



Women's Economic Opportunities Review NSW Ageing and Disability Commission Proposal

Introduction

The NSW Ageing and Disability Commission (ADC) has the objectives of protecting and promoting the rights of older people and adults with disability, and protecting them from abuse, neglect and exploitation. Among other things, the role of the ADC includes handling reports about older people and adults with disability who are subject to, or at risk of, abuse, neglect and exploitation in their family, home and community; and inquiring into and reporting on systemic issues affecting these cohorts.

The work of the ADC has identified significant concerns about the adequacy of the existing and projected future formal and informal care workforce to meet the fundamental needs of older people and people with disability (among others) who require day-to-day support. In particular, the continuing and increasing workforce deficits increase the occurrence and risk of abuse, neglect and exploitation of people who are reliant on care, and present substantial challenges for the ADC and other parties in seeking to prevent and address the abuse.

Actions to improve the economic participation of women are key to addressing the current and future 'care economy' workforce capacity and capability deficits and reducing abuse, neglect and exploitation of vulnerable NSW citizens who are reliant on care in their family, home and community. In this context, the ADC has developed the following proposal for the consideration of the Women's Economic Opportunities Review.

Background

What is the care economy?

South Australian research academics Jean Murray and Valerie Adams in 2012 set out a contemporary understanding of the care economy in an article on ['Counting the cost of Australia's care economy'](#). The care economy is comprised of paid care, unpaid care, and government investment in the care sector.

They defined it as: 'The total (paid and unpaid) labour required to meet the needs of children to be cared for and educated, everybody's physical and mental health that requires attention, and the needs of individuals who require assistance with the activities of daily living because of illness, age or disability'.

They went on to identify that "Care work" provides assistance and support to community members suffering from mental illness, chronic ill-health, terminal illness, disability and frailty associated with ageing. The volunteer sector is a key component of the care economy. The care economy therefore operates in a wide range of care settings, including: paid care in childcare, schools, hospitals and other health care facilities, and disability and aged care facilities; and unpaid care of children, elderly people and people with disabilities

in homes and community settings and by volunteers in formal health, disability and aged-care facilities’.

Of particular concern to the ADC is the care provided within family, household and community settings throughout NSW. The care economy is growing at a significant rate in this State. While much consideration is given to the demands on formal care settings, including aged and disability residential facilities, demand for in-home and community-based services is growing exponentially.

Size of the care economy

A report published by economicSecurity4Women in 2012, ‘[Counting on Care Work in Australia](#)’, estimated the care economy in Australia to have a value of \$762.5 billion in 2009/10. In relation to the findings in this report, Murray and Adams noted that ‘While paid care was worth \$112.4 billion – 8.8% of GDP – providing nearly 20% of all paid employment, unpaid care was imputed at a staggering \$650.1 billion. The 21.4 billion hours of annual unpaid care work (60% of which is undertaken by women) equates to 50.6% of gross domestic product (GDP); 11.1 million FTE workers, and 1.2 times the total Australian full-time employed workforce’.

A female dominated workforce

The Australian Government’s Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) has published several relevant reports. In 2019, in its ‘[Gender Segregation in Australia’s Workforce](#)’ report, the WGEA found that:

- Occupational gender segregation has remained persistent over the last 20 years.
- The proportion of women in traditionally female-dominated industries (Health Care and Social Assistance and Education and Training) has increased. The percentage of female employees as a proportion of the total workforce in these two sectors are:
 - Health Care and Social Assistance – female employees in 1998: 77.2%; in 2018: 79%
 - Education and Training – female employees in 1998: 65.8%; in 2018: 73.2%
- Average remuneration in female-dominated organisations continues to be lower than in male-dominated organisations.

Unresolved workforce constraints are impacting services and the economic participation of women

To meet the increasing demand in all aspects of the care economy, a rigorous understanding and robust addressing of key workforce issues is necessary in NSW. Current constraints are likely to have a detrimental impact on service delivery. Service gaps are increasingly evident, having been highlighted during the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. But they existed before the pandemic.

Further workforce impediments and constraints are directly impacting the opportunities for women to increase their economic participation. Among other things, issues of balancing informal caring responsibilities, re-entry to the workforce, and career interruptions all adversely affect women’s ability to optimise their direct economic participation.

To date, there has been a large number of reviews, inquiries and research studies into the emerging workforce issues in many key parts of the caring economy. Notably, the Australian Government’s Productivity Commission has issued several reports that, to different and varying degrees, deal with emerging issues of concern regarding the

adequacy, distribution, skills, competence and regulation of the workforces that will impact on the future growth of human services in Australia. These reports include inquiries and research studies into the following sectors:

- [Mental Health](#) (2020)
- [Disability Care and Support](#) (2011)
- [Caring for Older Australians](#) (2011)
- [Early Childhood Development Workforce](#) (2011)
- [Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector](#) (2010)
- [Australia's Health Workforce](#) (2006).

The Productivity Commission has just embarked on a [new study](#) into the aged care workforce.

In short, the common themes include:

- Increasing demand for services within both formal and community settings, especially in light of an ageing population.
- Inadequate supply of workers to meet contemporary and future demands.
- Inequitable distribution of the workforce, disadvantaging regional and remote communities.
- Impediments to creating a more mobile, agile workforce to meet changing work requirements across industry sectors.
- Remuneration inequities between men and women, and between various industry sectors.
- Issues regarding the recruitment, retention and re-entry of workers, especially having regard to informal caring undertaken largely by women.
- Concerns about the current training systems to deliver appropriate, quality skills, training and education across the industry sectors within the care economy.
- Inadequate workforce planning.

The workforce concerns exist across the nation and to varying degrees in NSW. These issues are of particular concern for women, who make up the majority of formal and informal workers in the care economy. These issues impact on women's ability to increase their economic participation. Such participation is currently being constrained by the failure to adequately address such workforce inadequacies.

Tragically, the benefits of enhanced economic participation through employment or the creation of enterprises are being constrained for women in vulnerable or marginalised socioeconomic circumstances. Economic participation is a vital pathway out of poverty and disadvantage.

A way forward

Investment in the care economy workforce is key to economic recovery in NSW. Given the predominance of women in the care economy, actions to facilitate and support women to gain and retain employment and economic opportunities are vital to:

- addressing current and future workforce shortages and significant risks to the increasing number of NSW citizens who require care
- addressing longstanding barriers to the economic participation of women
- boosting the NSW economy during and following the pandemic.

The ADC proposes that an important initial step and way forward would be establishing a NSW Care Economy Workforce Development and Skills Council.

NSW Care Economy Workforce Development and Skills Council

Objective

The primary objective of the Care Economy Workforce Development and Skills Council will be to develop a more sustainable, responsive and valued formal and informal workforce within the care economy, driven by strategies focused on facilitating and supporting women to gain, regain and retain employment in these industries. The resulting workforce would be able to meet increasing demands while maintaining a commitment to quality, affordable and appropriate care throughout all regions of NSW.

Primary role

The core role of the Council will be to lead, advise and assist in addressing female workforce supply impediments, female workforce development, and work-based qualifications and occupational standards for the care economy workforce in all regions of NSW.

Additional roles

The more specific roles of the Council will include:

- providing integrated sector intelligence to the NSW Government and sector stakeholders on female workforce supply impediments, female workforce development and skills needs for both the informal and formal care economy workforce in NSW
- actively supporting the development, implementation and continuous improvement of high quality training and workforce development policies, products and services for women to promote a more skilled and valued workforce
- identifying and supporting local innovations that address female workforce supply issues, including recruitment, re-entry and retention of formal and informal workers
- identifying and supporting initiatives that support the economic participation of women from diverse backgrounds
- engaging with NSW advisory bodies and peak representative bodies (including unions, service providers and consumer bodies) in the targeted fields.

Council structure

- established, recognised and funded by the NSW Government
- established as a separate corporate entity
- governed by an independent Board whose members will be selected on the basis of their skill, experience and understanding of female economic participation issues, and the care economy and its workforce needs.

Targeted areas

The Council will consider policies and initiatives being developed by the Commonwealth and other governments in relation the health workforce, formal aged care workforce, early childhood workforce and NDIS disability services workforce.

The Council will not seek to duplicate such work but would seek to inform and evaluate such policies and initiatives as they are relevant to NSW and women's economic participation. It will therefore initially target the following workforce areas within the care economy across all regions of NSW.

- supports and services to people ageing in place
- supports and services to people with disability living in the community
- supports and services to people affected by family and domestic violence
- supports and services to Aboriginal communities and multicultural communities
- community services, including enterprises that aid in the economic participation of women from diverse backgrounds.

Specific regard

The Council will have specific regard to enabling and fostering the valued participation of women from diverse backgrounds in the care economy throughout NSW, including women from Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disability, and women who identify as LGBTQI.

The Council will have regard to enhancing women's economic participation through new enterprises and innovative responses.

It will also have particular regard to the adequacy and distribution of the workforce to meeting the needs of regional and remote areas of NSW.

Meeting the Skills, Careers and Workforce Development Theory of Change Framework

The above proposal firmly sits within two pillars of the NSW Government's Theory of Change Framework, namely:

- Pillar 1: Supporting women to enter, re-enter and progress to higher roles in the workforce. This includes, but is not limited to, women seeking work after unpaid caring responsibilities; women needing foundational skills.
- Pillar 3: Investigating how the NSW Government can improve education and training, pay and work conditions in the care and human services workforce, so that it is viewed as a high priority industry with professional and sustainable career pathways.

The objectives of the proposed Council will directly contribute to achieving the stated long term outcomes of the NSW Government:

- Women are supported to smoothly enter the workforce, by Government and employers, at any stage of their working life, including after time away due to caring responsibilities or a period of unemployment or underemployment.
- NSW leads Australia in having a highly qualified, well paid and sustainable care and human services workforce, valued by individuals and businesses, with career progression opportunities, supported by readily available, affordable, and high-quality education and training.