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OVERVIEW

Women's Budget Statement 2001-02

This Budget continues to build on the Government's sound economic policies and taxation reforms. This strong platform, together with social policies such as increased assistance to mothers and carers, offers women more opportunities, more choices and a greater ability to exercise those choices than ever before.

The number of women in our paid workforce has reached a record high, and women are closing the earnings gap with men. More young women are in education and training than ever before. In this Budget, initiatives focus on increasing access to education for all women. Specific initiatives range from areas where women are traditionally underrepresented—such as science and technology—through to measures focusing on nursing.

Women in community and volunteer activities, and those in paid work or undertaking study, have access to record levels of child care and access to parenting and other family payments. Tax reforms have delivered significant income tax cuts for families and reforms to superannuation are helping more women to plan for a secure retirement. The \$1.7 billion *Australians Working Together* package now builds on the Government's commitment to strengthening Australia's social safety net, valued by all Australians as one of the key strengths of our society and, as such, is an important issue for women.

The Government is delivering on better health services for women. As well as the considerable foundations laid over the past few years, there are new measures that will improve women's access to services in both specific and general ways – including measures to increase the participation in the National Cervical Screening Programme to improve health services in rural and regional Australia, and to increase access to After Hours Emergency Care, as well as measures to assist older Australians and their health needs.

For Older Australians—the majority of whom are women—the Government has introduced a range of measures. These include a one off payment of \$25,000 in recognition of Japanese-held Prisoners of War and civilian detainees and their widows/ers, restoring pensions for war widows/ers who remarried prior to 1984, expanding telephone and other concessions and a one-off payment to recipients of income support who are of Age Pension age.

The Government recognises that Australia's extensive cultural diversity requires specialised measures to meet the concerns of women from these backgrounds and has introduced a range of initiatives to promote a harmonious Australia.

Indigenous women are benefiting from measures to address family violence in a holistic manner, employment assistance and improved quality of, and accessibility to, legal services.

A key element of the Government's vision for women is to create a culture, an Australia, where women and children can live in environments that are free of violence. The Government is providing sound policies to build an Australia where women have support and choices in deciding the directions of their lives.

This Budget builds on the \$50 million *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* programme with a new \$16.5 million national initiative to combat the alarming incidence of sexual assault in our communities.

Using a partnership approach between Commonwealth and State governments, service providers and communities, *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* has shown practical and effective ways that we, as Australians, can act together to stop domestic violence. The national approach to combat sexual assault against women will also provide real results for Australian women.

There is also a package of measures in this Budget specifically designed to further promote and assist women to have their say in the development of Government policies and take on leadership roles in the community. Women's organisations will benefit from the establishment of a \$5.6 million *Women's Development Programme* that extends Government support for organisations representing the diversity of Australian women and will encourage community contribution to Government policy discussion and formulation. The measure—which will bring the total Office of the Status of Women funding for women's development to \$7.6 million over the next four years—will fund projects that are responsive to women's needs, again providing support for real and practical outcomes for Australian women.

The Government will provide \$2.4 million over four years for *the Women's National Leadership Initiative* – extending current activities to increase the number of women in leadership roles in community spheres. A \$5.5 million comprehensive information strategy will also make information about women and *for* women more accessible.

There is much for all Australian women in the 2001-02 Budget.

Major Initiatives in the 2001-02 Budget

MEASURES FOR THE OFFICE OF THE STATUS OF WOMEN

- National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault – \$16.5 million over four years to facilitate a national approach to combat sexual assault against women.
- National Leadership Initiative – \$2.4 million over four years to further increase the participation of women in leadership positions.
- Women's Development Programme – \$5.6 million over four years to expand and enhance the engagement of women, women's organisations, and targeted research in government policy formulation.
- Informed Choices for Australian Women – \$5.5 million over four years to develop a women's information strategy, including a data warehouse, women's conference, research and policy publication series and web-based information for, and about, women.

KEY MEASURES IN OTHER PORTFOLIOS

- \$1.7 billion for the *Australians Working Together* package to strengthen Australia's social safety net. The measures include: \$251 million helping parents return to work; \$506 million making work pay: Working Credits; \$324 million for better employment services to help people who help themselves; and \$146 million for a fair go for mature age workers.
- \$115.6 million over four years for an independent Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation to prevent abuse of alcohol and other licit substances.
- \$43.4 million over four years to improve after hours emergency care, benefiting women who are high users of after hours emergency care services.
- \$120.4 million over four years to enhance the identification, care and review for mental health patients by general practitioners.
- Incentives totalling \$71.9 million over four years to general practitioners to increase the rates of participation of women in the National Cervical Screening Programme.
- \$104.3 million over four years to improve access to medical services in rural areas and other areas of doctor shortage by providing support for general practices to employ practice nurses.

- The Postgraduate Education Loans Scheme to provide opportunities for women and others seeking to further their qualifications through higher degrees by coursework or to acquire new skills.
- \$13.0 million over four years to improve the access to undergraduate nursing education for rural and regional students.
- Adjustment of the pensioner rebate, low income aged person's rebate and Medicare levy threshold to ensure that single senior Australians with incomes up to \$20,000 are completely free from tax, effective from the 2000-01 income year. For couples, the new effective tax-free threshold is up to \$32,612. These rebates cut out at \$37,840 for singles and \$29,122 for each member of a couple.
- Restoration of war widows pension to approximately 3,000 widows who remarried prior to May 1984 and therefore lost eligibility to their war widows pension as a consequence. This measure addresses a long-standing anomaly and ensures that all war widows will be treated in a fair and consistent manner.
- A one-off payment of \$25,000 each to Australian Defence Force veterans who were held as prisoners of war of Japan and Australian civilian detainees of the Japanese, or people who were at one time their widow or widower. The measure recognises the unique hardships endured by prisoners of war of the Japanese.
- A one-off payment of \$300 to around 2.2 million income support clients of age pension age, including service pensioners. This payment will provide additional assistance to older people and will also provide an immediate stimulus to spending in the economy.
- Increase to the income limits for Commonwealth Seniors Health Card to \$50,000 (singles) and \$80,000 (couples combined).
- Telephone Allowance, currently available for pensioners, will be extended to self-funded retirees who qualify for a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC).
- \$24.3 million over four years on measures to build on and extend quality residential and community care.
- \$28.8 million over four years on measures to ensure that care standards in residential aged care homes are maintained, a robust quality assurance and complaints handling system is in place and that the community is able to make informed decisions about residential aged care options, and \$5 million for grants for smaller aged care homes in rural and urban fringe areas.
- Measures to benefit indigenous women and their communities through the \$1.7 billion *Australians Working Together* package and other measures including:
 - \$31.1 million in support for Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) participants to get a job.

- \$32.2 million for Community Participation Agreements and capacity building.
- \$59 million in Training Credits for mature age and indigenous job seekers.
- \$10.2 million in increased education and training assistance for Indigenous Australians.
- \$75 million for upgrading indigenous housing.
- \$53.9 million to continue the Link-up network and the counselling and parenting programmes.

Women and Families

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy, announced by the Prime Minister on 16 April 2000 with funding of \$240 million, has established new partnerships to strengthen families and communities. The Strategy was developed in recognition 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.

The strategy includes measures to improve families' ability to access and choose child care that meets their needs by supporting 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 particularly gain through this strategy.

Additional initiatives are aimed at strengthening families through:

- the Stronger Families Fund, that provides \$40 million over 4 years to encourage communities to develop new and better ways to strengthen families with an emphasis on early childhood and parenting projects, and
- the Early Intervention, Parenting and Family Relationship Initiative, \$47.3 million over 4 years, that aims to strengthen families through services and activities such as parenting support and playgroups and marriage and relationship education. It also provides 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.

In addition the Government has implemented a number of other measures to increase assistance to those people who provide care for children, the majority of whom are women, particularly where there is a full time carer at home. These include:

- The introduction of the Family Tax Initiative – which increased the tax-free thresholds for one parent in a family for each dependent child up to the age of 16 years or 18 years if a dependent secondary student and assistance to single income families (including sole parents) with at least one child under 5 years.
- Simplifying family assistance from twelve types of family assistance into three: Family Tax Benefit Part A, Family Tax Benefit Part B and Child Care Benefit.
- An additional \$2½ million in assistance for families each year through the introduction of The New Tax System.

Australians Working Together – Helping people to move forward

The \$1.7 million *Australians Working Together* package announced in the 2001-02 Budget underlines the Government's commitment to strengthening Australia's social safety net, valued by all Australians as one of the key strengths of our society. The package will reinforce the uniquely Australian values of self-reliance, a fair go, pulling together and having a go. It will provide more encouragement, support and incentives for all Australians of working age to take part in Australia's social and economic life: to get a job, to gain new skills and to be involved in the community. Some of the elements of the package of particular interest to women are outlined below.

HELPING PARENTS RETURN TO WORK

The *Australians Working Together* package is particularly relevant for women in contemporary Australian society. The participation rate of women in the workforce has grown steadily over the latter part of the 20th century. More women have faced conflicting demands from paid work outside the home and from the unpaid work of raising a family. Many parents who spend time out of the work force caring for young children feel isolated from their communities, fear losing their work skills and lose confidence in their ability to compete in the labour market. A particular issue facing people receiving Parenting Payment while caring for children is that when their youngest child turns 16 they will be transferred to Newstart Allowance and face requirements to look for work and take part in mutual obligation activities.

Australians Working Together will help to address these issues by:

- encouraging parents whose youngest child is aged between 6 and 15 to start planning early for a future return to the workforce through annual opportunity planning interviews with Centrelink Personal Advisers;
- expanding the childcare and employment, training and education assistance currently accessible through the Jobs, Education and Training (JET) programme;
- building on the success of the JET programme to establish a new Transition to Work programme specifically designed to build the skills and confidence of people who have been out of the workforce for an extended period; and
- encouraging parents whose youngest child is aged between 13 and 15 to build or maintain work skills by requiring them to undertake 150 hours each six months of community work, study, or activity to improve their employment prospects, from July 2003.

As part of this package, out of school hours care will be available to more parents with school aged children: some 5,000 new places will be created from 1 July 2001 at a cost of \$16.2 million over four years.

MAKING WORK PAY: WORKING CREDIT

Australians Working Together contains a Working Credit initiative which, from September 2002, will encourage people to take up temporary or casual work opportunities. People on income support payments will be able to accrue up to \$48 per fortnight from their income free area when they have little or no earnings—to a maximum of \$1000—so that their payment will not be reduced as much when they take up work. This will be of particular benefit to women, who comprise a large proportion of the temporary and casual work force.

BETTER EMPLOYMENT SERVICES TO HELP PEOPLE WHO HELP THEMSELVES

Australians Working Together will also provide more opportunities for people receiving income support to build new skills, maintain existing skills and stay connected with the community through expanded and enhanced employment services. The Government will spend:

- \$19 million to create 30,000 extra Job Search Training places;
- \$40 million to create 16,500 extra Work for the Dole places;
- \$11 million to assist some 35,000 job seekers with Community Work placements;
- \$16 million on personal job seeker skills development for eligible job seekers in their last week of Work for the Dole or equivalent Community Work placement;
- \$50 million on Training Credits of up to \$800 each for 64,500 eligible job seekers being assisted by Community Work Coordinators;
- \$59 million on Training Credits of up to \$800 each for indigenous and mature age job seekers in Job Search Training or Intensive Assistance;
- \$9 million on 3,600 extra literacy and numeracy training places;
- \$62 million for a new Personal Support Programme improving and replacing the current Community Support Programme; and
- \$11 million for 42,000 assessments of Personal Support Programme participants by Intensive Assistance providers.

A FAIR GO FOR MATURE AGE WORKERS

People over 50 on income support payments—a growing number of whom are women—face a particular risk of losing up-to-date work skills, becoming isolated from the community, slipping into inactivity and ill health and running down their savings

before retirement age. Retrenchment is particularly difficult for people over 50 because of prevailing attitudes to employing mature workers, as highlighted in the June 2000 House of Representatives Employment, Education and Workplace Relations Standing Committee Report: *Age Counts: An Inquiry into Issues Specific to Mature Age Workers* (the Nelson report). *Australians Working Together* will help address these issues by:

- encouraging active involvement in the job market and the community among income support recipients over 50. There will be no new entrants to Partner Allowance and Mature Age Allowance—payments which do not require recipients to look for work or take part in the community—from July 2003. Some 98 per cent of Partner Allowees are women. People currently on these allowances will be encouraged to transfer to Newstart Allowance to take advantage of the training and other services available with that payment;
- people on Partner Allowance, Mature Age Allowance and Widow Allowance over 50 will be invited to attend an annual interview. The interview will encourage them to take up opportunities to stay involved in the community, to build their confidence, to maintain their skills, to retrain and to undertake financial planning as they approach retirement age;
- providing better information to retrenchees about opportunities in the labour market and how to access assistance to set up their own businesses and building a more co-operative approach between business and government to promote best practice guidelines on managing retrenchments; and
- better assessing people's capacity to work and providing people with more employment, rehabilitation, training and education support.

The Government will spend a total of \$146 million over four years in new assistance for workers over 50 and \$163 million in improving disability assessment and expanding assistance for people with disabilities.

Women and Health

Health and wellbeing are central to the lives of Australian women. This year the Howard Government builds on its considerable record in health. The Government is committed to the provision of universally affordable health services, preventative care and promotion of healthy lifestyles. Budget initiatives focus on cervical screening, after hours emergency care and health services for rural and remote women. These build on a wide variety of measures the Government has implemented over past years that will help to improve the health and well being of women. These include:

- Funding over four years for support services for women diagnosed with breast cancer through specialised health care and better information about support services, with a particular focus on the needs of women in regional and rural areas as well as funding for the National Breast Cancer Centre.

- The National Depression Initiative to destigmatise depression and get professional help to sufferers more quickly. Depression is a major health issue for women.
- Private health insurance reforms, including a 30 per cent rebate on private health insurance and life time health cover, reflecting a commitment to making private health care more affordable and accessible to all Australians. This will benefit women in particular as more women than men are covered by private health insurance.

MENTAL HEALTH: MORE OPTIONS, BETTER SERVICES

In the 2001-02 Budget the Government will provide \$120.4 million over 4 years to improve the quality of care provided through general practice to Australians with a mental illness. This measure will encourage better identification, care and review for mental health patients by general practitioners. It will also enable general practitioners to provide best practice mental health care through education and training, improved access to allied health professional support and psychiatric consultancy.

ALCOHOL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATION FOUNDATION

Alcohol abuse is a major cause of death and hospitalisation in Australia and makes a significant contribution to the total burden of disease. Alcohol misuse can not only shorten people's lives through disease, but is also a significant factor in road trauma, falls, drowning, suicide, other injuries and mental illness. The financial burden of misuse of alcohol to the community has been estimated at \$4.5 billion a year, including lower productivity due to lost work days, road accident costs, legal and court costs as well as health care costs. [Collins DJ and Lapsley HM (1996) *The social costs of drug abuse in Australia in 1988 and 1992* AGPS]

To help alleviate this burden, the Government is funding the establishment of an independent Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation in order to prevent alcohol and other licit substance abuse. The aim of the Foundation is to prevent abuse of alcohol and other licit substances, particularly among vulnerable population groups. This measure will provide \$115 million to the Foundation.

The Foundation will:

- support evidence-based treatment for alcohol and other legal substance abuse, including rehabilitation, research and prevention programmes;
- promote community education highlighting the dangers of licit substance abuse; and
- provide funding grants to organisations to deliver these services on behalf of the Foundation.

The focus of this initiative is on the provision of effective treatment and rehabilitation services and also of health promotion programmes which have been shown to make a significant contribution to the reduction of alcohol misuse.

CERVICAL SCREENING INCENTIVES FOR GENERAL PRACTITIONERS

In the 2001-02 Budget the Government will provide incentives totalling \$71.9 million over four years to general practitioners to increase the rates of participation in the National Cervical Screening Programme. This initiative will introduce a financial incentive that will be paid directly to the general practitioner whenever the doctor screens a 'high risk' patient. There will also be a population based incentive paid through the Practice Incentives Programme to general practices which meet certain targets for the proportion of women attending their practice who participate in cervical screening.

This initiative will be of particular benefit to older women in rural and remote areas, and from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, who participate in the cervical screening programme at lower rates, and who consequently have higher morbidity and mortality from cervical cancer.

AFTER HOURS EMERGENCY CARE

Research data indicates that women are high users of after hours emergency care services. This 2001-02 Budget measure has four components worth \$43.4 million over four years. Funding will be made available to:

- improve after hours service by providing funding for wider implementation of successful models demonstrated under the after hours trials, seed funding for groups of general practitioners to explore better ways of organising and providing services and service development grants to develop sustainable new after hours arrangements;
- facilitate the Commonwealth's work with State and Territory governments in the development of health call centres;
- develop and implement a quality incentives programme for deputising services based on accreditation to the National Association of Medical Deputising Services and Royal Australian College of General Practitioners approved standards for deputising services; and
- continue essential research into, and monitoring of, after hours primary medical care service provision.

Health services for rural and regional women

The Federal Government is committed to improving access to health and aged care services for Australians living in regional, rural and remote locations. Since 1996, it has introduced a broad range of initiatives to ensure the best health care is available to everyone no matter where they live, both through its own programs and the substantial support it provides to the States and Territories. Successive Budget packages have built on these initiatives culminating in the 2000–01 Budget's Regional Health Strategy: More Doctors, Better Services – an extensive and integrated package worth \$562.1 million over four years.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE NURSES FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL AUSTRALIA AND OTHER AREAS OF NEED

This Budget will provide \$104.3 million over four years to improve access to medical services for patients in rural areas and other areas of doctor shortage, by providing support for general practices to employ practice nurses. These arrangements will allow general practitioners in these practices to focus on diagnosis and clinical care, while practice nurses assist in the management of chronic diseases such as diabetes and asthma, conduct health assessments, and provide clinical support.

The initiative will be targeted to those areas where patient access to medical services is limited due to an undersupply of general practitioners, as in rural and remote Australia, and in provincial and outer metropolitan areas where there are doctor shortages. Funds will be provided through the Practice Incentives Programme.

Under this measure \$5.2 million over four years is for re-entry training programs for rural nurses. This will be provided via a scholarship programme of approximately 400 scholarships per annum, and provision of funding to support professional development of nurses.

RURAL NURSING SCHOLARSHIPS

In the 2001-02 Budget the Government will provide \$13 million over four years to improve the access to undergraduate nursing education for rural and regional students.

Under this initiative \$10.9 million over four years will provide greater access to undergraduate nursing degrees for students who are from rural and regional Australia. One hundred rural nursing scholarships of \$10,000 per annum will be available for rural students who nominate to study the majority or entirety of their degree at a rural campus. A further ten scholarships will be available for Indigenous Australian nursing students or Aboriginal health workers who want to upgrade their qualifications.

The scholarships will ensure that rural students have access to undergraduate nursing education in rural areas by removing some of the financial barriers associated with higher education.

In addition, \$2.1 million over four years will be provided for support measures associated with the scholarship with a particular emphasis on indigenous nursing students. Funding will be provided to facilitate greater access to mentor/preceptor programs and financial assistance will be made available for scholarship holders in exceptional circumstances where students suffer financial hardship. Funding will also be provided for culturally appropriate training for rural nurses to assist them better deal with Indigenous Australian clients.

Women, Education and Technology

Women continue to do well in all levels of education with more girls than boys completing Year 12 and more women than men undertaking higher education. There has been a steady increase in the participation of women in non-traditional areas of study. For example the number of women participating in vocational education and training is rising much faster than for men, and women now make up 49.0 per cent of students in this education stream. This year's Budget recognises that women are still not equally represented in science and technology and, in addition, places a new emphasis on increasing women's access to post graduate qualifications. The Budget also recognises the need to be at the forefront in areas where women are highly represented with a review of current arrangements for the education and training of nurses.

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY AWARENESS PROGRAMME

The Department of Industry, Science and Resources administers the Science and Technology Awareness Programme (STAP). STAP is designed to raise community awareness about the importance of science and technology and to encourage young people to undertake science-based careers. Women are one of the target groups of the programme: reached directly via a number of supported external activities and, indirectly, through general program activities. Currently women have a low participation rate at all levels of activity in science and technology, including secondary education, tertiary education and employment, and need to be made more aware of science and technology in career choices. Women can make a greater contribution in their own right and also have a significant influence on the attitudes of young people. An appreciation of the importance of science and technology will assist them in providing better informed guidance to young people.

The \$35 million National Innovation Awareness Strategy announced in the Innovation Statement *Backing Australia's Ability* will broaden the emphasis of STAP to encourage participation of women in innovation and entrepreneurship, in addition to science and technology.

REVIEW OF NURSING EDUCATION

The Government has announced a national review of nursing education, commencing in May 2001. The previous review of nursing education was conducted in 1994 a year after the transfer of nursing training from hospitals into universities was finalised. Since that review, the links between nursing education and the demands of the labour market have become the focus of increasing debate.

The review team has been asked to make recommendations on models of nurse education and training to meet emerging labour force needs, including practical training and re-entry into the workforce. It will also examine the types of skills and knowledge required to meet the changing needs of nurses and mechanisms for attracting new recruits as well as encouraging the commitment to life-long learning of those already engaged in the profession.

As the Government is keen to elicit views from the many stakeholders interested in nursing education there will be public submissions, consultations and a reference group from key organisations. To give stakeholders as full an opportunity as possible to have input into the review, it will not report until early 2002.

The review will look at the effectiveness of current arrangements for the education and training of nurses including enrolled, registered and specialist nurses. It will help inform Government and health care providers of the factors in the labour market that affect employment of nurses and the choice of nursing as a career.

POSTGRADUATE EDUCATION LOANS SCHEME

The recently announced Postgraduate Education Loans Scheme (PELS) will provide further opportunities for women and others undertaking higher degrees by coursework, both in acquiring new skills and in upgrading their existing qualifications.

As part of the Government's commitment to innovation, the *Backing Australia's Ability* Innovation Statement announced the PELS initiative to encourage life-long learning and to help Australian's upgrade and acquire new skills. PELS will be available from 2002 and provides an income contingent loan for eligible students enrolled in fee-paying postgraduate non-research courses. PELS will encourage individuals employed in community-based professions such as nursing, health and psychology, areas where women are often employed, to pursue further study without the need to pay a tuition fee on enrolment.

PELS is an interest free loans scheme similar to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) with income-contingent repayment arrangements. Students will begin repaying their loan when their income reaches the minimum threshold for compulsory repayments. Compulsory repayments via the taxation system will be based on the principle that the more a person earns, the higher the repayment until the loan is repaid. Unlike HECS however, universities, rather than the Government, will set tuition prices of courses for which PELS loans are available.

At the postgraduate level, 52.7 per cent of students undertaking higher degrees by coursework are women. It is expected that 126,000 women will be eligible to apply for a PELS loan over the next five years.

Preventing Violence against Women

The Commonwealth Government, having nominated domestic violence as an issue of national importance, is working with other governments and with business and the community to help prevent violence against women in all its forms.

The Prime Minister's leadership through the Government's landmark 1996 National Firearms Agreement has permanently removed 643,000 firearms from the Australian community. The levels of firearm related crimes and of firearm suicide have fallen. The Agreement denies access to firearms to individuals subject to a *Domestic Violence Order* or an *Apprehended Violence Order*.

Also in 1996, the Australian Bureau of Statistics Women's Safety Survey provided the first comprehensive national data on all forms of violence against women.

Partnerships Against Domestic Violence

In 1997, the Prime Minister brought together the heads of all State and Territory governments to work together to prevent domestic violence across Australia. This historic event was the first time that heads of Australian governments had joined to speak out against domestic violence.

The Commonwealth Government has committed \$50 million to *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* to test innovative preventative measures and best practice to prevent and address domestic violence.

Partnerships is additional to the Commonwealth's \$157 million funding each year for the Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme, a joint Commonwealth/State programme to provide transitional support and accommodation to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness, many of whom are women escaping domestic violence.

New emergency crisis payments from Centrelink are also helping women fleeing domestic violence to meet the costs of establishing a new and safer home.

Since the inception of *Partnerships*, the Commonwealth has:

- sponsored some 100 projects to explore best practice at local, regional and national level. Projects include the development of competency standards for worker training; research into domestic violence among older Australians; development of community awareness products for children, indigenous people and women with disabilities; and better coordination of information between police and justice systems.

- produced a range of showcasing events to disseminate information about new findings in domestic violence research, policy, and programmes.
- hosted three forums covering the areas of children witnessing domestic violence, men and relationships, and indigenous family violence. The forums have brought together academics, experts, service providers and government policy makers in the relevant areas to discuss policy and programme delivery and to identify next steps to move forward.
- established the Australian Domestic Violence Clearinghouse to gather together research and publications from states, territories and overseas. The Clearinghouse produces regular newsletters and discussion papers on areas of specific interest to domestic violence workers – for example children and young people, trends in domestic violence policy and men.

Current major initiatives for *Partnerships* include addressing the impact on children of domestic violence; strengthening programmes to ensure perpetrators of domestic violence put an end to the violence; and community education for mainstream, indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Programme is providing \$6 million over four years to help local indigenous communities take action to reduce family violence. Grant recipients will also be assisted by a mentoring team which will provide advice on project management, self-documentation and self-evaluation.

A new national indigenous family violence community awareness campaign was launched in April 2001. Called 'Walking into Doors', it features indigenous musicians Archie Roach and Ruby Hunter who talk about the experience of violence in their lives and those of indigenous families and perform a range of songs. A series of 10 community forums is being held and are designed so that community members can interact with service providers and can start discussions about addressing violence in their community.

The Commonwealth is also leading work with State and Territory governments, through the Ministerial Council on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (MCATSIA), to address indigenous family violence.

The Government has been working on a number of other strategies aimed at prevention of violence in the lives of women. This has been achieved through:

- \$50 million to establish *Crimtrac*, to provide Australia's police services with leading edge information and investigation tools, including a new national fingerprint and palmprint system, a national DNA system, a child sex offenders system and much better access to police operational information, including criminal records and domestic violence orders.
- The National Crime Prevention programme with funding of \$21 million promotes policies and projects to prevent and reduce violence and crime in Australian communities. A number of projects have prevention of domestic violence as a

focus, for example, a national survey of young peoples' attitudes to, and experiences of, domestic violence and a model of intervention with adolescents to prevent domestic violence in rural areas.

- Research and analysis of the impact of crime on women through the Australian Institute of Criminology.

NATIONAL INITIATIVE TO COMBAT SEXUAL ASSAULT

Building on its considerable record in domestic violence and crime prevention initiatives, in the 2001-02 Budget the Government will provide funding of \$16.5 million over four years to facilitate a national approach to combat sexual assault against women.

The measure, to be administered through the Office of the Status of Women, will establish partnerships with other governments, key organisations and service providers to develop, test and implement strategies that address the increasing incidence of sexual assault in the community. This will include campaigns to promote community awareness, ensuring the sharing of approaches to combat sexual assault and promote 'best practice' across jurisdiction and agencies, and funding of time limited projects.

International Year of Volunteers

The International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001 celebrates and recognises the achievements of all volunteers across the world. In Australia, women's volunteer rates are higher than those of men, 21 per cent compared to 17 per cent. This is the case regardless of age, occupation, family status or location.

During 2001, communities are encouraged to celebrate the international year of volunteers. This could include promotion of volunteer activity, greater recognition of volunteers, initiatives to foster volunteer efforts and supporting volunteers.

The following initiatives are being implemented by the Commonwealth Government in this, the International Year of Volunteers:

- The IYV Small Grants programme is a competitive process that offers funding of up to \$5,000 to assist local organisations and to recognise and celebrate the International Year of Volunteers. Over 700 applications have been funded in Round One of the programme.
- IYV Practical Solutions Grants of up to \$25,000 are rolling out to some peak volunteering organisations for legacy and community development projects.
- The Commonwealth has developed key partnerships to support IYV. These include sponsorship of Volunteering Australia's national volunteering conference in October, sponsoring an additional Award category called 'International Year of

Volunteers 2001' in the National CommunityLink Awards, a special IYV award in the Local Government Association Awards, and seconding a Department of Family and Community Services person to Volunteering Australia.

- A communication campaign has been designed to develop awareness of the International Year among the Australian community, and to encourage and nurture a positive image of volunteering.
- Commonwealth funding has been provided to Volunteering Australia's *Go Volunteer* recruitment database and website. *Go Volunteer* provides individuals with opportunities to volunteer and organisations with the opportunity to advertise volunteering positions.
- The Department of Family and Community Services has commissioned research into volunteering which includes a literature review on volunteering in Australia and overseas.
- The National Skills Development Programme for Volunteers initiative, introduced in the 2000-01 Budget will provide general and specialist training and skills development to volunteers that will improve the standard of service to the communities those volunteers support.

Older Women

Women make up more than half—56 per cent—the Australian population aged over 65 and almost 70 per cent of those aged over 85. Recognising the enormous contribution of older women to the Australian community, the Government is taking practical steps to ensure that women can plan for an active and rewarding old age. Financial security in older age is a key issue for women, particularly for those who have taken time out from paid employment for parenting or other responsibilities, through measures such as:

- ensuring that the single Age pension remains at least 25 per cent of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) with flow-ons to the married rate and as part of The New Tax System; introducing the Aged Persons Savings Bonus, worth up to \$1,000 per person; and the Self-Funded Retirees Supplementary Bonus, worth up to an additional \$2,000 per person for persons not in receipt of an age or service pension. Both bonuses are tax free and self funded retirees aged 60 and over may be able to receive both bonuses – a total of \$3,000.
- more flexibility and retirement security for members of couples when marriages break down. Separating couples will have the ability to divide their superannuation by agreement or, when they are unable to agree, by court order.
- Retirement Savings Accounts to provide a portable, flexible and low risk savings option for many women with broken periods in paid employment or irregular savings and the income tax Spouse Rebate provides an 18 percent rebate on

contributions of up to \$3,000 each year made to a superannuation fund or Retirement Savings Account of a spouse with little or no personal income.

- enhancing primary care for older Australians, people with chronic illnesses and those who require a range of different services to support them in the community. Older women and women who are paid or unpaid carers are the principal beneficiaries of these measures.
- enhancing quality care and improving standards in residential aged care.
- providing extra funding 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 widows/ers access high quality residential aged care services and community care packages, address gaps in service delivery and complement available services.

RESTORE WAR WIDOWS PENSIONS RELINQUISHED UPON REMARRIAGE PRIOR TO 1984

The Government will restore war widows pension to approximately 3,000 widows who remarried prior to May 1984 and therefore lost eligibility to their war widows pension as a consequence. This measure addresses a long-standing anomaly and ensures that all war widows will be treated in a fair and consistent manner.

ASSISTANCE FOR FORMER POW(J)S, CIVILIAN DETAINEES AND THEIR WIDOWS/ERS

The Government will provide a one-off payment of \$25,000 each to Australian Defence Force veterans who were held as prisoners of war of Japan and Australian civilian detainees of the Japanese, or people who were at one time their widow or widower. The measure recognises the unique hardships endured by prisoners of war of the Japanese. It will cost \$247.8 million and will be made as far as possible in 2000-01. The payment itself will be non-taxable, be exempt under the lump sum testing rules and be an exempt asset under the assets test, but the deeming rules will apply.

SENIOR AUSTRALIANS AND PENSIONERS – INCREASED REBATES AND THRESHOLDS

The Government has adjusted the pensioner rebate, low income aged person's rebate and Medicare levy threshold to ensure that single senior Australians with incomes up to \$20,000 are completely free from tax, effective from the 2000-01 income year. For couples, the new effective tax-free threshold is up to \$32,612. These rebates cut out at \$37,840 for singles and \$29,122 for each member of a couple such that all eligible

persons with incomes up to these amounts will pay less tax as a result of these measures.

ACKNOWLEDGING OLDER AUSTRALIANS – ONE OFF PAYMENT TO THE AGED

The Government will give a one-off payment of \$300 to around 2.2 million income support customers of age pension age, including service pensioners over age service pension age (56½ for women and 60 for men). The payment will provide additional assistance to older people and an immediate stimulus to spending in the economy. No means test is required for the payment and it will not be taxable. Income support customers will not have to lodge a claim to get the payment; it will be paid to them automatically before 1 July 2001.

Up to a further 30,000 people, who are outside the personal income tax and social security systems, and are of age pension age, are expected to claim the \$300 through a separate process. These people are not covered by the above measure and are not in a position to benefit from changes to the tax-free thresholds because of the level of taxable income. Claims will be able to be made through Centrelink from July.

ACKNOWLEDGING OLDER AUSTRALIANS – EXTEND ELIGIBILITY FOR COMMONWEALTH SENIORS HEALTH CARD

The income limits for the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC) will be increased as part of the 2001-02 Budget. The income limits for singles will be increased from \$41,000 per annum to \$50,000 and from \$68,676 to \$80,000 per annum for couples (combined). This will mean that an additional 40,000 self-funded retirees will have access to reduced prices for pharmaceuticals and Telephone Allowance of \$17.20 per quarter. Centrelink will assess claims and issue cards (although a very small number will be issued by the Department of Veterans' Affairs).

ACKNOWLEDGING OLDER AUSTRALIANS – TELEPHONE ALLOWANCE TO COMMONWEALTH SENIORS HEALTH CARD HOLDERS

The Government will extend Telephone Allowance, currently available for pensioners, to self-funded retirees who qualify for a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC). Self funded retirees of age pension age who hold a Commonwealth Seniors Health Card will now be able to claim a Telephone Allowance of \$17.20 per quarter. In addition, the Commonwealth will negotiate with State and Territory governments to extend to CSHC holders some or all of the concessions that are available to pensioners and certain allowees.

INCREASING CARE AND DIVERSITY FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS

The aged care measures announced in the 2001-02 Budget build on five years achievement in providing quality residential and community care to older Australians.

The Government will spend \$24.3 million over four years on measures that will build on and extend this framework by recognising the particular needs of older people from culturally diverse backgrounds, helping people to stay at home longer, manage better and feel more secure. Additional support will also be provided to older people living in the community, including continuation of the Safe at Home pilot, which provides personal alert systems to frail older people through enhanced Day Therapy Centres. Women comprise the majority of older people living in their own homes in the community, and in aged care homes, all of whom will benefit from these measures.

ENSURING QUALITY CARE FOR OLDER AUSTRALIANS

Women comprise 72 per cent of residents in aged care homes. The Government has substantially increased funding for residential aged care to ensure that Australia has an aged care system that offers high care standards, has the confidence of the community and is responsive to community needs. The outlay in the 2001-02 financial year is expected to be \$4.2 billion. This is an increase of \$1.7 billion or 68 per cent over the 1995-96 expenditure of \$2.5 billion.

The Government will spend \$28.8 million over four years on measures to ensure that care standards in residential aged care homes are maintained, a robust quality assurance and complaints handling system is in place and working effectively, and that the community is able to make informed decisions about residential aged care options.

RESTRUCTURING RURAL AND URBAN FRINGE AGED CARE HOMES

The Government will spend \$5.0 million in 2001-02 to promote ongoing care for aged care residents in rural and urban fringe areas of Australia by providing grants to smaller aged care homes which face particular challenges in improving business processes and infrastructure to continue to meet accreditation requirements. Funding will continue for the restructuring programme, including:

- assistance to improve care standards and management practices;
- minor capital grants, including for fire safety work; and
- stimulation for sharing of management resources.

Women in Regional, Rural and Remote Areas

The Commonwealth Government is committed to assisting women in rural and remote communities by strengthening the quality of support systems, enhancing the ability of women to actively contribute to policy affecting them and in building their communities.

In 1998 the Government commissioned ground breaking research that investigated rural women's economic contribution to rural industries and impediments to their access to decision making in the sector. The national research project entitled *Missed Opportunities – harnessing the potential of women in agriculture* quantified, for the first time, the dollar contributions rural women make to their farm businesses and their communities.

The Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services established a Regional and Rural Women's Unit in 1999 to address the needs of regional women and to ensure that women's perspectives are taken into account in the development of policies and programmes affecting regional Australia. One function of the Unit is to provide the secretariat for the Regional Women's Advisory Council, created by the Government both to advise on key issues facing regional Australia and to ensure that the Government is aware of the views, aspirations and needs of regional and rural women.

The Council is currently undertaking an action research project involving seven sites around Australia. The purpose of the research is to identify those behaviours, attitudes and skills that communities employ to successfully manage rapid change. The results will be announced in September 2001.

Indigenous Women

There is a range of Government policies, programmes and services that support indigenous women and their communities.

In indigenous health, the Government has introduced measures such as the National Breast Feeding Strategy and a comprehensive range of measures to reduce the incidence and transmission of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs) amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Other initiatives include funding to enable improved access to comprehensive primary health care services and funding to improve water, sewerage, power systems, roads, airstrips and the construction and upgrade of community facilities, and a National Child Nutrition Programme.

The Indigenous Employment Programme (\$57.7 million in 2000-01) comprises a range of complementary initiatives which work alongside the special measures to improve outcomes for indigenous job seekers from the Job Network. To date there have been the following achievements:

- More than 5,200 Indigenous Australians have been assisted under Structured Training and Employment Projects (STEP) since its commencement, of which 31 per cent are women. The 340 projects approved so far this year will generate more than 7,500 placements.
- 58 per cent of the cadetships under the Indigenous Cadetship Project are for women.
- Under the Wage Assistance component, which is particularly relevant to small business in regional areas, around 3,500 unemployed indigenous people have been placed in the 22 months of operation to date, of which 34 per cent are women.
- The Corporate Leaders for Indigenous Employment involves 48 major Australian companies in generating more jobs in the private sector for indigenous people. This will be supported by flexible funding under the programme. The funding will be based on outcomes achieved. To date, more than 1,600 job opportunities have been identified and around 26 per cent of the filled jobs have been by women.
- Over 300 Indigenous Australians have been assisted by their CDEP organisation to leave the project and get into mainstream unsubsidised employment. To date, around 40 per cent of those leaving their CDEP have been women.

The Government is working with indigenous communities to prevent violence and, through ATSIIC, funds Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Units and indigenous family violence projects under *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*.

Reforms to improve the quality, accessibility and accountability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services are continuing. National minimum service standards and new policy guidelines for test case funding have been implemented, and best practice standards for legal services are being developed on a State and Territory basis. A major focus of the reforms is to improve the services available to indigenous women, particularly in the areas of family violence, family law and other civil matters. In a related initiative, at a cost of around \$3 million, twelve Family Violence Legal Prevention Units are being established to provide advice and legal assistance to indigenous women.

The Government's Indigenous Sport programme, introduced in the 1999-2000 Budget, assists female athletes to attend national and international events and provides scholarships to women who compete in the mainstream sport development system and representative teams.

LINK-UP

The Government continues to address the consequences of past family separation practices through its four year \$63 million package of initiatives announced in December 1997. The Link-up network and the counselling and parenting programmes which were the centrepiece of the Government's practical package will continue beyond 30 June 2002 at a further cost of \$53.9 million over the four years to 30 June

2006. This will provide some certainty to indigenous people using these services to assist them to cope with the hurt and trauma caused by separation and will ensure the new national network of Link-up family reunion services—which will be completed with the opening of the Western Australian office—can continue to assist in reuniting families.

The Government's \$1.7 billion *Australians Working Together* package contains a number of measures to benefit Indigenous Australians and their communities.

SUPPORT FOR CDEP PARTICIPANTS TO GET A JOB

A \$31 million component of the *Australians Working Together* package will help to improve job outcomes from the CDEP scheme, by assisting up to 10,000 CDEP participants in areas with good job opportunities, by creating Indigenous Employment Centres which will work closely with local employers and the Job Network.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AGREEMENTS AND CAPACITY BUILDING

As part of the *Australians Working Together* package a further \$32.2 million over four years from September 2002 will be provided to develop community participation agreements in 100 remote communities. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission will work with these communities to identify practical ways members of the communities can contribute to their families and community development in return for income support. The Community Participation Agreements will help keep everyone in the community involved in practical solutions to the challenges their communities face.

TRAINING CREDITS FOR MATURE AGE AND INDIGENOUS JOB SEEKERS

Training credits of up to \$800 will enable eligible individuals to gain work-related skills. Commencing July 2002, 69,000 Training Credits will be provided over four years at a cost of \$59 million. Training Credits will be offered to mature age and indigenous job seekers who participate in Job Search Training and Intensive Assistance. The skills of some mature age and indigenous job seekers make it hard for them to gain existing local jobs or jobs in emerging industries and training credits will assist them overcome these obstacles.

INCREASED EDUCATION AND TRAINING ASSISTANCE FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

\$10.2 million over four years commencing in July 2002 will provide increased education and training assistance for Indigenous Australians and support local companies to help young indigenous people develop business and leadership skills. 1,600 secondary school students in indigenous communities will be encouraged to

complete year 12 and progress to further education and training and a further 2,300 secondary school students will be assisted to take up vocational learning opportunities supported by business. Local companies will be involved to help young Indigenous Australians to develop business and social leadership skills.

More information about the *Australians Working Together* package can be found online at www.together.gov.au

UPGRADING INDIGENOUS HOUSING

Commencing July 2001, \$75 million will be provided over four years to improve indigenous housing and infrastructure in rural and remote areas. Funding will be provided to State and Territory governments and to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission's Housing and Infrastructure Programme and will be used to repair existing houses and maintain them at a safe and healthy standard, to build new houses to reduce overcrowding and to enable communities to better manage their housing and tenancy services.

Migrant and Refugee Women

The Government is strongly committed to helping refugees and people who have faced serious abuse of their human rights. The Government has approved a Migration (Humanitarian) Programme of 12,000 places for 2001-02, the same programme level as for 2000-01. This reflects Australia's staunch commitment to play its part in international humanitarian crises by resettling in Australia people who face persecution, discrimination or similar abuse of human rights. In 1999-2000, approximately 6,000 females were assisted through this programme.

The Government has announced a Migration (non-Humanitarian) Programme of 85,000 places for 2001-02, including 37,900 places in the Family Stream and 45,500 places in the Skill Stream. The increase of over 4,000 places in the Family Stream reflects the increased demand for the migration of spouses and fiancées, over 60 per cent of whom are women.

Detention Arrangements

The Government announced in February 2001 that it is considering issues involved in a trial alternative arrangement for women and children required by Australian law to be in immigration detention. A key aim of the trial is to create an environment for women and children that is as "normal" as possible, albeit that they will still be formally in detention under migration legislation.

Promoting Leadership for Women

The Government is committed to ensuring increasing participation of women in leadership and decision-making roles. Initiatives to date include taking a leadership

role in increasing the representation of women on boards through the Executive Search Pilot Programme and the Early Warning System. Introduced in the 1998-99 Budget, these measures are designed to increase the nominations for all Commonwealth controlled boards and bodies. The Government also funds a range of other initiatives to improve leadership, for example, in communities, through the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy and for rural and remote women through the Department of Transport and Regional Services. In the 2001-02 Budget the Government will continue to promote women's leadership through a Women's National Leadership Initiative and a Women's Development Programme.

The Australian Commonwealth Parliament has led the way in women's participation. There are 57 women in the Commonwealth Parliament. Women make up 25.4 per cent of the Parliament, an increase from just 14 per cent in 1995 and almost double the international average of 13.4 per cent. Women also occupy 32.2 per cent of the positions on Commonwealth boards and bodies, where the Commonwealth has total control over the appointment.

WOMEN'S NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

The Government will provide an additional \$2.4 million over four years to extend Government activities that are increasing the participation of women in leadership positions and to promote leadership by women in other areas, particularly rural, indigenous, marginalised and disadvantaged women.

WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Government will provide an additional \$5.6 million over four years to expand and enhance government support for organisations representing the diversity of Australian Women through the establishment of the Women's Development Programme. The programme will fund targeted research, policy and service development projects responsive to women's needs and circumstances, and will encourage and support women's contributions to Government policy formulation. The programme will also support women's capacity building and mentoring activities. The Programme will be administered through the Office of the Status of Women and will bring their total funding for women's development to \$7.6 million over the next four years.

2001 Telstra Business Women's Awards

The Government continues to demonstrate its firm commitment to women through sponsorship of the 2001 Telstra Business Women's Awards. This prestigious national programme is designed to recognise and reward the outstanding achievements of women from all sectors and levels of enterprise. The Awards have also been instrumental in raising broader community awareness of the vital contribution that women make to the Australian economy.

The Government has sponsored the Awards since their inception in 1995 and has recently initiated a 'Commonwealth Government Private Sector Award' for employees or part-owners of businesses with less than 100 staff. Women play a particularly important role in this sector, where they currently account for 35 per cent of Australia's 1.3 million small business operators.

Informed Choices for Australian Women

The Government will provide an additional \$5.5 million over four years to develop a women's information strategy to improve access to government information for and about women. A key objective of this initiative will be to establish web-based access to integrated information for women and about women's circumstances and needs. In this phase:

- a comprehensive data warehouse, integrating statistical information about women's needs and circumstances will be established;
- government information relevant to women will be made accessible through a single web-site;
- a research and policy issues publications series relevant to women will be established; and
- a national conference for women will consider contemporary issues and concerns.

The National Conference, *Australian Women Speak*, will be hosted by the Commonwealth Office of the Status of Women in August 2001. It will enable discussion and information exchange between governments, service providers, women and their organisations. The four themes of the conference will explore: economic self support and security for women; optimal status and position of women; elimination of violence in the lives of women; and maintenance of good health and wellbeing throughout women's lives.

Women in the Workplace

More women than ever are participating in the workplace. In August 2000, the participation rate of women reached an all time high of 55.5 per cent. The gap between male and female earnings has narrowed since 1996.

The Government continues to place an emphasis on achieving a better balance between work and family responsibilities. For women in the workforce it provides particular support through:

- the *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* and the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA). EOWA offers pragmatic and solutions-oriented advice to assist employers to comply with the Act

and to move beyond compliance to see that enabling women to fully contribute to the best of their ability is a critical priority for Australian business; and

- the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (WR Act). A central objective of the WR Act is to assist employees to balance their work and family responsibilities effectively through the development of mutually beneficial work practices with employers. The WR Act also requires the Australian Industrial Relations Commission to implement the principle of equal remuneration for work of equal value and provides an extensive range of provisions to help prevent and eliminate discrimination on a range of grounds, including sex.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE AGENCY

In 2001, employers will report for the first time under the Government's *Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999* for 2000-01. In 2001-02 the Government will provide \$4.2 million over the next three years to enhance the role of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) in promoting equal opportunity in workplaces. This will enable EOWA to deliver the new improved on-line reporting and enhance the Agency's new expanded educative focus working to assist employers and building strategic partnerships. The Government continues to fund the EOWA Advisory Board to support and facilitate effective communications between employers and EOWA as part of this initiative.

Women's human rights and anti-discrimination

The Government continues to address the issue of discrimination against women and has taken the lead in the area of pregnancy or potential pregnancy discrimination.

In November 2000, the Government responded to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's report into pregnancy and work issues. The Government's response to the report puts forward practical and concrete steps to remove workplace discrimination against pregnant and potentially pregnant women. These include:

- the development and launch by the Sex Discrimination Commissioner in April 2001 of the Pregnancy Guidelines that aim to provide practical guidance and assistance to employers and employees about workplace pregnancy issues;
- amendments to the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* to clarify that discrimination on the ground of breastfeeding is prohibited; ensure that there is no confusion about the prohibition on asking questions at job interviews about pregnancy or potential pregnancy and to ensure that information gathered from medical examinations about pregnancy is not used for discriminatory purposes; and
- a public information campaign to raise awareness of, and inform employers and employees about, their rights and responsibilities regarding pregnancy and potential pregnancy issues in the workplace.

Women and Sport

The Government continues to change the current culture of Australian sport and physical activity towards one that enables the full participation and involvement of women through the National Plan for Women and Girls in Sport and Physical Activity Targeted at agencies and organisations which determine and deliver sport and physical activity opportunities, the national plan consists of a policy outlining guiding principles and a range of strategies, providing best practice examples for the inclusion of women in the sport and physical activity environment. Budget initiatives this year focus on harassment-free sport.

Harassment-free Sport Strategy

Development of the Government's Harassment-free Sport Strategy continued during 2000-01. The Strategy will work to decrease harassment, abuse and other forms of inappropriate behaviour in sport, to increase tolerance, sportsmanship, safety and to make more welcoming environments in sport for all people, particularly women, indigenous people and people with a disability. The Strategy encompasses several new measures designed to meet the diverse needs of the sport industry and the general community that were officially launched in March 2001. Additional measures around policy, education and training will commence in 2001-02 with the Government contributing approximately \$80,000.