

# Progress for All Women is Only Possible with Progressive Policy.

This year, for International Women's Day, we're asked to [\*Count Her In\*](#). It's a timely theme as we learn every day just how much social and economic systems, structures, and policies count women, and other priority populations, out of economic safety and wellbeing.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have always led in the community and that it is time for our systems and structures to recognise that and count First Nations Women in.

For the 2.3 million women and the 693,000 men who have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner since the age of 15 (ABS, 2023), the long-lasting effects of this trauma are far-reaching.

From health costs, including those associated with physical trauma and long-term mental health implications, to reduced productivity and capacity, including absenteeism and requirements to attend court, recovery and healing for people subjected to violence and abuse can be an incredibly challenging and complex process.

Government services, the justice system, and the broader domestic, family and sexual violence sector need to be resourced to provide trauma- and gender-based violence-informed support so that victim-survivors are given safe opportunities to recover and re-establish their lives.

Currently, people recovering from gendered violence are excluded from financial well-being and independence in the following ways:

1. Government systems and structures, such as Centrelink, employment services, Medicare, housing and education are not consistently responsive to the impacts of trauma, including issues such as:
  - a. Misidentifying or failing to recognise clients impacted by gender-based violence.

We acknowledge the traditional owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders both past and present.

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- b. Lacking insight and training into the ways that gender-based violence impacts capacity to work, undertake job searches or engage with service systems.
  - c. Trained to discern circumstances in which gender-based violence may give rise to exemptions from skills, training and job search mutual obligations.
2. Creditors, such as banks, mobile phone companies and car dealerships, are not proactive in identifying the early signs of coercive control and financial abuse.
3. Long, drawn-out court proceedings are often costly, re-traumatising and prohibitive, with victim-survivors made to re-tell their story in strategically hostile cross-examinations.
4. The knock-on effects of financial abuse impact access to education, career progression and workforce participation, further amplifying the impacts of trauma and the challenges of financial and professional independence.

#### Ways we can improve:

1. Reform Australia's employment services system so it is trauma- and gender-based violence-informed. That means removing draconian mutual obligation requirements that disproportionately impact women who have experienced violence and abuse, women with disabilities and Aboriginal women.
2. Resource specialist sexual violence services so they can provide expert, timely counselling and support to everyone who needs it when they need it.
3. Act on inquiries to reform our court systems and resource our service systems to reduce the burden of long, traumatic trials for rape and sexual assault that have very serious negative impacts on victim-survivors.
4. Support employers that are putting effort into making their workplaces and sectors safer for women and meeting their legal obligations, including the positive duty to prevent sexual harassment and sex discrimination in the workplace.

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5. Support scale up of progressive programs in banks and other institutions, so that the burden of debt and financial abuse is reduced and is less impactful on women's long term financial wellbeing.

**“Economic security is central to the capacity of women to transition from violent relationships, and to achieve wellbeing following domestic and family violence”**  
(Cortis, Bullen & Hill, 2016).

This year, the Australia Law Reform Commission is conducting an inquiry into opportunities for improving the way the justice system responds to sexual violence. Reforming our justice system, which too often inflicts financial pain, and retraumatizes those to whom it is supposed to provide relief, has the potential to improve women's economic security. In this vein, a recent Full Stop Australia submission to the Western Australia government, [\*Review of Criminal Justice Responses to Sexual Offending\*](#), included the following recommendations:

1. There should be mandatory training on trauma and gender-based violence for the police service, as well as investment in a specialised sexual violence workforce within police.
2. Free legal advice should be available to victim-survivors to help them protect their private information during evidence collection by police, and in response to subpoena applications by defence counsel.
3. Retraumatizing and irrelevant cross-examination must be stamped out.
4. Training on the impacts of trauma, and the dynamics of gender-based violence, should be provided to staff throughout the court system.
5. These systems, in their current forms, impact women's economic security. We need to continue pushing for reform that centres the needs of victim-survivors. By continuing to amplify the voices of victim-survivors, we can continue our march towards meaningful economic inclusion of women and all people impacted by sexual, domestic and family violence.

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References:

Cortis, N. Bullen, J., & Hill, T. (2016). *Supporting women to find and keep jobs following domestic violence* (Issues paper 1). UNSW Social Policy Research Centre.

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