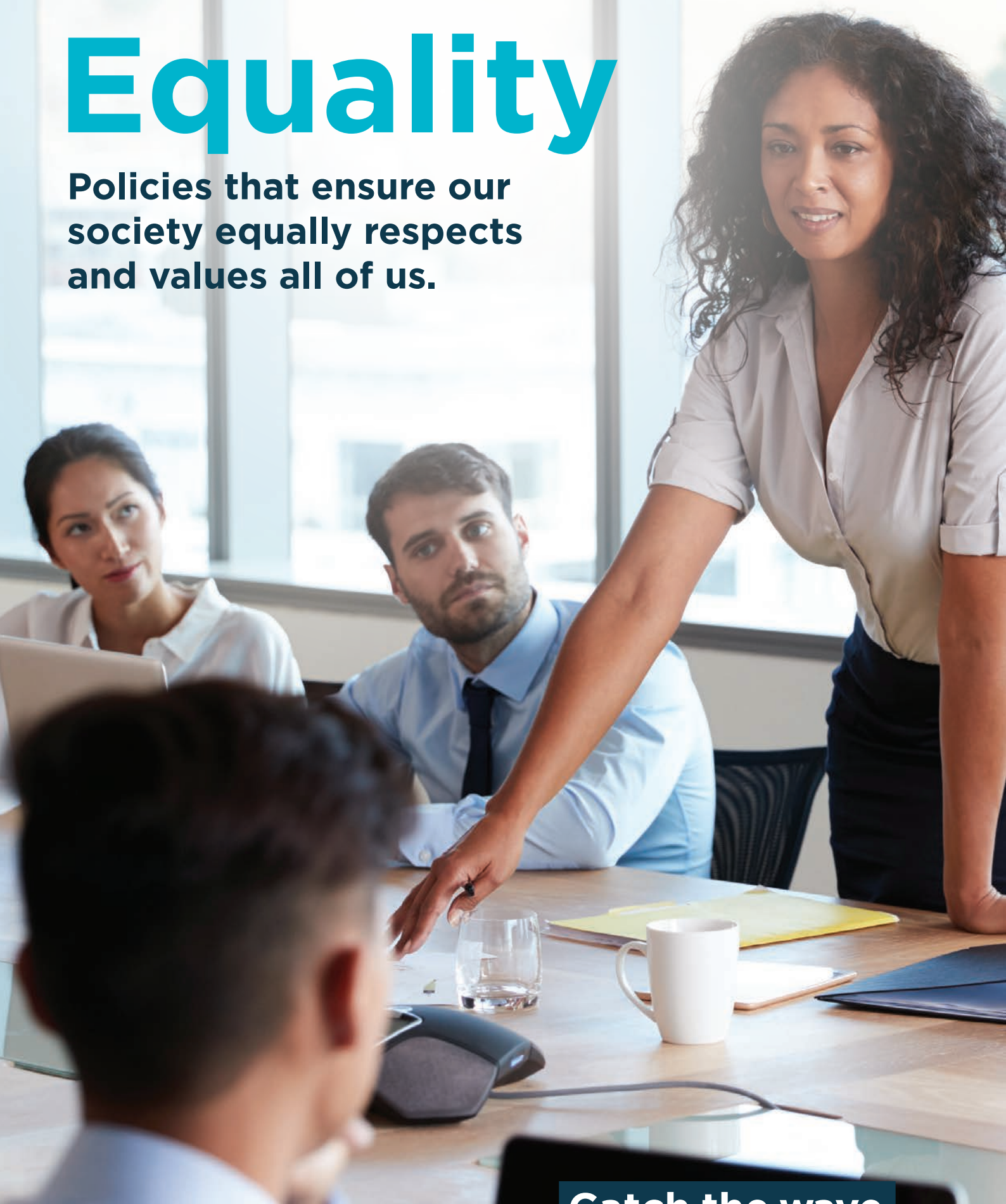


# Equality

**Policies that ensure our society equally respects and values all of us.**



**Catch the wave  
of opportunity**



## Foreword from Zali Steggall, Independent MP for Warringah

A strong economy values and respects a diversity of skills, talents and experience. The recovery from COVID-19 must improve workplace gender equality and diversity in order to generate the productivity our economy requires.

### Lifting up Australian women

Australia has slipped from 24th in 2014 to 50th on the World Economic Forum's 2021 Gender Gap index and from 12th to 70th in women's economic participation, and from 32nd to 54th in political empowerment.<sup>1</sup> These statistics show how current policy is skewed towards an old-fashioned cliché, where Australian women are the primary carers and men are the primary earners.

We need a radical refresh of our policy settings to reform gender equality and increase diversity in the workplace. We also need to consider social reforms that would provide greater security for women and children, reducing the number of older women falling into homelessness.

### Taking real action on diversity

We must fight for equity and human rights for all, ensuring everyone is empowered to be active, visible and respected. This includes ending the wasteful spending on the offshore detention of refugees and seeking alternative solutions to detention through resettlement in community or through diplomatic solutions with other countries such as New Zealand, the US and Canada.

Our Indigenous heritage should be celebrated. We must implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart and call for a referendum on Indigenous recognition in the Constitution. We also need to educate our communities and our children about Indigenous history and culture to truly close the gap.

Finally, we must provide better services to underrepresented groups in our community, such as the LGBTQIA+ community.

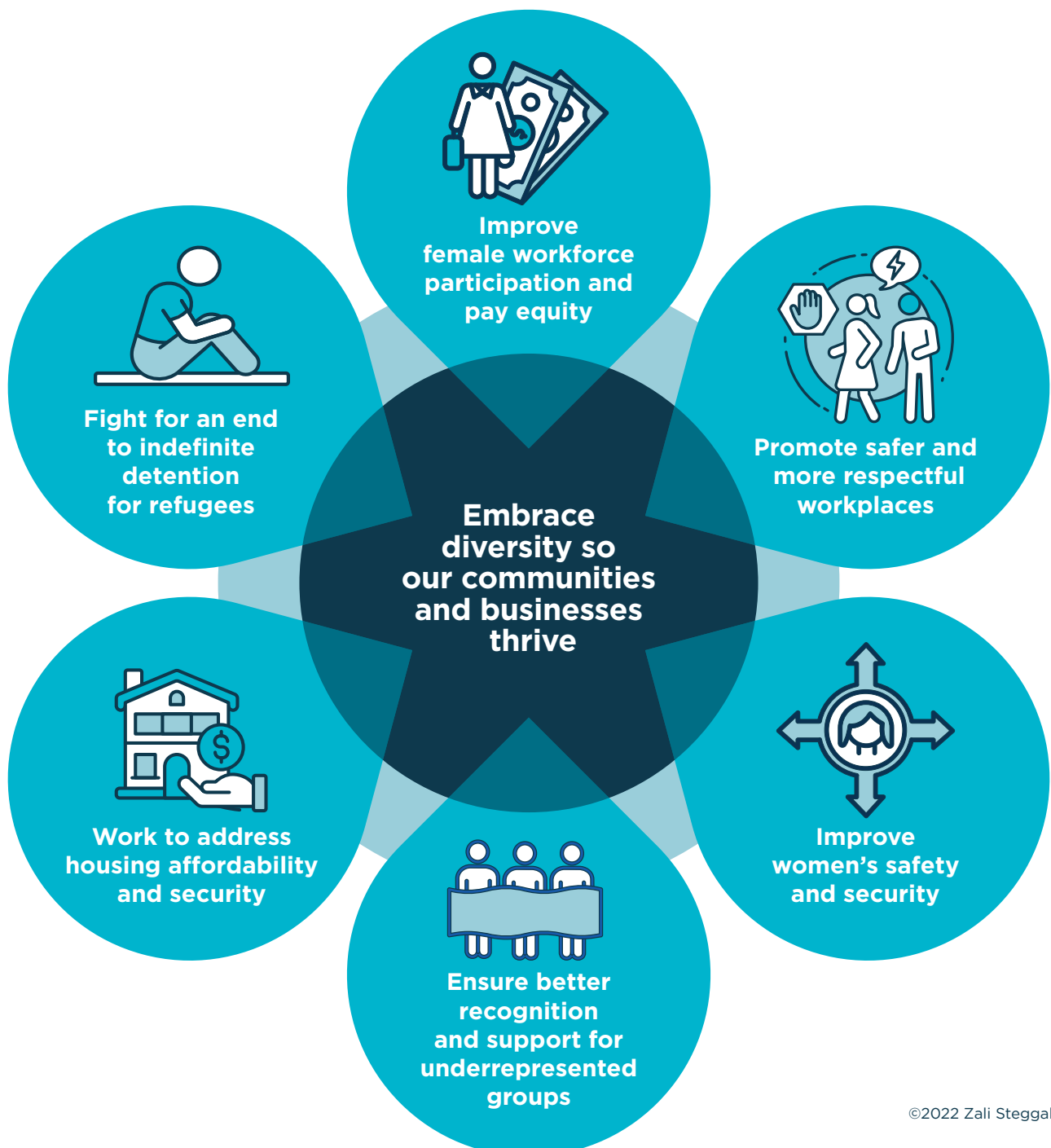
Zali Steggall, OAM MP





“The March4Justice was just the start. It’s time for real action on gender and diversity. Enough is enough.”

Zali Steggall



A photograph of four diverse professionals (three women and one man) sitting around a table in a modern office setting, engaged in a discussion. A laptop is open on the table. The background shows large windows with a city view.

# Improve female workforce participation and pay equity

Make parental leave fair and accessible to men and women, improve access and affordability of childcare and drive gender equity tax reforms.

Australian women are still paid 20.1 percent less per year than men.<sup>2</sup> That's an average of \$25,679 that women are not getting despite doing the same job as a man.

It's shameful, it's embarrassing and it's time to do something about it. We must implement policies that help:

- Stop devaluation of female work
- Remove barriers to higher paid positions
- End discrimination in hiring processes and institutional bias
- Reduce women's disproportionate share of unpaid care and domestic labour
- Increase female role models and mentors
- Increase male participation in parental leave

## When women benefit, we all benefit

A big part of the gender pay gap is how childbirth and childcare traditionally encourages women to depart from or reduce their participation in the workforce. This isn't just unfair to women, it's unfair to our economy. If we could support women to participate the same as men, we would boost our GDP by 8.7 percent. That's a \$353 billion uplift to our economy.<sup>3</sup>





## Making childcare fair

Paid parental leave schemes and more affordable childcare and healthcare are key ways to increase female workforce participation and re-engagement. A 2020 report by Equity Economics and the Parenthood Group found that improving parenting policies could increase GDP by 4.1% or \$166 billion by 2050.<sup>4</sup>

We have 20,000 families with children under 15 in Warringah and I have spoken to many who have told me they need more support. The sheer cost of childcare combined with the discrimination women experience when trying to return to their jobs is making it incredibly difficult for women to work.

## Men need time with their kids, too

Across the OECD, the average length of paid parental leave is 55 weeks. In Australia it's just 18 weeks, making it one of the least generous schemes in the developed world. Australian men (or supporting partners) get just 2 weeks.

Last Father's Day, the Grattan Institute released research showing that shared paid parental leave not only boosts the mother's earnings, it boosts our entire GDP. By increasing the entitlement to 26 weeks shared between

parents (6 weeks for each parent, 10 weeks shared and bonus 4 weeks if all used), it would cost the Government \$600million per year but would add \$900million to GDP per year, as well as boosting mothers' lifetime earnings by \$30,000.<sup>5</sup>

## Policies and actions we need to implement to improve female workforce participation and pay equity include:

- ✓ Dedicated analysis of the value of unpaid work in the Australian economy
- ✓ Improve the generosity of paid parental leave, remove existing gender bias and incentivise greater uptake of parental leave by men
- ✓ Increase accessibility and affordability of childcare



# Promote safer and more respectful workplaces

Demand full implementation of the Respect@Work Report recommendations to reduce sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace.

In March 2021, the March4Justice gathered on the lawns of Parliament House calling for an end to the workplace harassment and bullying of women.

## Getting respect on paper

I moved an amendment to the Sex Discrimination Act to make sure that politicians, judges and others in the public service were liable for and protected from sexual harassment. The Government ultimately moved its own legislation to capture this and some of the recommendations of the Respect@Work Report delivered by the Human Rights Commission more than a year earlier.

## Getting respect in reality

Despite this legislation and the Government's claim that it accepts all the recommendations of the commission, it has failed to implement many of those recommendations. The recommendations of the Respect@Work report need to be implemented in full, to drive positive behaviours in Australian workplaces.

The Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Kate Jenkins, led a review of parliamentary staff

and ex staffers by Kate Jenkins, which led to the *Set the Standard* Report. The recommendations of the *Set the Standard* Report need to be implemented in full. I am a member of the multi-party taskforce charged with implementing those recommendations.

## Policies and actions we need to drive reductions in sexual harassment and bullying in the workplace

- ✓ Full implementation of the recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission's Respect@Work Report
- ✓ Full implementation of the recommendations of Kate Jenkins' *Set the Standard* Report into Parliamentary workplace





# Improve women's safety and security

Increase affordable and crisis accommodation in Warringah. Work to combat domestic violence, bullying and intimidation.

Every 8 days, an Australian women dies at the hands of her current or former partner. Domestic abuse costs us \$26 billion every single year.

These are shameful statistics that cry out for action. I welcome the draft release of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women<sup>6</sup>, but it needs to go further with more tangible actions and more funding.

Increasing crisis accommodation in Warringah is just one step towards a safer environment for the women in our community. Nearly 7,700 women return to violent partners every year due to a lack of affordable housing.<sup>7</sup> I supported the establishment of the women's shelter during COVID-19 by Royal Far West, however, this was unfortunately only a temporary arrangement. We now need commitment to create permanent solutions for those fleeing domestic and family violence in our community.

I strongly support the Safety Respect Equity campaign launched by Grace Tame, Brittany Higgins, Chanel Contos and others calling for important reform to gender based violence in Australia. Included in this campaign is a call for 10 days domestic violence leave to enable women to escape abusive relationships.

## Policies and actions we need to improve women's safety and security

- ✓ Increase the number of places at women's shelters for those fleeing domestic and family violence
- ✓ Hold Government to account for the development of tangible action plans and evaluation criteria to underpin the National Plan to End Violence Against Women
- ✓ Support policy approaches to curb the growth of older women's homelessness including policies to address inequities in superannuation and housing
- ✓ 10 days' domestic violence leave



# Fight for an end to indefinite detention for refugees

Expand Australia's humanitarian intake and explore all options to resettle asylum seekers and refugees, including the New Zealand deal.

The 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees defines a refugee as a person who is outside their country of nationality or habitual residence, has a well-founded fear of persecution because of their race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion, and is unable or unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country, or to return there, for fear of persecution.

## End offshore detention now

We can treat refugees humanely and fairly while still maintaining our borders. We must co-operate with our neighbours to create a clear system for resettlement, so that people do not feel their only option is to risk a lethal sea journey or sit in detention for nearly a decade of their lives.

We also need to expand our humanitarian cap to take account of the people fleeing Afghanistan, Myanmar, Ukraine, and the many other countries where people continue to suffer persecution.





## Policies and actions we need to address indefinite detention of refugees includes:

### We must do our bit for those in need

We must end offshore detention, from both a humanitarian perspective and an economic perspective. Offshore detention cost Australians \$1.19billion in the 2021/22 Budget — an astronomical price just to keep 239 people detained.

As the offshore detention regime in Papua New Guinea winds up, refugees and asylum seekers there are forced to consider moving to Nauru. This incredibly remote country has even less access to healthcare, which has already led to the death of at least one refugee.<sup>8</sup>

Welcome the acceptance of the New Zealand deal (nine years too late) and encourage both Governments to work together to expedite the transition of all refugees from Papua New Guinea and Nauru as soon as possible.

- ✓ End offshore detention
- ✓ Cap the length of time a refugee or asylum seeker can be held in immigration detention
- ✓ Accelerate the transition of refugees from offshore detention to New Zealand.



# Work to address housing affordability and security

Explore policies to increase affordable housing supply especially for critical workers and young Australians.

House prices in Sydney have risen by more than 25% in the last 12 months<sup>9</sup> and even faster than that in popular suburbs in Warringah. The percentage of Australians renting (32%) is also at its highest point in the past 30 years.<sup>10</sup> Interest rates are at record lows while homelessness is at record highs, and the shortage of social and affordable housing has never been more acute.<sup>11</sup> The evidence from local organisations such as One Meal and Community Northern Beaches shows a dramatic increase in demand for homelessness services in the community locally.

## Tax reform is needed

One of the key levers the Federal Government can use to address this is tax reform – supporting state governments to transition from the inefficient tax of stamp duty to general property tax. Stamp duties are inefficient taxes: they discourage people from moving to housing that better suits their needs, and they discourage people from moving to better jobs.<sup>12</sup> The drag of stamp duty has increased over the past two decades as the average rates of stamp duty has risen from 2 to 4 percent and property prices have risen dramatically – property turnover has decreased substantially.

Former NSW Treasurer has proposed that shifting from stamp duties to broad based property tax (\$5 to \$7 for every \$1,000 of unimproved property value) could make Australians up to \$17 billion a year better off, while also making housing more affordable.<sup>13</sup> Proposals to make the shift are difficult to achieve because of the initial loss of tax revenue for the State. The Federal Government should commit to filling part of the revenue hole arising should a State swap stamp duties for property taxes, including any reduction in the State's share of GST.





## Policies and actions we need to increase housing supply and affordability include:

### Rent assistance and increased supply can help

Increases to Commonwealth Rent Assistance and better targeting of the scheme is another lever that should be considered in order to address the growing rates of housing stress and homelessness especially amongst older women, who are the fastest growing group suffering homelessness. The Grattan Institute calculated that a 40 percent increase in rent assistance would cost the Government \$1.5 billion<sup>14</sup> a year and would improve the ability of those receiving assistance to afford adequate housing and over the longer term would increase the quantity and quality of affordable housing. In parallel with this, governments should consider incentives for providing long-term lease arrangements to increase housing security and stability in the rental market.

On the supply side the magnitude of the challenge is extraordinary. The Productivity Commission review found that the affordable and social housing supply pipeline needs to dramatically increase and accelerate, from current net negative new supply levels.<sup>15</sup>

The National Affordable Housing Alliance (NAHA) which brings together property groups such as the Property Council of Australia and the Housing Industry Association with social groups including the Australian Council of Social Services and National Shelter, has proposed a set of policies to improve the supply of social and affordable housing over the next 20 years to address this exacerbating situation.

- ✓ Federal support for states to review and transition away stamp duty
- ✓ Increase Commonwealth Rent Assistance and review eligibility including application for essential service workers
- ✓ Consider incentives for long-term lease arrangements to boost housing security and stability in the rental market
- ✓ Establish Social and Affordable Housing Future Fund, the dividends from this fund would be invested as capital grants (or availability payments) to increase social and affordable housing supply annually
- ✓ Include a minimum contribution of social and affordable housing in new medium to large residential development projects



# Recognise and better support diverse and underrepresented groups within our community

Increase access to quality education and services.

## Embrace our Indigenous heritage

We need to improve and augment education across our school system about our indigenous heritage. We need to increase respect for the more than 60,000 years they have been custodians of our amazing country, and draw greater attention to the value of having the oldest continuous civilisation on earth.<sup>17</sup>

Our community will benefit enormously from better, more widespread education about Indigenous heritage. This includes understanding the value of constitutionally recognising Indigenous peoples and the need for a Makarrata commission in line with the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Crucially, we also need Government to call the referendum required to implement the Uluru Statement.<sup>18</sup>

We need to work harder towards closing the gap, Indigenous Australians still live on average 10-11 years less than non-Indigenous Australians. Even if the targets to reduce Indigenous incarceration by 2031 are achieved, Indigenous adults will be 11 times more likely to be incarcerated and Indigenous youth 12 times more likely to be incarcerated

than the rest of the Australian population. We need to do better, a great start would be increasing the minimum age of incarceration from 10 to at least 14.

### Policies and actions we need to promote and support Indigenous heritage include:

- ✓ Improve education about Indigenous history in schools and in community
- ✓ Implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart and call the referendum
- ✓ Progress the Close the Gap agreement
- ✓ Increase the minimum age of incarceration from 10 to 14 years of age. This policy that disproportionately affects Indigenous communities





## Policies and actions we need to promote and support diverse communities include:

### Ensuring everyone understands the power and history of diversity

There are many diverse and underrepresented groups within our community, including many different sexual identities, genders and cultural backgrounds. We need to ensure that all groups within our community have the access to services and support that they need, and that our whole community is educated about the richness and value that diversity brings.

We need to build the education of the general public around LGBTQIA+ issues and service needs. People of diverse sexual orientation may need specialist services that are not readily available in all communities. While there are a great range of services, access remains an issue — and especially during the pandemic, many of these services closed, including in Warringah.<sup>19</sup> We need to make sure that these services are made accessible to people where and when they need them.

- ✓ Increase access to health, education and specialist services for minority groups including the LGBTQI community
- ✓ Increase visibility of diversity in data collection and census to better understand service needs

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