Women in Super Policy Priorities 2026

WOMEN IN SUPER

Vision

Towards an Australia where all women are able to retire into security and safety.

About Women in Super

Women in Super is a not-for-profit organisation that works to improve women's retirement outcomes, by advocating for a super system void of gender-based inequality. We do this by working with government, unions, employer organisations, regulators, and superannuation funds to campaign for a fairer super system by representing the voice of women in superannuation.

Women in Super acknowledges the diverse identities and experiences of women and girls. We include all women, regardless of gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, and cultural background. We understand that women from marginalized communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disabilities, and LGBTIQ+ women, often experience intersecting forms of discrimination and inequality, particularly in relation to economic security. Our advocacy efforts are dedicated to supporting all women, particularly those most impacted by systemic oppression.

Since the launch of this iteration of Women in Super Policy Priorities in 2024, there have been some major wins.

- Introduction of Superannuation paid on the Australian Government Parental Leave Pay. This measure will impact 180,000 families every year, with 99% of primary carer Parental Leave Pay paid to women.
- The superannuation guarantee reached 12%, following decades of stagnation. This increase is estimated to provide an additional 15-20% of superannuation at retirement compared to the 9.5% rate.
- The realignment of the Low Income Super Tax Offset (LISTO) including a mechanism that pins the rate to future changes to the tax brackets, The LISTO and Division 293 tax do not apply to

The challenges faced by women retiring in Australia continue to include lower balances on average than their male counterparts, earlier average retirement age, greater share of unpaid caring duties and longer average lifespan, all of which combine to make it more difficult for many women to retire with dignity.

While good progress has been made in a number of areas to assist in reducing the gender super gap, many fundamentals remain stubbornly unchanged. These include lower pay for feminised workforces, a greater proportion of part time and casual work, and time taken out of the paid workforce for caring duties – most of which receives no, or minimal superannuation. Women in Super remains focussed on advocating for changes in policy and system settings which will facilitate all women in Australia being able to retire into security and safety. This policy document outlines our current areas of focus.

Background

The design of Australia's superannuation system means that labour market inequalities are reproduced in the unequal balances of women and men at retirement age. Some mitigation is possible, for example through co-contributions for the low-paid. In the current system, this is outweighed by generous tax concessions on additional contributions and investment earnings. These concessions have allowed superannuation to be used as a tax-minimisation vehicle for the purpose of wealth accumulation as opposed to a mechanism to fund retirement consumption and wellbeing. Importantly, these benefits have accrued disproportionately to men.

The design of the retirement income system also presumes that retirees live as couples who own their own home, and that women can rely on their partners' super balances. Yet many retirees are renters and an increasing number of retirees are single women who have never partnered or are no longer partnered. Three in four retired, single women who rent live below the poverty line.

Addressing systemic social and economic inequalities will require a comprehensive approach across all public policy domains.

Area of focus: Support women to retire with security.

Objective: Every woman retires with adequate income to support a retirement with security.

Background:

Women's retirement savings are driven by very different experiences and opportunities across their career and life course to men's. Women work relatively shorter total paid hours across their careers due to higher levels of part time work and taking breaks from paid work to care. Women also earn lower incomes across careers due to occupational undervaluation, clustering in lower-level and insecure jobs and gendered discrimination in pay and promotion systems. These factors impact on accumulation and on the adequacy of retirement savings.

Immediate Priorities:

1. Raise the Age Pension and Increase Flexibility

The Age Pension is an effective way to reduce gender-based income differentials at retirement. However, the Age Pension currently sits at around the poverty line and is generally considered inadequate to fund a comfortable standard of living. Currently, a single full Age Pensioner receives $1100.30 per fortnight, while a couple receives $829.40 each ($1658.80 total) (Services Australia, 2026)[i]. The poverty line is set as $1119.80 per fortnight for a single person including housing (Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research, 2025[ii]). 'The Age Pension is more than a safety net. It plays an important role in supplementing the superannuation savings of retirees and allowing them to maintain their living standards. It also provides a buffer for retirees whose retirement income and savings fall due to market volatility, and for those who outlive their savings' (Retirement Income Review, 2020[iii]). The retirement income system must be focused on the provision of decent living standards and less on consumption smoothing. To deliver safety and security to those relying solely on the Age Pension in retirement, including the 1 in 3 women retiring with no super at all, the Age Pension must be boosted

to sit well above the poverty line. All measures that socialise risk can be funded by progressive tax policy, including better targeted superannuation tax concessions.

The interaction between the income tax and Age Pension system actively discourages pensioners from working. To support those over 67 to continue to engage in some paid work, the taper rate should be reduced. This will allow those who do not have adequate superannuation savings to top up their Age Pension to continue to live with an income above the poverty line, as well as benefiting the economy by encouraging experienced workers to continue to participate in paid work.

2. Help people understand and access the Age Pension

A significant number of retirees (Parliament of Australia, n.d.[iv]), and particularly women (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare[v]), will rely on the Age Pension in retirement, with superannuation providing a key additional part of their financial security. The interactions between superannuation and government income support are vital to establishing that security, and government and superannuation funds each have a role to play in ensuring that people have the right information, at the right time, to manage those interactions. Sharing government data with funds, which are subject to strict data protection obligations, would enable funds to support members to maximise their retirement outcomes by maximising their Age Pension entitlements. In addition, having access to de-identified data sets, including those from Services Australia (e.g., Centrelink payment statistics, Child Support statistics, etc.) would provide a clearer stream of information that will assist trustees determine the key characteristics of cohorts of their membership and any sub-classes within it and assist them with their retirement planning. At significant age points, government should contact people to prompt them to consider applying for the Age Pension and provide information and assistance applying through relevant government agencies.

3. Ensure super is paid on every dollar, including income that is wholly or principally of a domestic or private nature.

NDIS support workers and other domestic workers such as nannies and housekeepers engaged directly, often as independent contractors, may be missing out on superannuation payments that they would otherwise be entitled to. This is due to clauses in Australia's superannuation laws that exempt work or income 'that is wholly or principally of a domestic or private nature' (and part-time — less than 30 hours per week). Given 70% of these support workers are women, there is a significant impact on women's balances and their security in retirement. The Superannuation Guarantee (Administration) Act 1992 should be amended to remove this clause in sections 11(2) and 12(11).

Those who are under 18 and working less than 30 hours a week are also not entitled to superannuation on their income. Section 28 of the Superannuation Guarantee Act 'Salary or wages: excluded earnings of young persons' provides that salary or wages of a part-time employee who is under 18 are not to be taken into account for the purposes of the entitlement to compulsory superannuation', should be amended to treat ordinary time earnings of under 18s in the same way as those of over 18s.

4. Design a new measure of retirement income adequacy.

Australia's retirement income system will work more effectively if we can see clearly and comprehensively how it is actually performing for different groups of people. Current measures of adequacy are inadequate: they focus on individual superannuation balances in isolation, obscure the interactions between the four pillars of the system (superannuation; the Age Pension; personal savings and housing) and fail to capture the compounding disadvantages faced by women, First Nations Australians, renters, and carers. We call for the development of a new, publicly accessible adequacy model that integrates data across all four pillars to produce a "heat map" of

retirement outcomes across different cohorts, revealing who and where the system is failing. This model should be designed to reflect intersectional outcomes and should serve as the baseline against which all proposed reforms to the retirement income system are assessed. No reform should proceed without being measured against this evidence base.

Long Term Priorities

1. **Regular reporting of progress against, and indexing of, the measure.**

Area of focus: Support women retiring now

Objective: Ensure that all women who retire before gender equity is achieved in superannuation retire with security

Background:

Currently, around 85,800 women are retiring each year. 78% of retired, renting, single women live in poverty (Grattan Institute, 2025[vi]). Given the slow movement of policy and societal change, there must be changes to support the women retiring into poverty today. While WIS will continue to advocate for systemic changes that address the structural drivers of economic insecurity for women over the long term but recognise this will not improve outcomes for women who are already or soon to retire.

Immediate priorities:

1. **Prevent gender-based violence and improve support for victim survivors.**

   Women in Super has been working closely with Treasury on its reforms aimed at preventing perpetrators from accessing victims' superannuation death benefits and recommend narrowed discretion under a prescribed approach. Under this option, where a trustee is provided with evidence of a relevant court finding they would maintain discretion as to whether to fully set aside the beneficiary and maintain discretion to distribute the death benefit.

   WIS will continue to work with our member funds to ensure they are supporting their members who are experiencing abuse.

2. **Increase the supply of social and affordable housing.**

   We need to ensure that people on very low to moderate incomes have access to a place to live which is safe, secure and appropriate. Access to adequate housing is a fundamental human right (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2012[vii]). It allows people to participate fully in their community.

Women are experiencing homelessness in increasing rates (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021[viii]), accounting for 82% of the 5% increase in the number of people experiencing homelessness in the last five years. Steps are being taken through measures like the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) which will be used to support the delivery of 20,000 social homes and 10,000 affordable homes but this does not come close to meeting the demand Australia is facing, with an expected shortfall of 262,000 in the six years to 2028 (Western Sydney University, 2025[ix]).

We recognise that "there is no silver bullet to achieve systemic change or investment. The responsibility does not rest with any one industry or government body. Rather, a coordinated response is required across governments, the private sector, community housing sector, industry groups and the community. It necessitates ambitious, bold decisions and an ongoing commitment to housing equity" (City of Melbourne, 2020[x]).

3. Close the gender pay gap.

As super is paid as a percentage of wages, the gender super gap is intrinsically linked to the pay gap. Closing the gender pay gap is not only vital for women's economic security throughout their working life, but also into retirement.

- The Workplace Gender Equality Agency Australia (WGEA) report the gender pay gap as 21.1%.
- The Jobs and Skills Australia report the gender pay gap as 25.7% and the accumulated 10-year gender pay gap as 30.7%.
- For First Nations women, the accumulated gender pay gap is almost 40%.

To see this gap narrow and close, feminised industries must be valued, flexibility in the workforce prioritised, and women promoted at equal rates to men.

Area of focus: Restructure tax concessions

Objective: Achieve a fair, equitable and sustainable system for superannuation tax concessions

Background:

The superannuation system is designed around continuous full-time employment and pays no regard to women's employment patterns or unpaid caring responsibilities. Superannuation tax concessions direct the most assistance to those on high salaries with big superannuation balances (mostly men) rather than to low- and middle-income earners (mostly women).

The only superannuation tax concession more likely to be paid to women is the Low Income Super Tax Offset (LISTO).

The stage 3 tax cuts further widen the gap between taxes on superannuation contributions and take-home pay for those earning $18,200 to $45,000. The Stage 3 tax cuts that commenced on 1 July 2024 changed the brackets and changed the tax those brackets pay.

The new LISTO thresholds commence on 1July 2027 whereby those earning less and $45,000 will pay no tax on their super contributions. Until that time, anyone earning between $37,000 and $45,000 will pay only 1% less tax on their super contributions than on their taxable income. For all other income brackets the tax advantage for super is much larger (between 15% and 30%)

Immediate priorities:

1. **$700 lump sum payment**

   A lump sum contribution of $700 for bottom 30% of superannuation balance by age would help increase the superannuation balances of women with the lowest balances in a targeted way. 1.5 million people would benefit from the proposed $700 lump sum contribution, 57% of whom are women.

Long Term Priorities

1. **Further adjustments to tax concessions for those who do not need Government support to achieve a secure retirement.**
2. **Move administration and approval of early release of superannuation to the ATO and remove tax penalty on withdrawal of financial hardship claims.**

People applying for financial hardship claims through superannuation are by definition in dire financial straits, the deduction of 15% tax further disadvantages the recipients who need the money to pay for essential expenses.
By moving the approval and administration of these payments to the ATO and thereby aligning these early release payments with payments under compassionate grounds, it removes the risk of applicants applying more than once in 12 months for this payment.

Area of focus: Value and share care work.

Objective: Value paid and unpaid care work more appropriately to improve the retirement outcomes of carers

Background:

Providing unpaid care for a dependent child or a relative with a disability, chronic illness, or needs arising from age is associated with interrupted employment and lower lifetime earnings, resulting in significantly lower retirement incomes and increased risk of poverty in old age (Bonnet and Rapoport, 2019). As women carry out a disproportionate amount of unpaid care, these impacts are felt more strongly by women. providing unpaid care can result in more than $500,000 in foregone wages and superannuation contributions over a lifetime (Hamilton, 2024). In Australia, by the time they retire, women typically have about one third less superannuation than men. Research suggests that interruptions to employment and earnings arising from childcare accrue over time in ways that extend well beyond the parental leave period. Research also suggests that these interruptions are often substantially greater for other forms of non-parental care, such as care for a family member with a disability or chronic illness (Hamilton, 2024).

Immediate priorities:

1. **Legislate and implement a model of Carer Credits in Australia's superannuation system.**

   Women in Super has worked with Associate Professor Myra Hamilton, of Sydney University, to develop a model of Carer Credits to mitigate the interruptions to earnings and savings that arise from providing care. This model focuses on primary carers of children under five years, and those receiving the Carer's Allowance, who are earning below minimum wage. This model will compensate these carers' superannuation balances, up to $5915 (12% of minimum wage) each year.

2. **Legislate and implement the superannuation guarantee on all forms of Paid Parental Leave**

We have welcomed the Federal Government's announcement in March 2024 that they will pay superannuation on the Commonwealth Parental Leave Pay Scheme beginning 1 July 2025 as a significant step to closing the gender superannuation gap and valuing child-rearing. Given most women spend 6 months or more out of the workforce after the birth of a child, and 63% of Australian employers with 100 or more employees already offering their own paid parental leave, the next step is to legislate superannuation on all forms of paid parental leave.

Long Term Priorities:

1. Expand the Paid Parental Leave entitlement.

We support the Women's Economic Equality Taskforce's recommendation of phasing the Paid Parental Leave entitlement up to 52 weeks and boosting the quantum of payments to reach a replacement wage and ensure the scheme incentivises men's use of PPL.

Area of focus: Apply First Peoples' lens.

Objective: First Nations people retire with the same outcomes as non-First Nations Australians

Background:

There are numerous barriers to First Nations people accessing and enjoying the benefits of the superannuation system. First Nations people have a lower life expectancy than non-First Nations Australians and are therefore less likely to reach preservation age. Other barriers include language, financial literacy, technology and difficultly of access to engage with superannuation in remote areas.

Immediate priorities:

1. **Accessibility of superannuation for First Nations people**

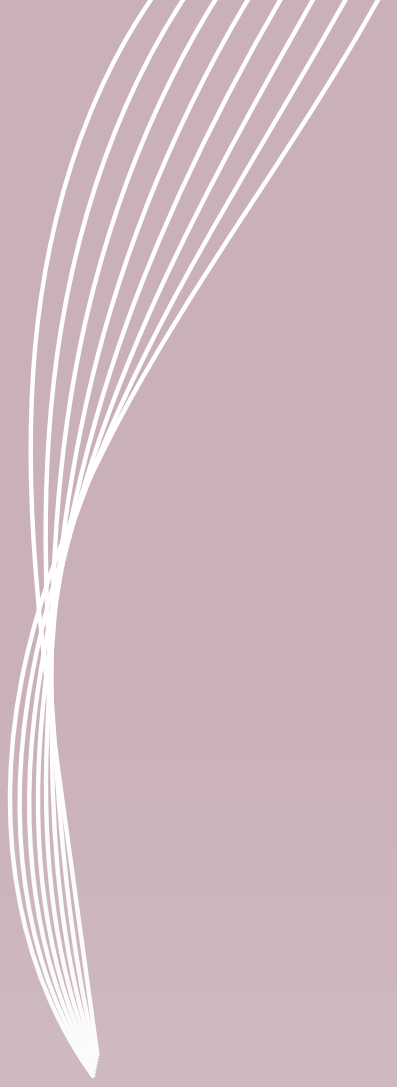
   According to the First Nations Foundation, "Indigenous people often have different kinship structures compared to non-Indigenous people and currently, these structures aren't recognised by the superannuation industry. This causes a significant challenge when a family member passes away, and their superannuation balance isn't accessible to rightful kin. This issue extends to deceased estates, were kin, despite being culturally appropriate beneficiaries, may encounter obstacles in applying for property inheritance."

2. **Culturally sensitive communication and engagement**

   To improve First Nations' access to their super, funds must implement culturally sensitive protocols including improving cultural awareness of those in the superannuation sector who interact with First Nations communities, standardising forms, and empowering financial counsellors to represent First Nations clients effectively.

Long Term Priorities:

1. **Support self-determination by First Nations people in the design and delivery of measures to improve retirement outcomes.**

References

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