

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting

Melbourne—Monday, 2 March 2020

Members

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESSES

Mr Jeremy Levine, General Manager, Service and Strategy Impact, and

Ms Susan Maury, Senior Research and Evaluation Officer, Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand.

The CHAIR: We are slightly ahead of schedule, but we have everybody so we might make a start. Thank you for coming along today. We appreciate you taking the time.

We begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay respects to their elders past, present and emerging. I welcome everyone to the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimates Committee's Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting.

All mobile telephones should now be turned to silent. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege; therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. You will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the Committee's website as soon as possible.

I invite you to make a 15-minute opening statement to the Committee, which will be followed by questions.

Mr LEVINE: Thank you, Chair and Committee members. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before the Committee today. I am Jeremy Levine, the General Manager of Service and Strategy Impact at Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand, and I am here today with Susan Maury, our Senior Research and Evaluation Officer.

I would like to start by telling you a little bit about Good Shepherd Australia New Zealand. We are a community services organisation that was established to address the critical and emerging issues facing women, girls and their families. We work to advance equity and social justice, and we aspire for all women, girls and families to be safe, well, strong and connected. A central part of our purpose is to challenge the systems that entrench poverty, disadvantage and gender inequality. Our Women's Research, Advocacy and Policy Centre, which is an area within my part of the business, does this for a range of research, policy and advocacy activities.

We play a critical role in Victoria and nationally by providing crucial support services to women and girls, such as family violence support, integrated family services, financial counselling services and financial capability building support. We are also Australia's leading provider of microfinance loans and products, including the No Interest Loan Scheme—or NILS—the StepUP program and the LaunchME program, which last year helped to support financial inclusion for over 20 000 women on low incomes. Through our services we have a firsthand experience of the poor outcomes that are achieved when gender inequality—particularly financial insecurity, family violence and homelessness—occurs.

We have been following the Victorian Government's work to improve gender equality in a range of ways, and we would like to highlight just a few before we move onto gender responsive budgeting specifically. The historic Gender Equality Bill is setting the standard across Australia for what is possible, and we congratulate the Government on its passage. Good Shepherd acknowledges the important work that has taken place to establish *Victoria's Gender Equality Baseline Report*, which provides a set of measures against which progress towards gender equality outcomes will be monitored. We applaud the Government's work to change attitudes to prevent family violence and end family violence against women at the same time as committing funding to expand the workforce that supports victim survivors. We also acknowledge achievements such as an increase in the representation of women in cabinet, as public sector executives and on paid government boards, and practical responses such as free pads and tampons in all government schools.

I would like to hand over to Susan to speak a bit more on the issues that we see as important when considering gender responsive budgeting. Susan amongst other things is our expert in gender disadvantage, but she also manages our blog, or web platform, called the Women's Policy Action Tank. It is a joint initiative between Good Shepherd and the Power to Persuade which specifically analyses government policy using a gendered lens.

Ms MAURY: We see the current initiative of gender responsive budgeting as one aspect of a larger initiative here in Victoria. Gender responsive budgeting is an acknowledgement that gender continues to be a primary predictor of disadvantage and divergent policy impacts for men and women. Australia has historically been a global leader in acknowledging this and was the first nation to introduce a federal women's budget in 1985, and that was produced for 30 years. While a women's budget can be an important aspect of gender responsive budgeting, to be effective GRB should incorporate the entire life cycle of the budgeting and implementation process. Gender responsive budgeting moves beyond setting aside funds for women's issues and takes a more holistic look at how government policy and expenditure differentially impacts on citizens, with an acknowledgement that historically these processes have favoured men. We have got a document tabled here, and we have created a table within that which is adapted from Oxfam Great Britain's guide to gender responsive budgeting. It provides a guideline for the types of activities and inputs that are required across the budget life cycle.

Another important way to improve gender responsive budgeting is to have more diverse representation in government. It is encouraging to see that in the 2018 elections the number of women in Victoria was raised to 53, which was quite a significant increase from 2006, when there were only 38 women. There is evidence that increasing female representation appears to impact on the types of issues that parliaments debate, so that is really wonderful.

Taken as a whole, women's lives are shaped differently to men's, and this includes their working lives. Important differences include: they have more caring duties, particularly as the primary parent for infants and young children; they have more household duties; and they have greater experiences of domestic and family violence, sexual harassment and discrimination. These differences have repercussions on a wide range of outcomes for women, including that women have higher rates of low-paid, part-time and casual employment; they have lower rates of superannuation; they have times in their lives when they are much more likely to be dependent on income support; and they are disproportionately impacted by the tax and transfer system, and this includes the need to access child support. Women are increasingly at risk of homelessness and poverty, particularly older cohorts of women. Additionally when gender is overlaid with other identities—including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistic diverse communities, experiences of disability, experiencing poor mental health or physical health, having reduced educational attainment and/or identifying as LGBTIQ—their trajectory across the life course tends to be poorer. This is not due to individual failings per se but rather the absence of appropriate and supportive policies and structures. As a result women's experience of the world needs to be considered when formulating policies and budgets or assessing them for their effectiveness. This goes beyond women's policies and instead takes a holistic look at the system within which women are attempting to thrive, and it seeks to remove those barriers.

We have been managing the Women's Policy Action Tank website, as Jeremy mentioned, for the last four years, and this places a gender lens on a wide range of policy. Authored by academics and subject matter experts, we have covered the main concerns often considered to be women's issues. This includes things such as childcare provision, issues pertaining to single parents and the gender pay gap. But we have also covered a suite of policies that are often considered to be gender neutral, including such things as mental health, heart disease, public transportation, income support, ageing, unemployment, casual labour, the criminal justice system, the aid budget, workplace promotions, housing, offshore detention, welfare to work policies, the cashless debit card, couch surfing, work hours and parliamentary representation. What this growing body of work indicates is that policy is not designed with women's specific needs in mind. And when we have published pieces from the perspective of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders, recently arrived women or women with a disability, it is clear that their everyday experience of policy is seldom considered.

We are not budget experts, but we do have some specific suggestions for how a gender frame could better be incorporated into the budgeting cycle. We see the necessary inputs that are needed as including: a human rights framework; gender-disaggregated data, which can be surprisingly hard to come across; time-use survey results or something similar; input from feminist policy experts, such as ourselves or our friends the National Foundation for Australian Women or the Equal Rights Alliance; and input and advice from experts on gender responsive budgeting—and I know you have talked to quite a few of these people already, but that includes Miranda Stewart, Helen Hodgson, Janine Dixon and also people at Per Capita and the Grattan Institute. We also suggest input from a citizen panel providing lived experience. Panellists would need proper support, training and remuneration, and they could possibly be recruited through social service agencies such as our

own, with the aim of diversity and a particular focus on those at the margins, whose voices are often muted in the policy debate—if the policy is not working for them, it is probably not a very good policy.

The key activity that must inform decisions pre-budget and determine effectiveness post-budget is to assess the impacts using a gender lens. Are there differences in how a policy lands for men and women? Such analyses must use gender-disaggregated data, keeping in mind the diverse way that women's roles as carers and their over-representation in experiences of intimate partner violence and abuse profoundly impact their experience of the world. These should be conducted by the Government but also importantly by others who can access the data and conduct an independent analysis. These findings can then be used to improve processes going forward. That is what we have for our opening statement. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much. Just to kick off the questions, how would you define gender responsive budgeting in and of itself?

Ms MAURY: As I said in my statement, I believe that it needs to acknowledge that gender is a determinant of reduced outcomes for men and women, that it drives a lot of disadvantage that women experience and that the policies are differentially experienced.

Mr RIORDAN: In your presentation a whole raft of issues were rattled off, with gender being identified as a key determinant or indicator of those. We have now been in a world for quite some time where there are senior women right across decision-making—influencers in these areas. The presentations we have seen during this hearing have mainly been led by senior women in academia or agencies or whatever. How would you identify the fact that increasingly there are more and more women in the roles of decision-making and so on, and yet these outcomes still seem to be significant problems? What else needs to happen in our mindset or our thinking when we have got women in these roles and yet we still seem to keep perpetuating the problems? What roadblocks do you see in having gender budgeting working more effectively or more transparently?

Ms MAURY: That is a good question—thank you. I think partly it is a matter of perception. There are a lot of women of course who have advanced quite far, but most places do not have gender parity. For example, if you look at academia, women have higher academic attainment than men in Australia, but at the higher levels of universities they are not equally represented there, even though they outnumber men. So it is partly perception.

Mr RIORDAN: Correct me if I am wrong, but the Government at a state level—many agencies, boards, hospitals, all sorts of Government boards—are sort of at gender parity on decision-making. Is there any correlation that we are getting improvements in outcomes? I am trying to understand: as more and more women get to high roles and have clear decision-making power in these areas, are we getting a correlated improvement in the types of disadvantage you have highlighted?

Ms MAURY: Yes—thank you. There is a lot of research that shows that the closer to parity we get, the better the decision-making processes become. So it is a really important thing to continue to be working on. But going back to your original question about is that enough to achieve gender parity, part of the problem is that the way that our economy is set up, it is designed as a kind of a breadwinner model where one person works full-time and one person stays at home. Now, of course that is not the reality for hardly anybody anymore in Australia, but that is how the system has been designed and it has not really been reconsidered in a meaningful way since forever. To create a system that is more conducive to women to attain higher areas and to be able to be fiscally secure requires rethinking the whole system really. I do not know if that is where the Victorian Government is going with this, but to encourage men to also have more time to spend at home, to take up more childcare roles, to be at home with their newborn children—I mean all those things are really important.

Mr LEVINE: I would add that it is a system. It is entrenched across the entire system, not just something that you tackle by having senior women in leadership and decision-making roles. So we are needing to tackle that through cultural attitudes to inequality—attitudes towards women—which is being done in a range of areas. But until you get a generational shift there, I think it is hard to actually shift the dial for women. But particularly the roles that we see women traditionally in is something that is not shifting fast enough, so even just the role of women as carers is enough to put women in a category separate to men, where all sorts of sorts

of opportunities for advancement, for pay parity, for education, are not able to be realised because of those other roles.

Ms RICHARDS: Thanks, both of you, for your evidence. We have had some really insightful evidence from lots of people with strong groundings in economics and academia. You mentioned the work that Oxfam has been doing, and I was wondering: have you got any insights into any practical lessons that Government can learn from NGOs and private organisations who have already been doing a lot of work on gender responsive budgeting? I am interested in making sure that we learn the lessons, thinking about Oxfam particularly as an international organisation, and organisations like yours: what lessons there are from those NGOs that have been already in this place for a little bit longer than others?

Mr LEVINE: Two things that spring to mind are allowing or affording a role for the NGOs to be part of the feedback loop of gender responsive budgeting. Clearly it is where Government needs to take a leadership position in both establishing something like that, then committing to measures and then reporting on measures. But if NGOs can be a part of that discussion of how things are going, even to do some of the reporting and investigation themselves, I think that would be particularly helpful because there is an expertise that resides in organisations outside of the government sector. That is probably a pretty key one. Oxfam—and I think actually the ERA talked a bit about that in their submission, and we would second that.

Ms RICHARDS: I am curious about that work that has already been done and just making sure that we learn those practical lessons. Especially if it is something that is quite well embedded, there might be lessons that we can learn from—especially errors, maybe.

Ms MAURY: I think if you are thinking about the international development sector, one thing that they have done particularly well is focused on culture change and the way that people think about women and leadership. Here in Australia there is quite a lot of blowback for women in particularly politics, as you probably know, and a lot of women have said they would not consider a job in politics because of the blowback. That is the kind of cultural change that needs to happen to support women to take up more leadership roles.

The CHAIR: To follow on from that a bit we heard from Janine Dixon, who you mentioned, and others and they gave good examples of economic policy that might have been different had there been a gender responsive budgeting layer applied to it. In the work that you do, have you got an example of a social policy that you think would be different—not that they are necessarily two different things. But in the areas that you work in is there a particular policy example you can give us where if you think that layer was being applied there would be different outcomes?

Ms MAURY: I did bring some examples but the one that we have been particularly advocating on has to do with welfare policies, which I realise is federal, but it has a profound impact on women and especially women with young children and particularly if they are single mothers. As you probably know, the most economically disadvantaged households in Australia are single-parent households, and it has to do with the welfare policies. If you look at the amount of hours that women work, if you do not segregate that as paid and unpaid but just look at it as work, women actually put in more hours per week compared to men, and if you are a single mother you are doing all that work yourself. So the idea that you could layer on top of that full-time employment is pretty ridiculous. An acknowledgement of the unpaid work that women do I think is really important, particularly in welfare policy, and to provide proper support for raising children. Child support is another one. It can be extremely difficult for women to receive child support for a range of reasons. When you start digging into it, it is really ridiculous that women are actually meant to navigate that process themselves when quite often they have experienced abuse or even just a bad relationship breakdown, but the fact that the Government does not mediate the collection of child support is ridiculous.

Mr MAAS: Good Shepherd operates nationally and in New Zealand as well, and I dare say internationally too, yes?

Mr LEVINE: Good Shepherd is part of an international network, so we operate in about 70 countries around the world. I might be exaggerating there—but something like that. In Australia we certainly operate nationally. Our base is here in Victoria. Our services are delivered in Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia, but we manage a network of 170 providers who deliver no-interest loans across the country in metro, regional and rural areas. New Zealand is a separate entity within the same network.

Mr MAAS: I see. I am just interested in your size because you have identified various structural inequities. Some of those exist at the State level, some exist at the Federal level, as we have discussed. I was just wondering what your thoughts were in comparing the various jurisdictions that you have coverage over. So how would Victoria, for instance, compare with—you mentioned South Australia, or even over in New Zealand or federally in Australia?

Mr LEVINE: In terms of policies like gender responsive budgeting?

Mr MAAS: Correct, yes.

Mr LEVINE: I certainly have a view that Victoria is showing great leadership across not only gender responsive budgeting but gender equality. The Bill that went through only last week is a great frontrunner. At a local government level we are seeing the flow-on effects of that in Victoria. So I think only today the Mornington Peninsula Shire Council was releasing their gender equality statement. I think they followed Geelong the week before that. So Victoria's position is absolutely shining the light. In New South Wales I think there are efforts to try to bring that sort of focus, but it is not quite as purposeful, I would say. It is a bit more ad hoc and a bit late to the party. Around the other states and territories I do not think we are seeing it quite as much. When we are involved in conversations with other states and territories around, obviously, the issues that we have spoken about today, we have not had quite as much opportunity to link up our stories, I suppose, and try to influence the conversation.

Mr MAAS: Any comment on our New Zealand neighbours?

Mr LEVINE: No. Because New Zealand is a separate entity we do not get involved in—

Mr MAAS: I see.

Mr LEVINE: I love the idea of the economic wellbeing statement. We would absolutely advocate for that in this country.

Mr D O'BRIEN: If you could give us one or maybe three things that we could do in framing the budget to improve gender equity, what would they be?

Ms MAURY: I really like the idea of a lived experience panel because I do think that it is those people who are kind of falling through the cracks a little bit and not getting the support they need that are really going to illuminate where the policy failings are, and for women that is particularly critical.

Mr D O'BRIEN: What does that mean—a panel that reviews the budget?

Ms MAURY: Maybe not reviews but gives input.

Mr LEVINE: It can be a challenging concept, that one, but I would support that. So in the same way that I think the NDIS is using citizen juries as part of policy development and review of services, I think something like that could be really useful here. It is the people who are falling through the cracks but particularly an ever-widening kind of missing middle group of people who, for a whole range of reasons, policymakers cannot keep in their view at all times. It is really not possible for any government, any policymaker, to ensure that all policies are meeting every kind of cohort that would be in scope of disadvantage, so bringing the voice of the participant is really important.

Ms MAURY: I also think just putting that gender lens on a range of policies is really important. Ideally that is pre-budget, but it may also be post-budget. I think I mentioned public transportation. That is a really interesting one, and I actually wrote up a few notes on that. Women are more likely to use public transportation. They are more likely to trip chain, which means they do multiple stops rather than going from home to work and back home again, which is what public transportation is currently set up to do for most people. They are more likely to walk. They are more fearful using public transportation, so that can really drive their decisions. Some research that was done here in Melbourne a couple of years ago, which unfortunately was not published but I did hear a talk on it, shows that women travel an average of 10 minutes less to and from work, and that is a choice they have made to maximise their time at home. So this means they have fewer job opportunities

available to them because they are sacrificing more jobs to be closer to home. This is particularly harmful for women who are in low SES postcodes. So that kind of thing may not come up unless you are actually interrogating the policy silo to see what it can tell you about the differential impacts on gender.

Ms STITT: Unpacking that is interesting because, as we have discussed today in your evidence, it is not really just as simple as looking at the number of women in senior management positions, because in Australia we have whole industries that are feminised and undervalued and drive that gender pay gap. Have you got a view about the kinds of data that we need to be collecting in order to measure whether or not we are actually having an impact on gender inequality in those sorts of scenarios?

Ms MAURY: I think anytime you are collecting data you should be gender disaggregating it, and it is surprising how seldom that is done. The question is always asked, but quite often the datasets when they come out, even on the ABS, are not disaggregated by gender. I do not know why. Recently I was trying to look at information about bank loans. Do women take out fewer bank loans than men? Are they for lower amounts? Are they better at repaying? I cannot find that information anywhere, but I am sure it is collected.

Ms VALLENCE: Thank you very much for your time today and for coming in and presenting. I would like to ask about the Victorian public service and your interaction and experience with them. Are there any particular aspects of the Victorian public service today that you feel are not responsive in this regard and not responsive in looking in terms of their contemplation of being responsive to gender? Are there any particular areas of the VPS that are failing women or gender-diverse people? If you could comment on that, please.

Ms MAURY: That is a good question. Jeremy?

Mr LEVINE: I do not have any examples of departments that are failing, certainly not the departments that we work with, predominantly the Department of Health and Human Services, Family Safety Victoria and Premier and Cabinet, who all have, either as the majority of their focus or a very large proportion, having women fairly and squarely in the purview of their policies. So, no, I do not have anything to respond to there.

Ms VALLENCE: So in that case then would you say that you are experiencing the Government and its public service already taking a gender responsive view in the way that they are developing their budgets and interacting with agencies and Victorians?

Mr LEVINE: Certainly responsive. I think the thing that separates gender responsive budgeting as a policy approach is that it has not been done before and it has not been the embedded practice. What that changes is actually making sure that it is everyone's responsibility, from the top of the departments down through to anyone involved in the policy cycle—the budget cycle. So while policies might be developed and designed by people wanting to do positive things for women in the community, that is still not going to be enough. But certainly when we engage with departments around the need of our cohorts that we work with, they are certainly responsive to our submissions and they are attempting to develop policy and programs that are seeking to address the need of those cohorts.

Ms VALLENCE: So on that basis do you think that you actually need a policy, if you do not see any part of the VPS, for example, not meeting your needs or being responsive to your requests in this regard?

Mr LEVINE: I just reiterate that gender responsive budgeting is an excellent approach to furthering that focus. I think the reason that we are having a discussion today is that the benefit that something like that would provide is to enshrine the focus and the lens in the policy and the budget cycle that is not currently in place. It dials it up.

Ms MAURY: We are really impressed with everything that the Victorian Government is doing regarding gender equality—a whole suite of things that you are working on, which are really exciting. But this has to do with looking at how the policies fall for people. It is more than just being aware or being sensitised; it is actually taking the time to dig down and say, 'Well, what is this impact going to be or what has it been?', which is a different question from just goodwill.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Are there any further questions? As it is 3.30, our time has expired, even though we started a bit early. Thank you so much for that really insightful presentation. We appreciate you taking the

time to speak with us today. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript to verify, and once that is done it will go on the website. Thank you for your time.

Ms MAURY: Thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.