



The Howard Government

Putting Australia's Interests First

ELECTION 2001

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OUR FUTURE ACTION PLAN

Opportunity and Choice

Opportunity and Choice reinforces the Coalition's ongoing commitment to delivering policies which give the women of Australia both opportunity and choice.



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Opportunity and Choice

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Our Future Action Plan - A Summary

The Coalition has delivered greater opportunity and choice for women.

Major reforms to the taxation system and enhanced assistance to families, in an environment of strong and sustained economic growth, have enabled more women to exercise choice in balancing family and workplace responsibilities, to find work and keep more of their earnings.

Throughout this election campaign, significant initiatives have been announced which will benefit women:

The First Child Tax Refund

One of the hardest times for families, financially, comes on the birth of a child. If re-elected, the Coalition will introduce a First Child Tax Refund. This Refund will pay back to mothers who leave the workforce after the birth of the first child born after 1 July 2001, tax paid on their income earned in the year prior to the birth of the child. A guaranteed \$500 minimum payment will be available for parents who have their first child after 1 July 2001, and earn less than \$25,000 in the assessment year, regardless of their hours worked.

Veterans' Affairs

The War Widows Income Support Supplement (ISS) – frozen since 1986 – will be indexed to increases in Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE) or the Consumer Price Index (CPI), whichever is greater. The 'un-freezing' of the ISS will cost \$70.3 million over three years.

The Workplace

A re-elected Coalition will spend \$39 million on a new Transition to Work program which will bring together a range of individual and flexible transitional assistance for people who have been away from the workforce for a long time and for those who have never had paid jobs.

Superannuation

The Coalition will also deliver a significant superannuation initiative for women, to be announced later in the campaign.

Over the next four years, the Coalition has committed an additional \$30 million for targetted initiatives that will directly benefit Australian women.

These important initiatives support work by the Office of Status of Women in the areas of:

- sexual assault;
- leadership;
- women's development; and
- an information strategy to provide all women with access to relevant information about the issues affecting them.

The Coalition has previously made a \$50 million commitment – *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* – to combat this insidious assault against women and children.

Under the *Partnerships* program, over \$10 million has been allocated to prevent Indigenous family violence. \$6 million over four years is being spent on the National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Program, enabling local Indigenous communities to develop and implement solutions to family violence.

Part A National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault

\$16.5 million over four years was committed in the 2001/02 Budget to combat sexual assault against women. The Coalition will establish partnerships with other governments, key organisations and service providers to develop, test and implement strategies that address the increasing incidence of sexual assault in the community. This will include: campaigns to promote community awareness; sharing approaches to combat sexual assault and promote 'best practice' across jurisdictions and agencies; and funding of time-limited projects.

Part B Women's Development Program

Funding of \$5.6 million was committed in the 2001/02 Budget over four years to expand and enhance the role of women, women's organisations and targeted research in government policy formulation. The program will support women's capacity building and mentoring activities.

From this Program, \$450,000 over three years has been allocated to establish a National Rural Women's Secretariat. The Secretariat will help give rural women a stronger voice and help to ensure the widest possible representation of women in rural Australia.

Part C Informed Choices for Australian Women

\$5.5 million over four years was committed in the 2001/02 Budget to develop a women's information strategy, including a data warehouse, research and policy publication series and web-based information for, and about, women.

The Office of the Status of Women hosted a National Conference in August 2001, *Australian Women Speak*. The Conference attracted women from around Australia and a significant number of high-quality speakers. The Conference explored economic self-support and security for women, optimal status and position of women, eliminating violence in women's lives, and the maintenance of good health and wellbeing throughout women's lives.

Feedback from participants was extremely positive and the Coalition will hold another Conference in 2002.

Part D National Leadership Initiative

An investment of \$2.4 million over four years, which was provided in the 2001/02 Budget, will increase the participation of women in

leadership positions and promote leadership by women in other areas, particularly rural, Indigenous, marginalised and disadvantaged women.

Part E *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*

The Coalition has committed \$50 million to *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* to develop innovative preventative measures and best practice in the prevention of domestic violence.

Major initiatives include: addressing the impact on children of domestic violence; strengthening programs to ensure perpetrators of domestic violence put an end to the violence; and community education for mainstream, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

Over \$10 million has been allocated to combat Indigenous family violence, with \$6 million over four years being spent on the *National Indigenous Family Violence Grants Program*, enabling Indigenous communities to develop and implement local solutions to family violence in their community. A mentoring team helps grant recipients with advice on project management, self-documentation and self-evaluation.

Part F *Child Care*

The Coalition supports a policy of choice for women. If women choose to work, we will support that choice with quality, flexible and affordable child care.

The Coalition has allocated record levels of funding to child care.

In our first four years of government, we spent \$4.3 billion on child care – over 30 per cent more in real terms than Labor's last four years in office.

The Coalition has allocated over \$6 billion to child care over the next four years – a record amount.

The Child Care Benefit has improved the affordability of child care for low and middle income families. The introduction of the Child Care Benefit in July 2000 has reduced child care costs by over 14.5 per cent.

The Coalition is providing parents with more flexible child care options. We have allocated \$65.4 million in the 2000/01 Budget to specifically help families whose child care needs are not currently met by existing services. This includes the introduction of in-home care targeted at shift workers, families working outside standard business hours, families who have a sick child or a child with a disability, and families who live in rural and regional areas.

Part G Education and Training

A re-elected Coalition will spend \$39 million on a new Transition to Work program which will bring together a range of individual and flexible transitional assistance for people who have been away from the workforce for a long time and for those who have never had paid jobs. This measure will build on the Jobs, Education and Training and the Return to Work programs which have been helping people, particularly women, return to paid work after long absences.

We have ensured a massive increase of 43% in women's participation in vocational education and training. We have also increased the number of women undertaking traineeships and apprenticeships.

Since the mid-1990's, both the proportion and absolute number of female New Apprentices have increased considerably. A third of all New Apprentices are now females, compared with just 16.5% in 1995 under Labor.

This year, there are 107,500 women in a New Apprenticeship compared with 22,500 six years ago under the former Labor government.

In higher education, women now make up 58% of under-graduate commencements, and 51% of post-graduate commencements.

Part H Families

The Coalition is delivering better support and assistance to families and actively supporting women's choices – whether they be full-time parents, carers, or participants in the paid workforce.

Our \$240 million *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* includes provision for early intervention parenting, family relationship support and greater flexibility and choice in child care. The Strategy specifically includes \$20 million for Indigenous communities.

The Coalition has provided \$46 million for a range of family support services through the *Family Relationships Services Program*, including marriage and relationship education, family skills training and relationship counselling.

Women who choose to have children are also supported through our Family Tax Benefit.

The introduction of the Family Tax Benefit as a part of the Coalition's tax reform agenda increased funding to Australian families by over \$2 billion a year (an increase of over 20 per cent in real terms).

2.2 million Australian families, including more than 4 million children, have benefited from the Family Tax Benefit – that's over 90 per cent of all Australian families with dependent children.

The Family Tax Benefit includes a payment that is specifically targeted at sole parent and single income families. It partly compensates these families for only having access to one tax-free threshold. This payment supports sole parents in the difficult job that they do and families where one partner chooses to stay at home to look after children.

Single income families with a child under 5 were given an increase of \$350 per year through Family Tax Benefit B, in addition to the increase in Family Tax Benefit A of \$140 per child per year.

Family Tax Benefit B has a higher rate for children under 5 to support families who choose to have one parent at home until children go to school.

Independent research has already confirmed that the Coalition's new family benefits are providing real assistance to families. For example, recent NATSEM research comparing the disposable incomes of a range of families with children between March 1996 and March 2001 indicates that these families had increased their disposable incomes, with gains of between 7 and 19 per cent.

This was primarily due to changes in government benefits for low income families, including increases of up to 75 per cent in some cases.

Sole parents relying totally on government assistance have received substantial increases in benefits.

Part I Health

The Coalition has increased support for national breast and cervical screening programs. It has also expanded coverage through targeted initiatives, including a \$70 million initiative in the 2001/02 Budget to have GPs increase cervical screening rates. These ongoing programs have seen significant declines in death from breast and cervical cancer in Australia.

The Coalition has also supported the National Breast Cancer Centre (\$2 million per year) as one of Australia's major centres for the study of issues related to clinical and patient care, treatment and management of breast cancer.

In addition, \$4.1 million over 4 years has been provided for better services for women with breast cancer, especially in rural and remote

areas, through initiatives such as the employment of specialist breast care nurses.

The Coalition has funded a new drug, Herceptin, for Australian women with a specific form of breast cancer. This drug can have a significant effect on improving the length and quality of life for women with a serious form of breast cancer. The Coalition recently decided to make the drug available free of charge to Australian women.

The Coalition has assisted the Jean Hailes Foundation (\$0.5 million per year for 3 years) to conduct world-class research on menopause and other women's health issues, and to link that research to community and health professional education.

Part J Workplace

Coalition policies have increased the real wages of working women, and have created new opportunities for working parents to balance the demands of work and family.

We have made permanent part-time employment more accessible, strengthened equal opportunity laws, restructured and renamed the Affirmative Action Agency, and cut the paperwork reporting burden of equal opportunity compliance.

Analysis of workplace agreements made under the Act (for the period 1 January 1998 to 31 December 1999) indicates that 76% of Certified Agreements (covering 85% of employees) contained at least one family friendly provision; and 77% of employees with Australian Workplace Agreements have at least one family friendly measure in their AWA.

(i) *Helping Working Families and Women in the Workforce*

The Coalition is committed to maintaining a flexible workplace relations system that provides choices for working parents, ensuring that workers as a group, or in an individual capacity, can more easily negotiate working arrangements that provide a better balance between work and family.

The Coalition is committed to maintaining a strong emphasis in industrial laws on equal opportunity for women in the workforce, and promoting the implementation of equal opportunity principles in the private and public sectors.

(ii) *Employment*

The Coalition has:

- increased total employment by more than 830,000 new jobs. This is twice as many jobs as were created in Labor's last six years. Over half of these jobs - 431,400 – were new jobs for women.
- increased full-time employment. Under the Coalition, there have been 412,000 new full-time jobs created, of which 198,500 went to women.
- reduced the unemployment rate for women to 6.3 per cent, down from 7.6 per cent when Labor left office.

(iii) Paid Maternity Leave

The proportion of women covered by federal collective agreements who have access to paid maternity leave provisions had increased to almost 40% in 2000, compared with 28% in 1997.

Part K Regional, Rural and Remote

We have introduced the \$8.2 million 'Fly In, Fly Out' Rural Women's GP Program to improve access to female doctors in country Australia and have introduced the largest ever rural health package - the \$562 million Regional Health Strategy - to increase doctor numbers and improve health services in country Australia.

A new booklet highlights seventeen regional communities which have developed innovative strategies to counter domestic violence and reduce barriers to those seeking help. The community-based projects were funded under the Federal Government's Rural Domestic Violence Program, which formed part of the Government's \$50 million *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative.

A new national research report has been developed – *Success Factors – managing change in regional and rural Australia*. The report identifies the critical factors in the successful management of change in rural and regional communities. The research has provided women with the opportunity to influence government policy making, and is guiding new initiatives to help strengthen communities. The research project was undertaken by the Regional Women's Advisory Council. The Regional Women's Advisory Council continues to advise on issues threatening the strength of social fabric in regional communities, such as family breakdown, domestic violence, youth suicide and substance abuse. It will focus on how existing programs, such as the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*, can be used more effectively to address some of these social issues.

Women Taking Action: Making a Difference in Regional and Rural Communities is a booklet detailing the vital role women play in driving economic and social change within their communities.

Part L Indigenous Women

In addition to initiatives under *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence*:

(i) Preventing Violence Against Indigenous Women

Indigenous Women's Roundtable on Violence: An Indigenous Women's Roundtable on Family Violence has recently been formed by ATSIC and, with the support of the Coalition, is responding to concerns about the level of violence in Indigenous communities and its effects on Indigenous women in particular.

Family Violence Legal Prevention Program: The Coalition has funded, through ATSIC, 12 Family Violence Legal Prevention Units in high need areas, at a cost of \$4m over four years. These units provide culturally appropriate legal advice and support on family violence issues, counselling, and community education services. ATSIC is also funding regional family violence initiatives at the local level.

In July 2001, the Minister for Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs reached agreement with the states and territories on a common seven-point strategy to reduce Indigenous family violence. The Department of Reconciliation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs chairs a working group of officials and community representatives to coordinate the national implementation of the strategy.

(ii) Initiatives for indigenous women

Legal Services Reforms: ATSIC provides funding to a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS). ATSIC is undertaking significant reforms to ATSILS with the support of the Coalition. A major focus of the reforms has been to improve the services available to Indigenous women, particularly in the areas of family violence, family law and other civil matters. This will address years of neglect by previous Labor governments to ensure that Indigenous women gained access to legal services.

Women's Advisory Committees: Eight ATSIC Women's Advisory Committees, which advise Regional Councils on women's needs, have been formed. ATSIC also convened an Indigenous Women's Conference in Perth this year where over 200 women discussed women's needs and policy issues. Regional Women's Advisory Committees have also been formed at the state level.

Regional Council Funding: ATSIC guidelines require Regional Councils to consider the specific needs of women when determining Regional Council annual budgets.

In total, ATSIC has provided funding for 135 projects for Indigenous women in 2000/01.

Part M Women in Business and Science

The Coalition sponsored the 2001 Telstra Business Women's Awards. This prestigious national program is designed to recognise and reward the outstanding achievements of women from all sectors and levels of enterprise. The Awards have also been instrumental in raising broader community awareness of the vital contribution that women make to the Australian economy.

We have recently initiated a 'Commonwealth Government Private Sector Award' for employees or part-owners of businesses with fewer than 100 staff. Women play a particularly important role in this sector, currently accounting for 35 per cent of Australia's 1.3 million small business operators.

The \$35 million National Innovation Awareness Strategy in the Coalition's *Backing Australia's Ability* package will broaden the emphasis of the Science and Technology Awareness Program, encouraging the participation of women in innovative entrepreneurship, science and technology.

The Small Business Enterprise Culture Program fosters the development and enhancement of small business owners' and managers' skills. The program has three elements: skills development; mentoring services and support to women in small business. The program was announced in the 1999 Budget with funding of \$6.4m over three years.

Part N International

During 2000/01, an estimated total of \$591.3 million was spent on activities in which gender was a major component or in which gender considerations informed a significant proportion of project components. Combating violence against women was a key focus for the sector.

Key commitments included:

- Support for women's needs in post-conflict situations in East Timor, Solomon Islands and Bougainville, including:
 - The Solomon Islands Women for Unity, Peace and Prosperity Conference;
 - The Leitana Nehan Women's Development Agency in Bougainville, dealing with social problems such as homebrew abuse and domestic violence, and helping ex-combatants integrate back into village life; and
 - Human rights education in East Timor to promote gender awareness, conflict resolution and reconciliation.

- Initiatives to reduce violence against women, including support for the work of the Fiji Women's Crisis Centre, the Vanuatu Women's Centre and the Solomon Islands Family Centre.
- HIV/AIDS projects in PNG and Indonesia to raise men's awareness of their responsibilities with regard to safe sexual behaviour.
- Support for programs to improve women's access to economic resources.
- Funding for a Community Fisheries Officer at the Secretariat of the Pacific Community, ensuring that women from coastal fisheries communities in the Pacific participate more effectively in, and benefit from, fisheries activities in the Pacific region.
- Provision of equity scholarships at vocational and technical institutes in Vanuatu and Samoa to encourage female participation in non-traditional trades.

Part O Law and Justice

(i) *Family Law and Superannuation*

The Coalition's *Family Law Amendment (Superannuation) Act 2001* will, for the first time, give divorcing couples the ability to split their superannuation in the same way they can split other property assets.

No other government has been able to achieve these reforms. The previous Labor Government failed to take any effective action to implement these reforms, even though they were recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission as early as 1987.

This reform is a milestone in the promotion of fairer property settlements, ensuring that divorcing women are not denied retirement income. Currently superannuation cannot be split. This often results in one partner – usually the woman – getting a greater share in the matrimonial home, and the other partner – usually the man – getting a smaller share in the home but all of the superannuation. This results in women having no access to retirement income and men being denied a larger share of current income – an unfair and inflexible situation.

The Act will come into effect towards the end of 2002, giving the superannuation industry time to prepare for the reforms.

(ii) *Legal Services for Women*

The Coalition is providing \$4.2 million this year to fund a comprehensive package of women's legal services. This includes

eleven Women's Legal Services throughout Australia, providing free legal advice and information, and specialising in legal issues affecting women – such as family law.

The funding also supports several Indigenous rural women's projects, providing specialised legal services for women in rural Indigenous communities, and rural outreach services for women in rural and regional areas.

The Coalition established the \$6 million Australian Law Online initiative, which is a smart and innovative way of ensuring all Australians, irrespective of where they live, can access information on family law issues via a telephone hotline (1800 050 321) and web site – www.law.gov.au. It also provides free legal advice to fourteen designated rural communities.

This initiative, and in particular its emphasis on family law, is enabling more women to understand their rights and obligations.

(iii) *Pregnancy*

The Coalition has undertaken legislative and policy changes to ensure that employers and employees better understand their rights and responsibilities in respect of pregnant women in the workplace.

We have introduced legislation to ensure that the rights of pregnant and potentially pregnant women are better protected by forbidding questions about pregnancy in job interviews, and ensuring that information about pregnancy obtained from medical examinations is not misused. The legislation also forbids discrimination against women who are breast-feeding.

These amendments will not only help prevent discrimination against employees, they will assist employers to understand how those laws impact on their businesses.

Part P *Sport and Recreation*

(i) *A Fair Deal For All – Diversity in Sport Media Reporting*

The Coalition aims to improve the overall quality, quantity and diversity of sports media coverage in Australia, particularly of women's sport. We will do this through developing materials targeted at people working at all levels in the sports media industry – media organisation management, on-the-ground journalists and camera people, journalism students, and public relations/media personnel in sporting organisations.

(ii) *Harassment-free Sport Strategy*

The Harassment-free Sport Strategy will work to decrease harassment, abuse and other forms of inappropriate behaviour in sport. It will increase tolerance, sportsmanship, and safety, and develop more welcoming environments in sport for all people, particularly women, Indigenous people and people with a disability.

Part Q Veterans and War Widows

The Coalition has taken the step to permanently link the War Widows' pension to 25% of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings (MTAWE).

A re-elected Coalition will:

- Extend the Gold Card to provide comprehensive free health care to female Australian veterans who are 70 years of age or over with qualifying service.
- Index the war widows' Income Support Supplement (ISS) – which was frozen by Labor in 1986 – to increases in MTAWE or the Consumer Price Index, whichever is greater.

In the 2001/02 Budget, the Coalition:

- Provided a \$25,000 cash payment to the widows of Australian service personnel and civilians held prisoner by Japan during World War II.
- Restored the pension rights of war widows who had their pensions cancelled when they chose to remarry, ending almost two decades of Labor-initiated discrimination which saw the creation of two types of war widows.
- Extended eligibility for the Repatriation Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme to female British Commonwealth and Allied (BCAL) veterans who are aged 70 years or over, have qualifying service, and have been resident in Australia for more than ten years.
- Committed \$6 million to extend the Residential Care Development Scheme, providing further financial support for organisations seeking to provide female veterans and war widows with access to high quality residential aged care services.

Part R Increased Representation on Company Boards

Women currently occupy 32.8 per cent of the positions on Commonwealth boards and bodies (where the Commonwealth has total control over the appointment). The Commonwealth maintains *Appoint*, a monitoring system managed by OSW that provides a whole-of-government status report on the representation of women on Commonwealth boards and bodies.

The Coalition has been a strong and vocal advocate for the appointment of more women to the boards of Australian companies.

The Minister for Financial Services and Regulation has set up an informal industry group to raise awareness and promote the benefits of greater women's representation at the senior levels of our corporations.

Highlights of the Government's Achievements

Australia has the most female-friendly government it has ever seen.

- Women's employment opportunity is increasing, participation in the workforce is increasing and the unemployment rate is down. For example, under Labor:
 - the female (aged 15 and over) unemployment rate was 7.6 per cent; under the Coalition it is currently 6.3 per cent;
 - the number of females (aged 15 and over) employed full-time was 2,071,100; under the Coalition the figure is 2,269,600;
 - the number of females (aged 15 and over) employed part-time was 1,532,000; under the Coalition the figure is 1,765,000.
- In child care, we've spent more than \$4.3 billion over the four years to June 2000. This is over 30 per cent more in real terms than Labor's last four years. Over the next four years, we will spend over \$6 billion. And, importantly, we have increased the flexibility of services available.
- In education, women now make up 58% of under-graduate commencements, and 51% of post-graduate commencements. There has been a massive increase of 43% in women's participation in vocational education and training. There has also been an increase in the number of women undertaking traineeships and apprenticeships.
- A sound economy, with record low interest rates, lower taxes and increased family payments, means that there is more money for women to spend as they make choices for themselves and their families.
- The Coalition has committed \$50 million, and provided strong leadership, to the campaign against domestic violence, via the *Partnerships Against Domestic Violence* initiative.
- We have committed \$16.5 million over four years to combat the serious issue of sexual assault.
- The Coalition has increased support for national breast and cervical screening programs. We have introduced the \$8.2 million 'Fly In, Fly Out' Rural Women's GP Program to improve access to female doctors in country Australia and have introduced the largest ever rural health package - the \$562 million Regional Health Strategy - to increase doctor numbers and improve health services in country Australia.
- The Coalition has committed new funding of \$27.9 million over four years to establish the new Federal Magistrates Service. The Service is easing the pressure on the Family Court and Federal Court and reducing waiting lists in family law matters and helping to

ensure that people living in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia have greater access to Commonwealth courts.

- The Coalition has significantly increased funding for community-based counselling and mediation services. This year we are providing 64% more in funds than Labor did in their last year of government (that is, \$32.1 million in 2001-02 compared to \$20.6 million in 1995-96).
- Australian families are concerned about the danger of illicit drugs in their communities. The Coalition has committed \$47.4 million in this election campaign to continue the fight against illicit drugs, building on the \$516 million *Tough on Drugs* strategy started by the Coalition.
- A series of state and territory forums were held this year with migrant and refugee women and their representative organisations. Issues of importance to these women and their families were discussed, and solutions to the problems of their everyday lives were proposed.

Labor's Alternative

The previous Labor Government did nothing to advance the rights of women in our society. They talked about women's issues, but failed to address the real issues facing most Australian women.

Superannuation – Labor talked for over 10 years about the allocation of superannuation upon divorce but did nothing to implement an equitable solution to this problem. Twice as many women as men receive the age pension, and it is estimated male members of superannuation funds hold three times the asset value of female members. For more than a decade, Labor put the issue of superannuation and marriage breakdown in the "too hard" basket. The Coalition Government's *Family Law Amendment (Superannuation) Act 2001* will, for the first time, give divorcing couples the ability to split superannuation in the same way as other property assets are split.

Childcare – Labor's chaotic, unplanned child care program saw many areas with under-utilised child care places and other areas with no facilities at all. This situation threatened the viability of long day care. The Coalition has put the necessary resources into child care, ensuring quality, affordability and greater choice for parents.

Violence – The previous Labor Government commissioned study after study into violence against women but took little decisive action and showed no national leadership on the issue of domestic violence.

Quotas for parliamentarians – Labor's quota system for the preselection of women to winnable seats has proved no more effective than the Coalition's non-prescriptive commitment to merit. Labor has 18 women in the House of Representatives compared with the Coalition's 17; and in the Senate the parties are equal, with 9 female members.

Labor pledges to "provide a Women's Budget Statement each year" and "communicate to all women's organisations on a regular basis, with a website". This is hardly innovative policy, with both practices currently well-established.

