



Australian Government

*Government response to
National Rural Women's Summit Report*

2009



Initiatives are current to March 2009

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A message from the Minister for the Status of Women

The Australian Government is committed to supporting and promoting women's leadership in every aspect of Australian society, including in regional and rural Australia.

The immense contribution of rural women to our economy and community is unquestionable. It is often women who have kept rural, regional and many urban communities and families together, particularly during times of drought and adversity. Unfortunately, rural women's contributions too often go unrecognised and unrewarded.

On 27 and 28 June 2008, the Government convened a National Rural Women's Summit in Canberra. The Summit gave effect to the Government's election commitment to strengthen the voice of rural women in shaping rural and regional policy. The aim of the Summit was to renew relationships between the Government and women from country areas and give rural women the chance to engage in the big policy debates of our time.

The Summit brought together more than 80 delegates from around Australia, led by a steering group of representatives from key rural women's groups. Participants comprised a diverse group of amazing women, from a cheese maker in Tasmania, to a wine maker from Margaret River, a sugar producer from Mackay and an Indigenous artist from Darwin. A full list of organisations represented at the Summit can be found at Appendix 1.

The Summit discussed a wide range of issues important to rural and regional women and their communities. The Summit identified issues in need of attention in the following areas:

- representation of women in decision making;
- climate change, the environment and water;
- health;
- education;
- young people;
- infrastructure, transport and telecommunications;
- community building, engagement and new arrivals;
- vocational training, skills development and workforce participation;

- employment and business development;
- families and children;
- women with disabilities;
- culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) women; and
- Indigenous women.

The Government has been taking action across all these areas. In some areas, funding has already been allocated. In others, in line with the Government's commitment to evidence-based policy making, reviews are in progress.

On behalf of the Government, I would like to thank the participants of the National Rural Women's Summit for their contributions.

Tanya Plibersek
Minister for the Status of Women



Representation of women in decision making

Summit participants identified a range of issues in the area of women's representation and decision making. In particular, participants supported the Rudd Government's election commitment to strengthen the voice of rural and regional women and the establishment of a national rural women's network.

Achievements and progress under way

In November 2008, the Minister for the Status of Women set out the Government's agenda for achieving equality between women and men. The three priorities include improving economic outcomes for women; reducing violence against women; and ensuring women's equal place in society.

The Government has moved to address these priorities by:

- establishing the Office of Work and Family;
- introducing a fairer and more balanced workplace relations system;
- improving the accessibility of quality and affordable child care;
- asking the Productivity Commission to conduct an examination into paid parental leave;
- conducting a thorough investigation into pay equity and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984*;
- developing a social inclusion agenda;
- reviewing the National Women's Alliances (formally known as the National Women's Secretariats); and
- acceding to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

In addition, the establishment of a national rural women's network is being undertaken within the context of the re-focusing of the Alliances, noting that there is already a Rural Women's Coalition.

On 5 February 2008, the Australian Government introduced a policy implementing transparent and merit-based assessment in the selection of most Australian Public Service (APS) agency heads and other statutory offices working in, or in conjunction with, APS agencies. Secretaries and Ministers will continue to seek to increase the representation of women in senior government appointments and include women on candidate lists by using the Office for Women database, AppointWomen, for example.

In addition, The Hon Tony Burke MP, Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, announced at the Summit a new commitment of \$500,000 for capacity building activities for women, including funds for grants under the Recognising Women Farmers program. The grants will offer up to \$50,000 to organisations to stage events that build the leadership and representative capacity of women in primary industries, particularly in the context of support for productivity and community resilience to a changing climate. The Community Networks and Capacity Building component of the Australia's Farming Future initiative also supports activities to build the leadership and representative capacity of women, including Indigenous women and those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Appointments by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry have seen the representation of women on rural Research and Development Corporation boards increase from 20 per cent to more than 40 per cent since November 2007.

Climate change, the environment and water

Participants at the Summit brought the perspective of rural women to the climate change debate and made recommendations in the following areas:

- impact of climate change in primary production and in communities;
- ways to encourage wider participation by women in the debate;
- how to provide choices for farmers facing adjustment that are not seen as failure;
- managing the land when it is no longer economically productive;
- the need to invest in industry diversity and support innovation and creativity;
- enabling community consultations to consider what the changes mean and to find ways to support each other;
- the need for a review of all our current 'disaster' arrangements including quarantine, as they are not set up for climate change;
- recognising that off-farm labour is subsidising Australian agriculture—particularly women's off-farm labour;
- ensuring that corporate farming takes social cohesion in rural communities as an important component of its triple bottom line approach;
- engaging broader than farming interests in rural Australia in the climate change debate; and
- encouraging a greater valuing of Australian rural and agricultural products.

Achievements

The Government has established several initiatives with substantial funding to address many of the challenges identified by Summit participants.

- \$12.9 billion for Water for the Future over 10 years incorporating:
 - \$5.8 billion for Sustainable Rural Water Use and Infrastructure;
 - \$3.1 billion for Restoring the Balance in the Murray Darling Basin;
 - \$1.0 billion for National Urban Water and Desalination;
 - \$580 million for Driving Reform in the Murray Darling Basin;
 - \$200 million for The Living Murray Initiative;
 - \$261 million for Cities and Towns;
 - \$250 million for the National Rainwater and Greywater Initiative;
 - \$447.9 million for improving Water Information Program; and
 - \$85 million for the Great Artesian Basin.

- Caring for our Country—more than \$2.0 billion over five years, investing in six national priority areas including:
 - a National Reserve System;
 - biodiversity and natural icons;
 - coastal environments and critical aquatic habitats;
 - sustainable farm practices;
 - natural resource management in remote and northern Australia; and
 - community skills, knowledge and engagement.



- The \$130 million Australia's Farming Future initiative will help primary industries improve productivity, adapt and adjust to the changing global climate and manage greenhouse pollution. Programs include:
 - the Climate Change Research Program which will provide funding for research projects and on-farm demonstration activities;
 - FarmReady, which provides specialised training and funding opportunities to help primary producers and industries manage climate change;
 - the Climate Change Adjustment Program which assists farmers in financial difficulty to manage the impacts of climate change. Farm business analysis, financial assessments and professional advice and training are individually tailored to help farmers adjust to climate change and to set goals and develop action plans to improve their financial circumstances. Rural financial counsellors can assist eligible farmers to take action to improve their long term financial position. Re-establishment assistance provides farmers who sell their farms with assistance to re-establish themselves; and
 - transitional income support which is linked to the Climate Change Adjustment Program and which provides short-term income support and advice and training opportunities to farmers in serious financial difficulty, while they adapt their farm to changing circumstances, including climate change; and
 - the Community Networks and Capacity Building component of Australia's Farming Future, which funds activities that increase the leadership and representative capacity of women, youth, Indigenous Australians and people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds.
- The \$35 million Regional Food Producers Innovation and Productivity Program aims to boost the productivity and competitiveness of Australia's regional food and seafood industries through innovation and technology improvements; and
- The \$5 million Promoting Australian Produce program aims to assist Australian food industries to develop their capacity to promote and market Australian produce more effectively to both domestic and export markets.

Processes under way

In addition, work is under way through a number of initiatives:

- the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) Working Group on Climate Change and Water—National Climate Change Adaptation Framework;
- the National Urban Water and Desalination Plan;
- the National Water Security Plan for Cities and Towns;
- the release of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme White Paper in which the Government indicated a disposition to include agriculture emissions in the Scheme by 2015. The Government also committed to undertake a work program in consultation with the agriculture industry to enable a decision in 2013 on coverage of agriculture emissions in 2015;
- the implementation of recommendations made in the 'One Biosecurity: A Working Partnership' review;
- the Government also committed to assist motorists, including those in rural areas, through a cent for cent reduction in fuel tax for the first three years of the Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme. This means households and business will be shielded from increases in the cost of fuel resulting from putting a cost on pollution.

The Government has initiated a comprehensive review of drought policy, recognising that the current Exceptional Circumstances arrangements may no longer be the most appropriate in a changing climate. The review included investigations of the climate, economic and social aspects of drought and drought support, and presented options to improve national drought policy and programs. The Government is considering the review's findings, as well as the farming community's views, and expects to announce an improved drought policy in 2009.

On 3 February 2009, the Government announced a \$42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan that will support jobs and provide significant new investment in rural and regional communities. Key measures that will directly benefit regional Australia include a one-off \$950 Farmer's Hardship Payment for farmers receiving Exceptional Circumstances income support. This will benefit around 21,000 farmers and small business owners who receive drought relief payments.



Health

In the important area of health and health services, Summit participants identified a wide range of issues needing attention, including:

- women's access to services, such as:
 - maternal services including locally delivered services such as birthing centres and child health;
 - cancer management;
 - transport needs and support; and
 - access to services for people with disabilities.
- health professionals such as GPs, allied health and specialists;
- mental health;
- Indigenous health services; and
- domestic violence.

Achievements

Health reform is a primary focus of the Australian Government and significant work is being undertaken across a range of areas that will benefit women and families in rural communities.

Health Reform

- The Office for Rural Health was established on 1 July 2008 to provide a focus for the reform of Australian Government rural health policy and programs. The Office is undertaking a review of Australian Government-funded rural health programs and of the classification systems used to determine eligibility for rural health program funding.
- \$275 million will be invested over the next five years from 2007–08 for the GP Super Clinics Program to establish 31 clinics across Australia, primarily in outer metropolitan and regional areas.

- The National Healthcare Agreement and National Partnership Agreements include:
 - an investment of \$64.4 billion over the five years to 2012–13 to cover not only hospitals but also prevention, primary and community care, and aged care as well as patient experience, social inclusion, Indigenous health, and sustainability;
 - a \$872 million National Partnership Agreement on Preventive Health and a National Partnership Agreement on the health workforce comprising \$1.1 billion of Australian Government funding and \$540 million in State funding; and
 - further funding is also provided to take the pressure off public hospitals with \$750 million in 2008–09 to relieve pressure on emergency departments and \$500 million to expand sub-acute departments.
- The Health and Hospitals Fund was established on 1 January 2009 (with \$5 billion already committed from the 2007–08 Budget) to support strategic investments in health. It is part of the Government’s reform agenda to equip Australia’s health and hospital system for the future.

Improving access to services

- The Regional Health Services program works to improve the health and well-being of rural and remote families by increasing their access to a broad range of primary health services for the prevention and treatment of illness. The program provides additional support services, including family and child health services, youth, drug and alcohol services; and a range of mental health and counselling services, with a mix of services based on locally-identified needs. Funding for the program in 2008–09 is \$48.1 million.
- The Rural Women’s GP Service works to improve access to primary health care services for women in rural and remote Australia, who currently have little or no access to a female GP, by facilitating the travel of female GPs to these communities. The service is administered through the Australian Council of the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia and the current funding agreement, which commenced in April 2008, provides up to \$12.4 million to June 2011.
- The Expanded Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program will invest \$12 million over four years to support medical specialists to deliver an expanded range of outreach services in rural and remote communities.
- Around \$6 million will be invested each year for incentives for rural GPs to maintain local access to obstetric services.



- \$7.9 million will be invested over four years to provide subsidies for obstetrician locums in rural and remote communities.
- Around \$4 million each year will be invested to provide incentives for rural practices to act as referral points for women experiencing domestic violence.
- \$2.5 million will be invested to upgrade Australian Breastfeeding Association telecommunications to a toll free 1800 MUM 2 MUM (1800 686 2 686) Helpline which is operational in all States and Territories.
- \$1.8 million will be invested over four years to support education on breastfeeding, including training and support for health professionals.
- \$12 million will be invested over four years to the McGrath Foundation to train, recruit and employ 30 specialist breast care nurses throughout Australia; 89 per cent of positions will be in rural and regional areas.
- The National Cervical Screening Program (NCSP) and BreastScreen Australia are joint initiatives of the Australian and State and Territory Governments. The Australian Government funds States and Territories to provide breast cancer screening services and to promote and support breast cancer and cervical screening for all women. This includes encouraging service providers to ensure that all women have the opportunity to participate in screening, including women with disabilities.
- \$12 million is invested annually as an incentive for general practices to increase cervical screening rates.
- \$46 million will be invested over four years through the National Rural and Remote Health Infrastructure Program for essential health infrastructure or purchase of equipment, and strategic planning for small rural private hospitals.

Health professionals

- \$148 million will be invested for an additional 175 new general practice training places (in 2009 and 2010) and the recent COAG agreement boosting the total number of GP training places to more than 800 from 2011 onwards.
- \$18.4 million will be invested for 22 ongoing GP places in the Remote Vocational Training Scheme from 2011.

- \$4.6 million will be provided through the John Flynn Placement Program to double the number of scholarships for undergraduate medical students to undertake placements in rural and remote medical practices.
- \$2.5 million will be invested for clinical placement scholarships for allied health students.
- \$39.4 million will be invested over five years for the Bringing Nurses Back into the Workforce Program which provides cash bonus payments for 7,750 extra nurses and midwives to return to nursing in public and private hospitals and 1,000 nurses in residential aged care homes.
- \$35 million will be invested for the Expansion of Additional Education Places, Scholarships and Clinical Training for mental health nurses and psychologists, with a specific focus on regional, rural and remote Australia.

Mental health

- \$60.9 million will be invested for Telephone Counselling, Self Help and Web-Based Support to enable organisations to reach rural and remote areas through telephone and web-based mental health support and interventions.
- \$127 million from 2006–07 to 2011–12 will be invested for the National Suicide Prevention Strategy to target at risk groups including rural and remote areas, Indigenous communities and young people.
- The Australian Suicide Prevention Advisory Council, established 10 September 2008 will include a focus on people in rural and remote areas and Indigenous suicide.
- \$55 million will be invested over five years for the Australian and State and Territory Governments' National Perinatal Depression Initiative to work to improve prevention and early detection of antenatal and postnatal depression and provide better support and treatment for expectant and new mothers experiencing depression.
- The National Advisory Council on Mental Health was established on 12 June 2008 to provide the Australian Government with independent, expert advice to help drive national mental health reform.



Indigenous health

- The Australian Government will invest \$806 million and the States and Territories \$772 million over four years for the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes. The Agreement will target five priority areas:
 - tackling smoking;
 - healthy transition to adulthood;
 - making Indigenous health everyone’s business;
 - primary health care services that can deliver; and
 - fixing the gaps and improving the patient journey.
- The Government will invest \$564 million over six years for the COAG National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development. Initiatives include:
 - \$292 million in Australian Government funding to States and Territories to establish 35 Children and Family Centres across Australia (20 will be located in regional and remote areas) to deliver integrated services that offer early learning, child care, family support programs and child and maternal health services (from 1 January 2009);
 - \$107 million in Australian Government funding to increase access to antenatal care, teenage reproductive and sexual health services, and child and maternal health services (from 1 July 2009); and
 - \$90 million in Australian Government funding and \$75 million in States and Territories funding for New Directions: An Equal Start in Life for Indigenous Children—comprehensive mothers and babies services.
- \$11.2 million will be invested for a Rheumatic Fever Strategy.
- \$10 million will be invested for an Indigenous Mothers’ Accommodation Fund.
- \$37.4 million will be invested over four years for the Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program to improve pregnancy outcomes for women pregnant with an Indigenous child and improve health outcomes for Indigenous children.

- \$36 million will be invested in 2008–09 for the Healthy for Life program to enhance the capacity of primary health care services to improve the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and maternal health services and chronic disease care, and to increase participation in the Indigenous health workforce.
- \$49.3 million will be invested over four years for Closing the Gap Indigenous drug and alcohol services, which will provide additional drug and alcohol treatment and rehabilitation services in regional and remote areas of Australia.

Processes under way

Additionally, work is under way on:

- a new National Women’s Health Policy to address the varied needs of women of all ages, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; women in rural and remote areas; women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, including refugees; and women from disadvantaged backgrounds. The Discussion Paper was launched on 12 March 2009;
- a Maternity Services Review—the report of the review was released on 21 February 2009. The Australian Government will consider all the report recommendations when developing a National Maternity Services Plan;
- antenatal care guidelines and a framework for universal health services for children and families;
- the Australian Government has committed to developing and implementing a National Breastfeeding Strategy;
- the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission was established on 25 February 2008 to develop a long-term strategy for tackling current and future challenges in the Australian health system—the interim report was released in February 2009, with the final report due mid 2009;
- the National Preventative Health Strategy to curb the growth in chronic disease and the associated costs to the health system and the broader community. The strategy to be completed by June 2009 will be developed by the Preventative Health Taskforce established on 9 April 2008;



- the National Primary Health Care Strategy to guide future policy development and improve the effectiveness of primary care service delivery in Australia. A draft strategy is expected for Australian Government consideration by mid-2009;
- the National E-Health Transition Authority—in November 2008, COAG approved continued funding of \$218 million from July 2009 to June 2012.

Education

The issues identified by Summit participants in ensuring that the education system meets the needs of rural Australians reflect many of the priorities in the Government's Education Revolution policy. In particular, these include:

- basic literacy and numeracy as a non-negotiable priority for all;
- access, including affordability and flexible delivery models;
- an education system that is inclusive of all backgrounds and experiences;
- adequate resources, including the attraction and retention of quality staff, and having the right infrastructure for flexible delivery;
- improving communication, developing knowledge management and building genuine partnerships;
- mapping what works and building on previous frameworks and actions;
- life-long learning through systems and processes that enable re-engagement with education at any level;
- innovative, flexible strategies ensuring local solutions to achieve national benchmarks; and
- genuine community engagement at the grass-roots level, and developing real partnerships that build on the social capacity of rural communities.

Achievements

The Government's commitments in this area have been significant. Initiatives include:

- \$8.7 billion for the Education Investment Fund;
- the establishment of the National Curriculum Board;
- the National Education Agreements;
- the National Secondary Schools Computer Fund;
- \$37 million to establish the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Agency (to incorporate National Curriculum Board and National Schools Assessment and Data Centre);
- \$800,000 for the Family–School and Community Partnership Bureau to conduct research and develop pilot programs to ensure schools are more welcoming to parents and the broader community;
- \$62.5 million over four years for Local Schools Working Together to build facilities to be shared between government and non-government schools.

Young people

Summit participants identified a number of issues and challenges facing young people (aged 15–30) in rural areas including:

- attracting and retaining young people in primary industries and rural communities;
- supporting young families;
- establishing a new paradigm for young people to move into agriculture;
- career pathways that are clearly outlined and known;
- increasing the performance of rural high schools;
- access to education;
- Indigenous young people;
- entrepreneurship and innovation; and
- suicide, sexuality and drug related problems.

Achievements

The Government is committed to ensuring that young people in Australia have a say in decisions affecting them and their futures. Convening the Youth Summit 2020 was an important first step in this regard. Subsequently, the Australian Youth Forum has been established to provide an ongoing consultative forum. In addition, the following initiatives have been funded:

- \$5 million will be invested over four years for Mentors for Students;
- \$6.4 million will be invested over four years for the Enterprise and Career Education Program;
- \$98 million will be invested over four years in school grants for on-the-job training;

- the establishment of the Office for Youth; and
- a range of health services targeting youth have been funded by the Australian Government, including:
 - \$9.8 million over four years for the national sexually-transmitted infections prevention campaign targeting young people;
 - \$2.6 million annually for the Innovative Health Services for Homeless Youth; and
 - \$490 million from 1 July 2008 for the Medicare Teen Dental Plan.

Young people base their decisions to work in primary industries and live in rural communities on a wide range of factors. Government programs support the development of dynamic primary industries and rural communities, and several highlight its focus on young people. They include:

- the Next Gen Farmers grants round that supports projects to improve the leadership and representative capacity of young people entering primary industries or already involved in them, particularly in the context of the challenges and opportunities these industries face from a changing climate;
- the ABC's *Heywire* program, which supports young people in rural and regional Australia to create and share their stories, ideas and opinions about life in non-urban areas;
- through the Australia's Farming Future initiative, the Government is supporting capacity building activities for young people. The Community Networks and Capacity Building component will support activities to encourage and improve learning about agriculture in schools. It will increase awareness about the contribution primary industries make to our society and the range of training and career opportunities in the sector; and
- whole-of-government programs supporting young people interested in primary industries include ministerial outreach visits and communication and engagement activities. These programs aim to encourage young people to participate in the Australian Youth Forum, the Government's new youth initiative.

Infrastructure, transport and telecommunications

Summit participants covered a wide range of infrastructure issues of concern to Australians in rural, regional and remote areas, under three broad categories:

- transport to and within regional Australia;
- access to telecommunications; and
- other infrastructure necessary to support communities and economic development.

Achievements

The Government's commitment to tackling these issues is evident in the establishment and delivery of:

- the Building Australia Fund to begin addressing national infrastructure bottlenecks —with \$12.6 billion already allocated to the fund for transport, water, energy, and communications infrastructure;
- the \$26.4 billion Nation Building Program which will fund road and rail infrastructure around Australia over the next six years;
- Infrastructure Australia, an independent expert advisory council providing a new approach to the identification, planning and implementation of infrastructure of national significance across Australia;
- the Community Infrastructure Program, delivering \$800 million in new funding over two years to help support jobs and boost local economies;
- the \$176 million Better Regions Program to fulfil election commitments and deliver a range of community infrastructure projects across Australia;
- the National Housing Affordability Scheme which will provide \$622.7 million over four years;

- the First Home Saver Accounts (\$1.2 billion funding) and First Home Owners Boost (almost \$1.5 billion);
- the \$512 million Housing Affordability Fund;
- the National Housing Supply Council;
- the new Office for Housing; and
- the COAG Housing Working Group.

Processes under way

Additionally, a number of processes are already under way, including:

- new arrangements for a National Broadband network;
- Regional Development Australia, a network of local advisory committees, to be finalised in 2009, with the aim of improving the coordination of regional development initiatives and ensuring engagement with regional communities;
- Standard Business Reporting (SBR) implementation plan agreed by COAG July 2008;
- Australia's National Infrastructure Audit undertaken by Infrastructure Australia and delivered to Governments in December 2008;
- the development of the Infrastructure Priority List delivered to Governments in March 2009; and
- Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee report, 'Framework for the Future', which was tabled on 15 October 2008.

Community building, engagement and new arrivals

Participants at the Summit developed a number of proposals aimed at building strong, inclusive communities through:

- working with and including Indigenous community members;
- community building programs;
- establishing community hubs/one-stop shops;
- mechanisms to support lower capacity communities;
- community consultation at all levels of policy development on key community issues;
- systems to support rural and regional communities to access funds and resources;
- innovative packages of mobile (combined) services to outback areas (e.g. child care, library, medical, welfare, banking, domestic/family violence, and mental health);
- supporting volunteers;
- welcoming new arrivals; and
- understanding cultural differences.

Achievements

The Government has already progressed:

- funding for the Community Infrastructure Program, which will deliver \$800 million over two years to local government to build and refurbish community infrastructure;
- funding for the Better Regions Program to build community infrastructure at an investment of \$176 million over four years;

- \$4.2 million in funding over four years for the expansion of Business Enterprise Centres, with an additional \$4 million over two years (as part of the global financial crisis package) for small business advice and support;
- grants through the Government's Rural Financial Counselling Service Program to enable state and regional organisations to provide free and impartial financial counselling to eligible primary producers, fishers and small rural businesses in financial hardship;
- the establishment of Regional Development Australia;
- the establishment of the Social Inclusion Board and Expert Panels;
- through the DoctorConnect website, Australian and overseas trained doctors and other health professionals can now easily find information about Australian Government incentives available in under-supplied geographic locations;
- the Computerised Practitioner Assistant, COMPASS, is integrated into the Australian Government's DoctorConnect website that started operating in December 2008. COMPASS allows health professionals to make informed decisions about where they want to work, with accurate information about their entitlements. It will be a valuable asset in drawing more medical and health care professionals and students to the parts of Australia where they are most needed. COMPASS is part of the broader DoctorConnect initiative that provides information about health workforce programs to Australian and overseas trained doctors;
- implementation of the Telephone Counselling, Self Help and Web-Based Support Programmes Measure, which provides \$60.9 million to organisations to enable them to reach rural and remote areas through telephone and web-based mental health support and interventions.

Processes under way

The development of the Social Inclusion Compact with the community sector (the Third Sector) is under way.

The Australia's Farming Future initiative also supports activities to build the leadership and representative capacity of target groups, including women, young people, Indigenous Australians and people from different culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Vocational training, skills development and workforce participation

Issues about training and skills development in rural, regional and remote Australia that were identified by Summit participants included:

- access to formal training, VET courses and the need for flexible learning systems;
- access to training in non-traditional occupation areas and the acknowledgement of different learning styles;
- access to informal training and the need for hands-on training;
- ensuring the training offered is needs based;
- on-line delivery systems;
- particular difficulties in remote areas, including Indigenous communities;
- pathways to paid work for women;
- leadership training and mentoring;
- the availability of rural and regional trainers; and
- the need for child care and elder care support for women re-entering training and work.

Achievements

The Government has already funded:

- Trade Training Centres in Schools through an investment of \$2.5 billion. Phase One is funding to 96 schools;

- Skilling Australia for the Future. More than \$2 billion will be provided to fund 701,000 new places over five years with more than 58,000 jobseekers enrolled in the first six months:
 - \$1.1 billion will be invested over five years in 309,000 places for individuals outside the workforce;
 - \$708.2 million will be invested over five years in 392,000 places for retraining or upgrading for those already in the workforce; and
 - \$242.2 million will be invested over five years in 85,000 new apprenticeship places to be divided between continuing workers and re-entrants to the workforce.
- \$84.5 million over five years will be invested for Industry Skills Councils;
- Skills and Training Information Centres—\$4.1 million will be provided over five years to provide a one-stop advisory service to employers, prospective students and training providers;
- links to training providers through the DEEWR website;
- the COAG Productivity Reform Agenda.

Processes under way

- A fairer and more balanced workplace relations system will assist in improving women's workforce participation and pay equity. *The Fair Work Act 2009* includes opportunities to improve pay equity, including:
 - improved equal remuneration provisions and a fairer safety net; and
 - the Act also encourages bargaining in low-paid and largely female dominated industries.
- The Government is also eagerly awaiting the findings from the pay equity inquiry to help guide further actions to achieve equality for all workers.

- Through the Community Networks and Capacity Building component of the Australia's Farming Future initiative, the Government is supporting activities to build the leadership and representative capacity of target groups, including women, young people, Indigenous Australians and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- The \$26.5 million FarmReady Fund will ensure access to specialised training to help primary producers and primary industries deal with climate change.
- The Australian Agricultural Industries Young Innovators and Scientists Awards provide eligible young Australians aged between 18 and 35 and working or studying in rural industries with grants of up to \$20,000 to pursue their innovative scientific ideas with long term benefits for Australia's rural industries. An additional \$30,000 is provided by the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry to help winners of the award to advance their research outcomes and careers.
- Advice and training grants of up to \$5,500 are available through the Climate Change Adjustment Program to help eligible farmers and their partners obtain professional advice and training to adjust and adapt their farm business to the impacts of climate change.
- Through the Exceptional Circumstances Exit Package, eligible farmers can receive up to \$10,000 for professional advice and retraining to assist them to prepare for the successful transition away from farming.
- The \$930,000 Forest Industry Database project aims to collect industry data and develop a central industry database to supply the forestry community with current, detailed and relevant information. The database will enable industry and government to understand the future demand and growth of the industry, identifying skill shortages, workforce planning and identify future needs within the industry.



Employment and business development

In discussing women's participation in the economy and the development of businesses, the following topics were considered by Summit participants:

- the impact of oil prices;
- interest rates and the value of the Australian dollar;
- labour shortages, superannuation and tax;
- child care;
- digital communications;
- trade barriers, including those created through regulation;
- training, apprentices and incentives;
- small business support networks in rural areas;
- research and development;
- drought assistance;
- tax incentives;
- export market development grants;
- integration of refugees into employment and the community;
- seasonal work challenges;
- worker support, e.g. housing; and
- family businesses and succession.

Achievements

The Government has made two important funding commitments in this area:

- An additional \$50 million in funding in 2009/10 for the Export Market Development Grants scheme; and
- The \$130 million Australia's Farming Future initiative to help primary industries improve productivity, adapt and adjust to a changing global climate and manage greenhouse pollution. Australia's Farming Future programs include:
 - the Climate Change Research Program to fund research and on-farm activities;
 - FarmReady, to boost training opportunities for primary producers by offering reimbursement of up to \$1,500 for approved training courses and to help industry, farming and natural resource management (NRM) groups develop strategies to adapt and respond to climate change;
 - the Climate Change Adjustment Program to help farmers develop options for on-farm climate change strategies and practices and to get professional advice and training or adjustment assistance—rural financial counsellors can help eligible farmers improve their long-term financial position;
 - Transitional Income Support, which is linked to the Climate Change Adjustment Program and provides short-term income support, advice and training to farmers in serious financial difficulty to help them adapt their farm to better deal with a changing climate; and
 - funding for community networks and capacity building activities that increase the leadership and representational skills of women, youth, Indigenous Australians and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Processes under way

Significant progress has been made with the National Review of Drought Policy, including:

- a detailed scientific examination of likely future climate patterns released in July 2008;
- an assessment of the social impacts of the drought released in October 2008; and
- an economic assessment by the Productivity Commission. The final inquiry report was sent to Government on 27 February 2009. The draft report is available for information until the final report is released by the Australian Government.



Families and children

Topics addressed by Summit participants in relation to families and children include:

- access to early childhood education and care, preschool education and early intervention for children with different needs;
- the availability of family support programs and marriage guidance;
- the need for programs to mitigate family violence and child abuse;
- rural children's services that face special challenges, such as transport for children from out of town, fluctuating enrolments threatening viability, inability of a community to support competing care and education providers; and
- the need for communities to retain the strong, local organisations that they have built up over many years to be responsive to their own needs, so that they can guide their own futures.

Achievements

The Government has made significant progress in this area. Initiatives include:

- a Carers Support Package (children with disability)—\$293.6 million in the 2008–09 Budget for improved support for carers, with \$273.6 million to improve the eligibility criteria and assessment processes for Carer Payment (child) and \$20 million over four years for carers who have experienced a catastrophic event involving a young child;
- the national rollout of the Australian Early Development Index—\$20.2 million over five years;
- the Early Childhood Education Workforce Strategy:
 - \$12.4 million over three years for remission of 50 per cent of HECS;
 - \$60.3 million over four years for removal of TAFE fees; and
 - \$53.9 million over four years for additional university places.

- the Early Learning Years Framework through an investment of \$2.5 million in 2008/09;
- the national rollout of the Home Interaction Program to help disadvantaged children improve school readiness through an investment of \$32.5 million over five years;
- JET Child Care Fee assistance;
- the increased availability of quality and affordable child care through the National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care through an investment of \$22.2 million over four years;
- universal access to early learning through an investment of \$533.5 million over five years;
- the establishment of the Office of Work and Family;
- the establishment of the National Council to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.

Processes under way

Two important strategies released early in 2009 are:

- the 'National Child Protection Framework'. The Framework will focus on stronger prevention and intervention strategies to better support vulnerable children and families. The Framework will clarify roles and responsibilities, and is likely to include practical, concrete actions to be undertaken by governments and community groups to better protect children; and
- the 'National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women'. The National Council has presented an advance copy of 'Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2009–2011' to the Government. The Government is considering the Council's recommendations.



Women with disabilities

Summit participants noted that, in regional, rural and remote locations women with disabilities face greater isolation problems than their urban counterparts due to:

- lack of accessible public transport and the expense and availability of accessible taxis;
- higher fuel costs that may make private transport too costly for many on fixed low incomes;
- lack of access to adequate information and communication technologies, including the lack of provision of broadband services in regional, rural and remote locations, and the high cost of hardware, software, service provision and equipment maintenance;
- lack of access to adequate mobile networks for contact in disability emergencies;
- fewer accessible general practitioner and general health services;
- lack of access to breast and cervical screening;
- fewer disability support and mental health services;
- distances and costs may preclude travel to regional centres for disability and health related treatment;
- lack of access to suitable, flexible work;
- lack of social supports; and
- a lack of peer networks and disability peer groups.

Achievements

The Government has already ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 6—'Women with Disabilities', specifically outlines States Parties' obligations to women with disabilities), and funded:

- the new National Disability Agreement including the Disability Reform Agenda through an investment of \$5.3 billion;
- the Regional Health Services program to improve the health and well-being of rural and remote families by increasing their access to a broad range of primary health services for the prevention and treatment of illness. Funding for the program in 2008–09 is \$48.1 million;
- the Rural Women's GP Service to improve access to primary health care services for women in rural and remote Australia, who currently have little or no access to a female GP, by facilitating the travel of female GPs to these communities. The service is administered through the Australian Council of the Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia and the current funding agreement, which began in April 2008, provides up to \$12.4 million to June 2011;
- the expansion of the Medical Specialist Outreach Assistance Program through an investment of \$12 million over four years to support medical specialists to deliver an expanded range of outreach services in rural and remote communities;
- \$60.9 million for Telephone Counselling, Self Help and Web-Based Support to enable organisations to reach rural and remote areas through telephone and web-based mental health support and interventions;
- access to breast and cervical screening including:
 - strategies currently in place for the NCSP and BreastScreen Australia;
 - both the NCSP and BreastScreen Australia are joint initiatives of the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments. The Government funds States and Territories to provide breast cancer screening services and promote and support breast cancer and cervical screening for women. This includes encouraging service providers to ensure that all women have the opportunity to participate in screening, including women with disabilities;



- in relation to the NCSP, several States and Territories put in place strategies to address the needs of women with disabilities who wish to have a Pap smear. Some of these are:
 - i. the purchase of adjustable examination couches;
 - ii. the development of information booklets aimed at women with physical disabilities;
 - iii. resources designed specifically for women with an intellectual disability;
 - iv. resources for women with visual or hearing impairments; and
 - v. referral to Pap smear providers who can meet women's special needs in terms of physical, intellectual, visual and hearing disabilities.

- BreastScreen Australia State and Territory programs have also developed a range of strategies at the local level to recruit women with disabilities into the Program and to support their participation in breast cancer screening. These include offering longer appointments or by providing specialised equipment, as well as the free telephone hotline in all States and Territories to gain information on access to BreastScreen Australia services.

Processes under way

These initiatives will be supported with the completion of:

- the National Disability Strategy (noting that the above issues have been raised during the consultations around the development of the Strategy);
- the Review of Disability Employment Services; and
- the National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy.

Culturally and linguistically diverse women

Summit participants noted that culturally and linguistically diverse women living in rural areas experience long term isolation, especially women who are born overseas and who are from non-English speaking countries. This isolation has brought about other issues and problems including:

- difficulty in accessing information about topics such as domestic violence protection orders, the requirements of the domestic violence provision in immigration regulations and other legal matters, various health services, welfare, counselling, education, training and employment;
- communication difficulties and a fear of not being understood;
- fear of authority, particularly on the part of women from corrupt or oppressive socio-political regimes;
- reluctance to use services such as counselling because of misunderstandings of what counselling offers, based on their experiences with services or lack of such services in their country of origin;
- fear of being judged and blamed;
- discriminatory, insensitive or misinformed work practices by service providers. There is a lack of multilingual and culturally appropriate information about legal and social entitlements and processes and a lack of appropriate outreach programs by service providers;
- fear of deportation; and
- the intimidating nature of court proceedings for those who have to undergo legal procedures.

Achievements

The Government has funded the following initiatives to address some of the issues identified, including:

- extending interpreting services in pharmacies, as announced on 8 December 2008;
- the Settlements Grants Program through an investment of \$34 million in 2008/09;
- Community Relations Projects through an investment of \$500,000 in 2008/09; and
- Employment Pathways & Traineeships in English and Work Readiness programs through an investment of \$49.2 million over four years for new arrivals.

Processes under way

Further options for action will be identified through:

- the review of the Adult Migrant Education Program; a discussion paper was released in July 2008;
- the review of the 'Living in Harmony' Program, as announced in February 2008;
- Australia's Farming Future, which is supporting activities to build the leadership and representative capacity of women from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds; and
- the 'National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children' which will address safety issues relevant to culturally and linguistically diverse women.

Indigenous women

Although Summit participants discussed issues facing Indigenous women, no specific recommendations for action were made. The Government's 'Closing the Gap' agenda, however, will provide significant improvements to the living circumstances and status of Indigenous women.

Achievements

- Through Caring for our Country, Indigenous Australians support the delivery of natural resource management by helping their communities undertake sustainable NRM practices.
- Caring for our Country also supports Indigenous Australians in decision-making positions on NRM bodies that assist regions to implement sustainable farming practices and repair and restore the natural environment.
- The roles played by Australian Quarantine Inspection Service Indigenous staff in their communities through the Northern Australian Quarantine Strategy are vital to the successful monitoring of Australia's north coast and Torres Strait for pests and diseases.

Processes under way

Through the Community Networks and Capacity Building component of the Australia's Farming Future initiative, the Government is supporting activities to build the leadership and representative capacity of Indigenous women.

In 2007–2008, COAG agreed a number of ambitious targets for closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational attainment and employment outcomes. These are:

- to close the life expectancy gap between Indigenous people and other Australians within a generation;
- to halve the mortality gap between Indigenous children and other children under age five within a decade;
- to halve the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement between Indigenous students and other students within a decade;

- to halve the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous people within a decade;
- to at least halve the gap in attainment by Indigenous students at Year 12 schooling (or equivalent level) by 2020; and
- to provide all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities with access to a quality preschool program within five years.

All governments acknowledge that closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage is an extremely significant undertaking that will require substantial investment. In November 2008, COAG agreed to targeted initiatives for Indigenous Australians of \$4.6 billion across early childhood development, health, housing economic development and remote service delivery.

COAG also agreed to a National Indigenous Reform Agreement. This draws together Indigenous related commitments across all National Agreements and National Partnerships as a schedule to the Intergovernmental agreement.

Additionally, COAG agreed to hold a dedicated meeting in 2009 to agree, between all governments, on a national strategy for achieving the six COAG Closing the Gap targets.

Organisations represented

From the Australian Capital Territory:

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation, Australian Rural Leadership Foundation, Women with Disabilities Australia

From the Northern Territory:

Tangentyere Council, Larrakia Media and Arts, NT Playgroup Association, NT Women in Agriculture

From Tasmania:

Fruit Growers Tasmania

From South Australia:

SA Women in Agriculture, SA Advisory Board of Agriculture, Department of Primary Industries and Resources, Australian Women in Agriculture, Women's Industry Network Seafood Community, Australian Government Regional Women's Advisory Council, Ernabella Arts, Clare Valley Children's Centre, Team of Two

From Western Australia:

Latitude Pearls, Jarvis Estate, National Rural Women's Coalition, Cambinyata Yabbies, Kondinin Group, Curtin University of Technology, Rural Remote and Regional Women's Network, WA Women in Agriculture

From Queensland:

Cooee, Torres Shire Council, Qld Pork Producers, PC Brooks & Co, National Rural Women's Coalition, Institute of Child Protection Studies, Women in Sugar Network, AgForce Qld, Torres Strait Island Regional Council, Royal Flying Doctor Service, Qld Rural Women's Network, Gympie Chamber of Commerce, Qld Rural Workers Network, Queensland Country Women's Association, Women's Industry Network Seafood Community, Zonta Charters Towers

From New South Wales:

Charles Sturt University, Rural Women's Network, NSW Rural Women's Network, NSW Women with Disabilities, NSW Partners in Grain, Rural Doctors Association, Smith Family, Coonamble Women's Gathering, SE Advocacy, Breastfeeding Association, YHI Products, Rural Women's Advisory Council, Immigrant Women Speak Out Association, North Coast Area Health Service, National Rural Women's Coalition, High Resolutions consultancy

From Victoria:

Lodden–Murray Community Leadership Program, Victorian Women's Trust, Longhaven Orchard, Sunraysia Institute of TAFE, Defence Special Needs Support Group, Greater Green Triangle Area Consultative Committee, Birchip Cropping Group, Young Professional Network, Lurg Cattle Company, Foundation for Australian Agricultural Women, Department of Sustainability and Environment, Australasia Pacific Extension Network, Gippsland Lamb, Simply Rose Petals, Rural Ambulance Victoria, Grass Roots Mentoring.

