

# Status of Women

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## AUSTRALIAN DEMOCRATS ACTION PLAN STATUS OF WOMEN WOMEN

*Australian women have changed the face of Australian public life over the past twenty years, but much remains to be done.*

*To make it easier for working women (and their families) to better balance their work and care responsibilities, we need essential work and family supports such as increased and affordable childcare; paid maternity leave; flexible working hours; the right to return to work part time, and supports for a variety of caring roles including for aged and disabled family members.*

*Women have the right to vote in Australia, so it is time to flex some muscle in this year's federal election and demand better supports for all women.*

## Our Action Plan

The Australian Democrats are committed to action to assist women. We will take action on seven fronts:

- Preventing violence - Women are subject to terrible violence in so many locations. Our society cannot guarantee women's safety in the streets or at home;
- Paid Maternity leave - Being a mother, as well as a paid worker, is a challenging balancing act. Access to paid leave is important in recognition of the physical need to take a break from the workforce;
- Child care - Over recent years, child care has become more expensive for families. We need to ensure that families have access to more affordable and accessible child care.
- Equal pay and equal representation - Full time women in the workforce now earn more than \$100 less a week than men – the same gender pay gap as 1978;
- Discrimination - Discrimination remains an important issue affecting many women;
- Women's voice - We will increase resources available to women's organisations to ensure that the voice of women – in all its diversity – is loud and strong, especially the voice of younger women.

*“Full time women now earn on average 10% less than men — the same gender pay gap as 1978, almost 30 years ago.”*

**Sharan Burrow**  
ACTU President



Other ACTION PLANS are available online at  
[www.democrats.org.au](http://www.democrats.org.au)

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## Preventing violence

The Democrats are committed to programs that assist community and women's services, as well as collaborative efforts, to prevent, educate, intervene and assist with recovery from violence.

## Paid maternity leave

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, only 34% of women have access to PML across Australia, highlighting just how backward Australia is when it comes to providing equality in the workforce, compared with the rest of the world.

The Democrats will re-introduce legislation later this year calling for a national 14-week government-funded paid maternity leave scheme, to take into account changes to Australia's industrial relations law

PML is a better scheme for working women than the Baby Bonus. Unlike the maternity payment which is administered through the welfare system, Paid Maternity leave is administered through the employer, it recognises maternity leave as a workplace right and therefore addresses workplace discrimination and inequality.

The introduction of a PML scheme would help address the systematic discrimination and disadvantage women in the workforce are faced with on a daily basis, and help protect working women from economic hardship due to pregnancy.

## Child care

Women need choices about how they care for children. They should not be forced into work, or kept out of it by high fees or a lack of options.

Women need flexible, affordable, quality child care.

The Australian Democrats recognise that child care addresses the social, emotional and intellectual development needs of young children and supports families. To address this we will:

- Immediately raise the level of child care benefits so that the gap is decreased;
- More affordable and accessible child care – especially for the under twos;
- Increase workplace-based child care so that parents can be closer to their children;
- Resist pressure forcing single parents into paid work, but ensure that they have adequate child care facilities to support their choices, especially in rural and regional Australia;
- Establish a new fund to create child care services in regional centres where sufficient demand exists, and to support employers who assist with the provision of child care for their employees;

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## Equal pay and equal representation

An ACTU analysis based on recent Australian Bureau of Statistics figures shows full-time female workers earned on average 10 per cent less than men: around \$100 less per week.

We propose a national review of pay equity in Australia by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission.

## Freedom from Discrimination

All Australian women should be free from discrimination in any form.

Australian Governments must work harder to recognise women's contribution and remove direct and indirect discrimination, which includes signing the Optional Protocol to the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

## Women's voice

It is vital that we see an effective voice for women in Government and the community. This means we support:

- A well-resourced national funding program for women's organisations, including specific support for young women's organisations;
- Increasing participation of women in all levels of Government;
- A strong and effective Office of the Status Women, with cross Government authority.