

Ms Marilyn Beaumont OAM
National Board Chairperson
Australian Women's Health Network
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Via email: marilyn1379@gmail.com

21 March 2019

Dear Marilyn

The Australian Women Health Network Women's Health Charter 2019

Thank you for your email on 1 March 2019, with details of the Australian Women's Health Network's Women's Health Charter. Firstly, I'd like to commend the Network on such a holistic, rigorous piece of work on women's health. Secondly, I'd like to endorse the Network's vision of an Australia where every woman is safe, respected and secure. It aligns very closely with my own, and that of the Australian Greens. I am responding to your email as the Greens' spokesperson for Women.

We know that despite decades of progress toward equality, many women still experience sexism and discrimination at work and home, and in the community and our health system. The Greens are committed to achieving structural reforms that directly address the key causes of inequality for women in Australia and around the world.

Towards global equality, we want to reverse the trend of slashing aid budgets as successive governments have done, and see that our aid program raises the status of women globally. We want to see measures aimed at achieving global gender equality, developing an adolescent girls action plan and requiring the Minister for Foreign Affairs to present an annual gender equality report to parliament.

Ending violence against women

On International Women's Day this year, the Greens launched our plan to ensure Equality for Women. Details are [here](#).¹ As part of this plan, we will invest \$5.3 billion into a new ten-year National Partnership Agreement on Domestic Violence and Violence Against Women between state and federal governments. This will include frontline services such as outreach, crisis response and legal support, as well as funding for Our Watch and Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, who are the national primary prevention and cultural change

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<https://greens.org.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/POLICY%20INITIATIVE-Equality%20for%20women.pdf>.

experts. We know that violence against women stems from a culture that accepts it, and we can only end it through challenging that culture.

We would commit a further \$200 million over four years to a Survivor Grant fund, providing up to 50,00 survivors of family and domestic violence grants of up to \$4000 to maximise their financial stability in leaving an abusive situation. This can go on household staples, safety technology, health costs, housing and expenses that maximise their independence and community participation.

To further relieve the financial burden on women leaving violent relationships, the Greens have also introduced legislation in both houses of parliament to provide ten days of family violence leave is available to all workers, rather than the five days that are currently available.

Reproductive health

The Greens have advocated for a nationally consistent framework for women's sexual and reproductive health for decades. Only now are we starting to see state policies modernise, with my home state of Queensland legalising abortion last year.

The Greens will continue to work at federal and state levels to ensure abortion is safe, free and legal in all Australian states. We will provide \$15 million in additional hospital funding, to ensure all women can have an abortion in a public hospital within a reasonable distance of their home. This adds to our long-standing commitment to index diagnostic imaging rebates on the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

We have also released a plan to boost maternity care and breastfeeding support with \$10 million a year, so public hospitals can accommodate new mothers with holistic care including breastfeeding support.

Housing

The Greens intend to directly support women, including the largest-growing cohort of homeless people, being older women, with housing. We will make private housing more affordable by reforming unfair tax breaks, strengthening renters' rights and investing in social housing to build 500,000 new public and community homes. Further, as part of our \$5.3 billion package for domestic violence services, we will prioritise dedicated resources to build transitional housing and crisis services for women.

Keeping women safe from harassment

The Greens want to invest in challenging the deeply ingrained attitudes that give rise to discrimination and ultimately violence against women. We support primary prevention programs and men's behaviour change programs, like the Change the Story framework for primary prevention developed by Our Watch. We want to see Respectful Relationships programs consistently delivered in schools across the country, and for updated, fit-for-purpose sexual education to incorporate issues like consent, respect and safe sex. We'd task the Sex Discrimination Commissioner with reviewing the success of France's ban on street harassment, with a view to considering if it could be implemented in Australia. We are also working to end the sexist, violence-inciting slogans against women on Wicked Campers.

Ending the gender wage gap

The Greens see women's economic security as key to their societal security, and we have a [plan](#)² to close the gender pay gap of 16.2% by:

- Setting gender pay equality as an objective of awards and the Fair Work Act.
- Banning 'pay gag clauses' in employment contracts.
- Strengthening the Workplace Gender Equality Agency with more powers to gather data, audit pay and conditions and develop sector-specific guidelines.
- Legislating to allow workers to request flexible working arrangements from the outset of employment.
- Extending the current paid parental leave arrangements at six months, paid at 100% of the primary carer's regular wage.
- Removing the minimum threshold for compulsory superannuation contributions.

Further, I understand that you are seeking where the Greens sit in relation to the 5 key proposals set out in the Charter.

1. A new national women's health policy which places gender into all Commonwealth portfolio areas and is underpinned by a Social Determinants Framework.

The Greens agree that a gendered approach to healthcare and health promotion is critical to empowering women and promoting gender equity. Given the unique and often overlooked nature of women's health, the Greens would be supportive of a women's health policy underpinned by a social determinants framework.

2. Within a national women's health policy as a first priority develop a national women's sexual and reproductive health policy.

The Greens have advocated for a nationally consistent framework for women's sexual and reproductive health for decades. Only now are we starting to see state policies modernise, with my home state of Queensland legalising abortion last year.

The Greens will continue to work at federal and state levels to ensure abortion is safe, free and legal in all Australian states. We will provide \$15 million in additional hospital funding, to ensure all women can have an abortion in a public hospital within a reasonable distance of their home. This adds to our long-standing commitment to index diagnostic imaging rebates on the Medicare Benefits Schedule.

Sexual and reproductive health is critical to women's health, and we support its prioritisation as a key plank of a national women's health policy.

3. Government funded independent women's health peak.

The Greens see huge benefit in the establishment of a publicly funded independent women's health body, with membership from all states and territories. The federal government currently provides funding for 23 national health organisations, including the National Rural Health Alliance and Mental Health Australia. Given the importance of women's health to our healthcare

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<https://greens.org.au/sites/default/files/2019-03/POLICY%20INITIATIVE%20-close%20the%20gender%20wage%20gap.pdf>

sector and our society, we would see the inclusion of an independent peak body for women's health as a valuable step to ensuring women's wellbeing.

4. Establish women's equity committees in all federal government departments.

The Greens support the establishment of women's equity committees in all federal government departments, reporting back to a central unit in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, with the aim of empowering women by addressing structural issues such as unfair social norms and attitudes, as well as developing progressive legal frameworks that promote equality between men and women. We would push for a serious conversation about how to best resource such committees.

5. Funded national conversation and sustainable ongoing funding

While women's economic, societal and health status has improved over the past century, there are many more ways to empower women, and many new conversations to initiate. We would support the development of forums to have a national, collaborative conversation to set priorities for new initiatives and research.

Again, I commend the Network for its role in advancing women's economic, social and health status in Australia. The Australian Greens look forward to working with the network to advance our vision of an equitable Australia where women are free from discrimination and have genuine choices in health care.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any further queries.

Yours sincerely,



Larissa Waters
Australian Greens Senator for Queensland