

Dear Senator Gallagher

On behalf of Zonta Australia, I want to acknowledge and thank the Commonwealth Government for the policy advancements made during the current term, particularly in addressing issues affecting women and girls. Zonta International's mission is to create a better world for women and girls through economic equality, security, and the elimination of gender-based violence. While progress has been made under the government's leadership, there is still much to be done to fully realise these goals.

At Zonta Australia's recent national think tank, four priority areas were identified as urgent policy concerns: **Duty of Care for Future Generations; Stopping Gender-Based Violence; Economic Equality and Security; and Housing/Homelessness**. These priorities have become even more pressing given the ongoing impacts of climate change and economic instability, which disproportionately affect women and girls. Women, particularly those in vulnerable groups, continue to face systemic inequality, leaving them with fewer resources, fewer choices, and greater exposure to risks such as homelessness and gender-based violence. Continued government action is critical to addressing these issues.

We are aware that several government committees, including the **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, the Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability and Supply, and the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children**, have made key recommendations to address these challenges. However, there are still outstanding actions that must be implemented to achieve meaningful change.

In particular, we urge further action in two key areas:

1. Homelessness and Older Women

The **2021 Census data** revealed that the number of women over 55 experiencing homelessness increased by 6.6%, highlighting the urgency of this issue. The **House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs** and the **Senate Select Committee on Housing Affordability and Supply** have provided recommendations on improving housing accessibility, reforming tax and pension systems, and increasing support for affordable housing. These measures are crucial to ensuring older women do not continue to fall through the cracks.

We urge the government to:

- Implement **tax and pension reforms** to support older Australians, particularly those who are asset-rich but cash-poor.
- Develop **incentives for spare-bedroom rentals** to alleviate housing pressures.

- Promote **community-led housing solutions**, such as co-housing, to provide secure and affordable living options for older women.

2. Climate Change and Gender Equality

Zonta Australia supports the **Zonta Says NOW to Gender-Equal Climate Action** campaign, urging the government to integrate gender equality into climate policies and ensure women's leadership in climate decision-making. The **Senate Environment and Communications Committee** has recommended that gender disparities be addressed in climate change adaptation strategies, yet further action is required.

We call on the government to:

- Close the **gender pay gap** and improve women's financial resilience, particularly post-disaster;
- Strengthen **disaster response frameworks** to prevent gender-based violence in crisis situations;
- Implement a **clear, actionable plan to achieve net-zero emissions** while safeguarding the rights of future generations; and
- Continue to take positive steps to eliminate and prevent **Gender Based Violence**.

The Need for Full Implementation of Outstanding Recommendations

Despite the recommendations from various committees, gaps remain in their implementation. We urge the government to prioritise the full execution of outstanding policy recommendations, particularly in housing affordability, economic security for older women, and gender-responsive climate action. By taking decisive action in these areas, we can ensure a future where women and girls are not only safe but thrive in a society of equality, security, and opportunity.

We deeply appreciate the progress made so far and remain committed to working alongside the government and relevant committees to advance these vital issues. The time to act is now.

Thank you for your attention and ongoing commitment to improving the lives of women and girls in Australia.

Yours Sincerely

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cc: Hon Sussan Ley – Shadow Minister for Women