countries and Canada are consistently identified as leading examples of systematic, coordinated and transparent mainstreaming of gender equality work across government, and between them they display all of the elements which are required to deep-seated and sustainable progress towards greater gender equality in public and private life. Also Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and South Africa each offer interesting elements of best practice, as does New Zealand.

b) Maximising effectiveness of whole of government gender equality work

Some of the key elements identified internationally as characterising best practice in gender equality work within government are:

1. A clear statement of the government's priorities for gender equality
2. Political leadership and commitment
3. Legislative, parliamentary and other formal sanctions
4. Robust reporting, monitoring and accountability framework
5. Clarity of roles and coordinating structures
6. Consultation, participation and engagement

Each of these elements of international best practice are discussed briefly below.

● Clear statement of the government's priorities for gender equality

In the words of the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women "A lesson of experience is that capacity to work on gender issues does not materialise 'automatically.' Rather (a government) must develop a plan or programme that sets realistic targets, specifies accountability and mobilises the appropriate levels of support."²¹

For the whole of the government apparatus to take genuine responsibility for and make

ongoing and energetic efforts to progress its government's gender equality priorities, it is firstly necessary for that government to make a clear statement of those priorities, also communicating its own political will and commitment unambiguously. International experts argue that for mainstreaming to be thoroughly and genuinely embraced across government, there must be a formal requirement that this occur, either through government policy requirements or legislative sanctions.²²

Thus every one of the countries identified as exhibiting best practice in its gender equality work has a high level, cabinet endorsed action plan or formal framework document which specifies its gender equality priorities, identifies actions and programs to achieve these, allocates responsibilities, and specifies targets, performance indicators and timelines for the work.²³

- **Political leadership and commitment**

Best practice governments show the seriousness of their intentions and commitment by communicating and regularly re-stating their gender equality priorities in a consistent, unambiguous, and public way. The conclusion of the groundbreaking Governance of Scotland Forum on lessons in mainstreaming equal opportunities, was that explicit, high profile and sustained political support is perhaps the single most important variable in the success or failure of (gender) mainstreaming.²⁴ Australia's report to the recent UN Expert Group Meeting concluded that only the imprimatur of the head of government is likely to overturn entrenched norms enabling new cross-government approaches to gender equality activities across government.²⁵

Political leadership, commitment and high level support within the government have been identified as underpinning the success of gender equality mainstreaming in Scotland, in Canada, and in the Canadian province of British Columbia, particularly in terms of holding line ministries accountable

for the implementation of their government's gender equality goals.²⁶ This high level political leadership ensures that the work of the specialist gender equality staff is taken seriously across government and also opens up opportunities for collaboration with other parts of the government.

For the whole of the government apparatus to take genuine responsibility for and make ongoing and energetic efforts to progress its government's gender equality priorities, it is firstly necessary for that government to make a clear statement of those priorities, also communicating its own political will and commitment unambiguously.

The so-called "Nordic equality paradox" is relevant here.²⁷ Although equality work is well advanced in the Nordic countries and their governments are proud of their international leadership in this area, these very achievements have led to complacency in some quarters and an excuse for not continuing or strengthening equality work. Overt political leadership and commitment at the highest levels of government is recognised as crucial in counteracting this complacency and the resulting inertia, and in regenerating the activity required for sustaining gains and long term progress in meeting gender equality objectives.

- **Legislative, parliamentary and other formal sanctions**

Many governments underline the seriousness of their gender equality intentions and policy priorities by putting in place domestic legislative sanctions, through reference to their international obligations, and by means of parliamentary structures and procedures.

For example, the constitution of post-apartheid South Africa makes explicit statements guaranteeing equality for women in a whole series of dimensions of public and private life, including within the

International best practice in gender equality within government

home and religion. And devolution in the United Kingdom has offered the opportunity for the governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales to formally express their commitment to equal opportunity principles

Explicit, high profile and sustained political support is perhaps the single most important variable in the success or failure of (gender) mainstreaming.

and practices (with respect to gender and other specified grounds) as fundamental to their newly self-governing communities. Thus the *Northern Ireland Act 1998* requires public authorities to promote equal opportunities through their work, specifies timelines and procedures, and provides detailed guidelines and instructions for doing so.²⁸ Similarly the *Scotland Act 1998* defines equal opportunities as one of four key principles which directed the drafting of the Standing Orders and Procedures for the new Scottish Parliament. A whole series of practical initiatives flow from this, including family friendly sitting hours and other processes in the Parliament, the establishment of an Equal Opportunities Committee within the Parliament (one of eight mandatory committees), and the requirement that all Executive Bills are accompanied by an equal opportunities' impact statement.²⁹ Some countries, such as the Netherlands, have adopted legislation which requires a report to their own parliaments on the implementation of CEDAW prior to its periodic submission to the UN.³⁰ In Sweden all parliamentary enquiries have a mandate to examine the gender implications of proposals³¹ and the city of San Francisco has built its own local mainstreaming program around the CEDAW.³²

As well as these formal government policy requirements and legislative sanctions, the European Union and some countries (in addition to Scotland) have established

parliamentary standing committees on gender equality or equal opportunity over the last decade. As reported at the UN Experts Meeting held in Rome late last year, these have had a significant impact in terms of agenda setting on equality issues and 'equality proofing' of legislative proposals, using such means as commissioning research on the status of women (including particular populations of women) in various areas of economic and social life; promoting greater representation of women in decision making within parliaments, executives, and ministerially appointed public bodies and advisory committees; and by putting otherwise neglected issues (such as domestic violence and trafficking of women and children) onto the political agenda.³³

In South Africa the national Parliament has established a Joint Monitoring Committee on the Quality of Life and the Status of Women. And the cabinet has established a Cabinet Cluster Committee which is responsible for ensuring the implementation of the National Gender Policy, by making policy and legislative recommendations to cabinet, monitoring implementation achievements by all government sectors, analysis of the budget in terms of gender impact, and asserting ministerial accountability for the Government's gender equality priorities.³⁴ The parliaments of some countries, states and provinces have cross-party or intra-party caucuses of women parliamentarians which work to promote gender equality in and through the parliament, by scrutinising parliamentary procedures, structures and matters under debate.³⁵

Finally, as in Australia, many countries have also established independent commissions and statutory authorities with legislated powers and responsibilities for equal opportunities and gender equality, and these are identified by the Commonwealth Secretariat as one of the key components of the structures required to drive, coordinate and deliver gender mainstreaming.

- **Robust reporting, monitoring and accountability framework**

Robust accountability mechanisms are consistently identified as a crucial component of effective gender mainstreaming, for example by the Council of Europe Expert Group and the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women.³⁶ As discussed at last year's UN Expert Group meeting, experience internationally indicates that ensuring the required level of accountability across the different layers and sectors of government remains a pivotal challenge, despite political will and commitment. In addition to a clear statement of the government's priorities for gender equality, underpinned by overt political will and commitment from the highest levels, systematic reporting, monitoring, evaluation and effective accountability processes are required if these priorities are to be energetically implemented across the whole of the government apparatus.

The mechanisms in place in Canada have been identified by international experts as essential to the effectiveness of that Government's gender mainstreaming work. In South Africa, the national Office of the Status of Women conducts an Annual Gender Audit to monitor progress by government agencies in implementing the responsibilities allocated to them by the *National Gender Policy*.

Relevant and reliable data, disaggregated by gender, is an essential prerequisite to monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of gender equality work, for formulating relevant and effective policies and programs, and for determining priorities for future attention. Systematic monitoring and reporting of gender equality efforts across government, and more widely, requires the establishment of outcome indicators which are themselves reliant upon the accuracy and availability of gender-disaggregated data.

Information on the relative position of men and women, and of the impact on them of government policies and programs, is crucial to gender equality work – to give an accurate picture of current realities and to identify appropriate action and programs. Last year's UN Expert Group Meeting recommended that relationships be established between academic institutions and national mechanisms for gender equality for this reason. It also reported that

Robust accountability mechanisms are consistently identified as a crucial component of effective gender mainstreaming, for example by the Council of Europe Expert Group and the UN Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women

many countries now publish an annual collection of statistical information on women and men, and that research on women and gender issues has increased in many places. This includes initiatives by government gender equality offices to improve the availability of data disaggregated by gender, to develop statistical indicators, and to support gender-related research in collaboration with central statistical offices and research institutions.³⁷

In Canada, policy-relevant research is at the heart of the government's gender equality mainstreaming strategy:

*All stages of the gender-based analysis process – from the development and analysis of policy options and recommendations of indicators used in the policy evaluation – depend upon the availability and accessibility of timely, policy-relevant research.*³⁸

and the role of the national statistics office in compiling and disseminating gender-disaggregated data is crucial in this work. Canada (and its province of British Columbia) are also regarded as pioneers in the development and use of gender sensitive

International best practice in gender equality within government

analytical tools, such as the national *Gender-based Analysis* and provincial *Gender Lens*, a significant element of gender mainstreaming best practice in that country.

Many countries use the budget process to analyse both inputs and outcomes of gender equality work across government in meeting their government's priorities.

In addition to the national approaches to reporting and accountability mentioned above, many countries use the budget process to analyse both inputs and outcomes of gender equality work across government in meeting their government's priorities. Gender budget processes were introduced and used by Australian governments during the 1980s and 1990s, with South Australia a pioneer in the introduction of this approach to gender equality work within government. Although it has all but disappeared within Australia, international experts in the area have recently identified over fifty gender budget initiatives at various levels of government worldwide.³⁹ While some of these replicate earlier approaches in relatively simple analysis and quantification of annual budget allocations, others show increasing sophistication in moving towards gender-responsive budget work. These approaches use a range of processes and analytical tools, to influence budget and program planning, and to determine input allocations against identified gender equality priorities, as well as analysing outputs and outcomes against agreed targets.⁴⁰

- **Clarity of roles and coordinating structures**

Having identified the range of gender equality structures and processes which are in place in various countries, last year's UN Expert Group Meeting concluded that an essential precondition for success is good collaboration and coordination amongst

these different mechanisms. Best practice lessons drawn by international experts from the Canadian and Nordic gender mainstreaming case studies, underline the significance of integrated strategies and systems for initiating, coordinating and monitoring equality work across government structures and agencies. Clarity of roles and relationships between the different components of the overall gender equality machinery within government is also important, including between mainstream government planning and budget processes and gender structures.

Many national machineries still have very unclear mandates and are uncertain about their functions, and the UN has identified this lack of clarity and structural and communication problems within and among government agencies as significant barriers to the effectiveness of national gender equality machineries.⁴¹ These inhibit the development of collaboration and support between different gender equality structures, undermining their overall effectiveness and preventing the synergies which have been identified internationally as an element of best practice.

In contrast, South Africa's *National Gender Policy* outlines with clarity and precision both the different components of the national gender equality machinery and relationships between them. The resulting integrated package of structures (located at various levels of state, civil society, and within statutory bodies) together demonstrate best practice in terms of the inter-relationship between different components.

- **Consultation, participation and engagement**

Effective consultative, participatory and engagement mechanisms with the wider women's movement and non-government women's organisations are another critical element of best practice in gender equality work. Collaboration between government mechanisms and women's groups and organisations has been identified as an

element of best practice internationally. And capacity building work with non-government partners is recognised by the UN as crucial if effective gender equality is to be sustained over the long-term.

For example, last year's UN Expert Group Meeting recommended that government gender equality structures should provide technical and financial support to empower non-government women's organisations and networks. Recognising that women's participation in decision-making is generally lower than men's, the UN's Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women recommends that specific strategies be put into place to ensure that women's voices are heard. The lessons learnt from the Nordic and Canadian examples of best practice in gender mainstreaming include the need for consultative fora and other innovative tools to involve women in gender equality policy development.

National reports to the 2004 UN Expert Group Meeting make it clear that experiences in building collaborative relationships between government gender equality offices and non-government women's organisations have varied. In some countries effective alliances and ongoing collaboration have been put into place, achieving a successful strategy of inside-outside advocacy to promote the gender equality agenda and women's empowerment. Several countries reported that their governments had included members of non-government women's organisations on the bodies they have established for monitoring and evaluating the outcomes of gender equality work, and others that such organisations have set up their own monitoring bodies and processes. In many places, developments in information and communication technologies are being used to explore and open up new and innovative opportunities for more effective communication, consultation, networking and engagement with women and women's organisations, and also as the basis for new

forms and increased collaboration between them. In other countries, poor relationships between government gender equality mechanisms and women's organisations in civil society have resulted in competition for scarce resources and duplication of effort, undermining their effectiveness, credibility and impact on both sides.

Clarity of roles and relationships between the different components of the overall gender equality machinery within government is also important, including between mainstream government planning and budget processes and gender structures.

Communication and consultation with women's groups in the Nordic countries and in Canada has been identified as crucial for the effectiveness of their gender equality efforts within government. Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and South Africa have also given significant emphasis to consultation and engagement processes, which has strengthened the impact and effectiveness of their gender equality structures within government.

The South African Office of the Status of Women maintains a regular program of extensive consultation with the wide and

Capacity building work with non-government partners is recognised by the UN as crucial if effective gender equality is to be sustained over the long-term

politically complex array of women's groups in that country, and publishes information annually about where and when groups can engage with this process. The women's movement in Northern Ireland is recognised as having made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming in government. The *Northern Ireland Act* specifies consultation as an integral part of

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its framework for gender mainstreaming, building on a strong tradition and history of community participation in that country. Experts have identified an advanced exchange of expertise between non-government groups and the policy

In some countries effective alliances and ongoing collaboration have been put into place, achieving a successful strategy of inside-outside advocacy to promote the gender equality agenda

administration as one of the many beneficial outcomes of this partnership between Irish civic society and its Government.⁴² And in both Scotland and Wales women's community organisations have been developed into significant consultative bodies to their Parliament and Assembly respectively.⁴³

Canada's well developed network of over 1,500 women's organisations plays a significant role in determining local, regional and national agendas for gender equality work within government, an important plank of effective gender mainstreaming in the Canadian context. Women's organisations contribute actively and regularly to consultations on a range of matters, ensuring that the Government of Canada is well informed about their concerns and ideas about public policy matters which affect their lives. This

includes participation in the annual public consultations on the federal budget. The central government office for women includes a network of regional staff who maintain regular contact with women's groups throughout Canada. This office also provides financial and administrative support to a wide range of community, regional, provincial and national women's organisations through its extensive grants program. The non-monetary support given to Canadian women's organisations is also significant in terms of sharing information on best practice, support for organisational development, direct involvement in the development and implementation of projects, and help with identifying alternative sources of finance. These empowerment strategies strengthen the voices and effectiveness of women's organisations and networks across Canada, and contribute significantly to the outcomes of gender equality and engagement work within government. This active interaction with and empowerment of the wider women's movement is also recognised as making an important contribution to gender-based analysis in Canada, as it has resulted in increased engagement with and more informed contribution to the policy consultations conducted by the government's gender equality machinery. Similarly it has increased recognition and respect within government circles for the expertise available from the women's community.

Conclusion

The consultation process offers the opportunity for consideration of whether the elements of international best practice outlined above are relevant to the South Australian context, and if so, which ones are currently in evidence and which could usefully be put into place or strengthened.

Attachment 1: Issues for Women in South Australia

Issues identified internationally

As a signatory to *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW)* Australia is required to report on implementation action to the United Nations.

The Beijing Platform for Action identified the following key areas for specific attention: Women and Poverty; Education and Training of Women; Women and Health; Violence against Women; Women and Armed Conflict; Women and the Economy; and Women in Power and Decision Making.

Issues identified at the national level

The Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women (MINCO) offers Ministers for Women an opportunity for a coordinated approach in identifying and addressing priority issues for women.

Currently attention is being given to the following key areas: Women's Economic Status; Women's Safety, Health and Well-being; Women's Leadership; and Women and the Marketplace. These themes are also highlighted in the Indigenous Women's National Action Plan.

South Australian focus on issues for women

Informed by the broader national and international agendas mentioned above, the Office for Women has grouped the current issues for South Australian women into four areas:

- Women's Safety, Health and Wellbeing
- Indigenous Women's Issues
- Women's Economic Status
- Women's Leadership

In addition, the Premier's Council for Women has identified Women and Work and Women and Poverty as its key priority areas for ongoing action.

a) Women's Safety and Health and Wellbeing

- Domestic violence
- Rape and sexual assault
- Services for survivors of violence, including housing, health care, legal etc
- Women's health services
- Culturally appropriate services for women of diverse backgrounds
- Special intersectional issues around safety, health and wellbeing eg. specific issues for Aboriginal women, women with disabilities, older women, young women and girls

Women's Health Policy

The newly released South Australian Women's Health Policy highlights the importance of women's access to health services and the need to reduce health inequalities, including improving the health and participation in the health system of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Multiple factors contribute to the health of women, including physical, mental, social and emotional factors. Further to nationally identified health priorities, the policy states that women have consistently raised a number of important health issues and these include: obesity, mobility and physical activity, body image and eating issues, and smoking and drug and alcohol issues.

Women's Safety Strategy

The South Australian women's safety strategy identifies the following priorities for the next five years: prevention of violence against women, service provision, legal protection, and performance (incorporating monitoring and evaluation).

Violence against women can consist of a range of forms, which may also co-exist: psychological and emotional violence, physical violence, sexual violence, social abuse, and economic abuse. Evidence supporting the development of the safety strategy shows that

Attachment 1: Issues for Women in South Australia

women predominantly experience domestic and sexual violence, women's experiences of violence are often unreported or under reported, domestic violence is predominantly carried out by men, the nature and impact of men's violence is different to that of women's violence, and children are exposed to domestic and sexual violence.⁴⁴

The safety strategy's approach for responding to Indigenous family violence is informed by the *Rekindling Family Relationships: Framework for Action 2001-2006*⁴⁵ which identifies the need for a whole of government approach to achieving the following commitments: a recognition of community ownership of family violence strategies; commitment to work in partnership with Indigenous communities to restore family and community wellbeing; commitment to assist Indigenous communities to develop and implement local Action Plans to promote family harmony; and a commitment to a set of principles and processes necessary to reduce the incidence of family violence.

● Some Background Statistics/Information

- 60% of Australian women who are murdered are murdered by an intimate partner⁴⁶
- The victims of offences recorded by police in 2001 included 581 female victims of rape (88%), 525 female victims of indecent assault (80%) and 153 female victims of unlawful sexual intercourse 80%⁴⁷
- Violence against women has been estimated to cost the Australian community \$8.1 billion annually⁴⁸
- Sexual assault affects approximately one in five Australian adult women throughout their lifetimes⁴⁹
- Domestic Violence is by far the greatest health risk for women in Australia aged between 15 and 44, and causes more ill health than well known risks to health such as high cholesterol or illicit drugs.⁵⁰

b) Indigenous Women's Issues

Aboriginal people are the most disadvantaged group in our community⁵¹ and the particular problems faced by Aboriginal women require concerted attention.

In 2001 MINCO made a commitment to work directly with Indigenous women to develop a National Action Plan that reflected Indigenous women's priorities. The resulting National Action Plan was endorsed by MINCO in 2003, involving a commitment to a national approach to improving outcomes in the areas of leadership, safety and economic independence, as well as associated funding.

The related **South Australian Mimiinees Action Plan** identifies three priority action areas for Aboriginal women: women and leadership, women and safety, and women and economic status.

It is currently being updated by the Aboriginal Women's Policy Officer in the Office for Women, informed by outcomes of the 2003 Spear Creek Gathering (which recommended an Aboriginal Women's Advisory Structure to Government) and the outcomes of the 2004 Nuttbush Retreat Gathering (which identified 46 key issues facing Aboriginal women). Currently a series of meetings of Aboriginal women are being held across the State to identify further issues and to identify participants in the 2005 State Aboriginal Women's Gathering.

● Some Background Statistics/Information

- Indigenous women are ten times more likely to be murdered and 45 times more likely to experience family violence than non-Indigenous women⁵²
- South Australia has the lowest estimated Indigenous life expectancy at birth, 61.9 years for women and 55.2 years for men⁵³ resulting in approximately 20 years less estimated life expectancy for Indigenous peoples as compared to the total population⁵⁴

- The Indigenous unemployment rate for the Adelaide metropolitan area is 22.2% compared with 7.4% for the non-Indigenous population⁵⁵
- 46% of Indigenous females discouraged from labour force participation report child care and other family responsibilities as the major reason for not looking for work (national figures)⁵⁶
- In 1992, the women's overall imprisonment rate in South Australia was 13.8 compared with 275.7 for Indigenous women whose imprisonment rate outnumbered the total male imprisonment rate⁵⁷

c) Women's Economic Status

Women's participation in the labour market continues to be disadvantaged in comparison to men's along a number of key dimensions: they are concentrated in work areas characterised by low pay, high rates of casual and part-time work, and are under-represented at the more senior levels of all forms of organisations, in the public as well as the private sphere. The interaction between women's participation in the paid workforce and their unequal burden of unpaid responsibilities in the home and community is a major cause of their labour market disadvantage. Key priority areas identified by the Office for Women include:

- Work/life balance including availability of affordable childcare, involvement of men in domestic and family responsibilities, maternity/parental leave provisions, cultural issues (including men's limited uptake of existing parenting/carer's leave)
- Low levels of superannuation
- Gender pay gap
- Casual and precarious employment
- Under-representation of women in senior positions

Some groups may be more at risk of poverty, including Indigenous peoples, carers, people with disabilities and mental illness, people with

chronic medical conditions, people from non-English speaking backgrounds and single parents⁵⁸.

● Some background information

- 73% of all South Australian part-time workers are women⁵⁹
- Women in full-time employment earned an average of 85.3% of men's full-time earnings in 2003; and women's total take home earnings compared to men's has dropped from 68.2% to 67.9% between 1993 and 2003⁶⁰
- Women are concentrated in occupational categories and industries which attract the lowest rates of pay, are often considered unskilled or low skilled in nature and are not easily linked with 'productivity gains' for wage bargaining purposes⁶¹
- 71% of primary carers are women⁶²
 - Women give three times as much of their time to child care than men
 - Fathers sacrifice less of their leisure than mothers do, helping rather than taking full responsibility for childcare⁶³
 - Family carers have been estimated to contribute \$19.3 billion annually to the national economy, with carers being the major providers of community care services (70%)
 - Many carers are amongst the poorest and most disadvantaged in our community.⁶⁴
- 20% of women have disabilities and 51% of women with a disability earned less than \$200 per week compared to 36% of men with a disability (in 1996)⁶⁵.
- Sole parents have the highest poverty rate of any group in Australia⁶⁶
 - Female headed sole parent families with children under 15 were 22.2% of all South Australian families with children aged under 15 (as compared with 3.0% of sole father fathers).

Attachment 1: Issues for Women in South Australia

- South Australia has the second highest proportion of sole parent families nationally⁶⁷
- Between 1986 and 2001, the number of one-parent families in Australia increased by 53% compared to only 3% increase in the number of couple families with children. At the same time there has also been an increase in the percentage of child free couples from 28% to 35.7% of all families.⁶⁸
- Progress with respect to the representation of women at management levels of South Australian organisations is glacial, with the change between the 1996 and 2001 Census just 0.1% in terms of the proportion of Managers and Administrators who were women (from 27.1% to 27.2%)
- Only six of 184 top positions in the State's corporate leadership (positions that yield the most influence and policy making power) were held by women, or 3.2%
- Women are 32% of the members of the state Parliament

In no society do women enjoy the same opportunities as men nor does any society treat its women as well as its men.

UNDP report 1995

d) Women's Leadership

- **Women in leadership positions, including on boards and committees and within Parliament**

The South Australian Strategic Plan includes three state-wide women in leadership targets:

- Increase the number of women on all State Government boards and committees to 50% on average by 2006
- Have 50% on average of State Government boards and committees chaired by women by 2008
- Increase the number of female members of Parliament to 50% within 10 years

- **Some Background Statistics/ Information:**⁶⁹

- Women are 32% of the members of government boards
- Women hold 28% of senior public service positions
- Women comprise approximately 26% of local government members

Removing gender inequality has nothing to do with national income ...rather it requires firm political commitment, not enormous financial wealth.

UNDP report 1995

Attachment 2: Global context

The basis for governments to establish specialist offices for the advancement of women was firmly established at the United Nation's First World Conference on Women, during the World Decade for Women (1976-1985) including three further UN World Conferences on Women (1980, 1985 and 1995), and most recently by the UN Expert Group Meeting on "The Role of National Mechanisms in Promoting Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women" held late last year.

The international context also includes the special report of the UN Human Development Program (UNDP) on the position of the world's women, published to coincide with the UN World Conference on Women in Beijing. This report amassed extensive data about the relative position of men and women on a range of factors accepted as the prerequisites for human dignity and the basic resources needed to develop human capabilities. It also documented and ranked the gender gap in access to these significant dimensions of life for every country in the world for which comparable data was available.⁷⁰ The Report's two main conclusions, and ones which have been reiterated in a series of UNDP Reports since then are, firstly, in no society do women enjoy the same opportunities as men nor does any society treat its women as well as its men; and secondly removing gender inequality has nothing to do with national income nor does the achievement of gender equality depend on the income level of a society rather, it requires firm political commitment, not enormous financial wealth.⁷¹

Governments at national, state and provincial levels worldwide have responded to this international context by establishing specialist offices, bureaus, ministries and departments for the advancement of women in their communities. In brief, and as summarised in the report of last year's Expert Group Meeting:⁷²

- The term "machinery for the advancement of women" is used internationally to refer to the overall mechanisms (usually central policy units and related structures and processes) established by governments to promote and support the achievement of gender equality,

including through commitments made in global processes such as the four world conferences on women (1975-1995);

- The UN's First World Conference identified the need for such national machinery to advocate for attention to women's advancement, to provide policy direction, to undertake research and to build alliances;
- Subsequent UN World Conferences on Women (1980-1995) called for an increase and strengthening of the machinery established in the 1970s and 1980s by governments around the world to support women's advancement and gender equality;
- The functions of such machinery were described in 1988 by the UN Secretary-General as including to:
 - ensure the highest level of government support for action to achieve the advancement of women
 - promote women's education and participation in political decision-making and the economy
 - combat negative cultural attitudes and stereotyping of women in the media
 - support effective participation of women in development
 - facilitate research on the status of women and collecting sex-disaggregated data;
- The Beijing Plus Five Outcome Document (adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2000) stressed the complementarity of gender mainstreaming and special activities targeting women;⁷³
- Most recently, the 2004 UN meeting of the international experts on gender equality mechanisms within government reaffirmed the significance of these central policy coordinating units inside government, the role of which (as defined by the Beijing Platform of Action) is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender-equality perspective in all policy areas.⁷⁴

Attachment 3: Office for Women

Women's policy section of the Office for Women

The role of the policy section is to advise the Government on legislative and policy responses to issues facing women in the State, and to assist government agencies in integrating a consideration of women's needs within their own policy and program development.

Recent examples of this work include:

- Providing advice on proposed new legislation in relation to discrimination against same sex couples, proposed changes to the South Australian Equal Opportunity Act 1984, and the development of the Gender Balance Bill;
- Contributing to development of the Women's Safety Strategy and Women's Health Policy, and new research focusing on women and the labour market;
- Collaborating with the Department of Premier and Cabinet to increase the number of women appointed to state government boards and committees through the development of the Premier's Women's Directory, Women's Register, Vacancy Search and the Shadow Boards pilot project for young women;
- Participation in the Cabinet allocation and Cabinet comment process, providing advice to other agencies on implications for women of their Cabinet submissions; and preparation of recommendations, correspondence and briefings for the Minister for the Status of Women;
- Establishment of a collaborative project to develop a gender impact assessment tool, aimed at integrating gender considerations into every stage of government policy development and analysis, to be trialed by selected government agencies in both SA and WA;
- Supporting the establishment of a formal network of organisations which provide women's services, the Women's Services Network;
- Participating in regular meetings and events of women's organisations and coordinating events and publicity for International Women's Day;
- In collaboration with Aboriginal women and groups:
 - development of the Draft Action Plan for Aboriginal Women of SA;
 - providing support for State and National Gatherings of Aboriginal Women;
 - ongoing meetings with Aboriginal women regarding the nature of existing state government programs;
 - and the development of a quarterly newsletter for Aboriginal women.
- Participation in national Women's Advisers Meetings and as a member of the National Women's Safety Taskforce.

Women's Information Service

The Women's Information Service provides a telephone service and a co-located shop front, free legal advice, internet access and training, and an interpreter service. The current trends of internet usage indicate that users are predominantly already skilled with a minority of first-time users, and there is a discernible increase in usage by women from the African community. Although the Service is metropolitan based, the information officers make efforts to provide outreach into rural and regional areas by regular and publicised visits and attendance at field days and country shows. The Service aims to work in collaboration with other government information services, however enquiries to the State's mainstream information service (Service SA) relating to women's issues are currently referred to the Women's Information Service. There is currently a focus on increased collaboration with other service providers (both government and non-government), including joint rural and regional outreach with other state-wide women's services and providing internet training through Services SA rural offices. The Women's Information Service has also worked in partnership with the universities to conduct phone surveys on domestic violence and stalking. Telephone inquiries continue to attract women who use the service as their last-port of call and the Service provides a vital referral service, particularly for rural women, linking them to relevant service providers and information.

Attachment 4: Premier's Council for Women

The Council provides advice and recommendations to both the Premier and to the Minister for the Status of Women with the aim of bringing the interests and needs of South Australian women to the forefront of government policies and strategies.

Its key functions are to:

1. Ensure that the Government receives expert policy advice on identified policy and program issues;
2. Develop a positive and active policy agenda for South Australian women;
3. Facilitate a whole-of-government approach to ensuring that programs and services match women's needs;
4. Monitor all government policies and programs related to women and measures of women's progress against set indicators;
5. Develop strategies for dealing with the causes of inequalities for women and to provide leadership to influence and shape women's policy.

Since its establishment in December 2002, the Council has:

- provided advice on a range of issues including: women's health, child protection, Women's Safety Strategy, anti-discrimination legislation, Adelaide Women's Prison, and the representation of women on government boards and committees;
- Developed and disseminated the *Statistical Profile of Women in South Australia*;
- Established the on-line directory of women suitable for appointment to boards and advisory committees (the Premier's Women's Directory);
- Commissioned research into the implications for women of the increasing casualisation of the South Australian workforce;
- Recommended to the Premier the establishment of the gender data on-line project to enhance policy and program development, and service delivery across the State by the ready availability of gender disaggregated data on a wide range of indicators relevant to the quality of life of the South Australian community;

- Conducted a series of consultative occasions for women across the State, in Adelaide, the Riverland, Whyalla and Mount Gambier (forthcoming) and forums for young women in outer suburban areas;
- Contribution to monitoring the outcomes of the South Australian Strategic Plan through representation on both the Strategic Plan Implementation Committee and its Audit Committee

International experts note that high level women's advisory councils can play a significant and complementary role to the work of specialist offices for women's policy, for example by:

- commissioning research which might be too sensitive to be commissioned directly from within government;
- acting as a public voice on policy issues of concern;
- promoting broader community understanding of the value of women's offices and their work;
- providing an interface between women's policy units and the wider women's sector;
- and protecting the women's policy machinery within government, especially powerful and effective if the council includes members from a wide political spectrum.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Attachment 1 for the global context for the establishment of gender equality mechanisms within government.
- ² New Zealand is included in this section because it is a member of the Commonwealth/State Ministers' Conference on the Status of Women (MINCO) and also shares many similarities with Australia in terms of its gender equality machinery.
- ³ The most recent reports on CEDAW implementation were delivered to the UN in March this year by the 180 countries which, like Australia, are signatories of the Convention, and can be found at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/Review/>
- ⁴ UN Fourth World Conference on Women, 1995, *Global Platform for Action – Beijing*, New York
- ⁵ Marian Sawyer, "Gender equality in the age of governing for the mainstream", 2004, *Report of the Expert Group Meeting*, Rome, 29 Nov-2 Dec 2004, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, p.2 <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw>
- ⁶ Government of South Australia, *South Australian Women's Health Policy*, Adelaide, March 2005
- ⁷ Government of South Australia, *Our Commitment to Women's Safety in South Australia*, Adelaide, 2005
- ⁸ In partnership with the Office for Women in Western Australia and two universities, Adelaide and WA, and funded by an Australian Research Council Linkage grant
- ⁹ Government of South Australia, *Valuing South Australia's Women: Towards a Women's Safety Strategy for South Australia. Supporting Documentation*, Adelaide, 2004
- ¹⁰ Queensland, NSW, Victoria and the ACT
- ¹¹ Tasmania and Western Australia
- ¹² Western Australia
- ¹³ Queensland
- ¹⁴ For example, the 2004 Forum for CALD Women was partnered with the Office of Multicultural Affairs; the 2005 Forum on Young Women's Health with the Departments of Health and Youth Affairs, and the Roundtables on Women and Leadership with local government
- ¹⁵ Sawyer, op.cit., p.5
- ¹⁶ Tanya Barnett Donaghy, 2005, "Death of the Australian Femocrat", forthcoming in *Australian Journal of Political Science*
- ¹⁷ Sarah Maddison et al, 2004, *Silencing Dissent: Non-government organisations and Australian democracy*, Canberra, Australian Institute Discussion Paper 65, cited in Sawyer, op.cit
- ¹⁸ Donaghy 2005, op. cit., p.9
- ¹⁹ For example, Queensland, Tasmania, Victoria and WA
- ²⁰ The Commonwealth Secretariat's *Gender Management System* is detailed in a series of manuals and guidebooks. See <http://www.thecommonwealth.org/gender> (cited in Fiona Mackay and Kay Bilton, March 2000, p.2)
- ²¹ *Gender Mainstreaming: an Overview*, United Nations, New York, 2002, p.26
- ²² Tanya Barnett Donaghy, October 2004, "Applications of Mainstreaming in Australia and Northern Ireland", *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 25, No. 4, p.394
- ²³ For example, the Canadian *Federal Plan for Gender Equality*, the NZ *Action Plan for New Zealand Women*, and South Africa's *National Gender Policy*.
- ²⁴ Fiona Mackay and Kate Bilton, March 2000, *The Governance of Scotland Forum. Learning from Experience: Lessons in Mainstreaming Equal Opportunities*, University of Edinburgh, p.7
- ²⁵ Sawyer, op.cit., p. 2
- ²⁶ Mackay and Bilton, op.cit, pp.43 and 102
- ²⁷ Ibid., p.90
- ²⁸ Donaghy 2004, op.cit., pp.399 and 406
- ²⁹ Mackay and Bilton, op.cit., pp.42-3
- ³⁰ Sawyer, op.cit,p.7
- ³¹ Ibid, p.6
- ³² Mackay and Bilton, op.cit., p.5
- ³³ Ibid, p.108
- ³⁴ Christine Warioba , 2004, "The role of national mechanisms in promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women: Southern African Development Community Experience", *Report of the Expert Group Meeting*, Rome, 29 Nov-2 Dec 2004, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women, <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw>
- ³⁵ For example, South Africa has a cross-party Parliamentary Women's Caucus and Queensland has its Labor Women's Caucus of women members of parliament.
- ³⁶ Mackay and Bilton, op. cit., pp. 8 and 97
- ³⁷ Report of the Expert Group Meeting, op.cit., p.9
- ³⁸ Mackay and Bilton, op. cit., p.95
- ³⁹ Rhonda Sharp and Ray Broomhill, 2005, *Envisaging Gender: Towards gender responsive policies and budgets in South Australia*, Wakefield Press, Adelaide (forthcoming)
- ⁴⁰ Ibid
- ⁴¹ Special session of the UN General Assembly "Women 2000: Gender Equality, development and Peace for the 21st century", cited in *Report of the Expert Group Meeting*, 2004 op.cit.
- ⁴² Tanya Barnett Donaghy, February 2003, "Mainstreaming: Northern Ireland's participative-democratic approach" in *Policy and Politics*, Vol. 32, No.1, pp.55-56
- ⁴³ Ibid, p.56
- ⁴⁴ Ibid
- ⁴⁵ A Collaborative Initiative of the Intersectoral Officers Group for Indigenous Family Violence, *Rekindling Family Relationships: Framework for Action 2001-2006*, Adelaide: Government of South Australia
- ⁴⁶ Government of South Australia, 2005, op. cit.
- ⁴⁷ Office of Crime Statistics, Crime and Justice in SA, 2001 cited in Premier's Council for Women. *Statistical Profile: Women in South Australia*, Adelaide: Government of South Australia, p 16

- ⁴⁸ Government of South Australia, 2005, op.cit
- ⁴⁹ ABS, Women's Safety Australia '96, p.12
- ⁵⁰ Access Economics, *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy, Part 1*, p.25
- ⁵¹ Hetzel D. et al, 2004, *Inequality in South Australia: Key Determinants of Wellbeing Volume 1: The Evidence*. Adelaide: South Australian Department of Health
- ⁵² Government of South Australia, 2005, *Our Commitment to Women's Safety in South Australia*. Adelaide
- ⁵³ ABS Deaths Australia 2001, cited in Premier's Council for Women. *Statistical Profile: Women in South Australia*. Adelaide: Government of South Australia, p. 12
- ⁵⁴ Hetzel D. et al, op. cit.
- ⁵⁵ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), 2003, *Patch-up or Prevention?: A call for action on poverty in metropolitan Adelaide*, Adelaide, p. 9
- ⁵⁶ Ibid
- ⁵⁷ Government of South Australia, 2004, *Valuing South Australia's Women: Towards a Women's Safety Strategy for South Australia. Supporting Documentation*, Adelaide
- ⁵⁸ Social Development Committee, *Poverty Inquiry: Seventeenth Report of the Social Development Committee*, Adelaide: Parliament of South Australia, Tabled 13 May 2003.
- ⁵⁹ Rhonda Sharp and Ray Broomhill, 2005, op. cit.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid
- ⁶¹ Ibid
- ⁶² Carers Association of SA Inc., "Key Facts about Carers". <http://www.carers-sa.asn.au/statistics.htm>
- ⁶³ Lyn Craig, 2003, 'Do Australians Share Parenting? Time-diary evidence on fathers' and mothers' time with children', Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales, paper presented to the Australian Institute of Family Studies, 8th Annual Conference, Melbourne
- ⁶⁴ Carers Association of SA Inc., op.cit.
- ⁶⁵ Howe, K. and Salthouse S, 2004, " 'Lack of Data Means Lack of Action' – A clinical examination of access to health services for women with disabilities", paper presented by Keran Howe on behalf of Women With Disabilities Australia (WWDA) to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HRECO) National Summit, Sydney, 28 May 2004
- ⁶⁶ AHURI figures cited in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), 2003, op.cit p. 9
- ⁶⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Family and Community National and State Summary Tables' *Australian Social Australian Trends*, 2004
- ⁶⁹ Government of South Australia, 2004, *Statistical Profile: Women in South Australia*, pp.32 and 35
- ⁷⁰ In the 1995 report, largely based on 1993 and 1994 data, Australia ranked 6th on the Gender Development Index (which measures access to basic levels of health, education and employment) and 11th on the Gender Empowerment Index (which quantifies women's participation in economic, political and professional life). *Human Development Report 1995*, UNDP, Oxford University Press. These rankings have progressed to 4th and 8th in the 2004 UNDP Report, *Human Development Report 2004*, UNDP, Oxford University Press
- ⁷¹ UNDP, 1995, op.cit., Oxford pp 2-3 and 75-76
- ⁷² *Report of the Expert Group Meeting*, 2004, op.cit
- ⁷³ Marian Sawyer, op.cit, p.4
- ⁷⁴ Para 201 of the Beijing Platform for Action cited in the Report of the Expert Group Meeting, op.cit., p.6

Women's Futures

Beyond 2005...

Directions for the
Office for Women

