

Women's Economic Opportunity Review

The COVID-19 Economic Recovery Strategy committed to identify and review barriers to women's economic participation and reform opportunities such as enabling greater workplace flexibility, reducing gender segregation within industries and occupations, and improving the accessibility and affordability of early childhood services. This commitment led to the Women's Economic Opportunity Review (the Review), an initiative jointly sponsored by the NSW Treasurer, the Minister for Women and the Minister for Education and Early Learning.

The review was conducted by NSW Treasury along with Women NSW, the Department of Education and other government agencies. NSW Treasury coordinated the Review, with subject matter experts from across government collaborating on specific streams of work.

An expert reference panel was established to provide subject matter expertise and advice. to inform the Review, NSW Treasury also sought public submissions, undertook focus groups, commissioned expert advice, and held targeted consultation with key stakeholders and representative organisations.

This consultative process led NSW Treasury to deliver the inaugural Women's Opportunity Statement as part of the 2022–23 NSW state Budget. The Statement sets out the following five strategic priority areas for reforms, which are fundamental to increasing women's economic opportunities and lifelong economic security:

1. Increase women's workforce participation: supporting more women to enter and stay in the workforce and take on more full-time roles, including by improving access to affordable early childhood education and care
2. Improve the experience of women in the workforce: closing the gender pay gap, reducing industry segregation and supporting more women to progress into leadership positions
3. Support women in small business and entrepreneurs: increasing the number and success rates of women-led small businesses and start-ups
4. Support and raise awareness of women's health needs: investing in specific health needs of women over their working lives
5. Respect for women and women's financial security: preventing harassment and violence against women in the home and workplace and supporting victim-survivors of domestic and family violence.

One direct positive outcome for NSW public sector employees is the introduction of fertility leave and improvements to paid parental leave from 1 October 2022. These changes are intended to recognise the time demands of in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) and other reproductive treatments, to encourage parents to take a shared role in caregiving and to provide more opportunities for parents to balance family and work commitments. The new leave schemes for public sector employees will:

- provide public sector workers in NSW with access to five days of fertility treatment leave
- remove the distinction between primary and secondary carer, meaning that every parent working in the NSW public sector will be entitled to 14 weeks paid parental leave
- include an additional two weeks of bonus leave if paid parental leave entitlements are equally shared between partners
- extend the window in which paid parental leave can be taken from one year to two years.

These changes will contribute to NSW public sector employees being provided with more choices about how they balance family and work commitments. The NSW Government is the largest employer in the state and is leading by example, encouraging other workplaces to improve workplace conditions and employment opportunities for women across the state.

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