

STRENGTHENING OUR COMMITMENT TO WOMEN

STATEMENT BY
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FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN
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Overview

In the year 2000, the Howard Government is strengthening its commitment to women. This budget builds on continued strong economic growth, and the major reforms to taxation and assistance for families designed to deliver more choice for Australians but, most importantly, more choice for women.

The Government's number one priority is reforming social policy — an issue of vital importance to all Australians — particularly women. In this Budget, women's issues are central in many portfolio areas, reflecting the Government's commitment to strong policy that delivers a wide range of enhancements of direct benefit to women. Some are new and some build on programmes and initiatives already underway.

More women than ever before are participating in the labour force — the participation rate for women of workforce age (15-64) reached a record high of 65.5 per cent in March 2000. Since the Howard Government came to office in 1996, 335,600 new jobs have been created for women, leading to a total of 3,925,000 women employed in March 2000.

This Budget contains an outstanding package of initiatives that will benefit Australian women and their families, particularly those living in rural and regional areas.

The Government will ensure that women who are engaged in the important job of parenting are supported to maintain their workforce, training or community links to enable them to have choices about returning to work and balancing their work and family responsibilities. The Government is promoting stronger communities, getting more women into leadership roles, and adjusting workplace relations to enable more family friendly work practices. It is working with other levels of government, communities and business to foster social coalitions to address issues such as welfare reform and domestic violence prevention — issues that are of prime concern to women. This Government recognises that the right solutions for the community as a whole are generally the solutions that women want.

Women and their Families

There is much in this Budget for women and their families. The Government is more strongly and demonstrably committed to supporting families and strong family life as the cornerstone of Australian society.

The Government's Stronger Families and Communities Strategy represents a major investment in the basic skills and services that underpin family and community life in Australia. Strong and healthy family relationships are the best guarantee of strong family and community relationships. One focus of the strategy is to prevent difficult and expensive problems if family relationships break down, by focusing on parenting and relationship skills and those families at risk.

STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY

The \$240 million Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, announced by the Prime Minister on 16 April 2000, establishes new partnerships to strengthen families and communities. The Strategy recognises that the best solutions are developed and delivered locally in partnership with others — local organisations, volunteers, businesses, communities, families, individuals and all levels of government.

Measures in this Budget will work to:

- strengthen families through investing in prevention and early intervention in three priority areas: early childhood and the needs of families with young children; strengthening marriage and family relationships; and balancing work and family; and
- strengthen communities through investing in community capacity to solve problems and grasp opportunities. It will support communities to find local solutions to local problems; develop community leadership; promote best practice in communities; and support volunteers to develop skills.

The Strategy will encourage families and communities to tell government what works and does not work for them in their particular location or circumstance. It will provide more flexibility for government to respond to local concerns.

The Strategy encompasses nine new measures that are designed so that they will work well on the ground. These measures will commence in 2000-01.

Stronger Families Fund

The Government will provide \$40 million over four years to support the Stronger Families Fund. This initiative will encourage communities to develop new and better ways to strengthen families with an emphasis on early childhood and parenting. Projects will be established in a significant number of communities across Australia. These projects will help build knowledge about how communities can develop early intervention and prevention approaches that really work in supporting local families. Each project will be locally developed and will be designed to help communities strengthen families in their local area by helping them create their own solutions and encouraging them to understand the value of prevention, early intervention and capacity building. Local communities will be encouraged to combine Stronger Families Funds with existing community resources and infrastructure.

Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Initiative

The Government has committed \$47.3 million over four years to the Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Support initiative to strengthen families. The initiative will provide services and activities such as parenting support and playgroups and marriage and relationship education. It will also provide family counselling with a focus on regional Australia and support for legal, medical and other professionals in their support for families. It responds to emerging needs including those identified through the Stronger Families Fund.

Elements included in this measure are:

- boosting parenting skills through offering Family Skills Training in more locations, including a focus on separated families and step-families;
- establishing more playgroups in rural and regional areas and helping families with children with special needs to access playgroups. This will link families within communities as well as support early childhood development;
- providing relationship education in new and more responsive ways and developing relationship education materials in more relevant formats, and tailored to the changes in people's lives;
- providing early intervention support to families in rural and regional communities by making available family counselling services as part of the Department of Transport and Regional Services' Regional Communities Programme; and
- developing and providing training resources for legal, medical and other professionals to help them identify, assist and refer individuals and families to needed support.

Greater Flexibility and Choice in Child Care

This package of measures, totalling \$65.4 million over four years, will improve families' ability to access and choose child care that meets their needs. The measures support parents in balancing paid work, education, community activities and parenting responsibilities through flexible and responsive child care. Shift workers, families working non-standard hours, those who have a sick child or who live in rural areas without access to care will particularly gain through this strategy. Additional funding will be provided to encourage the establishment of child care centres in rural areas where there is a recognised need. For the first time, subsidies currently available only to community based providers will be available to private providers. This will create a positive effect for rural and regional economies, in employment and social contact.

Longitudinal Study of Australian Children

For the first time a national Longitudinal Study of Australian Children will be conducted with \$6.1 million provided over four years. This study will be an invaluable tool in the development of government policy on early childhood and effective early intervention and prevention strategies in the areas of health, education, child care and family support. This will address a major gap in knowledge and information leading to the development of sound social policy in Australia.

The importance of early childhood to outcomes in later life has been proven by research and is recognised by professionals who work with children in health and education settings. In Australia there has been little research focusing on the effects of various settings and interventions on the development of young children and no comprehensive longitudinal study has been undertaken. This study will enable evaluation of the longer-term impact of childhood interventions on education, health, employment, crime and social problems.

Potential Leadership in Local Communities

The Government will provide \$37.1 million over four years for this initiative which will identify and support potential community leaders who live in socially disadvantaged areas largely from outside industry and government structures. This measure will provide: a programme to develop and link new and emerging leaders who will learn new ways to engage people in community building projects; a youth cadets programme to help re-engage youth to their community; a national community leadership conference to promote networks and share local solution approaches; and a networking activity to stimulate exchange of 'local solutions to local problems' projects.

Once fully phased-in, it will involve up to 400 communities in a leadership programme and network and will develop between 1600-2400 leaders who will work on projects of benefit to their local community. Through the youth cadetship initiative, approximately 10,000 young people in over 200 communities will be funded to participate in community activities.

National Skills Development Programme for Volunteers

This initiative will help people involved in volunteer work build skills and will celebrate the International Year of the Volunteer. The Government has allocated \$15.8 million over four years for this programme.

During 2001, communities will be able to select from a range of activities to celebrate the International Year of the Volunteer, including promotion of volunteer activity, greater recognition of volunteers and initiatives to foster volunteer efforts in regional and rural communities.

This measure will also enable people to gain the skills needed to support programmes which rely heavily on volunteers. It will provide on-going specific skills training (for example counselling, working with people with disabilities, interviewing techniques, financial management for board members etc) necessary for volunteers to provide a better standard of service to the community group with which they are involved.

Local Solutions to Local Problems

The Government has committed \$15.4 million over four years for this initiative which will bring a broad and flexible approach to funding communities to find local solutions to local problems. It will fund in excess of 500 projects over the next four years in recognition of the great diversity in communities and potential local responses.

Local solutions will depend on each community's needs and could include:

- converting unused buildings into community facilities;
- providing establishment costs for self-help services such as food cooperatives and food banks;
- developing community resources, particularly human resources, through access to training (for example 'how to involve local people in community activities', 'how to run community groups — basic meeting processes');
- linking communities and people who are tackling similar issues in their community, involving mentoring programmes;
- providing facilitators and advice services (volunteering, business and family advice); and

- providing information technology training and support for individuals to seek information or contribute to information about their community.

Can Do Community Initiative

Funding of \$5.2 million over four years has been allocated for the Can Do Community initiative which will showcase Australian best practice and encourage people to participate in community life. It will:

- identify and promote best practice examples of local solutions to local problems using mechanisms such as interactive information technology, community events, workshops, field days and a media campaign;
- develop a project ideas bank;
- encourage people to get involved in their community;
- network community leaders and community builders; and
- publicly recognise best practice examples of collaborative community actions which effectively address local issues.

Communications Strategy

The Government has committed \$8 million over four years to a broad multi-media communications strategy which will promote the elements of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy to the broader community and promote local partnerships that support families in their communities and workplaces. It will reinforce the significance of good parenting and strong family relationships to our children's lives, our communities and Australia's future.

The communications campaign will underpin the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and assist to achieve outcomes such as a reduction in family breakdown and family violence, crime, suicide and drug dependency. It will also seek to influence increased school retention rates, work force attachment and greater family self-reliance. The strategy will target particular audiences through a range of media including television, radio, print and the internet.

WELFARE REFORM PILOTS

The Welfare Reform Pilots are being developed by the Department of Family and Community Services in response to the Interim Report on Welfare Reform. The aim of the pilots is to test ways to link people more effectively with available services and encourage them to make the most of opportunities for economic and social participation.

The Mature Age Participation Pilot will trial a new approach to mature aged people without jobs. The project will test the extent to which certain groups of older working age customers face barriers to greater economic and social participation, and will also explore the feasibility and effectiveness of a range of approaches to assist these people to be more active in work and community life.

The Workless Families Assistance Pilot will test approaches to facilitate economic and social participation amongst workless families with school age children. The pilot has two areas of focus: workless couples and workless customers with repeated transitions between single and partnered status. The pilot will also investigate barriers to accessing assistance.

CHILD SUPPORT PACKAGE

This package of measures supports better relationships between separated parents and better contact between children and parents after separation. The package aligns the benchmarks for child support liabilities; provides a fairer basis for government assistance for children of subsequent families; enhances parents' ability to improve the position of their new family; and improves incentives for non-residents to maintain contact with their children.

Women and the Law

In recognition that sometimes relationships do break down, the Government is providing practical support to help separating couples rebuild their lives, resolve family law matters in a quicker and more cost effective way, and increase their future economic and social participation.

SUPERANNUATION AND FAMILY LAW

On 13 April 2000, the Government introduced the Family Law Legislation Amendment (Superannuation) Bill 2000. This legislation will fundamentally reform the way in which superannuation is treated upon marital breakdown. The Bill gives separating couples the ability to divide their superannuation by agreement or, when they are unable to agree, by court order. This will improve the long-term financial security of each member of a separated couple.

LEGAL AID

In December 1999, the Government announced an additional \$63.1 million for legal aid over four years. This comprises new funding of \$45.6 million and indexation of \$17.5 million. Family law matters, and especially matters relating to children, are key

priorities. Protecting the safety of a child or spouse who is at risk are accorded the highest priority in grants of aid in family law.

FEDERAL MAGISTRATES SERVICE

In the 1999-2000 Budget, the Government announced a new Federal Magistrates Service. The Service will open later in 2000. Ms Diana Bryant QC has been appointed as the Chief Federal Magistrate. Much of the Service's work will be in family law. Its less formal procedures and lower costs will be of direct benefit to many women seeking resolution of family law matters. Federal magistrates will also be able to hear discrimination matters under human rights legislation. Recruitment of the first 15 federal magistrates is nearing completion. It is anticipated that a significant number of magistrates will be women.

Women and The New Tax System

Under The New Tax System, families will benefit from around \$12 billion in personal income tax cuts each year. There will be an extra \$2½ billion in assistance for families each year as well.

Marginal tax rates will be reduced so that around 80 per cent of taxpayers will have a top rate of 30 per cent or less, compared to 30 per cent currently.

The Government will introduce a new Child Care Benefit to combine the current payments that assist with the cost of child care from 1 July 2000. An additional \$600 million for the introduction of the Child Care Benefit has been committed. This is part of a record \$5.3 billion allocated to child care over four years to 2002-03. There are around 300,000 families receiving Childcare Assistance across all forms of child care.

Women in the Workplace

The Government is pleased to report that more women than ever before are participating in the paid workforce ensuring greater financial independence and economic security. The gap between male and female earnings is narrowing. For women in the workforce, the Government has continued with its workplace relations reforms and introduced the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* after reviewing the Affirmative Action legislation. The Government is supporting women re-entering the workforce after they take time out to care for children, disabled or elderly dependents by continued growth in expenditure on childcare and other initiatives such as the Return to Work Programme. Women are also being supported through the Small Business Enterprise Programme and measures to increase women's participation in rural industries.

RETURN TO WORK PROGRAMME

The Government will provide \$7.3 million for the Return to Work Programme in 2000-01. The programme is targeted at those who have been out of the workforce for two years or more as unpaid care givers of children under the age of 16 years or carers of those who are aged, sick or have a disability. Participants receive guidance on possible career directions and help in areas such as skills assessments, career and training plans, information technology, and access to training. The programme commenced nationwide services in February/March 2000. Sixteen thousand participants, mainly women, will benefit from places under the first \$7.3 million round of contracts, the first of 35,000 to be assisted.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE ACT 1999

The Government's new *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* came into effect from 1 January 2000. The Government has set aside \$0.3 million in 2000-01 for the continued implementation of new and simplified reporting arrangements and to provide support to the new Equal Employment Opportunity Advisory Board. The Act aims to achieve genuine equality of opportunity for Australia's working women. Compliance is improved through a facilitative rather than punitive approach. The new Advisory Board of employee, employer, business and community representatives will play an important role in ensuring employers have the tools to achieve equal opportunity in their workplaces.

WOMEN IN SMALL BUSINESS

The Government is providing \$5.1 million over three years to the Small Business Enterprise Culture Programme. There will be two funding rounds in 2000-01. The programme is designed to support skills development and mentoring projects, focused on women small business operators. Women are a growing force in small business. Between 1995 and 1997, the number of women business operators increased by 38,000 while the number of men increased by 21,000. Women now make up about 35 per cent of all business operators. Full details of the programme, announced in the 1999-2000 Budget, are on www.dewrsb.gov.au.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL INDUSTRIES

Increased participation of women in rural industries is one of the benefits of the Government's \$309.4 million Agriculture Advancing Australia package. This funding, provided over four years, is a continuation and enhancement of the original package. The initiative includes leadership training for women, increased partnerships with women to address portfolio issues and the development of a strategy for the recognition and participation of youth in portfolio industries.

Women, Health and Ageing

Good health underpins women's participation in a full and active life on all levels. The Government is committed to the provision of universally affordable health services, preventative care and promotion of healthy lifestyles. This is particularly important for older women who by 2010 will constitute 10 per cent of Australia's population. Budget initiatives focus on nutrition for children, blood bank initiatives and safety of blood products, strategies to address depression and alcohol related problems, cancer and care for older Australians through the National Strategy for Older Australians and measures to enhance residential and community care.

NATIONAL CHILD NUTRITION PROGRAMME

The National Child Nutrition Programme will provide \$15 million over three years to improve the diets of children aged 0-12 years. In 1999-2000, \$2 million has already been committed for this initiative. It will also help pregnant women, especially in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and remote and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Women will benefit from better knowledge of nutrition and the right dietary choices to meet their needs and those of unborn children. The programme will improve access to nutritious foods in local communities and encourage women to share their new skills and knowledge through community programmes about good nutrition.

NATIONAL DEPRESSION INITIATIVE

On 14 March 2000, the Government announced \$17.5 million over five years for the National Depression initiative. This initiative aims to destigmatise depression and get professional help to sufferers more quickly. Depression is a leading cause of illness and disability. It is a major health issue for women in particular. More than 500,000 adult Australian women experience depressive illness each year, over 60 per cent of all sufferers. 7.4 per cent of Australian women experience depression. One in ten young women aged 18 to 24 years is significantly affected. Many will experience the stigma and discrimination caused by lack of understanding of their illness.

IMPROVING THE SAFETY OF FRESH BLOOD PRODUCTS

The Government is providing \$32.1 million over four years to introduce Nucleic Acid Testing for Fresh Blood Products. This is a new technology that enables the detection of the presence of a virus in a blood donation before the donor has developed antibodies that are detected by current testing procedures. The testing will significantly reduce the risk of transmission of blood-borne diseases such as Hepatitis C and HIV through blood and blood products.

ESTABLISHMENT OF AN AUSTRALIAN CORD BLOOD BANKING NETWORK

The Commonwealth Government will work with the States and Territories to establish the national cord blood banking network. Umbilical cord blood is a rich source of stem cells to treat life threatening cancers such as leukaemia. Mothers will be asked to donate the umbilical cord after birth. A national database will help find compatible donations for patients. 22,000 cord blood units will be banked, including 2,000 from Indigenous mothers. The Government has committed \$9 million over four years for this initiative.

NATIONAL ALCOHOL STRATEGY

The Government is providing \$4 million over four years for the National Alcohol Action Plan under the National Drug Strategic Framework. A range of initiatives will reduce the health, social and economic costs of alcohol related harm in Australia, including through increased public awareness of the consequences of harmful levels and patterns of drinking and initiatives for groups at higher risk of alcohol related harm including young people and Indigenous Australians.

NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR AN AGEING AUSTRALIA

The Government is providing \$6.1 million over four years to progress the National Strategy for an Ageing Australia, to build on the achievements of the 1999 International Year of Older Persons. In the next 20 years, the proportion of Australia's population aged over 65 years will increase from 12 per cent to more than 16 per cent. Women make up around 56 per cent of Australians aged over 65 years.

The Strategy will support a whole-of-government approach to the ageing of the population; more positive images of older Australians; healthy ageing; research into mature age employment; and the sharing of international expertise in delivering aged care services. These initiatives will improve the quality of life of many older women and recognise their value and contribution in the community.

RESIDENTIAL AGED CARE

Women comprise 70 per cent of residents in residential aged care facilities.

The Government will provide \$11.6 million over four years for enhancing quality care. In the past year, increasing action has been taken to improve standards in residential aged care. Concerns about standards of care will be promptly investigated and resolved through rapid reaction investigation by either the Department or the Aged Care Standards and Accreditation Agency.

The Government will also provide \$10.8 million over four years for simpler income testing arrangements for residential aged care fees by moving from a daily to quarterly assessment of fees. This will reduce letters to residents notifying fee changes by two-thirds and eliminate retrospective fee increases and administratively inefficient small fees.

Indigenous Women

This year's initiatives include increasing Indigenous women's representation, a range of measures aimed at addressing family violence in a holistic manner, employment assistance and improved quality of, and accessibility to, legal services.

INDIGENOUS FAMILY VIOLENCE

Family violence is a major health and social issue for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The nature and severity of the problem is of great concern to the Government. Almost half (46 per cent) of all hospital separations among females for intentional injury are Indigenous women. Among Indigenous women, intentional injury accounts for more hospital separations than does diabetes or cancer.

A recent study highlighted that in 1998, Indigenous children constituted 17.4 per cent of the total national number of children on care and protection orders.

The Government is working with Indigenous communities to prevent violence. The Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA) has endorsed a national strategy on Indigenous family violence which will focus on inter-government coordination and supporting community initiatives at a local level. A MCATSIA working group of Commonwealth, State and Territory officials and representatives from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Torres Strait Regional Authority and the Round Table convened by the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in July 1999 has been established to develop and implement the strategy. The working group will work with a number of communities around Australia to trial a coordinated whole-of-government approach to the issue that is community based and driven.

The Government, through ATSIC, is already funding four Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Units in Moree, Kempsey, Port Augusta and Darwin to work with victims and communities in a holistic manner to prevent family violence.

The Government, through ATSIC, is funding a further eight Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Units at Katherine and Alice Springs in the Northern Territory; Fitzroy Crossing, Geraldton and Kalgoorlie in Western Australia; Mt Isa in the Gulf and Cairns, Cape York, in Queensland; and Walgett in NSW.

The Government, through ATSIC, has provided \$1.15 million under *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* for Indigenous family violence projects in Cape York and Kalgoorlie. In October 1999, the Government announced a further \$6 million over four years (1999-2003) non-recurrent funding from *Partnerships* for community grants to assist Indigenous communities to prevent and address family violence.

INDIGENOUS EMPLOYMENT

The Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme provides part-time work and community capacity building for more than 32,000 Indigenous Australians in 270 communities around Australia. 40 per cent of the scheme's participants are women in activities ranging from arts and crafts to caring for the elderly to managing Indigenous community organisations. The Budget will provide 1,500 new CDEP places in regional and remote areas in 2000-01.

CDEP participants volunteer to forgo income support entitlements. In doing so they fund approximately two-thirds of the costs of the scheme. Following the passage of legislation in November 1999, CDEP participants are now able to access a supplement of \$20 per fortnight similar to Work for the Dole participants and social security add-ons such as rental assistance, pharmaceutical allowance and health care card.

Over \$55 million is being provided in the 2000-01 Budget to build on the success of the Indigenous Employment Programme (IEP). This programme will help participants into sustainable employment through a package of measures including wages assistance, the Indigenous Small Business Fund and a CEOs for Indigenous Employment initiative. The IEP makes a major contribution to getting more Indigenous women into jobs.

LEGAL AND OTHER SERVICES

The Government has improved the quality and accessibility of legal services available to Indigenous women through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS). In recent years, ATSILS have ensured that private sector legal representation is made available to Indigenous women in cases of conflict of interest with other clients.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION

Following elections in 1999 ATSIC has, for the first time, a fully elected board of Commissioners. Four women Commissioners were elected compared to one on the previous board. The Government also implemented reforms to other electoral processes leading to fairer representation on regional councils. This Government is committed to giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a greater say. The number of women elected to regional councils has increased from 23 per cent of total positions in 1996 to 30 per cent of total positions in 1999.

Women, Sport and Education

In this, the year of the Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Government is committed to encouraging and assisting the increased participation of women and girls in sport, recreation and physical activities and is implementing a range of initiatives in support of this, as well as building on ongoing measures for women in sports leadership and administration.

Women and girls continue to maintain and improve their good performance across many areas of education and training with significant implications for their later economic status and range of choices. This year further funding is being provided for young people to assist with vocational training through the Jobs Pathway Programme and the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation.

SPORT

In September 1999, the Government launched its new National Policy on Women and Girls in Sport, Recreation and Physical Activity. The Government has introduced a national mentor programme for women in sport, developed a Harassment-free Sport Contact Officer and Complaints Officer Network and will hold a National Indigenous Women in Sport Summit in May 2000.

The Sydney 2000 Olympic and Paralympic Games will mark the centenary of women's participation in the Olympic Games. The Government is supporting several projects to commemorate this event and highlight the contribution and achievements of women in sport. These include a women and sport scholarship/ exchange between Australia and France, a schools' education package and a major function co-hosted by the Australian and French governments.

EDUCATION

Women have benefited from the Government's research and policy initiatives, improving or maintaining their strong performance across many areas of education and training. Females have higher Year 12 retention rates than males (78.5 per cent in 1999 compared with 66.4 per cent for males). Women now make up 58 per cent of students commencing a Bachelor degree at university.

Youth Allowance Family Assets Limits for Farms and Businesses

The Government's support for families, particularly those in rural areas, has been further enhanced by an increase from 50 per cent to 75 per cent in the discount available on farm and business assets under the Youth Allowance family assets test. An estimated 7,200 young people will benefit from this measure by qualifying for Youth Allowance. Families with business assets up to \$1.658 million may now qualify for Youth Allowance, subject to the family income tests.

Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme

From 2001, parents of isolated children will benefit from a \$13.8 million increase to allowances under the Assistance for Isolated Children Scheme over the next four years. The increase to these allowances will assist rural and remote families to access education for their children who are unable to attend an appropriate government school daily because of geographic isolation.

Jobs Pathway Programme

Additional funding of \$10.3 million is being provided in 2000-01 to maintain the high level of demand for the Jobs Pathway Programme. This funding builds on the ongoing base funding of \$11.7 million for 2000-01, and will assist young women and men between the ages of 15 and 19 years across Australia to make a smooth transition from school to work.

Australian Student Traineeship Foundation

Funding of \$43.7 million over four years will be provided to the Australian Student Traineeship Foundation to extend work placement coordination for male and female students undertaking formal vocational education in schools. This funding is additional to the Foundation's \$9.9 million annual core funding.

Assistance to Veterans and their Families

In this Budget the Government's assistance to veterans concentrates on improving residential and community care for Australia's ageing veteran community as well as Vietnam veterans and their families.

RESIDENTIAL CARE DEVELOPMENT SCHEME

The Government is providing \$6.8 million to extend the Residential Care Development Scheme (RCDS) until June 2001. The Scheme assists ex-service and community based organisations to help veterans and their widow(er)s access high quality residential aged care services and community care packages, address gaps in service delivery and complement available services. RCDS also helps residential care facilities to meet certification and accreditation standards applying from 1 January 2001.

Women comprise around a third of the treatment population of the Department of Veterans' Affairs. A significant number of women will benefit from improved aged care facilities and improved access to community care packages as a result of this initiative.

VETERANS' HOME CARE

Home Care Services for veterans and war widow(ers) holding Gold and White cards will be transferred to the Department of Veterans' Affairs as part of a strategy to improve and maintain health, well-being and independence and provide better targeted support in the home. Women make up around a third of the veteran community treatment population. The initiative will target those experiencing some difficulty with acts of daily living. It will help improve their ability to live independently in their own homes and reduce their need for a range of medical services. The programme will also help carers of veterans, 92 per cent of whom are women.

VIETNAM VETERANS AND THEIR FAMILIES

The Government is meeting its election commitment to respond to the validated findings of the Vietnam Veterans' Health (Morbidity) Study, at a cost of \$32.3 million over four years. The study found that veterans perceive their health as much poorer than others their age and indicate that they, and their children, have some chronic illnesses at higher rates than the community norm. This response not only enhances assistance to Vietnam veterans but also recognises the effect of the veterans' service on their families by providing psychiatric assessment, counselling, crisis relief, additional lifestyle management and treatment for specific conditions.