



VERITY FIRTH MP FOR BALMAIN

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Older Women's Network (NSW) Inc.
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Dear Older Women's Network

Response to Older Women's Network (OWN) Questions

Thank you for your thoughtful questions.

I am very happy to discuss some of the Labor government's achievements in the promotion of gender and age equity and NSW. The Government fully supports the six recommendations of the 'The Disappearing Age' report, and the Minister for Women, Jodi McKay MP, and Minister for Health, Carmel Tebbutt MP, have introduced specific measures to address some of the issues raised.

As the NSW Minister for Women between 2007 and 2009, I oversaw the development of the NSW Office for Women into the Office for Women's Policy (OWFP), a high-level agency within the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) to co-ordinate research and policy initiatives on gender equality across government.

The current term of government has also seen the creation of the Premier's Expert Advisory Council for Women, an extensive consultation process for the formation of the *NSW Women's Plan*, and the development of a multi-agency, whole of government approach to tackling domestic violence.

I am particularly proud of the NSW Government's achievements in tackling domestic violence. The development of an integrated Domestic and Family Violence Services Program, the introduction of special Domestic Violence Liaison Officers within the NSW Police Force are just some of the initiatives that have been introduced.

Several programs have been set up to address the risk factors that have in the past increased the chance of homelessness or lack of stability for older women. These include the *The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program* and the *Staying Home, Leaving Violence Program*, which attempts to keep victims in their own homes wherever possible, instead moving perpetrators into other accommodation.

I have strongly supported the creation of further affordable and community housing within my electorate, and this is something I will continue to champion.

As the Member for Balmain, I have also advocated for an accessible and extensive public transport system. I have been particularly pleased to witness the rollout and growth of the new Metro Bus Network.

In my capacity as the Minister for Education and Training, I have overseen a number of programmes designed to encourage older women to find and retain employment, as well as explore new career pathways, re-enter the workforce after a long period away, or simply to upgrade their current skills.

TAFE NSW recognises that mature age women have particular learning needs. A number of strategies to meet these needs have been developed under the *Access to Employment and Education Training Framework*.

In many cases, women gain significant experience and qualification through both formal and informal paths. In the past, the extent and significance of such qualifications have not always been fairly recognised. TAFE NSW provides a dedicated print resource, *Women's Skills: Valuing Your Experience* that addresses this issue, while a number of TAFE institutes offer programmes designed to update skills, particularly in new technologies, to increase employability, and particularly in the case of women in rural and isolated areas, to take full benefit of these technologies in both their professional and personal lives.

TAFE NSW - Hunter Institute provides an outstanding example of the possibilities for older women in further education and employment. Its *Career Education for Women* program and Work Opportunities for Women (WOW) courses are designed specifically for women over 45. Women are provided with a supportive, flexible environment in which to identify and work towards their goals.

Not all prior learning is obtained in a formal setting. Many women have gained significant skills as a parent, carer or community worker.

The *STEPS Mobile Literacy Mentoring Program*, delivered by the TAFE NSW Riverina Institute, is designed to assist mature women in fostering the learning of their children or grandchildren. This was also an effective way of engaging marginalised families in education, and providing a support framework for further learning.

The Certificate III in Home and Community Care (TAFE NSW Sydney Institute) is delivered to mature age women who have extensive experience working in community based health services. A combination of the recognition of prior learning, on-the-job assessment and curriculum-based learning is an effective way of allowing these women to formalise their qualifications.

A pilot program, *Recognition for Mature Aged Students Certificate III/IV in Aged Care*, has also been carried out at TAFE NSW Riverina Institute. This pilot recognised the high number of women who work in the community or at home as primary carers for aged people. It also recognises that such women were more likely to be isolated in home settings, and facilitated higher-level TAFE training in Aged Care.

TAFE NSW also works closely with industry, local business, the community sector, and other educational providers. TAFE NSW Western Institute customised a course to support mature-age women gain employment at a new aged care facility at Parkes in Western NSW, delivering units of competency from the Certificate III in Aged Care.

These and other efforts appear to be paying off. A recent Productivity Commission survey has found that nearly 80% of women now remain in the workforce past the age of 45, including in non-traditional roles.

We are continuing to investigate and address existing inequities. In 2007 I introduced the *Women's Employment and Development Strategy*, which focuses on increasing the participation and retention of women in the public service. Measures under the Women's Employment and Development Strategy are designed to for example, scholarships and a child care subsidy are available to women to who wish to take part in the Executive Fellows Program at the Australia and New Zealand School of Government. More recently, the Premier's Expert Advisory Council on Women has completed a report on women and work which is forming the basis for further consultations.

A dedicated website provides further information on issues affecting older women in employment and education at <http://www.workandfamily.nsw.gov.au>.

As the hub of public sector employment, DPC makes public a great deal of statistical and other information, including in regards to EEO policy, benchmarks and targets.

All Government agencies are already required under the *Annual Reports (Departments) Act 1985* and the *Annual Reports (Statutory Bodies) Act 1984* to include a report of the EEO achievements during the reporting year and planning outcomes for the following year in their annual reports. A model template is provided by DPC to assist agencies in their reporting.

In regards to your questions about gendered research into issues such as homelessness, health and poverty I will, as always, be guided by the experts on the most effective methodology.

Thank you again for your questions. I am constantly inspired by the older women who I have met during my time as an MP and Minister, and will continue to support the interests of these women.

Yours sincerely



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Member for Balmain