

# NTCOSS

Northern Territory Council of Social Service



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## **Feedback on Consultations for the Development of a Northern Territory Gender Equality Framework**

The Northern Territory Council of Social Service (NTCOSS) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Territory Families – Office of Gender Equity and Diversity’s current consultation process regarding the development of a Gender Equality Framework (the Framework) for the Northern Territory (NT).

NTCOSS is a peak body for the social and community service sector in the NT, and an advocate for social justice on behalf of the people and communities who may be affected by poverty and disadvantage. The community sector in the NT is made up of community managed, non-government, not for profit organisations that work in social and community service delivery, sector development and advocacy. The community sector plays a vital role in creating social wellbeing for all Territorians and in building safe and healthy communities by providing services that enable people to access and participate in health services, education, employment, economic development, and family and community life.

NTCOSS’ vision is for a ‘fair, inclusive and sustainable NT where all individuals and communities can participate in and benefit from all aspects of social, cultural and economic life’. NTCOSS’ mission is to ‘promote an awareness and understanding of social issues through the NT community and to strive towards the development of an equitable and just society’.

NTCOSS represents a varied service sector, with members bringing different experiences and perspectives relating to gender equality across the region. NTCOSS acknowledges that a number of our member organisations with specific expertise in this area have also provided submissions relating to the consultation document. Due to this, and in respect to NTCOSS’ vision and mission, this submission will outline how gender inequality results in poverty and disadvantage, impacting a large cohort of the NT population unfairly.

As established in the consultation document, gender based violence, equal representation, gender pay gaps, equal access to health care and public services and participation are all issues affecting cohorts of people within the Territory. Data shows us that this gender inequality is compounded by other factors (known as intersectionality). Women and girls around the world, regardless of income levels, experience additional disadvantages on the basis of age, income, ethnic or religious identity,

geographic location, sexual orientation and gender identity, disability and immigration status (among a range of other factors).<sup>1</sup>

In the past decade, despite continued campaigns to address gender inequality, the gap between women and men caught in the cycle of poverty has continued to widen.<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon is often referred to as the ‘feminisation of poverty’.<sup>3</sup> The feminisation of poverty has not risen from purely economic perspectives, but also as a result of the continued and ingrained societal biases that exists towards women. Women living in poverty are often denied access to resources that others in our society benefit from; they often will not have adequate access to healthcare and housing, and are less likely to be educated.<sup>4</sup>

Despite Australia experiencing consistent economic growth over the last three decades, poverty levels have remained entrenched at a high level – with more than 3 million people living below the poverty line in Australia, with women comprising 52% of a core group of all people experiencing poverty.<sup>5</sup> Of the poverty rates in Australia, those living in remote or very remote localities, experience much higher levels of poverty than those living in urban centres.<sup>6</sup> These high rates of poverty are experienced disproportionately across the NT, with Aboriginal people in particular over represented regarding homelessness, unemployment and poor educational outcomes.

Of the population in the NT, 48% of people are female.<sup>7</sup> This statistic is similar for the NT’s Aboriginal population – of the 25% of the population who identify as Aboriginal, 50% are female.<sup>8</sup> As identified in the Framework document, the NT has the highest rates of domestic, family and sexual violence (DFSV) in Australia, and Aboriginal women are more likely to be victims of this form of gender based violence, with Aboriginal women accounting for 89% of all victims of DFSV in the NT. The impacts of DFSV as a driver of poverty and disadvantage are well documented; they include social isolation and exclusion, economic disadvantage (particularly regarding how changes in circumstances can impact welfare payments), and is the main reason women leave the home in Australia.<sup>9</sup>

Along with gendered crimes and the related impacts, economic instability is a key driver to women entering and/or experiencing poverty. Not only do women live with wage disparity, but they are less likely to hold permanent employment positions (often being employed on a casual basis).<sup>10</sup> Women disproportionately take on the majority of unpaid carer and domestic duties, including taking time off from work to raise children.<sup>11</sup> These factors not only apply financial strain and can be correlated to

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<sup>1</sup> Equal Measures 2030, *Harnessing the Power of Data for Gender Equality*, 2019

<sup>2</sup> UN Women – The Feminization of Poverty, accessed at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs1.htm>

<sup>3</sup> UN Women – The Feminization of Poverty, accessed at <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/followup/session/presskit/fs1.htm>

<sup>4</sup> Oxfam, *Our Approach*, accessed at <https://www.oxfam.ca/what-we-do/how-we-work/our-approach/>

<sup>5</sup> ACOSS and UNSW, *Poverty in Australia 2018*

<sup>6</sup> ACOSS and UNSW, *Poverty in Australia 2018*

<sup>7</sup> ABS, 2016 Quick Census Stats 2016, accessed at

[https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/7?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/7?opendocument)

<sup>8</sup> ABS, 2016 Quick Census Stats 2016, accessed at

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<sup>9</sup> Spinney 2012, *Home and safe? Policy and practice innovations to prevent women and children who have experienced domestic and family violence from becoming homeless*

<sup>10</sup> Australian Government – Gender Workplace Equality Agency, ‘Gender workplace statistics at a glance 2017-2018’, accessed at

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/fact-sheets/gender-workplace-statistics-at-a-glance-2017-18>

<sup>11</sup> Australian Government – Gender Workplace Equality Agency, ‘Gender workplace statistics at a glance 2017-2018’, accessed at

<https://www.wgea.gov.au/data/fact-sheets/gender-workplace-statistics-at-a-glance-2017-18>

hardship, but have long term impacts, such as the inability to own assets along with accumulate/allocate superannuation. These economic drivers also mean that women may depend on support from partners/ family/ social welfare to help provide financial stability, and if circumstances change (such as relationship breakdowns, women having to leave the home or acting as a sole parent), it can have far reaching impacts on an individual's welfare. The historical, entrenched nature of gender inequality also means that older women are unfairly burdened, particularly when it comes to accessing appropriate services later in life.

In this regard, the role that poverty plays in gender inequality is crucial in any future development of the Framework. The four key areas of safety, health and wellbeing, economic security and leadership and participation highlighted in the consultation document demonstrate that the Government is committed to addressing the multifaceted nature of gender inequality. In conjunction with this, a commitment to a whole of life approach acknowledges the need for early intervention and prevention strategies, in combination with the need to provide wrap around support services for those in our community experiencing disadvantage.

Ensuring a whole of Government approach and commitment to the implementation of the Framework (along with existing related initiatives such as Action Plan 1: *Changing Attitudes, Intervening Earlier and Responding Better (2018-2021)*), accompanied by adequate funding and resourcing across all regions of the NT, will be positive drivers for change. Building models to best practice, with cultural safety enshrined, and ensuring that the interlinked nature of social issues in the NT is at the forefront of program development will guarantee that communities benefit from the Government's investment in such strategies.

NTCOSS recommends that the Framework also addresses equity, with much of the language in the consultation document positioned around equality. The treatment of everybody within our society as equals does not necessarily produce equitable results; while it may result in everybody being presented the same opportunities, it does not mean that everyone is beginning at the same point. Encapsulating this in the development of any strategy is therefore crucial; it assists in not only acknowledging disadvantage but also ensures that the different elements that attribute to this disadvantage are addressed and captured in the development of future policies and programs.

NTCOSS commends the Government for taking steps to enshrine greater gender equality in their policy, practice and broader initiatives; in particular the positive impacts this can have on creating a community culture that values and espouses equality. The complexities of the NT's diverse population mean that care has to be taken when addressing the multiple forms of gender based discrimination and inequality, while recognising intersecting elements that further exacerbate such disparity. Addressing poverty for women in the NT will be a significant contributor to gender equity.