

# **PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE**

## **2021–22 Budget Estimates**

Melbourne—Friday, 18 June 2021

### **MEMBERS**

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr David Limbrick

Mr Gary Maas

Mr James Newbury

Mr Danny O’Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Nina Taylor



**WITNESSES**

Ms Gabrielle Williams, MP, Minister for Women,

Mr Ben Rimmer, Acting Secretary,

Ms Brigid Monagle, Deputy Secretary, Fairer Victoria, and

Mr Andrew Minack, Deputy Secretary, Corporate and Delivery Services, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister, again for appearing before the committee today. The committee is now moving to consideration of the womens portfolio with you. We again invite you to make a 5-minute opening statement, and this will be followed by questions from the committee. Thank you.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thank you, Chair, and again thank you for all rejoining. Again I would acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and any other elders we have here with us today. Brigid is again going to be my clicker, so thank you, Brigid, for that.

As we continue our state's post-pandemic recovery we need a long-term plan. This means not only supporting Victorian women in the short term but actually in our future as well. That is why through the Victorian budget the Andrews Labor government continues to put women at the heart of our recovery, delivering targeted support that will make a real difference. This is a \$521.6 million investment, which I noted in the last session, towards ending family violence and progressing gender equality. This includes making sure every dollar of investment is delivering a double benefit, making Victoria stronger and getting more Victorians, particularly women, back into work. Our investments will support thousands of new jobs, giving more women economic security. We are also supporting women's health and wellbeing by rebuilding our mental health system from the ground up. This investment, in addition to targeted funding for women's health, will make sure every Victorian has care they can rely on.

This budget further invests in our commitment to end family violence not just by improving our response to it but by actively addressing the gendered factors that drive it. It is why this budget also delivers funding devoted to advancing gender equality, with dedicated support to improve outcomes for Victorian women. These investments build on our government's work over the past six years to achieve better outcomes for all Victorian women.

Victoria's economy, thankfully, has bounced back strongly and is forecast to be the fastest growing in Australia in 2021–22. Women's employment has also rebounded to pre-pandemic levels, something I am also very pleased about. At the same time, though, gender inequality in the labour market remains, with long-term impacts on women's economic security. As of March 2021 there were over 30 000 more underemployed women than men—that is, women who were working fewer hours than they would like—and 201 000 fewer women than men in the Victorian labour force. Women are also over-represented in part-time and casual workforces, or insecure work, making them more vulnerable in times of economic downturn, which explains I think the outcomes during the pandemic last year for women.

The gender pay gap remains a real and persistent challenge, sitting at 10.9 per cent in Victoria in November 2020, up 1.5 per cent from the previous year. Nationally men working full-time earn on average \$25 000 a year more than women. The Victorian government is taking targeted action to address barriers to women's workforce participation. This budget builds on last year's significant investment in women's economic security by continuing to support more women into jobs, extending initiatives to help families to better balance work and care and providing new professional development opportunities.

This budget also delivers funding devoted to advancing gender equality, with dedicated support to improve outcomes for Victorian women. This includes embedding gender impact analysis in the government's budget decision-making through a brand-new gender responsive budgeting unit, continuing Victoria's nation-leading approach to advancing gender equality. It also includes \$3.2 million to deliver targeted programs to support migrant and refugee women to either pursue employment, establish a small business or access further

education, if that is what they would like to do. We know that migrant women are the backbone of our particularly small business community, and I can speak to that especially with my local hat on as the Member for Dandenong, the most culturally diverse region in the country. But these women we know were also very hard-hit by the pandemic, and that is why they are very much at the heart of our recovery.

So we will further support women in all parts of our community by investing \$1.8 million to improve the representation of women in local government, \$1.4 million to assist the Victorian Rural Women's Network to upskill and support the professional development of women living in rural communities and \$1.8 million for a community leadership training program for 120 women across local government, with a focus on supporting development pathways for women ahead of the next council elections in 2024. Of course all that is done with the aim to meet our target of 50 per cent female mayors and councillors by 2025, and hopefully we are on track for that.

The Victorian government wants to make sure that every Victorian is healthy, happy, supported and connected, and this year's budget continues our investments in the health and wellbeing of women. An investment of \$91 million will address the impacts of the pandemic on community-based health care. This includes funding to help Victorians catch up on treatments they may have deferred during the pandemic, including public dental, cancer services and maternal and child health as well. This investment provides \$4.1 million to establish three new women's reproductive health hubs, enabling more women to access expert advice on sexual and reproductive health.

There are a number of other highlights I could make, but I will leave you to look at those on the screen.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Deputy Chair.

**Mr RIORDAN:** Thanks, Chair. Minister, I want to move to budget paper 3, page 293—and it refers to 'Prisoner Supervision and Support', including outputs for female prisoners—and the sort of disturbing story I guess of one of Victoria's worst serial killers, Paul Denyer. As we know, he murdered two schoolgirls and a 22-year-old mother in Frankston back in 1993, and despite being a confessed woman hater who started stalking women when he was only 17 Denyer now dresses as a female and asks to be called Paula. Minister, should criminals like Denyer, with a history of horrific violent crimes against women, be allowed to choose to serve their prison sentence in a women's prison?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** What was that, sorry?

**Mr RIORDAN:** Should people like that, who now identify as a woman, be able to choose to serve their prison sentence in a women's prison?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** There are a couple of points you have made there. For starters, I want to acknowledge the sensitivity around this issue in terms of Paula Denyer, and in particular for—

**Mr RIORDAN:** Some of our colleagues.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Mr Limbrick. This must be an incredibly gruelling discussion to sit through, but one I know that you are very passionate about too, Mr Limbrick. So I want to acknowledge that there is an immense amount of pain caused by this particular individual, which needs to be acknowledged first and foremost.

In terms of your broader points around the prison system, obviously I do not have responsibility for the prison system. Many of the aspects of how the actual operation of requests to be in any type of incarceration environment are best directed to the Minister for Corrections, who will be able to explain in greater depth than I ever could what the rules around that are and how those decisions are made. I will not talk to that. What I can talk to or make reference to is the fact that, in terms of some concerns around, say, parole for Denyer, matters relating to parole are obviously the responsibility of the Adult Parole Board and that the board operates as a separate, independent statutory body—so, free from political or bureaucratic involvement.

In terms of that question though that you are asking around what is appropriate or not in terms of specific requests as to where somebody should be incarcerated, I as Minister for Women would be ill equipped to be able to comment on what rules govern—

**Mr RIORDAN:** But as the Minister for Women, the question I am really asking you is—and we have had this discussion with other ministers, and your role is to advocate for women and to advance the cause and so on—are you taking a strong position, and what is your position, about the concept of a known woman hater and serial killer who now identifies as a woman wanting to be in a women’s prison? What is the feedback you are giving, and what advocacy are you giving for women in women’s prisons? This is clearly a very problematic situation.

**Mr MAAS:** On a point of order, Chair, again I come back to the scope of this inquiry, and I will leave it at that. I will just leave it at that.

**The CHAIR:** Would anyone else like to contribute on the point of order? Mr Riordan?

**Mr RIORDAN:** So, budget paper 3, page 293, specifically refers to prisoner supervision and support and outputs for female prisoners. Clearly outcomes and outputs for female prisoners are greatly affected with a situation like this. I understand that the minister has no jurisdiction over what actually the corrections minister and others—

**Mr MAAS:** We have just done your point of order.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan—

**Mr RIORDAN:** What I am talking about is the advocacy of this department of women’s affairs for the women in prison who are not choosing or have other options—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan—

**Mr RIORDAN:** and are getting incarcerated. What advocacy is there from the department on an issue like this, which is a very clear issue?

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan, we are hearing on the point of order at the moment, not the issue itself. Would anyone else like to contribute on the point of order? No? I will uphold Mr Maas’s point of order. I allowed that—

**Mr Riordan** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan, if you could allow me to complete my words, please. I allowed the question to stand in the first instance, in my view generously. It was outside of scope, and you continued to go outside of scope—the Minister has provided with you with an answer, including that the estimates for this particular issue that you raised did not fall within her portfolio responsibilities. We are yet to meet with the ministers whose portfolio responsibilities it is, and I suggest if you have questions that are within scope around that issue that you save them for the appropriate minister. I am sorry, but your time has expired. I would ask that—

**Mr RIORDAN:** So do we assume that the minister does not have a—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan, we can all accept that the point of order was upheld and your question was out of order, but you are more than welcome to rephrase it in accordance with the scope of this inquiry when the relevant minister is before you. On that note, I will pass the call to Ms Richards.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Minister. I would like to explore economic participation, which is inside the scope of the inquiry, and refer you to budget paper 3, page 57. Could you please indicate to the committee how this government will strengthen women’s economic participation in Victoria over the next two years?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Sure. Thank you, Ms Richards, and again thank you for your ongoing commitment not only to women’s economic participation but to gender equality more broadly, as one of the fiercest advocates in caucus on many of these issues.

As you would be aware, strengthening women’s economic security is a central tenet of our wider gender equality reform and a vital mechanism towards Victoria’s recovery from the pandemic. The government works every day across all portfolios—and that is a very important emphasis: gender equality is not just my

responsibility, it is the responsibility of every minister in our government—but that work across all portfolios is to ensure that all Victorian women have the opportunity to lead fulfilling and dignified lives. We recognise that the workplace participation gap between men and women is widening, sadly, broadly due to low labour force participation and because of the bias and discrimination that, sadly, women continue to encounter in the workplace. Equally, though, the pandemic has magnified the already entrenched inequalities experienced by women and created additional barriers to women's participation, and this has left women at far greater risk of adverse economic impacts not just in the immediate term but potentially in the longer term as well.

Increasing the participation of women in the economy is one of the most meaningful interventions that we can make to improve the outcomes of women and to accelerate our state's economic growth long into the future, and that is why we are establishing a specialist gender-responsive budgeting unit through this budget—something I am very, very excited about. The unit will oversee decision-making processes and budgeting priorities across government to ensure that there is greater cohesion in our response to these important issues but also ensure that as we make important economic decisions we do so with a greater understanding and consideration of the impact on women of those decisions, some of which can be hidden or quite invisible in some ways. And I could bore you to death with some international experiences, particularly a great one around snowploughing in, I think, Sweden, around demonstrating that sometimes what can seem innocuous and gender neutral is anything but in terms of impacts on women, which has firmly, over the course of my role as the Minister for Women, led me to the conclusion that there is no such thing as gender neutrality. Everything, even if unintended, has a consequence, which is why the gender-responsive budgeting unit is such a critical structural piece of reform that we have been able to commit to that will ensure that we have, as we refer to it, a gender lens on everything that we do to ensure that equal outcomes are being achieved across our community. And I think that is cause for us to be excited, because it is not just about a good result in a particular year, it is about ensuring great results every year, and we should be very proud of that.

We know that on average women retire with less, resulting in financial insecurity, and in poorer health and wellbeing as well, as they get older. And that is why our very bold gender equality agenda has women's future security at its heart and why this budget builds on last year's very significant investment in driving gender equality and ending family violence.

We recognise the over-representation of women in certain industries, in particular creative, teaching and health and a number of others, which is why we are delivering a huge boost to ensure that women in these industries have greater certainty and opportunities—so some sector-targeted work. With more than 12 000 extra subsidised TAFE and training places, we are also providing more opportunity for women to upskill and re-skill so that they can move towards the career opportunities that they desire, we hope, but also those—which I have got to also add—that we desperately need, too, in our workforces at the moment, particularly in those sort of social sector workforces. We are not only equipping more women with in-demand skills, networks and confidence but through this budget doing this in a way that recognises where the need for certain jobs is so we can meet that and where our opportunities are to do that, but also acknowledging where the pain has been most acutely felt, particularly over the last 12 months.

We are also supporting migrant refugee women into employment through tailored programs, and we are proudly funding the Victorian Rural Women's Network to provide professional development opportunities for women in our rural communities. By continuing our three-year-old kinder program and ensuring it is accessible to families across the state we are removing yet another barrier to women's workforce participation—and a very topical one, I should say, too.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate it.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Ms Richards. Mr Hibbins.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thanks, Chair. Thanks, Minister and the team, for appearing this morning. In your presentation you did not mention any funding to reduce incarceration rates of women. Given that the budget papers indicate that it is set to increase by over 100 women, on average, incarcerated per day, I was just wondering if there are any initiatives within this year's budget to reduce incarceration rates for women.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** I think there are a number of parts to that in terms of a collective piece of work going to not only reduce incarceration rates for women in prison but also improve the outcomes of women in prison.

That should also be seen in relation to our broader commitment to gender equality and the number of initiatives that form a part of that, which as I emphasise is a whole-of-government initiative. I could have talked in the last session in relation to family violence about that relationship in terms of women incarcerated and the relationship to family violence victimhood as well—it is quite significant. I think on some estimates about half of the male prison population are victims of family violence, often childhood victims, and something like over 90 per cent on some estimates of female prison population are victims of family violence as well. So any investment in family violence also needs to be seen in that frame so we can understand that by doing that work we can be having a significant impact on the back end in terms of addressing those poor outcomes that many women suffer—at its most extreme end, incarceration themselves for offences that in many cases may relate to their victimhood. I say that by way of introduction.

I also want to highlight, though, that as part of that \$521.6 million package to support women in Victoria we are investing \$13.7 million to fund a range of programs that will help prevent and support women intersecting with the justice system. These include perpetrator intervention programs to reduce women's offending rates and to expand also legal services into the Orange Door network; family violence training across the justice system; and initiatives to support women in prison, such as the extension of the disability and complex needs service pilot, which is located in the Dame Phyllis Frost Centre, for example. The Victorian government also recognises that many women in prison have, as I have outlined, experienced high rates of victimisation and trauma and suffer from really complex mental health issues as part of that impact of trauma, and that is why our \$3.8 billion mental health reform investment will be trauma informed and will also in the implementation phase introduce a very strong gender lens in the delivery of those outcomes.

I have touched on already the impact of family violence and its relationship not only to women's trauma in the community but also potentially to offending and how that is represented in our prison stats, so I will not rehash that too much. I will reference, though—and again it is out of my portfolio and sits more firmly within DJCS, the Department of Justice and Community Safety—the *Strengthening Connections* program, which provides a service delivery model and evidence-based delivery policy framework that informs the approach to working with women to address their specific issues and their offending pathways as well. So it is obviously another dedicated program to go to the outcomes that you were talking to, Mr Hibbins. We know that women in prisons have really complex needs. Gender-responsive programs are delivered in our women's prison system to enhance rehabilitation prospects and also to reduce the risk of reoffending and also include clinical offending behaviour interventions as well. Drug and alcohol programs, programs focused on the transition and reintegration of women into the community as well as a range of parenting, family violence, health and wellbeing initiatives are also accessible to women in prisons, again, out of the justice portfolio. And women in prisons can also access education and training courses with a focus on developing skills for future employment, which we know is a huge issue as women exit the prison system in terms of being able to get on their feet and put a roof over their heads and some of those additional challenges that we know seem to be—

**Mr HIBBINS:** If I could get, just in the short time, just on notice the total funding that is in this year's budget that is made available for those programs.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** I have given you a figure of what relates directly to my portfolios. You might be best placed asking the justice ministers, too, around what sits within their portfolios. They can talk at length about some of those both diversionary but also in-prison programs, and they can give you the full breakdown of those.

**Mr HIBBINS:** Thanks.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Mr O'Brien.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Thanks, Chair. Minister, budget paper 3, pages 71 and 83, refers to \$300 000 for a new statue at the newly named John Cain Arena for an iconic female netball identity. Who will decide who that is and what role will you and your office play in that process?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Look, that funding comes out of the minister for sport, I believe.

**Ms MONAGLE:** Yes, it does.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** In terms of the process as to how they are determining which player it is—I am just clarifying that I have got the right statue in mind; is this the one that Netball Victoria has been advocating for?

**Ms MONAGLE:** Yes.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Netball Victoria have been advocating heavily for this, so based on that I would assume it is to be a netballer and that Netball Victoria themselves will have a significant input into that.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Will you have any say? Have you asked for an opportunity to have input?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** I would be pleased, Mr O'Brien, to see more women full stop represented in statues around our city and state. Of about 580 statues that exist in Melbourne alone I think less than 4 per cent of them are women, and a portion of those are nymphs and fairies, which as delightful as they may be particularly for the smaller people among us, are not exactly equal in terms of celebrating the achievements of women across our community. I might have a personal view, but I would be probably guided by the minister for sport as to the process—for example, whether he, in partnership with Netball Victoria, would throw that out to the community or whatever. There are a number of amazing options, though, I should say.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** To your point about better recognition of women, particularly sporting women, did you have any role in the renaming of Melbourne Arena as John Cain Arena? Have we missed an opportunity here to celebrate a female sporting icon in favour of a male Labor politician?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Look, I mean, to be frank, I will always advocate—

**Mr MAAS:** Giving you a long leash, Danny.

**The CHAIR:** A very long leash, Mr O'Brien.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** I am not sure exactly how that relates to the budget papers, I have to say, Mr O'Brien. It is probably out of scope. What I will say is, whether it be in partnership with the minister for sport in relation to the commitment of funding around another female statue celebrating what I expect will be a netballer given that partnership, I will always advocate to celebrate and to elevate the achievements of women in every possible agenda. It is core to my role; it is something that I do regularly and I do proudly

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So just a simple question: were you asked for input on that renaming of—

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, I would ask that you keep your questions to the budget estimates and to the relevant portfolio that we are discussing today.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Well, we are talking about women's iconic status—

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, as was explained to you, the funding of the statues and the naming of the arenas considered is a responsibility of the minister—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** So we cannot ask the Minister for Women questions about women?

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, you know that you are—

**Mr Newbury** interjected.

**Mr Riordan** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan and Mr Newbury, if you do not mind—

*Members interjecting.*

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan and Mr Newbury, if you would mind not speaking over the top of me, please, and Mr O'Brien, if you would not mind keeping your questions to the scope of this inquiry and to the relevant portfolio before us and the budget estimates that the minister is responsible for—

**Mr Newbury** interjected.



**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, could you please stop interrupting me?

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Chair, we have got the point. Can I move on please? You have ruled.

**The CHAIR:** Well, I am glad you got the point—

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** You do not need to make a statement, you have ruled.

**The CHAIR:** Well, I am having great difficulty saying anything because of the people who are speaking over the top of me.

**Mr Riordan** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Riordan, you are doing it again. Mr O'Brien has the call.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Minister, budget paper 3, page 47, and you alluded in your intro to \$4.2 million over two years for improving outcomes for women in Victoria: in the detail further down on page 57 that funding is split between establishing a gender-responsive budgeting unit in the Department of Treasury and Finance—which, interesting enough, is not in this portfolio but apparently that is okay—and a program

... to deliver targeted economic security programs to support migrant and refugee women into employment.

They are very, very different outcomes yet they are under one line item. What is the budget breakdown between the two of the \$4.2 million?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Of that \$4.2 million?

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Yes.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** There is \$1 million to establish the gender-responsive budgeting unit within Treasury—for setting that up.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** Yes.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** And then there is \$3.2 million for programs that support women's economic participation and financial security with a focus on improving the outcomes of women from migrant and refugee backgrounds, particularly in the frame of a recovery from the pandemic.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** It is only over two years. What does the money actually go to for Treasury for the gender-responsive budgeting unit? Is it half a million a year for staff or is it just for set-up costs for an ongoing program?

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Mr O'Brien. I am sorry.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** On notice would you be able to provide a copy?

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, I am sorry, but your time has expired, and I will pass the call to Ms Richards.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Chair. I think I will return to the scope of the inquiry again. Mr O'Brien, you might be pleased to know that I will be exploring the economic security of migrant women as well, so conscious—

**Mr D O'Brien** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, could you please stop interrupting people.

**Mr D O'BRIEN:** I just made a comment.

**The CHAIR:** Mr O'Brien, you do not have the call; it is not your time to make a comment. Ms Richards has the call.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Minister, recognising that migrant women are of the utmost importance in the communities that so many of us represent—and certainly you and I both represent—we know that women experience economic insecurity due to a range of systemic as well as cultural barriers that they face when it comes to employment. Referring you to the budget papers, budget paper 3 and page 57, I am interested in perhaps having you outline the measures that support migrant women's economic security.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thank you, Ms Richards, and that may well intersect with some of questions Mr O'Brien was asking.

**Ms RICHARDS:** It does.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** To your point: absolutely, we are acutely aware of the range of barriers precluding women from culturally and linguistically diverse communities from meaningful workforce participation and financial security. Like you, I am more aware and exposed to this every day in my local community in Dandenong—just as you are, Ms Richards, in your community in Cranbourne. The way that gendered barriers interact with other forms of disadvantage and discrimination means that women face greater risk of adverse economic impacts. We know that women from CALD backgrounds in particular are over-represented in part-time and casual workforces, which further exacerbates their vulnerability in times of economic downturn. I made that point about women generally before, but it is particularly acute in relation to women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. And we also know that many CALD women are precluded from the workforce altogether while others—and we will all be familiar with this—are massively overqualified for the roles that they end up filling and often massively underpaid given the skill set that they bring to many of their roles as well.

So the Andrews government recognises that this needs to change. Women face an uphill battle every day, and addressing these barriers remains a focal point of this government now and into the future. We know that higher rates of unemployment and underemployment are also associated with higher rates of family violence, of mental health issues, of child safety concerns, crime, lower educational outcomes, housing stress and homelessness. Through this one measure of economic security it is effectively in its own right a prevention measure for a whole raft of other poor social outcomes, and this is why embedding gender impact analysis and a better understanding of the impact on gender lines and then letting that inform our decision as to how you allocate resources is so vital to making sure that we are creating a genuinely level playing field in our community. To address the workforce participation gap this budget equips local community organisations to work closely with women from migrant communities to build their confidence and their skills and to support them in securing employment or indeed establishing their own business or accessing further education. That goes to that \$3.2 million I was just referring to in my discussion with Mr O'Brien earlier. The budget enables community organisations to also respond to the specific needs of women at different stages of their employment pathway, and I think that is a very important part of these initiatives in terms of the ability to provide tailored support, advice, mentoring et cetera to build the necessary confidence and skills these women need.

Women from CALD communities already experience a range of stresses that not only impact upon their future economic security but have an impact on their overall health and wellbeing outcomes as well, and by building their capacity through targeted programs we open windows of opportunity to give those women greater control over their own lives as well. So this budget is very focused on delivering real and lasting change, and through our commitment to delivering gender equality every day we are taking a step towards tackling the barriers which continue to keep women subjugated in our community and continue to hold them back from achieving their full potential.

I just wanted to touch on, in the closing few seconds, that while the gender-responsive budgeting unit might seem not targeted in particular to your question around migrant women, it stands to make a huge impact in terms of how we think about all of our policy decisions and how they, through the chain, impact on our community, allowing us to make more equitable decisions.

**Ms RICHARDS:** Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Limbrick.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Minister, and team again. Just for the record I would like to state that I had nothing to do with the Deputy Chair's earlier questions about the Denyer case, but I would also like to state that he was actually legally prevented from changing his name as many women considered it deeply insulting, so I just thought I would make that point.

I am going to ask about something that is nothing to do with that, though, and very within your portfolio. With the passing of the *Gender Equality Act* there was much discussion at the time about the gender impact assessments and the gender action plans that needed to be produced and what sorts of workloads are going to be required for that and how people are going to do it—like, are they all going to be bespoke, or that sort of thing. I am interested to know how you are going to make it easier for organisations to actually put these things together, because it was not clear at the time when the legislation went through. Are there going to be templates or resources, or are they expected to just come up with these things? How is that actually going to work?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thank you for your question. In terms of the work that is going on with the *Gender Equality Act* and working, we have always said from the outset for starters that this is a collaborative model. There is obviously always great interest in sticks, but what we were really interested in doing was just driving better outcomes, which meant that the role of the commissioner—this is the commissioner for gender equality, Dr Niki Vincent—is to work with the defined entities that are covered by the Act to make sure that we are working with them to both present or prepare their gender equality action plans, their GEAPs, and then meet the targets that are set as a part of that, noting of course that the measures that are put in place or the targets, for want of a better term, that are set, are bespoke to the different organisations. We have done that quite deliberately, noting that across those 300-odd organisations that are captured by the Act they are wildly different in terms of composition and where they are up to and what kind of progress is needing to be made. So that goes to part of your point around trying to not be unreasonably burdensome while still setting a very clear expectation that progress is expected.

I want to summarise or paraphrase what you are getting at in terms of the level of difficulty that might be attached to complying with the requirements of the Act, and I know it has been put to me around the red tape, if you do not mind me using that term—I know you did not, but I think that is what you are getting at, as to whether this is putting an unreasonable burden on some of these organisations to meet their reporting requirements. I know that there is—and it goes to my previous point around each organisation being quite different and at different stages—sort of no uniform cost, if you like, for each organisation, because they are all quite different in profile, but the Act specifies that defined entities ensure that appropriate resources are available to develop and implement their GEAPs, their gender equality action plans. Organisations will also, though, through doing that sort of work, be able to see a return on their investment. We know, for example—and this is part of the driver of doing this in addition to it being the right thing and creating a more equal community and equal workplace—that there is a very significant economic benefit to stem from more-equal workplaces. It improves business outcomes on many fronts, including workforce participation, increased retention and increased productivity.

**Mr LIMBRICK:** How are you going to measure that return on investment?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Look, that might be a question that would be well directed to Dr Niki Vincent, who could tell you this at great length. Before I get to that, though, to go to your initial question, I want to recognise essentially that some public sector entities are also very much leading the pack, not just within the public sector but within the community more broadly, in terms of their workplace gender equality. This is effectively just enhancing their existing effort. I want to draw attention there to councils who have implemented the workplace equality and respect standards. They are well and truly on the way to meeting these obligations and already have effectively some frameworks to do that, so they are very well advanced. Universities, for example, are already required to provide data in line with WGEA, which is the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, and the commissioner for gender equality is working with them to ensure that the requirements under the state Act are not onerous and do not add to their requirements under other acts. Where we can, we want to make sure we are streamlining people's responsibilities while also making sure we are being very clear that they do need to make sure that they are reporting against this and also able to measure the outcomes from that.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Thank you. If I could please refer you to budget paper 3, page 57, I think it would be interesting for the committee to understand how the government's double-benefit approach will contribute to enhancing women's economic participation coming out of COVID.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Look, thank you. You have drawn on a term I used in my opening remarks about a double-benefit approach, probably one that we have heard the Treasurer himself use to describe a principle that underpins our entire budget commitment, but it is great to be able to talk about it in the frame of women's economic security as well. This is an approach that is critical in our recovery from COVID and is ultimately about ensuring that every dollar of investment this government makes is delivering, as described, a double benefit to the Victorian community. It is basically about delivering the jobs, services and reform that our state needs while growing the economy and supporting job opportunities.

When it comes to women's economic security, we are delivering change across the board and making it a priority, and I hope that is evident from our investment not only this year but over many years. We know that women have borne the brunt of the pandemic, performing a large part of many of the hardest-hit industries across our state, whether that be accommodation and food services, arts, education et cetera, all being female-dominated industries, and we have seen more women take on a larger load of caring responsibilities and a disproportionate share of household responsibilities as a result. Now, that is off a pretty low base, because women were already shouldering the burden of most caring and household responsibilities, but you can sort of put that on steroids during the pandemic.

Women have long faced barriers to employment, with detrimental impacts on their long-term financial and health and wellbeing outcomes. Yet despite that—and it goes to the point I was also making to Mr Limbrick before—we know that gender equality is good for the economy. Having more women engaged in the workforce is very, very good for the economy on a number of different levels, which I am sure you are all familiar with. But without a focus on strengthening women's economic security, we will only drive further disadvantage and leave more women behind, and ultimately our economy will be the worse for it. So it has been very much, I know, at the core of the Treasurer's thinking and mine in advocating to him that women need to be at the centrepiece of our economic recovery. But more than that, we have a golden opportunity to recast the way we do things and the way we think about our economic building blocks to be able to harness what is effectively an untapped resource in terms of women in our community who have too long been held back or prevented from contributing to the extent that they want to be able to contribute. So we know that if we do not address economic insecurity and we are driving further disadvantage as a consequence, that also poses greater strain on our employment, family violence, justice, policing and health services long into the future, and that is why this budget proudly builds on last year's significant investment in women's economic security by continuing to support more women into jobs, by extending initiatives to help families to better balance work and care and by providing new professional development opportunities as well to be able to make sure that through an economic participation model we are also having benefits that are absolutely felt in our social service system as well. And obviously if we were in a previous session, I would talk about family violence being one of those areas where we definitely would see an impact if we saw greater levels of equality in workforce participation and the like and economic outcomes more broadly.

Our initiatives target women at greater risk of economic insecurity and leverage industries with potential to accelerate women's economic recovery. We know that women who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 or who were already unemployed prior to the pandemic are now competing in an even harder jobs market as more recently displaced workers compete for those jobs, and that is why this double-benefit approach is really critical. Our investments in child care, in mental health and education and even in the environment will drive real and positive change for our communities while creating job opportunities, expanding our capacity to support Victorians in their time of need. And through our big road and big rail projects—and I know we had Minister Allan up yesterday, I believe, who would have talked to those in great detail, but through some of those big infrastructure projects—we will be shaping our city to better connect people to those jobs and opportunities and to each other as well as in their own right creating jobs.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Mr Newbury.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you. Continuing on that fund—that \$4.2 million fund over two years, the ‘Improving outcomes for women in Victoria: strengthening Victoria’s economic recovery through women’s participation’ fund, which is at page 47 of BP3—we know last year 140 000 women lost their jobs. I have spoken a lot about sole traders. I think women were disproportionately affected in that area. Noting that \$4.2 million, which is broken up as \$2.1 million over the two years, it represents for those 140 000 women \$15 a year each year. Is \$15 a year enough in your view to help those women?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** I think the mischaracterisation present in that question, Mr Newbury, with all due respect, is that that \$4.2 million is funding that sits directly within my portfolio. But to go to the point I made at the beginning, our commitment to gender equality and to better economic outcomes for women is a whole-of-government responsibility. So that is a very small portion of a very big whole-of-government package. I think it is something in the order of, in terms of workforce participation alone, about \$250-odd million. That is not an exact figure. Roughly it is \$259 million or \$249 million from memory in terms of our workforce participation package. But also to go to that broader \$521 million figure that I raised in my presentation for this session and for the previous session, that also goes to a number of portfolios that are contributing to that effort as well. So while that \$4.2 million sits within a very targeted set of supports—it sits within my portfolios for a targeted response to a particularly vulnerable and disadvantaged cohort of women—there is a body of work going on across from Minister Pulford’s portfolio of course, from the Treasurer’s work to a range of others that goes to economic empowerment and creating jobs in our economy for women, which was what I was just referring to in terms of that double benefit in addressing Ms Taylor’s question around creating jobs in sectors, too, that we know are female dominated.

I am very pleased to be able to say that, despite the job losses last year and the fact that women were irrefutably worse off in terms of what the data told us around job losses over that period of time—for example, I think from February 2020 to October 2020 there were 130 000 fewer employed, and I think that is just the women figure as compared to 56 000 men who were basically out of a job over the same period—thankfully what we have seen in recent months is the employment figures, particularly for women, going back to pre-pandemic levels. So there has been strong recovery, which we are very pleased about, but that does not mean we take our foot off the gas. As I was saying to Ms Taylor, we have got a golden opportunity now, I think, to drive better economic outcomes for women, well beyond just seeing it through a crisis frame, and actually work out how we do that, whether that be through infrastructure projects or whether that be through targeted supports or jobs growth within our social services sector, noting of course that through the reforms in the education portfolio, particularly around, say, three-year-old kinder and those sorts of reforms, there is a great need in areas of early childhood. There is also great need in family violence response. We have got to double our workforce to meet our commitments. There is great need in disability and now also, on the back of the mental health royal commission, in mental health as well. So providing those opportunities, partnering those opportunities with measures, say, that exist within Minister Tierney’s portfolios in terms of training and providing training opportunities—free TAFE being a huge initiative there—particularly for women and getting them upskilled to be able to take on some of these newly created jobs that have been driven by such significant social reform, and making sure that we are also breaking the cycles of only confining female employment to insecure work and providing opportunities that are more secure in their profile I think is a good long-term outcome for women.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Noting that response, can I ask—it might be a secretary question—do you have an estimate for the number of women that will actually be benefiting from that fund?

**Ms MONAGLE:** Which fund are you referring to?

**Mr NEWBURY:** The \$4.2 million.

**Ms MONAGLE:** In terms of the \$4.2 million, that is split into two parts, so the \$3.2 million and gender responsive—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Just a rough estimate.

**Ms MONAGLE:** No, not at the moment. Sorry, Mr Newbury. Because we will be—

**Mr NEWBURY:** Are you able to take that on notice?

**Ms WILLIAMS:** So the \$3.2 million component of that that is targeted particularly for multicultural or diverse women will go to organisations to work with those women. So it would be a difficult one to assess in the terms that you are making. In terms of the workforce participation package more broadly, you might be best to direct that to each of the component ministers who form part of the package as to what their estimates are for that much bigger package.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. Ms Taylor.

**Ms TAYLOR:** Just shifting gears slightly, if I can direct you to page 59, budget paper 3, could you please indicate for the committee how the government is supporting women's health and wellbeing.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** So 59, budget paper 3, you said, didn't you?

**Ms TAYLOR:** Yes, that is right.

**Ms WILLIAMS:** Thank you very much for your question. That is an issue close to my heart on a number of fronts, which I will get the opportunity to touch on. When it comes to improving lives of women, we recognise the range of barriers that permeate the system and serve to limit women's opportunities, and we have obviously had a very comprehensive discussion over the course of this session on economic opportunity. But we also know that women experience substantial differences in health outcomes and in the way they seek assistance as well, as compared to their male counterparts, and that economic, social and cultural disadvantage can worsen a woman's health outcomes quite drastically, which ties in neatly to what we were discussing previously about that connection to economic opportunity and also social outcome as well. And I could probably bore you to tears with a whole discussion around the social determinants of health, which very much is relevant to this question, but to get onto what this budget seeks to do, we have effectively committed to addressing systemic drivers of poorer health outcomes, and I think that is important to get to root causes. The budget proudly invests in a range of services to ensure women's health needs—those differences and those drivers—are addressed and that women's health and wellbeing is well served in the long term.

So this budget continues what has been a long-term commitment for this Labor government to improve health outcomes for women, and we continue that in this budget through funding 12 women's health services across Victoria to meet demand for gender-responsive health care across the regions as well as metropolitan Melbourne. From my end of things, there is \$2.4 million in there for women's health services, which builds on the \$8.8 million a year that those services get through the health portfolio. We are also investing a further \$4.1 million towards the establishment of three new women's reproductive health hubs to provide advice and support on sexual and reproductive health issues, and we will expand the operating hours and scope of those services at those existing eight hubs to give more women access to the support and the services they need.

We are funding additional access to breast screening and assessments as well to ensure that 25 000 Victorian women can catch up on the health care they missed during the pandemic. We are also proudly delivering—and it is something extremely close to my heart, for reasons I have made public—free and public IVF services to start up to 4000 Victorians each year on their journey to parenthood. Obviously that comes on the back of a significant reform of the IVF sector—much needed, I would add—by the former health minister, and being continued by the current health minister as well. I am very proud about that.

We recognise that family violence has a major direct and indirect impact on women's health. We have already implemented more than two-thirds of the royal commission's recommendations—so 167 recommendations acquitted of those 227—with the remaining 60 all underway. We will continue that important work of keeping women safe, not only physically but ensuring that mental health and wellbeing benefits and trauma recovery are key parts of that story as well.

We also know that sport and active recreation have benefits beyond just physical health. That is why we have invested a further \$10 million for the Female Friendly Facilities Fund—I know one that was hugely popular in our local communities. As somebody who played a silly amount of sport growing up, I became well accustomed to getting changed in the back of cars and never thought twice about it while all the boys got changed in the changing rooms. You know, I am hoping that is a lived reality that does not have to be continued for young girls into the future, and through this investment, thankfully, we are bit by bit changing the

narrative on that so that hopefully those of us around the table, those of you with daughters, are not having that same experience.

Of course also as part of that Female Friendly Facilities Fund we are supporting local clubs and sporting organisations, not only for change rooms but other female-friendly facilities. Can I just throw in, of course, the \$101 million investment towards the home of the Matildas, which is hugely exciting for those of us who love our football—the real football.

**Mr NEWBURY:** If you can help us, Minister, in Elwood—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, you do not have the call.

**Mr Newbury** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, if you do not mind, please.

**Mr Newbury** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, could you please stop interrupting and speaking over the top of people.

**Ms RICHARDS:** On a point of order, Chair, it is just really difficult sometimes to hear what other people are saying when people down at that end of the table speak over the top of us.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Look, we do not need a political lecture.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, you are talking over a point of order now as well.

**Mr NEWBURY:** I am talking over a political—

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, Ms Richards has made a legitimate point of order.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Your Labor colleague has made a point of order.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, you are demonstrating the exact point that Ms Richards is trying to make, which is about speaking over the top of people.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you, Labor Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Newbury, if you do not mind, I would respectfully ask that you respect other people's turn at this table to ask their questions in their time uninterrupted. Thank you.

**Mr NEWBURY:** Thank you, Labor Chair.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you very much, Minister, for appearing before the committee today, and thank you to your officials also. The committee will follow up on any questions which were taken on notice in writing, and responses will be required within 10 working days of the committee's request. We also appreciate the swap that you made at the last minute to facilitate our hearings this afternoon, so we thank you and your officials for your time this morning. The committee will now take a short 15-minute break before resuming with consideration of the ambulance services portfolio. We thank you for your time. I declare this hearing adjourned.

**Witnesses withdrew.**