

NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022 Review



Overview

In 2022, Women NSW engaged Erin Cahill Consulting to undertake a review (the Review) of the *NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022* (the Strategy).

Review scope

The scope of the Review involved:

- whether the Strategy was implemented as intended
- whether the Strategy achieved its objectives through implementation of activities under the Strategy (where evaluation findings and data were available)
- an analysis of future priorities
- any gaps in the current strategy.

Review methodology

The Review was based on a desktop review of documentation relating to the Strategy.

The Review considers years 1–3 of the Strategy only, with Year 4 pending completion at the time of writing.

Documentation considered as part of the Review included:

- the *NSW Women's Strategy 2018–2022*
- action plans 1, 2 and 3 of the Strategy
- agency annual plans and detailed reports for years 1–3 of the Strategy
- Terms of Reference of the NSW Women's Strategy Interdepartmental Committee.

Data limitations

The collection of data and reporting on activities under the Strategy was somewhat limited. As a result, some indicators, particularly those related to the reach of activities and attendance, represent only the proportion of data available at the time of review. These numbers are undoubtedly an under-representation but the factor to which this is the case cannot be estimated.

Key findings:

Activities under the Strategy focused on 3 key priority areas for change. These were:

- economic opportunity and advancement
- health and wellbeing
- participation and empowerment.

The Strategy encompassed 160 activities over the first 3 years of implementation. Despite the impacts of the global COVID-19 pandemic, more than 90% of these activities were successfully implemented.

The Review found that the Strategy has been implemented as intended across a range of markers. These include:

- the successful implementation of activities
- the successful meeting of a range of targets, set during annual action plans
- the involvement of a broad range of NSW Government agencies across the first 3 years of the Strategy
- the generation of research and reports to guide further movement towards gender equality in NSW.

Against this backdrop of success, the Review also identified a range of areas to target for improvement, including:

- an unequal distribution of actions against the priority areas, leading to greater work in some areas
- a lack of adequate mechanisms for the inclusion of different priority groups within annual action plans and activities
- a low evaluation rate for activities under the Strategy, and a range of data collection issues that, when combined, reduced the ability to review the Strategy in full detail.

Findings for each priority area

Economic opportunity and advancement

- This priority area consisted of 74 activities over 56 action areas.
- Actions were undertaken by 23 different agencies.
- More than 6,238 people attended events and programs or interacted with initiatives.
- At the time each activity was reported on:
 - 49% of activities were complete
 - 43% were on track or progressing
 - 8% of activities were delayed, not started or not reported.
- Close to half of initiatives focused on women in leadership roles.
- Initiatives were most frequently undertaken in the NSW Government sector.
- Reviewing initiatives across the lifespan:
 - most initiatives were targeted at adult women
 - no initiatives were specifically targeted at older women.

Health and wellbeing

- This priority area consisted of 39 activities over 31 action areas.
- Actions were undertaken by 7 different agencies.
- More than 2,964 people attended events and programs, or interacted with initiatives.
- At the time each activity was reported on:
 - 50% of activities were complete
 - 45% of activities were on track or progressing
 - 5% of activities were delayed, not started or not reported.
- One third of activities focused on pregnant women.
- Almost a quarter of activities focused on wellbeing outside of health systems.
- Initiatives were most frequently undertaken in the NSW Health system.
- Reviewing activities across the lifespan:
 - most initiatives targeted all women
 - no initiatives were specifically targeted at adult women only.

Participation and empowerment

- This priority consisted of 47 activities over 41 action areas.
- Actions were undertaken by 14 different agencies.
- More than 4,627 people attended events and programs or interacted with initiatives.
- At the time each activity was reported on:
 - 60% of activities were complete
 - 25% of activities were on track or progressing
 - 15% of activities were delayed, not started or not reported.
- Close to 40% of actions were focused on building confidence in girls and women.
- More than a quarter of initiatives were related to engagement in sport.
- Reviewing initiatives across the lifespan:
 - most initiatives were targeted at all women
 - 6% of activities were specifically aimed at young women – more than in any other priority area.

Contribution of the Strategy to promoting gender equality

The Review considered information for a 3-year period only. Major changes would not be expected within this limited time frame.

The reports and data provided indicate that many targets have been achieved and change towards gender equality has been made in these measures. These are usually, however, restricted to small geographic, population or workplace localities.

It would appear from data trends and the limited research available that the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted women compared with men in some areas. This necessarily overlays work towards gender equality, and in some instances has created even greater chasms.

Moving forward

The intersection between the Strategy and other frameworks and strategies (for example the *NSW Homelessness Strategy 2018–2023* and *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2023*) means that some aspects of the work that has been undertaken will be ongoing beyond the Strategy. A range of actions also have target dates beyond the Strategy timeframe.

Seven pilots were undertaken across the first 3 years of the Strategy. Evaluations have generally not been made available as part of the reporting process. There is a useful opportunity to consider whether these pilots could be replicated or upscaled in future iterations of a women's strategy. One pilot has already been scaled up (Dads and Daughters Active and Empowered) and another has been translated into accessible communication resources (Inclusive Leadership Experience).

Some programs in the Strategy may also provide opportunity for upscaling or delivery in other geographic, population or workplace localities.

Stakeholder reports contain information relating to learnings and research undertaken as part of the Strategy. Opportunities to develop actions from these also exist. It is unclear from the reports whether this has already happened.

Recommendations

1. Future iterations of a women's strategy include more overt intersections with other frameworks and strategies at the national and the state level.
2. Future iterations of a women's strategy include a program logic, an evaluation framework and measurements of change.
3. Insert a specific question into the agency reporting template – *Is this activity being evaluated? If yes, please provide evaluation. Where this is not available, please provide details of findings.*
4. The next iteration of a women's strategy addresses the ongoing impacts of COVID-19.
5. Activities with delivery or expiry dates beyond the 12-month annual reporting period be given the same action item number in the following action plan, and mechanisms for cumulative reporting of this be implemented in the reporting template.
6. Consideration be given to how pilot initiatives and localised programs that are delivered under the Strategy may be applicable to broader audiences and upscaled.
7. Future iterations of a women's strategy place emphasis on addressing drivers of gendered discrimination.
8. Future iterations of a women's strategy better account for intersectionality.
9. Future women's strategies provide overview of lifespan needs and demonstrate, through actions and activities, a more even consideration of spread across the life course.