



Australian Government



# BUDGET

2008-09

Women

Australian Women





## **A MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER AND THE MINISTER FOR THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

The 2008-09 Budget will secure Australia's future and build a strong economy to deliver for working families. The Government values the contribution Australian women make in our workplaces, homes and communities across the country. With this Budget women will share more equally in Australia's prosperity.

As the frequent managers of household budgets, women have experienced first hand the impact of rising costs of living and global economic forces. The Government wants to assist, where it can, to relieve the pressure on women's lives.

The 2008-09 Women's Budget Statement highlights measures in the Budget that will assist women and their families. With this 2008-09 Budget begins a new era of responsible economic management. The Government is investing in Australia's long term future through tax cuts that will assist low and middle income earners, especially women returning to work. The Government is investing in education, early childhood learning and increasing child care assistance. The Government is investing in better hospitals and more help for carers.

In delivering on our election commitments, the Government is developing and implementing a *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children* and is commencing the assessment process required to ratify the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women.

This is a new age and we look forward to working with you, and all Australians, to improve the lives of women and their families.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin Rudd".

Kevin Rudd  
Prime Minister

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "T. Plibersek".

Tanya Plibersek  
Minister for the Status of Women

## **WOMEN'S BUDGET STATEMENT 2008-09**

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## **WOMEN'S ECONOMIC SECURITY AND INDEPENDENCE**

The Government respects the choices of Australian women regarding their decision to work or stay at home to care for family members. Women in their prime working age take on multiple roles including paid, unpaid and voluntary work. Australia must value the unpaid work of caring, predominantly done by women, as well as supporting opportunities for their increased workforce participation. Many women want to work more hours than they currently do, but cite caring for children or dependent adults as the main reason they don't.

Paid work provides women with economic independence and increases their retirement savings. Increasing women's participation in the workforce is also an important way to further Australia's economic growth. The Government is concerned about the lower workforce participation rates of Australian women compared with their counterparts in other countries and is committed to achieving reform in the areas that impede women's chances to take up job opportunities. Workplace arrangements should deliver flexibility for employers and employees, fair wages and conditions, productive work practices and a balance between work and family responsibilities.

The tax cuts that will come into effect in July this year are an important first step to longer-term tax and welfare reforms which will provide more women with the opportunity to work. To address hurdles to workforce participation faced by women with young children, the Government is making quality child care more affordable and more accessible. The Government is increasing the Child Care Tax Rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of out of pocket costs from July 2008 and establishing up to 260 additional child care and early learning centres.

Ensuring that parents have access to affordable, high quality child care that helps them to balance their work and family responsibilities is a high priority for the Government. Top quality affordable child care is a necessity for working parents and it must also provide a positive educational experience for children. The increase in the Child Care Tax Rebate reflects the Government's commitment to improving the opportunities for women to balance their work and family life.

The Government is developing National Employment Standards which will increase the safety net of minimum conditions, providing for additional unpaid parental leave and introducing a right for parents to request flexible working arrangements such as part-time work, flexible working hours and working from home arrangements until their child reaches school age. The Government has also asked the Productivity Commission to examine different models of support for parents in the labour force with newborn children including paid maternity, paternity and parental leave.

Work and family measures should provide different forms of flexibility to people whether they are caring for children, other family members or the frail and aged. The Government has created an Office of Work and Family within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet so that policy-making to support work and family takes place centrally and at the highest level.

The Office of Work and Family is driving a comprehensive response to child care for working families and is addressing the needs of Australian parents who choose to care for children at home in their early years. It is also looking at ways to support women who may be caring for an ageing relative or child with a disability.

## **Budget and other measures**

This Budget delivers a significant increase in the take home pay of working mothers through tax cuts and child care relief. A mother employed two days a week with two children in child care will receive relief of up to \$71 a week. A mother working five days a week with two children in child care will receive relief of up to \$136 per week.

### ***Personal income tax cuts***

In recognition of the financial pressures on many Australian families, the Budget delivers tax relief worth \$46.7 billion over the next four years.

### ***Early childhood***

This Budget commits \$2.4 billion over the five years from 2007-08 to early childhood education and care initiatives to ensure our youngest Australians have the best possible start in life. One of these initiatives includes increasing the rate of Child Care Tax Rebate from 30 to 50 per cent of working families' out-of-pocket expenses for approved child care costs from 1 July 2008. This gives all eligible parents access to a benefit that is better than tax deductibility. It will deliver \$1.6 billion over four years to Australian families, with benefits ranging between \$500 and \$2,500 per year for the average family. The Government will lift the cap from \$4,354 to \$7,500 (indexed) per child per year.

### ***\$4.4 billion to help families meet schooling costs***

Australian working families are set to benefit from the Government's decision to create a new Education Tax Refund, to help with the cost of education. About 1.3 million families (with 2.7 million students) will be eligible for the refund tax offset which is expected to benefit Australian families by more than \$1 billion a year.

### ***Schools***

The Government is meeting its commitment on schools and providing support for technology, infrastructure, curriculum and resourcing through a \$3 billion downpayment on building a world class school education system.

### ***Higher education***

This Budget provides a further \$1.8 billion to strengthen Australian universities and other higher education institutions including \$500 million to help universities rebuild their campus infrastructure.

### ***Indigenous***

The Government is delivering \$1.2 billion over five years, including 37 2008-09 Budget measures, towards closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Government has a comprehensive plan to tackle Indigenous disadvantage, make communities safe for children and families and promote economic participation.

### ***Employment***

This Budget commits \$3.7 billion over three years to implement a new integrated Employment Services system to provide greater flexibility for providers to streamline services for individual job seekers.

### ***Jobs, Education and Training Child Care Fee Assistance (JETCCFA)***

The Government is delivering \$23.9 million over the next four years to extend JETCCFA from one to two years for approved study. This initiative will help parents with child care needs to improve their skills through education and training and will give them enhanced opportunities for their sustained employment and workforce participation.

### ***Fresh Ideas for Work and Family***

The Fresh Ideas for Work and Family Program delivers on the Government's election commitment to increase workforce productivity and participation. The program will invest \$12 million over three years to encourage small businesses to implement practices that help employees balance their work and family obligations as well as improve employee retention and productivity.

### ***Housing affordability and homelessness***

The Government is tackling housing affordability and homelessness with a Budget housing package investing \$2.2 billion over the next four years on boosting rental stocks, helping people save for their first home, making new homes more affordable and building new homes for the homeless.

### ***Counselling support doubled to ease financial stress***

The Government is supporting working families under financial pressure by expanding financial counselling services and support as part of a \$20 million Government commitment over four years.

### ***Support and recognition of carers***

Australia's carers are set to benefit from an \$822 million package of measures to increase support and recognition of their vital economic and social role. Budget measures include fairer and simpler access to financial support of up to \$546.80 per fortnight for 19,000 additional eligible carers looking after children with a severe disability, bonus payments for recipients of Carer Payment, Carer Allowance and eligible service pensions and \$100 million for

additional supported accommodation for people with disability to help ageing parents who can no longer care for their disabled children at home.

### ***Older Australians***

Older Australians will benefit from a range of Budget initiatives including bonus payments, national transport concessions, free internet kiosks and portability of concession cards when travelling overseas. The Government will guarantee that the Age Pension will increase in line with the higher of the consumer price index, increases in male total average weekly earnings or the living cost index for age pensioner households. This comes on top of our \$5.6 billion commitment over five years to increase the Utilities Allowance and Seniors Concession Allowance to \$500, paying the \$500 Seniors Bonus again and increase the Telephone Allowance to \$132 for those with home internet access. The first quarterly instalments were paid in March, with the next instalment due in July.

### ***Veterans and their families***

Australia's veterans will benefit from an increase in total Veterans' Affairs funding as the Government delivers on its election promise to restore the value of veterans' compensation. This includes funding of \$6.34 billion for compensation and income support pensions and \$4.87 billion in funding for health. The Government will also extend the number of repeat prescriptions available to the almost 290,000 veterans, war widows and widowers who have a chronic health condition.

### ***Helping volunteers pay their petrol bills***

In a move that significantly expands the Volunteers Grants Program the Australian Government has committed an additional \$15 million over three years to help community organisations and their volunteers with their work, including help to pay their fuel bills.

## **WOMEN'S SAFETY**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that around one in three Australian women experience physical violence, and almost one in five experience sexual violence, over their lifetime.<sup>1</sup> The unique nature of violence against women demands a specific and urgent national response.

### ***National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Children***

Delivering on its election commitment, the Government is implementing a National Plan and is setting up a National Council. The immediate actions to be delivered through the Plan include:

- Developing respectful relationship resources for Australian high school students to educate young Australians, particularly boys, about the impact of domestic violence and sexual assault;
- \$1 million over four years to support White Ribbon Day education activities in rural and regional communities to promote culture-change that will reduce violence against women;
- toughening and harmonising state and territory domestic violence and sexual assault laws;

- \$200,000 for new research into international best practice models for working with perpetrators of violence; and
- \$500,000 million to boost the Australian Institute of Criminology's National Homicide Monitoring Program to inform future interventions to protect women and children from violence.

### ***National framework for protecting Australia's children***

As part of our commitment to tackle child abuse and neglect, the Australian Government is developing a National Child Protection Framework. The Australian Government has committed \$2.6 million to work with all levels of government, child protection workers and the community sector to establish a national framework to protect children.

### ***Cyber-safety - policing for Internet safety***

The Australian Government has committed \$125.8 million to a comprehensive range of cyber-safety measures, including law enforcement, filtering and awareness. The Government's cyber-safety funding will provide \$49 million to law enforcement, ensuring that the Australian Federal Police (AFP) Child Protection Operations Team can expand its capacity to detect and investigate online child abuse, with 91 additional AFP members dedicated to online child protection by 2011.

## **WOMEN'S HEALTH AND WELLBEING**

The Government recognises that by improving the health of all Australian women, it improves the health of the whole community.

Women are the majority of health consumers,<sup>2</sup> the majority of health service providers<sup>3</sup> and the majority of carers<sup>4</sup> in the Australian community. On average, women live for 4.8 years longer than men, so women are more likely than men to experience health conditions common to old age.<sup>5</sup>

The Government is developing a national policy on women's health to ensure the development of solutions specific to the health needs of women.

### **Budget and other measures**

#### ***Investing in a health system for the future***

The Australian government will establish a \$10 billion Health and Hospitals Fund to support strategic investments in health as part of the Government's reform agenda to equip Australia's health and hospital system.

#### ***Ending the blame game: Reforming the health and hospital system***

All women will benefit from the Government's commitment to ending the blame game in health and reforming the health and hospital system. These measures tackle the current and future challenges in the Australian health system including the growing burden of chronic disease, the ageing of the population and rising health costs. Budget measures include:

- National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission - \$4.6 million in 2008-09;

- Elective Surgery Waiting List Reduction Plan - \$600 million over four years;
- National Advisory Council on Mental Health;
- Supporting nurses back into the workforce - \$39.4 million over five years; and
- Increasing the Medicare levy surcharge thresholds so that singles below \$100,000 and families below \$150,000 don't have to pay this surcharge.

### ***Keeping people well – Focus on prevention***

Preventative health care will get a boost in the 2008-09 Budget as the Government focuses on keeping Australians healthy and out of hospital. The National Preventive Health Strategy will have an initial focus on tobacco, alcohol and obesity. Budget measures include:

- National Preventative Health Strategy - \$4.5 million over five years;
- National Tobacco Strategy - \$15 million over four years;
- National Binge Drinking Strategy - \$53.5 million over four years;
- Illicit Drug Use - targeting young people who use methamphetamines (Ice); and
- Obesity Reduction - \$1.7 million over four years.

### ***Fighting cancer – Australia's biggest killer***

The fight against cancer is a national challenge and the Government is committed to supporting researchers, clinicians, practitioners and other health professionals involved in cancer research and treatment. Budget measures include:

- National Centre for Gynaecological Cancers - \$5.1 million over three years;
- Specialist breast cancer nurses - \$12 million over four years;
- Breast prostheses - \$31 million over four years;
- Olivia Newton-John Cancer Centres - \$15 million over two years;
- Completion of the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Register - \$19 million over four years; and
- Listing of Tykerb® (lapatinib) for women with advanced breast cancer under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme from 1 May 2008 - \$83.5 million over four years.

### ***Delivering health care to all Australians***

Improvements to rural, regional and outer metropolitan health services mean working families will receive health care where and when they need it, no matter where they choose to live. Budget measures include:

- GP Super Clinics - \$275.2 million over five years;
- Rural Health - Additional Funding for the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program - \$12 million over four years;
- Rural Health - Specialist Obstetrician Locum Scheme - \$7.9 million over four years; and
- Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer - \$1.2 million over four years.

### ***Supporting child and maternal health***

The Government will improve the health and wellbeing of our children by helping children and their parents learn about the importance of diet and nutrition and preparing them to make healthy choices for life, as well as improving maternal health. There are also a number of Government initiatives focused on Indigenous early childhood health. Budget measures include:

- Perinatal Depression - national plan - \$55 million over five years;
- Breastfeeding Mothers – funding for a 24-hour helpline - \$2.5 million over five years;
- Child Health – health check for four year old children - \$25.6 million over four years;
- Preventative Health – Healthy Guidelines for Early Childhood Obesity Reduction – \$4.5 million over five years; and
- Child Health – Kitchen Garden Program - \$12.8 million over four years.

### ***Closing the gap in Indigenous health***

The Australian Government is investing \$334.8 million towards closing the 17 year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.

## **WOMEN'S INFLUENCE IN DECISION-MAKING**

The Government is committed to developing and supporting women's leadership in every aspect of Australian society. Australia has appointed its first female Governor General and Deputy Prime Minister and has more women in the Ministry than ever before. Women, however, still account for only 30 per cent of members and senators in the Federal Parliament.

The Government supports and encourages women to contribute to the development and implementation of policies that affect their lives by supporting organisations that advocate on their behalf. The Government is building dynamic interactions with women's representative organisations to ensure women's perspectives and the diversity of women's needs influence the development of policies and programs in all areas of government, business and the community sector.

### **Budget and other measures**

#### ***National Rural Women's Summit***

While there are a significant number of rural and regional women's organisations, the Government recognises the need to strengthen the collective voice of rural women at the national level. The Government will host a National Rural Women's Summit in June 2008 to identify and discuss the scope of issues affecting rural women and their communities and consider recommendations to address these issues. Following the Summit, the Government will consider options to strengthen the capacity of rural women to participate in policy debate affecting their communities.

### ***Supporting women's representation and leadership***

The Government is also building a stronger and more dynamic program of engagement with women's non-Government organisations and is examining the existing National Women's Secretariat model which comprises of 69 women's representative groups. The evaluation has an emphasis on strengthening the voice of women from marginalised groups to influence policies that affect their lives and increasing the effectiveness of Government-funded women's groups in advocating effectively on behalf of all women.

## **WOMEN'S INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT**

The Government is committed to positive and active engagement at international fora to protect Australia's interests and to influence international debates, policies and programs towards achieving gender equality globally. This will improve the status of women, enable them to participate fully in economic growth and increase their business opportunities.

### **Budget and other measures**

#### ***United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)***

The Government is working to ratify the Optional Protocol to CEDAW. The Optional Protocol establishes a procedure for individuals and groups of women to complain about violations of CEDAW by Australia. Complaints can only be made once all domestic legal avenues are exhausted.

Preparation is well underway for Australia's combined 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> report to the UN on our implementation of CEDAW, due in August 2008. To inform the report, the Government is undertaking extensive consultations involving community organisations and State and Territory Governments.

#### ***The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and APEC Women Leaders' Network***

The UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) is the highest forum on women's issues in the UN and meets annually to discuss critical and emerging issues of concern to women globally. The Government is committed to ensuring Australia is appropriately represented at CSW each year.

The APEC Women Leaders' Network (WLN) is a critical vehicle for promoting regional prosperity. The WLN is a network of women from the 21 APEC economies representing business, academia, government and non-government organisations. The Australian Government is playing a key role in the APEC WLN meeting in May 2008, presenting new research on women in trade and export.

#### ***United Nation's Partnership for Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)***

The Government will commence a \$200 million package of initiatives to boost progress towards the MDGs. Strengthened partnerships with seven key UN agencies will boost their capacity to lead global efforts to realise the MDGs. Australia will contribute directly to the UN's efforts on issues as diverse as

increasing child literacy, improving maternal and child health and the empowerment of women.

Progress on gender equality is an integral part of achieving the MDGs. Australia is working to implement international best practice in the area of gender equality, focusing on areas where least progress has been made in narrowing the gender gap such as improving women's economic status, expanding their participation in decision-making and strengthening their leadership. Specific development assistance initiatives to promote gender equality and empower women include:

- An evaluation on violence against women;
- A leadership program, Advancing Gender Equality in Pacific Governance: Stronger Women's Citizens and Leaders;
- The Women Entrepreneurs Program is working on reforms that improve business opportunities for women in the Pacific; and
- The community empowerment program, Local Governance and Infrastructure for Communities, develops the confidence and leadership skills of over 2,300 village representatives in Aceh, Indonesia, of whom more than half are women.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> ABS, *Personal Safety Survey*, cat no. 490.6.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Australia's Health, 2006*, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Canberra, 2006

<sup>3</sup> ABS, *Australian Labour Market Statistics, January 2007*, cat. no. 6105.0, Australian Bureau of Statistics, Canberra, 2007

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare op.cit.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*