What the Australian Government is doing for Women
The 2005–06 Budget delivers on the commitments that the Australian Government made to women in the 2004 election in *Australian Women — Opportunities for Life*. It demonstrates our commitment to provide opportunity and choice for Australian women, recognising the challenges of contemporary women’s lives. Strong and sustained economic growth and low interest rates have been the cornerstone of the Government’s achievements. This has enabled greater financial assistance to be provided to families and has increased opportunities for women.

In the 2005–06 Budget, the Government has introduced measures to further support women to participate, both economically and socially, in their communities.

The Government is making a substantial investment to assist parents of school age children receiving income support to find work, including funding for new child care places to assist these parents in taking up work. This will reduce the number of children growing up in jobless households and reduce reliance on income support. Assisting women to enter the workforce will improve their economic security across their lifetime.

The Government has further strengthened its support for families, child care and assistance to carers. These measures are significant for women, as it is women who provide the majority of unpaid care in our community and who are more likely to adjust their paid work to balance their caring and family responsibilities. The Government’s substantial investment in these areas will help families to achieve a better balance between work and family.

Importantly, the Government is providing further substantial personal income tax cuts to all taxpayers, building on the tax cuts that the Government made in the 2004–05 Budget. This ensures that people are better rewarded for work and that all Australians continue to share the benefits of the Government’s strong economic management.

Measures to improve health outcomes for women and assist with healthy ageing are particularly important in the context of an ageing population. The Government has increased funding for measures that will improve women’s quality of life and address serious health issues confronting women. This includes funding for research into the early detection of breast cancer; more pap smears for women in rural and regional areas; assistance in reducing maternal smoking rates; and additional support to improve the health of Indigenous mothers, babies and children.
The Government has committed more funding than ever before through a new Women's Safety Agenda to continue to work towards the elimination of domestic violence and sexual assault. New initiatives include providing training and support for nurses in regional and rural areas on identifying and responding to domestic violence and re-running the Violence Against Women. Australia Says No campaign. The Women's Safety Agenda will build on the substantial achievements of the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence initiative and the National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault.

Women in Australia are making inroads into leadership and decision making positions. In Australian political life, we now have a record number of women in Cabinet, and we have almost double the international average in our Parliament, with women making up more than a quarter of senators and members. However, we still have a long way to go across the community. Just four of Australia’s top 200 companies had a woman CEO in 2004, and 42 per cent of Australian companies had no women executive managers. I think we must all strive to make a difference, by encouraging skilled and talented women to aspire to a higher profile and more challenging roles.

The Australian Government is playing a part in this through the Women’s Leadership and Development Programme, which will assist in building women’s participation in all parts of Australian life. It will increase the number of women in leadership roles throughout society by providing capacity building, for example through leadership programmes.

The Women’s Safety Agenda and the Women’s Leadership and Development Programme will be coordinated and delivered by the Australian Government Office for Women and represents a substantial Budget allocation to women’s programmes. It reinforces the important work of the Office for Women and its role as a central point of advice on the impact of policies on women for the whole of government.

This publication outlines all of the important measures for women in the 2005–06 Budget. It also highlights a range of current initiatives and programmes that benefit women and are currently being successfully implemented across a range of portfolios. It is with great pleasure that I commend this publication to you.

Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson
Minister for Family and Community Services
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women’s Issues
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Overview of Budget
2005–06

The 2005–06 Budget recognises the challenges faced by women today. The measures included in the Budget reflect the many roles that women fulfill as they move through their lifespan: recognising that they have differing needs relating to education, families, work and retirement at different points in their lives.

This Budget recognises the importance of supporting women to participate, both economically and socially, in their communities. Measures provide financial support for families, improve carer’s access to respite care, improve women’s health, support women’s leadership and development and ensure women’s safety all play a role in improving women’s ability to actively participate in all parts of Australian life.

In the 2005–06 Budget, the Australian Government has delivered upon the commitments it made to women in the 2004 election in Australian Women — Opportunities for Life.

Outlined below are highlights for women from the Budget.

Assistance for Families

Measures to assist women and their families:

• around $1 billion over four years to introduce the 30 per cent Child Care Tax Rebate;
• $1.1 billion over four years to increase the Family Tax Benefit Part A lower income threshold;
• $6.6 million over five years (including $0.5 million in 2004–05) to extend the Maternity Payment to parents of adopted children under two years of age;
• $54.8 million over four years to assist parents receiving arrears of child support payments that may cause Family Tax Benefit overpayments;
• $18.6 million over four years to help families start the income year with a more accurate income estimate for family assistance payments;
• $11.4 million over four years to improve the recovery of family assistance overpayments through more flexible recovery rates and case management practices;
• $8.5 million over four years to improve support to families at risk of family assistance overpayments;
• $5.9 million over four years to enable families to negotiate smaller adjustments to family assistance payments, to reduce possible overpayments;
• $4.7 million over four years for Family Tax Benefit top-ups and income tax refunds to be used to offset existing family assistance overpayments; and
• the census will include questions on unpaid work for the first time in 2006.
Personal Tax Cuts
• $21.7 billion over four years for tax cuts to increase incentives to participate in the workforce:
  - from 1 July 2005 the 17 per cent marginal tax rate will be cut to 15 per cent;
  - the 42 per cent tax threshold will increase from $58,000 to $63,000 on 1 July 2005,
    and to $70,000 on 1 July 2006; and
  - the 47 per cent threshold will increase from $70,000 to $95,000 on 1 July 2005, and
    on 1 July 2006 increase again to $125,000.

Assistance for Carers
• $207.6 million over four years to assist carers with better access to respite services;
• $316.9 million over two years to provide a one-off lump sum payment to eligible carers;
• standardising backdating provisions for Carer Allowance to a maximum period of
  12 weeks for carers of both adults and children; and
• $3.4 million over five years (including $0.7 million in 2004–05) to add new conditions and
  modify some of the existing conditions on the Lists of Recognised Disabilities in Assessing
  Carer Allowance, which enable fast-tracking eligibility for Carer Allowance.

Family Law
• $397.2 million over four years for new services to enhance family relationships and bring
  about cultural change in how parenting issues are handled after separation, including:
  - a new network of 65 Family Relationship Centres to be established over three years;
  - a national advice telephone line and web-site;
  - additional family relationship education services and 35 counselling and family
    relationship skills training services;
  - 15 additional services under the Contact Orders Program;
  - 30 additional children’s contact services; and
  - a community education campaign to support the reforms.

Welfare Reform
• $3.6 billion over four years for a package of measures to assist people to move from
  welfare to work, including:
  - extra assistance to help parents become less dependant on welfare and to participate
    in the workforce; and
  - $266 million over four years for a package of child care assistance to help parents
    make the transition from welfare to employment, education and training opportunities.
Health

Measures to strengthen improved health outcomes for Australian women:

- $17.8 million over five years to expand Medicare by enabling practice nurses to take pap smears on behalf of the general practitioner;
- $102.4 million over four years to improve the health of Indigenous mothers, babies and children through the Healthy for Life Program;
- $39.6 million over five years to support the work of beyondblue in tackling depression, including a particular focus on postnatal depression;
- $320.6 million over five years for the Government’s election commitment, Dementia — A National Health Priority, involving:
  - dementia research, management services, improved training of health professionals and new tools and guidelines to help GPs;
  - Extended Aged Care at Home places for people with dementia; and
  - training for aged care workers and people in the community;
- the Strengthening Cancer Care Initiative which includes:
  - $17.6 million over four years to establish a dedicated cancer research budget;
  - $1.0 million over four years to assist the Breast Cancer Network to further develop and disseminate resources to help women newly diagnosed with breast cancer;
  - $43.4 million over four years to phase in a National Bowel Cancer Screening Program; and
  - $4.3 million over three years to provide information to pregnant women about the health implications of smoking during pregnancy; and
- continued funding of $129.7 million over four years to support employment of practice nurses, to general practices in rural areas and other areas of need.

Aged Care

- $66.3 million over five years (including $2.9 million in 2004–05) to exempt accommodation bonds from the assets test.
Superannuation

- $2.5 billion over four years to improve incentives to make additional voluntary superannuation savings by abolishing the superannuation surcharge from contributions and termination payments made or received from 1 July 2005; and

- $17.4 million over four years to allow the splitting of superannuation contributions between eligible couples.

Women’s Leadership and Development

- $15.0 million over four years for the Women’s Leadership and Development Programme to assist in building women’s participation in all parts of Australian life, to continue the focus on capacity building for Australian women and to consult widely with women in the community, including continued support for the National Secretariat model for consultation.

Women’s Safety

- $75.7 million over four years for the Women’s Safety Agenda to enable the Government to continue to take a lead role in eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault in the Australian community. The Agenda will address four broad themes — prevention, health, justice and services.

Working Women/Women in Business

- $2.0 million over the period 2004–05 to 2007–08 to deliver approximately 50 home-based business seminars and setting up home-based business clubs in regional locations;

- introduction of a new Mature Age Worker Tax Offset for workers aged 55 and over;

- $15 million over three years, commencing 2005-06, for the Industry Partnerships Program including industry capacity building initiatives and facilitation of women’s leadership and skill development for the agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries;

- $14 million over five years from 2006–07 to 2010–2011 for Backing Australia’s Ability: Building Our Future Through Science and Innovation, including support for women through grants, scholarships and access to agribusiness development learning tools;

- enhancements to the simplified taxation system to assist small business; and

- $50 million over the period 2004–05 to 2006–07 for the Regulation Reduction Incentive Fund to further encourage the local government sector to introduce reforms that benefit home-based businesses.

Indigenous Women and Housing

- $102.8 million over four years to maintain the real value and improve the effectiveness of the Australian Government’s Indigenous housing investments.
Assistance for Families

30 PER CENT CHILD CARE TAX REBATE

The Government recognises that access to affordable, high quality child care is vital for many families to participate effectively in the workplace. As a result, the Government is introducing a 30 per cent Child Care Tax Rebate which is in addition to the current Child Care Benefit (CCB). This new rebate was a Government election commitment.

The Child Care Tax Rebate will cover 30 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses, that is, fees incurred for approved care less CCB, for families who receive CCB and meet the CCB work/study/training test, up to a maximum of $4,000 per child.

Families can claim the rebate in the tax year after child care expenses have been paid. This means that families will lodge claims for child care expenses paid for in 2004-05 in the 2005–06 tax return. The timing for claiming the rebate is affected by the CCB reconciliation process, as out-of-pocket expenses can only be calculated once the final reconciliation of CCB is completed.

The timing has been constructed to ensure families will receive their correct entitlement without adjustments. It will also minimise taxpayers’ interaction with the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) and Centrelink.

In recognition that the payment will be made in a subsequent year’s tax return, the start date for eligibility has been brought forward from 1 January 2005, as announced in the original policy proposal, to 1 July 2004. This will enable families to claim an extra six months of out-of-pocket costs.

The 30 per cent Child Care Tax Rebate will provide additional child care assistance to around 640,000 families at a total cost of around $1 billion over four years. The rebate will be non-refundable. However, to ensure families obtain the maximum benefit possible, taxpayers with insufficient tax liability to absorb the whole rebate can transfer any unused amount to their spouse.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE – INCREASE IN MAXIMUM RATE FAMILY TAX BENEFIT PART A INCOME THRESHOLD

The Government will provide $1.1 billion over four years to increase the Family Tax Benefit Part A lower income threshold from $33,361 to $37,500 from 1 July 2006.

This measure will assist lower income families, particularly those returning to work, by increasing the amount of earnings they can have before their family assistance is affected.

As a result of this measure, around 400,000 families will receive more Family Tax Benefit Part A, with an average increase of $24 per fortnight.
EXTENDING MATERNITY PAYMENT TO ADOPTED CHILDREN UP TO TWO YEARS

The Government will extend Maternity Payment to families who adopt a child under two years of age (provided Maternity Payment has not already been paid in respect of the child) and to families who adopt a child from overseas who is under two years of age when entering Australia, at a cost of $6.6 million over five years (including $0.5 million in 2004–05). Currently, Maternity Payment is available to families who adopt a child under the age of 26 weeks. This measure will be backdated to include children who were adopted on or after 1 July 2004, which was the date Maternity Payment was introduced.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE — MAINTENANCE INCOME CREDIT

From 1 July 2006, the Government will introduce a new measure to assist parents receiving arrears of child support payments that may cause Family Tax Benefit (FTB) overpayments, at a cost of $54.8 million over four years.

Most child support payees are unable to control when they receive their child support payments and may be disadvantaged if they receive child support arrears in a lump sum. Currently, families who receive arrears of child support from a previous year do not benefit from the free area under the Maintenance Income Test that would have applied if they had received the child support income in the year that it was due.

This measure will allow families to access their unused maintenance income free area from previous years to offset late child support maintenance payments. This measure will also increase the FTB entitlement for those families that receive late child support maintenance payments, as it will ensure that FTB recipients who receive maintenance payments on an irregular basis receive the same level of FTB over time as those receiving maintenance on a regular basis.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE — AUTOMATICALLY UPDATING INCOME ESTIMATES

The Government will provide $18.6 million over four years to improve the process of income estimation. The improved process will help families start the income year with a more accurate income estimate for family assistance payments by improving the process of income estimation. This measure will commence on 1 July 2006 and is expected to reduce overpayments for families by $115.2 million over four years.

When the Family Assistance Office contacts a family prior to the start of each income year, the family will be advised of a default estimate that will be used to calculate their fortnightly payments. This default estimate will be calculated by increasing the family’s existing estimate in line with movements in Average Weekly Earnings (AWE). Families will be invited to provide an alternative estimate if they think the default estimate does not reflect their circumstances.
In addition, to ensure that the default estimate remains in line with the family’s actual income, when the actual income for the previous year becomes known (ie they lodge their Income Tax Returns) the default estimate will be compared with the actual income (increased by AWE), with the higher value used as the default estimate. Families will be advised of any change and have the opportunity to provide an alternative estimate.

**FAMILY ASSISTANCE — IMPROVING DEBT RECOVERY**

The Government will provide $11.4 million over four years to improve the recovery of family assistance overpayments. This measure ensures that families do not face recovery of overpayments over an extended period of time. The measure will reduce outstanding overpayments for families by $135.3 million over four years and include:

- increase the flexible recovery rates for family assistance reconciliation overpayments from $20 per fortnight (for overpayments under $750) to $30 per fortnight and from $40 per fortnight (for overpayments over $750) to $60 per fortnight (to be implemented from 1 July 2006); and
- introduce case management practices for family assistance overpayments greater than $3,000 and over 12 months old (to be implemented from 1 January 2006).

Since the introduction of Family Tax Benefit, family assistance payments have significantly increased. However, the flexible recovery rates have remained unchanged.

Those families who owe larger amounts of money will be referred to specialist recovery officers within Centrelink. These officers will help determine the customer’s real financial capacity and negotiate the most appropriate recovery arrangements.

**FAMILY ASSISTANCE — ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES AT RISK OF OVERPAYMENT**

The Government will provide $8.5 million over four years to increase support to those families who have the most difficulty with correctly estimating their income.

From 1 July 2005, the Family Assistance Office will contact these families and provide them with additional assistance with income estimation, as well as providing information sessions at local community venues about the family assistance system.

This measure, by improving understanding of entitlements and obligations, will benefit family assistance customers by reducing their risk of incurring an overpayment.
FAMILY ASSISTANCE — A NEGOTIATED PAYMENT OPTION TO REDUCE OVERPAYMENTS

The Government will build on the existing More Choice for Families initiative, at a cost of $5.9 million over four years.

Currently, when families increase their income estimate during the year, they are offered the choice of adjusting their ongoing payments by an amount that would, where possible, completely avoid an overpayment. From 1 July 2006, while the Family Assistance Office will continue to strongly encourage families to avoid any potential overpayment by choosing a full adjustment, customers who are reluctant to do so will be able to negotiate a smaller adjustment. This measure is expected to reduce overpayments for families by $160.3 million over four years.

FAMILY ASSISTANCE — USING RECONCILIATION TOP-UP PAYMENTS AND TAX REFUNDS TO OFFSET OUTSTANDING FAMILY ASSISTANCE DEBTS

From 1 July 2006, the Government will use available Family Tax Benefit (FTB) top-ups and income tax refunds to offset existing family assistance overpayments. The measures will cost $4.7 million over four years and are expected to reduce overpayments for families by $47.1 million over four years.

Under the current reconciliation process, tax refunds and reconciliation top-ups are not used to recover family assistance debt incurred in previous years. Under this measure any monies remaining from a recipient’s tax return or FTB reconciliation top-up will be able to be used to offset family assistance debt related to previous years.

NEW INFORMATION ON UNPAID WORK

The Government will provide funding to include questions on unpaid work in the 2006 census. The level of involvement women and men of different ages and living arrangements have in unpaid work in the home will be measured. The census will also measure the numbers of unpaid carers for children and for people with disabilities and the numbers of volunteers working through organisations or groups. This information will provide greater capacity to analyse the contribution of women and men to national wellbeing. It will also assist in the planning of services in local areas, and contribute to an understanding of the strength of local communities.
Reductions in Personal Income Tax

The Government will provide tax cuts worth $21.7 billion over four years.

From 1 July 2005, the 17 per cent marginal tax rate will be reduced to 15 per cent, the 42 per cent threshold will be increased to $63,001 (as announced last Budget) and the 47 per cent threshold will be increased to $95,001 (compared to $80,001 announced last Budget).

A further reduction in tax will be provided from 1 July 2006 when the 42 per cent threshold will be increased to $70,001 and the 47 per cent threshold will be increased to $125,001.

The tax cuts will improve the incentives for all Australian taxpayers to participate in the workforce. They will ensure that more than 80 per cent of taxpayers will face a top marginal tax rate of no more than 30 per cent over the next four years.

Substantially raising the thresholds for the top two marginal tax rates will more closely align Australia’s top threshold with international practice in the OECD.
Assistance for Carers

RECOGNISING SENIOR AUSTRALIANS — THEIR NEEDS AND THEIR CARERS: CARING FOR CARERS

An estimated 475,000 Australians perform the role of informal primary carer of people with disabilities or older people. Over 70 per cent of these carers are women.

Carers have a difficult job. Respite services help carers manage other aspects of their life, so that they are better able to continue in their caring role. This gives carers more choice and delays entry into residential aged care.

As part of the Australian Government’s commitment to carers, $207.6 million over four years will be continued to assist carers with better access to respite services. This delivers on the Government’s election commitment — Recognising Senior Australians — their needs and their carers: caring for carers.

Over four years, this initiative will provide up to 1.3 million additional days of respite care to an estimated 50,000 carers, providing them with an average of 26 days of respite care per year, in a number of respite settings.

This initiative comprises four measures.

Respite care to assist employed carers
Carers in paid employment and carers re-entering the workforce will benefit from an increase in the number of respite services available, through funding of $95.5 million over four years. This will include increasing the funding to Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres, enabling day respite centres for older Australians to extend their hours of operation.

Residential respite funding boost
Funding for residential respite will be boosted $41.8 million over four years. This will provide more high care respite in aged care homes, to enable carers to take a break from their demanding carer role.

Overnight respite in community respite houses
The Government will increase overnight respite in community respite houses by providing $61.0 million for Commonwealth Carer Respite Centres to purchase extra overnight respite in community homes, particularly in areas where such options are limited. The funding will also support the development of specific standards and reporting requirements for community respite houses, to ensure older people in respite care receive the quality care they need.

Increase Rural and Regional Respite Services
The capacity of these services will be increased to provide access to flexible respite services tailored to meet demand specific to rural and remote areas, through $9.3 million funding over four years to Multipurpose Services.
PAYMENT OF A ONE-OFF CARER BONUS
The Government will provide $316.9 million over two years to provide a one-off lump sum payment to eligible carers.
A payment of $1,000 will be made to carers in receipt of Carer Payment. Recipients of Carer Allowance will receive a payment of $600 for each eligible care receiver. The payment will be automatically made to the majority of eligible carers by 30 June 2005.
These payments are being made in recognition of the contribution of people who provide substantial care for a person with a disability or the frail aged.

CARER ALLOWANCE — STANDARDISE BACKDATING PROVISIONS
From 1 July 2006, backdating provisions for Carer Allowance will be standardised to allow for a maximum period of 12 weeks prior to the claim lodgement date by carers of both adults and children. This will remove inequities in the current arrangements and reduce confusion about the different backdating rules that currently exist. This measure will result in a net saving of $107.6 million over four years.

LISTS OF RECOGNISED DISABILITIES IN ASSESSING CARER ALLOWANCE
The Government will provide $3.4 million over five years (including $0.7 million in 2004–05) to add new conditions and modify some of the disability or medical condition eligibility descriptors in the Lists of Recognised Disabilities. The expanded Lists, to be implemented from 1 July 2005, will benefit customers and medical practitioners by making it easier for people caring for children with eligible disabilities or medical conditions to be fast-tracked to receive Carer Allowance.
The Lists of Recognised Disabilities were introduced in July 1998 and are used in the assessment of eligibility for Carer Allowance for carers of children under 16 years of age with a disability or medical condition. The Lists identify conditions (disability or medical) that fast-track eligibility for Carer Allowance. Where a child has a condition on the Lists, the child will not be required to have a further medical assessment until they turn 16 years of age.
A NEW FAMILY LAW SYSTEM

The Government will provide new services to help families who are experiencing relationship difficulties or have separated. Central to the Government’s initiatives is a new network of 65 Family Relationship Centres to be established over three years. The centres will provide a range of information and referral to services that can help prevent family separation or help deal with separation. The centres will also provide advice about the family law system, including the development of parenting plans and help parents to reach agreement on parenting arrangements after family separation. The centres will be supported by a national advice telephone line and web-site. An important role of the centres will be to screen for cases in order to identify family violence or child abuse and to refer those cases to support services, child protection agencies and/or the courts.

Other services to assist families have also been expanded. These include early intervention services such as additional family relationship education services and 35 counselling and family relationship skills training services. Fifteen additional services under the Contact Orders Program and 30 additional children’s contact services will assist parents who are having ongoing difficulties with contact arrangements with their children following separation.

The new reform package is in response to the report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, Every picture tells a story. The Government will also be introducing amendments to the Family Law Act 1975 later this year. The reforms will be supported by a community education campaign. The total cost of the reforms is $397.2 million over four years.
The 2005–06 Budget includes $3.6 billion over four years for a package of measures to assist people to move from welfare to work. The package includes a range of elements to support people to become less dependent on welfare and to participate in the workforce, including support for parents.

HELPING PARENTS BACK INTO WORK: MORE ASSISTANCE AND NEW REQUIREMENTS

The Welfare to Work package includes extra assistance to help parents become less dependent on welfare and to participate in the workforce. The changes apply from 1 July 2006 and affect income support arrangements, participation requirements and employment services for lone and partnered parents on income support who are the primary carers for their school-aged children. These changes are designed to support and encourage parents to return to work when their children are old enough to go to school.

There are significant enhancements to Job Network and improved access to other services for parents. A new Employment Preparation service will be introduced within Job Network to help parents on income support. Employment Preparation will equip parents with skills to re-enter the workforce and will be available on an unlimited basis for parents on income support. In addition, up to 5,000 Employment Preparation places a year will be available for parents not on income support.

Parents will receive a guarantee that Job Network help will be tailored to their individual needs and workforce experience through a ‘Service Guarantee for Parents’.

Parents with special needs will continue to be referred to specialist services like the Disability Open Employment Service, Personal Support Programme or the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service.

There are also important changes to income support arrangements, for people newly claiming income support, depending on the age of the children of parents receiving income support. From 1 July 2006, parents whose youngest child is aged six to 15 will be eligible for a Newstart Allowance payment that will have a new more generous income taper. Single parents on Newstart will also receive the Pharmaceutical Allowance and Pensioner Concession Card. The payment is designed to support and encourage parents to take up part-time work when their youngest child is of school age, while also ensuring that parents retain the important benefit of the concession card.

New claimants whose youngest child is under six will receive Parenting Payment until their youngest child turns six and they will then transfer to Newstart Allowance. Single and partnered parents already receiving Parenting Payment on 1 July 2006, whose youngest child is six or older, will remain eligible for Parenting Payment.
From 1 July 2006, parents newly claiming income support whose youngest child is aged from six to 15 will be required to work part-time, search for part-time work or undertake suitable activities to prepare to return to work. These new requirements will be introduced from 1 July 2007 for current Parenting Payment recipients. Requirements will be tailored to the individual and family circumstances.

CHILD CARE MEASURES TO SUPPORT WELFARE REFORM

The Government will provide a package of child care assistance at an estimated cost of $266 million over four years, as part of the Welfare to Work package, to help parents make the transition from welfare to employment, education and training opportunities.

This measure is in addition to the Government’s existing significant support for child care through Child Care Benefit (CCB), the Child Care Tax Rebate and the Child Care Support Program. The Government’s investment through these programmes will exceed $9 billion over the next four years.

The elements of the new child care package are:

• 84,300 additional Outside School Hours Care, 2,500 Family Day Care and 1,000 In-Home Care places will be established throughout Australia over four years;
• further support will be available through Jobs Education and Training (JET) Child Care for an additional 52,000 low income customers to meet the “gap” in child care fees. This will ensure that child care costs are not a barrier for parents making the transition from income support to employment;
• a package providing practical support will be introduced to help some parents return to the workforce as Family Day Care workers. This will include grants to Family Day Care workers, more Vocational Education and Training places for parents and older workers, and a communication package to address the shortage of child care workers;
• support will be provided for the establishment of new services through the Child Care Support Program; and
• improvements will be made to the work/study/training test for CCB. The base level of participation required by each parent to satisfy the work test will be increased to around 15 hours per week. However, the number of hours per week of CCB a family will be eligible for without meeting the work test will be increased from 20 to 24 hours.
INVESTING IN STRONGER REGIONS: ENABLING PRACTICE NURSES TO TAKE PAP SMEARS

As part of the *Investing in Stronger Regions* policy, the Government has committed $17.8 million over five years to expand Medicare by enabling practice nurses to take pap smears on behalf of the general practitioner.

From 1 January 2005, a Medicare rebate became available for pap smears that are taken by a practice nurse on behalf of a GP in a regional, rural or remote area.

Some women in rural and regional communities do not have the option of seeing a female medical practitioner and may be uncomfortable with having a male doctor perform a pap smear. By supporting practice nurses to take pap smears, more women will be able to access this vital health check.

This initiative builds on the existing Medicare items for immunisations and wound management provided by a practice nurse and will further help to free up GPs for other clinical tasks that need their attention.

HEALTHY FOR LIFE PROGRAM

The Government’s commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers, children and families is strengthened in this Budget. The *Healthy for Life Program* provides $102.4 million over four years to improve the health of Indigenous mothers, babies and children, leading ultimately to reductions in adult chronic disease and death in Indigenous communities.

The programme will expand best practice initiatives in maternal and child health and chronic disease. It includes a workforce component designed to increase the number of Indigenous Australians with professional health qualifications to, build the skill base of Indigenous communities to improve local service delivery and employment prospects.

NATIONAL DEPRESSION INITIATIVE, BEYONDBLUE

In 2000, the Government announced funding for the National Depression Initiative. The initiative aimed to destigmatise depression and get professional help to sufferers more quickly.

In its 2004 Election policy, *Mental Health — Tackling Depression*, the Government included a commitment to provide beyondblue with a further $39.6 million over five years to continue and expand its important work in changing community attitudes, supporting early intervention, encouraging research and improving services for people with depression.
Depression is a leading cause of illness and disability. It is a major health issue for women in particular. More than 500,000 adult Australian women experience depressive illness each year, over 60 per cent of all sufferers. Around 7.4 per cent of Australian women experience depression. One in ten young women aged 18 to 24 years is significantly affected. With the additional 2004 Election commitment funding, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Depression and Mental Health, rural communities, programmes and projects targeting Depression in the Workplace and the National Postnatal Depression Program will benefit from expanded and strengthened projects.

Postnatal depression affects about 14 per cent of women giving birth and recent evidence suggests that many women may in fact be depressed in pregnancy. Beyondblue has developed a National Postnatal Depression Program which, to date, has screened over 20,000 women for postnatal depression. The new funding over 2004-08 will enable beyondblue to continue its National Postnatal Depression Program. This programme is a world first in its establishment of a database evaluating the mental health of women during pregnancy and early parenthood, and providing resources for women at risk of postnatal depression.

DEMENTIA — A NATIONAL HEALTH PRIORITY

Approximately 185,000 older Australian’s have dementia, the majority of whom are women. With the rapid growth in the aged population over the next few decades, improving understanding of dementia and providing the right care will continue to be a priority.

The Australian Government’s election commitment Dementia — a National Health Priority will provide a focus for collaboration between governments and other organisations to improve health outcomes for people living with dementia.

In response to this commitment, the Government is providing total funding of $320.6 million over five years:

- $52.2 million over four years (commencing in 2004–05) was announced by the Minister for Ageing in February 2005, for dementia research, new dementia management services, improved training of health professionals and new tools and guidelines to help GPs, as well as prevention and early intervention initiatives. New memory centres, communication programmes and education will help people with dementia and their carers better understand the condition and how they should handle it. An additional $16.6 million extends funding to 2008–09, together with $1.8 million over five years for the administration of the initiative;
• $225.1 million over four years for 2,000 new Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) places for people with dementia and complex care needs. EACH provides high-level residential care in the home for frail older people. Care is coordinated and tailored to meet the needs of each person. About a third of EACH clients have dementia and the creation of 2,000 new EACH dementia places will provide more care to more people with dementia in their homes; and

• $25.0 million over four years to provide training for aged care workers and people in the community likely to come into contact with people with dementia, expanding the current Carer Education and Workforce Training project. It will provide dementia specific training for up to 9,000 community care staff and residential care workers and for up to 7,000 extra carers and community workers, such as police, emergency services and transport staff.

The Extended Aged Care at Home (EACH) Program provides high level residential care in the home for frail older people. Care is coordinated and tailored to meet the needs of each person. New dementia service and assessment guidelines will help care providers and Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACATs) get the EACH Dementia packages to the right people. Training in dementia assessment and care will be provided for EACH aged care workers and ACATs.

Providing dementia training to health and aged care workers as well as community workers such as police, emergency services and transport workers will not only contribute to better care, but help improve community understanding and acceptance of this widespread condition.

**STRENGTHENING CANCER CARE**

The Australian Government recently reaffirmed its commitment to reducing the burden of cancer by announcing the Strengthening Cancer Care Initiative. Strengthening Cancer Care provides funding to ensure better coordination of the national cancer effort, more research funding for cancer care, enhanced cancer prevention and screening programmes, and better support and treatment for those living with cancer.

There are several components of the Strengthening Cancer Care Initiative that have a primary focus on women’s health.

The Government will provide $17.6 million over four years to establish a dedicated cancer research budget with initial priorities including screening programmes; early detection of breast and ovarian cancers; the application of emerging new treatments and technologies, particularly for bowel and prostate cancer; and improvements in cancer outcomes through better coordination.

The Government has committed $1.0 million over four years to the Breast Cancer Network Australia to assist with the further development and dissemination of resources to help women newly diagnosed with breast cancer.
The Government’s Strengthening Cancer Care package includes $43.4 million over four years to build towards a full National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.

A recent report from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare shows that bowel cancer is the second most common cancer in women, with over 40 women dying of the disease each week. A national, coordinated bowel cancer screening programme will aim to reduce mortality and morbidity from bowel cancer. This measure will enhance prevention and early detection of cancer through the phasing in of a National Bowel Cancer Screening Program.

As part of the Government’s election commitment, an investment of $4.3 million over three years will be provided to assist in reducing maternal smoking rates. This programme will aim to reduce parental smoking, which, in turn, will reduce the adverse health consequences for babies and children. The programme will encourage doctors, midwives and Indigenous health workers to give advice to pregnant women about the damage caused by smoking. The funding will be used to enhance smoking and pregnancy education both in hospitals and General Practitioner settings.

Cigarette smoking can result in difficulties becoming pregnant, and pregnancy complications including miscarriage and birthing difficulties, and problems for the infant. Smoking during pregnancy increases the risks for both the woman and the baby. While the desire to become pregnant and pregnancy itself is a powerful motivational factor for women to quit there are women who smoke throughout the pregnancy and many women who quit during the pregnancy, start smoking again within a year of the baby’s birth. The Government will work closely with relevant professional and community organisations to ensure the successful implementation of this programme.

ADDITIONAL PRACTICE NURSES FOR RURAL AUSTRALIA AND OTHER AREAS OF NEED

The Australian Government has committed to continue providing grants to support employment of practice nurses, to general practices in rural areas and other areas of need. The grants are made available to practices enrolled in the Practice Incentive Program, and will total $129.7 million over four years to 2008-09.

The role of the nurse in general practice will be enhanced by other programmes being introduced by the Australian Government. This includes a new role for practice nurses as contacts for domestic violence victims, and in providing cervical screening to women in rural and regional areas.
The Government will provide $66.3 million over five years (including $2.9 million in 2004–05) to exempt accommodation bonds from the assets tests. From 1 July 2005, the refundable balance of all lump sum accommodation bonds, paid on entry to residential aged care, will be exempt from the social security and veterans’ entitlements assets tests. The exemption applies regardless of when the bond was paid or when the resident entered aged care.

Assistance will also be provided to aged care residents who pay their accommodation bond periodically or through a mix of lump sum and periodic payments:

- residents who pay their accommodation bond partially or wholly by periodic payments will be able to rent out their former home, without the rental income or the value of their former home affecting their rate of pension.
ABOLISHING THE SUPERANNUATION SURCHARGE

The Government will abolish the surcharge payable on individuals’ surchargeable contributions and termination payments, with effect from 1 July 2005, at a cost of $2.5 billion over four years.

Currently, the surcharge is payable on individuals’ surchargeable contributions where their adjusted taxable incomes exceed $99,710. The termination payments surcharge is also payable on parts of certain employment-related termination payments that are not rolled over into a superannuation fund.

The Government previously announced an intention to reduce the surcharge to 10 per cent in 2005–06 and 7.5 per cent in 2006–07. The Government has decided to abolish the surcharge rather than continue to phase it down to avoid a situation where compliance and administrative costs would become disproportionate to collections.

As a result of this measure, from 1 July 2005, the surcharge will no longer apply in respect of superannuation benefits that accrue, contributions made or termination payments received from that date.

This measure will simplify the operation of the superannuation system, boost the savings of affected individuals, and provide incentives for individuals to make additional voluntary savings through the superannuation system.

SPLITTING OF SUPERANNUATION

The Government has committed $17.4 million over four years in order to allow the splitting of superannuation contributions for contributions made on or after 1 July 2006. In its 2004 election policy document, Super for All and Understanding Money, the Government recommitted to its policy of allowing eligible couples to split their employer and personal superannuation contributions with their spouse.

The provision of splitting to fund members will be voluntary for superannuation funds. This change to the original splitting model, which proposed mandatory provision, addresses concerns expressed by the industry that some funds will be forced to provide splitting where few or no members have an interest in this being utilised.
THE WOMEN’S LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

The Government will provide $15.0 million over four years for the Women’s Leadership and Development Programme. This programme delivers on the Australian Government’s election commitment to build women’s participation in all parts of Australian life, to continue its focus on capacity building for Australian women and to consult widely with women in the community.

This programme builds women’s capacity to take on greater leadership responsibilities, funds communication and consultation activities with women’s groups, funds capacity building and commissions research on issues relevant to women.

Consultation

The Government will continue to listen to the views of Australian women and consult widely on issues of relevance to them. The Government will also continue to support the National Secretariat model for consultation.

Capacity Building

The Government will focus on capacity building for Australian women in the following ways:

• continuing to build on the increasing number of women on Australian Government Boards as well as encouraging the appointment of women to public company boards;

• developing a Young Women’s Leadership and Mentoring Programme to link young women in local community groups with high-achieving women from their communities as well as targeting personal development, goal-setting and governance skills;

• encouraging the involvement of women and girls in all aspects of sport leadership by doubling the funding available to develop these skills through grants to women in rural and remote areas, Indigenous women, women in disability sport and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;

• providing strong ongoing support to national non-government organisations through project grants; and

• promoting women’s fitness through the establishment of a pilot walking programme to be conducted in locations across Australia and the distribution of Women’s Active Living Kits.

Communication

Through a range of activities the Australian Government will continue to showcase and celebrate the achievements of Australian women. This will occur through staging major events, such as International Women’s Day, and maintaining a range of publications, and websites that provide useful information to women.
Research and Commissioned Work

The Australian Government will continue to undertake research or commission work in fields that are of relevance to Australian women.

The Women's Leadership and Development Programme consolidates and replaces four previous programmes: Other Women's Programmes, Informed Choices for Australian Women, Women's Development Programme and the National Leadership Initiative.

These initiatives will be delivered by the Australian Government's Office for Women in the Department of Family and Community Services.
THE WOMEN’S SAFETY AGENDA

The Government has committed $75.7 million over four years to the Women’s Safety Agenda. The Women’s Safety Agenda delivers on the Government’s election commitment to continue to take a lead role in eliminating domestic violence and sexual assault in the Australian community.

The Women’s Safety Agenda addresses four broad themes — prevention, health, justice and services. Together they aim to decrease the impacts of domestic violence and sexual assault upon the community by building on the achievements of the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence initiative and the National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault, increasing attention on preventing violence and early intervention and support for those affected by violence.

The measure will include:

- **rerunning the successful national Violence Against Women. Australia Says No campaign.** This national multimedia campaign will build on the success of the campaign run in 2004 and will increase community awareness of the issues of domestic violence and sexual assault. Through a 24-hour help line, the campaign will provide practical assistance to those experiencing violence, friends and family who want to know what they can do to help, and assistance to those wanting to change their violent behaviour;

- **continued funding for the Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse and the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault.** These national resource centres will continue to provide central points for the collection and dissemination of Australian domestic and family violence and sexual assault policy, practice and research;

- **research projects on domestic violence and sexual assault.** This element will fund research and pilot projects concerning domestic violence and sexual assault in the Australian community. It will enhance previously developed research and good practice;

- **training for nurses in regional and rural areas.** Practice nurses in regional and rural areas will receive training to assist them to identify and respond to domestic violence and doctors will receive assistance to release the nurses for this training. This will give people in regional areas access to a personal and confidential referral service;

- **training for the criminal justice sector on sexual assault.** This element will develop training for the legal sector to ensure that it is attuned to the sensitivities that accompany women’s experiences of sexual assault. Research has highlighted the important role of the criminal justice sector in determining whether a victim of sexual assault proceeds through the legal system;
• **dedicated resource at the Australian Institute of Criminology.** This will continue the valuable research programme on various aspects of sexual assault; and

• **Mensline.** This funding recognises the demand on Mensline’s services that will be generated through the re-running of the *Violence Against Women. Australia Says No* campaign and will provide counsellors at Mensline with training and materials on domestic violence.

These initiatives will be coordinated by the Australian Government’s Office for Women in the Department of Family and Community Services.
Working Women/Women in Business

HOME BASED BUSINESS SEMINARS AND CLUBS
The Australian Government has committed $2.0 million over the period 2004–05 to 2007–08 to delivering approximately 50 home-based business seminars and setting up home-based business clubs in regional locations. This proposal will encourage home-based businesses to gain the skills and knowledge necessary for innovation and growth. This proposal also provides networking opportunities.

The home-based business sector is a significant proportion of the small business sector (67.5 per cent in June 2004). The need for greater workplace flexibility and the emergence of enabling technologies have contributed to the growth of this sector in recent times. In 2004, there were an estimated 304,200 female home-based business operators, with 62 per cent of these between the ages of 30 and 50 years.

MATURE AGE WORKER TAX OFFSET
The Government has announced that a new Mature Age Worker Tax Offset will be available to workers aged 55 and over. The offset will provide a maximum annual tax rebate of $500 with effect from the 2004–05 income year. This measure is a Government election commitment.

To be eligible for the offset, a person must have income from working, such as wages and salaries, or business income. Income from working does not include passive types of income such as rent, interest, superannuation, social security payments or capital gains. However, receipt of passive income does not disqualify an individual who receives income from working from receiving the offset.

The offset will phase in from the first dollar of net income from working, with the full offset being available to all mature age workers when net income from working reaches $10,000. The offset will phase out from $48,000, so that no offset is available when net income from working exceeds $58,000. In 2005–06 and beyond, both thresholds will increase so that mature age workers with net income from working of up to $63,000 will receive some offset.

THE INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAM
$15 million over three years, commencing 2005-06, is available under the Industry Partnerships Program and will include a comprehensive range of industry capacity building initiatives, in particular the facilitation of leadership and skill development amongst young people, women and Indigenous people, to further contribute to the future success of agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries.
BACKING AUSTRALIA’S ABILITY: BUILDING OUR FUTURE THROUGH SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

In 2005–06, support to women will continue through grants, scholarships and access to agribusiness development learning tools. The New Industries Development Program has been extended under the successor package Backing Australia’s Ability: Building Our Future Through Science and Innovation with funding of $14 million over five years from 2006–07 to 2010–11.

WOMEN IN SMALL BUSINESS

The Government is making a number of enhancements to the Simplified Taxation System (STS) to assist small business. Women account for 33 per cent of Australia’s 1.6 million small business operators.

The Government has introduced a 25 per cent entrepreneurs’ tax offset on the income tax liability attributable to the business income of certain small businesses in the STS. The full 25 per cent offset will be available for STS businesses that have an annual turnover of $50,000 or less. The offset will phase out for STS businesses with annual turnover between $50,001 and $75,000. The offset will provide further incentive and encouragement to small businesses, particularly those that set up and operate from home.

In addition, the Government has removed the requirement that taxpayers in the STS must use a cash accounting basis for calculating taxable income. This measure will enable more businesses to access the benefits of the STS as they will now have the flexibility to calculate their taxable income using the accounting method most appropriate to their circumstances.

The Government also proposes to reduce the period for amendment of assessments of small businesses in the STS from four years to two years, subject to certain exclusions. This measure will give about 745,000 small businesses earlier certainty as to their income tax liability.

REGULATION REDUCTION INCENTIVE FUND

To further encourage the local government sector to press ahead with regulatory reforms that specifically benefit home-based businesses, the Government has committed $50 million for the Regulation Reduction Incentive Fund (RRIF). Local Governments will compete for payments from the Fund based on their proposals to reduce regulatory complexity and compliance requirements for the home-based business sector. Other than a small amount allocated for a number of demonstration projects in 2004–05, the $50 million RRIF funding will be distributed in 2005–06 and 2006–07.
Indigenous Women and Housing

ADDRESSING INDIGENOUS NEEDS — HEALTHY INDIGENOUS HOUSING — CONTINUATION

From 1 July 2005, the Government will provide $102.8 million over four years to maintain the real value and improve the effectiveness of the Australian Government’s Indigenous housing investments. The funding will support a number of “healthy housing” initiatives and further consolidate the Government’s targeting of community housing needs in rural and remote communities. The focus of the measure will:

• encourage reform of Indigenous community housing through improved governance and asset and tenancy management practices on an ongoing basis;

• based on the principles of “shared responsibility” and building capacity in local communities, continue a programme of involving Indigenous households and communities in assessing and repairing up to 500 houses per year in around 15 communities; and

• continue to deliver Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Programme (AACAP) projects in at least one community per year as a positive demonstration of practical reconciliation.
Women and their Families

CHILD CARE
Support for child care strengthens families by allowing parents to participate more fully, both economically and socially, in the community. Access to quality, affordable child care is essential for parents trying to balance work and family responsibilities. Mothers in particular want to know that they have choices about child care arrangements, whether they are currently combining paid work with caring for children or are considering returning to the workforce in the future.

Child care also benefits children (including those children with additional needs) by providing them with opportunities for learning in a social environment and quality educational experiences.

Child Care Support
The Australian Government, through the four funding streams of the Child Care Support Program, supports a diverse range of child care services including: centre-based long day care; family day care; Jobs, Education and Training (JET) child care services, in-home care; outside school hours care and vacation care; occasional care services; and a range of services for rural, remote and Indigenous communities.

The underlying principles of the Child Care Support Program are: equity in the distribution of resources according to need; accessible and transparent planning and performance assessment processes; capacity for flexibility, responsiveness and innovation; efficiency in achieving outcomes; and a focus on outcomes for families and children.

Child Care Services in Rural, Regional and Indigenous Communities
In rural and remote areas, families often have fewer child care choices than their city counterparts and it is important that wherever possible, services in these areas are given additional support. Almost $10 million in additional funding in 2004–05 is being provided to rural, regional and Indigenous communities for child care services under the Child Care Support Program. Children in Indigenous areas often face physical barriers in accessing services and this funding will assist in making child care more accessible for these isolated communities. A number of these projects will be developed under the shared responsibility framework between the Howard Government and Indigenous communities to improve outcomes for Indigenous families and children.

Through the Long Day Care Incentive Scheme and its predecessor, the Private Provider Incentive programme, over $800,000 in funding is being provided in 2004–05 in the form of short term incentives to community based and private child care providers to establish long day care centres in rural and urban fringe areas of high, unmet demand.
Child Care Benefit

Child Care Benefit (CCB) is a payment to assist families with the cost of child care. The amount of CCB to which a family is entitled depends upon family income, number of children in care, the number of hours of care and the type of care used. Families on the lowest incomes receive the highest rate of assistance when using Australian Government approved child care services. The CCB rate is gradually reduced as assessed family income increases, to the point where families receive the minimum rate. Families using registered care can receive minimum CCB.

During the September quarter 2004, over 536,500 families received CCB as fee relief. Of these, about 36 per cent received maximum rates of CCB and about 17 per cent received minimum rates of CCB. Since the payment was introduced on 1 July 2000, over 1 million families have been assisted. The average amount of CCB received in 2003–04 (based on pre-reconciliation data) was $2,046 per family, or $1,406 per child.

Outside School Hours Care

Outside school hours care provides quality care for school children before and after school, on pupil free days and during school holidays. In 2004–05 the Australian Government is providing over $9 million for the establishment of new services and subsidies to providers in disadvantaged areas to support Outside School Hours Care services.

Family Day Care

Family day care provides care for children in a home environment and offers flexible care, including long day, part-time and casual care. Funding includes an operational subsidy for providers of additional places. In 2004–05, the Government is providing funding of over $68 million in Operational Subsidy to support Family Day Care services.

JET Child Care

Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Child Care provides flexible child care assistance to jobless parents wishing to undertake study, work or job search activities to help them to enter or re-enter the workforce. JET Child Care can help meet the cost of child care by paying most of the “gap fee” — the difference between the full child care fee and Child Care Benefit (CCB). In addition, JET crèches are run alongside training courses for targeted groups, for example teenage parents, and in rural, remote and Indigenous areas where child care is not otherwise available.
MORE PLAYGROUPS

Playgroups are community-based initiatives involving parents, carers and their children who are under school age, meeting together regularly to share experiences and help their children learn through play. Playgroups provide opportunities for children’s social, emotional, physical and intellectual development, while also providing support networks for parents and carers.

In 2004, the Government provided funding of $11.3 million over four years (2004–2008) to establish and support around 4,200 additional playgroups across Australia.

STRONGER FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES STRATEGY REFOCUS ON EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Stronger Families and Communities Strategy is an Australian Government initiative giving families, their children and communities a chance to build a better future.

In 2004, the Government committed to continue and refocus the Strategy which now has a stronger emphasis on improving early childhood outcomes and expands on the Government’s commitment to early childhood. Total funding for the Strategy is now $490 million to 2009.

The Strategy comprises four components.

Communities for Children where a facilitating non-government organisation will be engaged to work with local stakeholders to plan and deliver early childhood development strategies.

Early Childhood: Invest to Grow will support the roll-out of successful and developing early childhood programmes focused on early intervention and fund the development of resources or tools for parents, community groups and professionals working in the area of early childhood.

Local Answers will support local, small-scale initiatives that are developed by local organisations. A diverse range of projects will be funded, from family and relationships, to mentoring, leadership, volunteering and community building. The Strategy focuses on opportunities that communities can create for themselves, in partnership with local government, business and community organisations. In addition, $14.6 million for 2004–09 has been provided for Volunteer Small Equipment Grants of up to $3,000 each which are available to local community organisations for the purchase of equipment.

Choice and Flexibility in Child Care will continue the work of the first Strategy in providing innovative and flexible child care solutions. It will expand the in-home care initiative to help families who have no other child care options, provide incentives to establish long day care centres in areas of high demand and will continue to support the Quality Assurance System.
NATIONAL AGENDA FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Australian Government announced the development of the National Agenda for Early Childhood in November 2002 in recognition of international evidence about early childhood, emerging issues for children, and the need for a more holistic approach to prevention and early intervention service delivery across sectors.

The aim of the National Agenda is to give all children the best possible start in life so that they develop the foundations to reach their physical, emotional, intellectual and creative potential. It has an emphasis on supporting the role of parents, in recognition of their primary role as a child's first and most influential carer and teacher.

The draft framework National Agenda is currently being finalised with state and territory governments to provide a guide for working together to achieve common goals and outcomes for Australian children within respective roles and responsibilities.

Four key action areas are proposed, covering healthy young families, early learning and care, supporting families and parents, and creating child-friendly communities.

The National Agenda seeks to strengthen the system of services and support available for young children and their families, and maximise current and future investment through greater coordination across health, early education and care and welfare sectors, within and across the levels of government, and non-government organisations.

FAMILY TAX BENEFIT

Family Tax Benefit Part A (FTB(A)) provides families with general assistance towards the costs of children. Individuals may choose to receive Family Tax Benefit: either through Centrelink as a fortnightly or a lump sum payment; through the taxation system as a lump sum payment after the end of the income year or as reduced taxation withholdings during the income year. The payment is income tested on the family's income.

Family Tax Benefit Part B provides extra assistance to families with only one main income earner (including sole parent families). The payment is income tested on the secondary earner's taxable income.

On 1 July 2004, to the Government increased FTB(A) by providing a $600 per child supplement each year and reduced the withdrawal rate between the maximum and base rates of FTB(A) from 30 per cent to 20 per cent.
MATERNITY PAYMENT

Maternity Payment is a universal, flat rate payment for each new child born which assists with the costs associated with the birth or adoption of a baby.

Since 1 July 2004, new mothers have received a non-means tested Maternity Payment of $3,000 (indexed to $3,042 from September 2004). From 1 July 2006 the rate of the Maternity Payment will increase to $4,000 and to $5,000 from 1 July 2008.

MATERNITY IMMUNISATION ALLOWANCE

The Maternity Immunisation Allowance is a non-means tested one-off lump sum paid for children fully immunized at 18 months. As at 20 March 2005, the Maternity Immunisation Allowance was $216.20.

HOUSEHOLD ORGANISATIONAL MANAGEMENT EXPENSES ADVICE PROGRAM

In the 2004–05 Budget the Australian Government committed $10.4 million over four years to the Household Organisation Management Expenses (HOME) Advice Program, building on the success of the earlier 2000–01 Budget measure — the Family Homelessness Prevention and Early Intervention Pilot.

The HOME Advice Program identifies families at risk of homelessness and provides early assistance to prevent family homelessness occurring. Community agencies and Centrelink work in partnership to provide services to families at risk of homelessness, to stabilise their housing, economic, social and community circumstances in eight locations — one in each state and territory.

Community organisations delivering the HOME Advice Program can assist clients with a range of issues, including:

- resolving tenancy issues;
- budgeting and financial issues;
- family counselling;
- training and education;
- barriers to employment;
- legal issues;
- parenting skills;
- support for children; and
- information and advocacy.
DEFENCE PERSONNEL AND THEIR FAMILIES

The Australian Defence Force has a highly mobile workforce, with approximately 17,000 members and their families posted annually. The Defence Community Organisation manages a number of programmes to assist Defence spouses and families.

The Family Support Funding Program supports local initiatives and enables Defence families to undertake support projects which assist in reducing some of the difficulties of military life, particularly mobility and separation. The Services Workforce Access Programs for Partners was launched in October 2003 to assist Defence partners to become job-ready and access the local workforce market when they relocate on posting. Professional Registration Expense Payments provides assistance with the payment of re-registration fees and short upgrade or pre-registration courses for Defence spouses who, as a result of a posting, move to a different state or territory and incur a professional registration cost. This has assisted nurses, allied health professionals, teachers, accountants, lawyers, hospitality workers and real estate agents.

The Defence Child Care Program aims to ensure Defence families have access to high quality, affordable child care, regardless of their posting locality, through community-based Defence-sponsored programmes. The programme currently provides 1,352 places in centres across Australia.

Defence School Transition Aides were introduced into schools with significant Defence populations in July 2001 to assist children and families to make a smooth transition between schools and provide a link for Defence families moving into a new education system. In 2005, 81 part-time Aides are employed nationally.

A range of measures to assist Defence families with special needs came into effect in 1998. The measures include formal recognition of the special needs, a pre-posting visit for families with special needs; assistance to acquire special equipment, respite and therapy services and appropriate accommodation. These measures are designed to minimise the disruption of services to families with special needs on posting.
Carers

CARER PAYMENT — FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CARERS
As part of its election commitments, the Government has introduced more flexibility for Carer Payment customers by increasing the time a carer can work, train or study, without losing eligibility for payment from 20 to 25 hours per week. This change came into effect from 1 April 2005. It is expected that the majority of carers who will benefit from this measure will be women.

CARER ALLOWANCE — EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
From 1 April 2005, the Government has extended eligibility for Carer Allowance to carers who provide substantial levels of care but do not currently live with the person for whom they provide care. These carers provide personal care in a private home to people with a disability or a severe medical condition, or to people who are frail aged.

Over 75 per cent of carers who currently receive Carer Allowance are women. It is therefore expected that the majority of carers who will benefit from this measure will be women.

OLDER CARERS — INCREASED ACCESS TO RESPITE CARE
From 1 January 2005, the Government has increased respite services for ageing parents who care for a child with a disability. Parents aged 70 years and over who provide primary care for a child with a disability are now eligible for four weeks respite each year, while parents aged 65 to 69 years who care for an adult child with a disability are eligible for two weeks respite each year if they (the parent) need to spend time in hospital.

YOUNG CARERS — RESPITE AND INFORMATION SERVICES
As of 1 January 2005, young carers at risk of prematurely leaving school, or the vocational equivalent, have been provided with additional respite, support and information services.

Young carers have access to up to five hours in-home respite per week during the school term and can have access to one fortnight of respite care each year to undertake activities such as studying for exams, training or recreation. In addition, young carers are able to access age-appropriate information, advice and referral services including an information network, a hotline and on-line advice.
Healthy Women

BREAST CANCER
The Australian Government assists women with breast cancer through a number of treatment and support initiatives.

Breast cancer is the most common cause of cancer-related death in women in Australia. A total of 2,594 women died from breast cancer in Australia in 2001. Breast cancer is the second most common cancer among Australian women, after non-melanoma skin cancer. In Australia in 2001 a total of 11,791 women were diagnosed with breast cancer.

National Breast Cancer Centre
The National Breast Cancer Centre is the main organisation through which the Government delivers its breast cancer control programme. The Centre has successfully developed and implemented an evidence-based approach, worked in partnership with consumers, clinicians, cancer organisations and other levels of government, and has trialled and evaluated innovative approaches to improved health services. It has improved the management and treatment of breast cancer, monitoring outcomes and disseminating information to women and health professionals. In 2004, additional funding of $3.1 million over four years was announced as part of the Strengthening Cancer Care package. Additional funding is aimed at supporting improved quality of care, to raise awareness about early detection and to identify improved approaches to early detection. This brings the Australian Government's annual commitment to the Centre up to approximately $2.9 million per annum for the management of breast cancer.

Support services for women with breast cancer
As part of improving support for women living with cancer, $50,000 in sponsorship funds was provided to the Breast Cancer Network Australia for the 2nd National Breast Cancer Conference for Women in 2004. The Breast Cancer Network Australia was also funded for the launch and implementation of the "My Journey Kit" nationally in May 2004. The Kit provides women newly diagnosed with breast cancer with immediate access to relevant and easy to comprehend information, contacts, services and support from a credible source.

The Government has also committed to support the development of cancer support networks as part of the Strengthening Cancer Care package through small grants of up to $90,000 for support groups.

The Support Services for women with Breast Cancer programme provides $1 million per year to assist women in rural and regional areas where geographic isolation and limited contact with specialist health care workers may impede access to the full range of treatment options and support services.
The Government will continue to enable women in late stages of breast cancer to receive Herceptin, a drug used to treat certain forms of metastatic breast cancer. Use of Herceptin can extend survival without significant side effects. Herceptin is available free of charge to eligible patients at an expected cost of $38.1 million in 2005–06. To the end of February 2005, 1,444 patients had registered with the Herceptin programme.

The expansion of the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) listing for treatment includes two effective high cost drugs used in breast cancer treatment, making them available for approximately 8,000 more patients per year. The availability of anastrozole (Arimidex®) was expanded on 1 December 2004 to allow treatment in early breast cancer in some circumstances. Gemcitabine (Gemzar®) availability was expanded on 1 April 2005 to allow treatment in advanced breast cancer.

SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

The objective of the Government’s Family Planning Program is to provide a balanced approach to differing family planning service models, aimed at promoting responsible sexual and reproductive behaviours, rather than focusing on one particular strategy or programme. The programme targets high risk population groups; health and other professionals; sexual and reproductive health organisations and research centres; peak health professional organisations, and state and territory health and education authorities.

The Australian Government provides $2 million to four national organisations which provide a range of sexual and reproductive health services. In addition, funding is provided through the Population Health Outcome Funding Agreements to support the work of state and territory family planning organisations.

SHARING HEALTH CARE INITIATIVE

The $36.2 million (over 1999-2007) Sharing Health Care Initiative (SHCI) is designed to improve the health related quality of life for people with chronic conditions, to encourage people to use the health care system more effectively and to enhance collaboration between individuals, their families and health care professionals in the management of chronic conditions.

Chronic Condition Self-Management (CCSM) is a client-centred, holistic way of engaging people with chronic conditions in monitoring and managing their health. The SHCI is evaluating, across a series of demonstration projects, a range of CCSM models that could be suitable for the Australian health care system.

The preliminary results of the National Evaluation of the SHCI show that almost 70 per cent of the participants in the demonstration projects are women, as women are much more likely to access group based CCSM programmes than men. The most commonly used CCSM programmes involve face to face group learning and support.
The results to date across all the demonstration project interventions are proving very positive, particularly for women’s health, including indications of reductions in depression, pain and general health distress and increased symptom management. There have also been signs of reductions in physician visits and hospitalisations.

PUBLIC HEALTH OUTCOME FUNDING AGREEMENTS

The Australian Government is providing approximately $812 million over five years for the new Public Health Outcome Funding Agreements (PHOFAs) (2004–05 to 2008–09).

The PHOFAs are bilateral agreements with the states and territories. The Australian Government provides a pool of funds to each jurisdiction to assist them to achieve agreed national outcomes in a number of public health areas including Women’s Health, Cervical Screening, Breast Cancer Screening, and sexual & reproductive health.

Under the broadbanded (or pooled) funding arrangements, states and territories have the flexibility to use their pool of PHOFA funds to make local service funding decisions in line with local needs and priorities. States and territories are required to report annually on a number of performance measures which include some indicators specifically related to the delivery of women’s health programmes and family planning services.

BETTER ARTHRITIS CARE INITIATIVE

The prevalence of rheumatoid arthritis and osteoarthritis is greater in women at nearly all ages, and the prevalence of osteoporosis among women has been estimated at more than four times that among men. In addition, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has estimated that overall seven per cent of non-Indigenous women have arthritis compared to 18 per cent of Indigenous women. In recognition of this prevalence in the Australian community, the 2002–03 Budget provided $11.5 million over four years to improve care for people with these conditions. In addition, in July 2002, all Australian Health Ministers agreed to establish arthritis and musculoskeletal conditions as the seventh national health priority area. Under the 2002–03 Budget initiative, 28 improvement grants have been funded to expand the evidence base for osteoarthritis, rheumatoid arthritis and osteoporosis, and to enable innovative and effective interventions to be implemented at a local level.

MULTIPURPOSE SERVICES PROGRAM

Through the Multipurpose Services (MPS) Program the Australian Government combines its aged care funding ($55.8 million in 2004-05) with state health service funding to provide flexible, cost effective aged care and health services to small rural communities, often within the one facility. In this way the best mix of services can be provided to each community. These include nursing home and hostel care, women’s health, palliative care and community nursing, radiology, mental health, home care, meals on wheels and podiatry as well as
integrated services for young children such as immunisation, infant welfare and parenting information. The program is continuing to expand and there are now 91 MPS operating. It is expected that the number of operational flexible care places allocated under the MPS Program will increase by an estimated seven per cent.

RURAL HEALTH STRATEGY
The Government’s commitment to providing high quality, effective health services for women living in rural and remote areas continues under the Rural Health Strategy. Since 1996, the Government has introduced a broad range of initiatives to ensure the best health care is available to everyone no matter where they live, both through its own programmes and the substantial support it provides to the states and territories.

The Rural Health Strategy includes the Rural Primary Health Programme which assists small rural communities to identify local primary and allied health priorities and develop and support services relating to these priorities. At present, there are 115 operational Regional Health Services and 65 More Allied Health Services across rural and remote Australia. A range of services are supported under the Programme, including women’s health, illness and injury prevention, community nursing, palliative care, children’s services, mental health, occupational therapy, asthma and diabetes education, nutrition and dietetics, and health promotion.

RURAL WOMEN’S GP SERVICE
The Government is continuing to provide funding of $8.9 million over four years, 2003–04 to 2006–07, for the Rural Women’s GP Service (the Service). The Service aims to improve access to primary and secondary health care services for women in rural and remote Australia who currently have little or no access to a female GP.

Consultations include cervical cancer screenings and breast and skin examinations, as well as identifying and providing the necessary intervention for other conditions such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, menopause, psychosocial problems and conditions related to the reproductive system and sexual health. The Service also provides education and self-help information, which is very important to women in rural areas as they often need to play a greater role in their own health care. The Australian Council of the Royal Flying Doctors Service (RFDS) is contracted to administer the Service, with the four sections of the RFDS (Central Operations, Queensland Section, South Eastern Section and Western Operations) responsible for planning and negotiating services and employing/contracting female general practitioners to provide the Service. The RFDS reported that from January to June 2004, it provided the Service to 121 locations throughout rural and remote Australia resulting in 8,044 patient consultations in 557 clinics.
MEDICAL INDEMNITY INSURANCE FRAMEWORK — RURAL OBSTETRICIANS

From 1 January 2004, the new Premium Support Scheme (PSS) replaced the previous Medical Indemnity Subsidy Scheme (MISS). Under the PSS, all medical practitioners in Australia are eligible for financial assistance for their medical indemnity costs. The PSS provides funding of 80 per cent of a doctor's medical indemnity costs if these exceed 7.5 per cent of his or her gross private medical income. Procedural general practitioners in rural areas (many of whom carry out obstetric procedures) also receive a higher level of assistance under the PSS than they had previously received under the MISS.

WOMEN’S HEALTH — AUSTRALIAN LONGITUDINAL STUDY

The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women’s Health was established in 1995 and is projected to run for 20 years to fulfill its value as a database tracking individuals’ experiences of disease and service use over time. The study examines the social, behavioural and economic determinants of women’s health and their relationship to health outcomes and the use of health and related services at key points in women’s lives. In 2004–05, the Australian Government committed an additional $3.2 million over four years to cover increases in the cost and scope of the study.

NATIONAL ILLICIT DRUGS STRATEGY – STRENGTHENING AND SUPPORTING FAMILIES COPING WITH ILLICIT DRUG USE (STRENGTHENING FAMILIES) MEASURE

In the 2004 Budget, the Australian Government announced a further $13.6 million over four years to extend the Strengthening Families measure.

The Strengthening Families initiative is an early intervention, family-focused initiative that funds non-government organisations to provide assistance to families struggling with, or affected by drug and substance abuse. This is achieved through the provision of education and counselling support services; advice and referral services; and targeted projects for families. Strengthening Families projects assist in enhancing emotional wellbeing and communication within families and provide opportunities for the development of stronger links between families, education, employment and the community.

The primary focus of the Strengthening Families initiative is to provide support for families, including parents, grandparents, kinship carers and children of drug-using parents. The initiative focuses on illicit drugs but recognises polydrug use, as well as the issue in some jurisdictions of problematic use of alcohol and chroming.
Widows

WIDOW ALLOWANCE
Widow Allowance provides income support to mature aged women who no longer have a partner and who face obstacles in finding employment because of limited participation in the workforce. The number of recipients is decreasing, reflecting the stronger economic conditions and a general trend across all labour market payments. The average number of Widow Allowance recipients during March 2005 was 45,081 representing a decrease of 854 over the previous year. The allowance is income and asset tested.

As made clear when the Widow Allowance was implemented in 1995, the gradual phase-out of the payment will commence from 1 July 2005 with new grants being limited from that point to women born before 1 July 1955.
Support for Wives and Widows of War Veterans

WAR WIDOWS PENSION
A war widow’s pension may be paid to the widow of a veteran whose death is linked to war or defence service. Automatic war widow’s pension may be paid to the widow of a veteran who was severely incapacitated as a result of a war-caused or defence-caused disease or injury, or was an Australian ex-prisoner of war.

The base rate of war widow’s pension is no less than 25 per cent of Male Total Average Weekly Earnings. More than 110,000 wives of veterans are currently in receipt of the war widow’s pension.

As well as war widow’s pension, widows of veterans may be entitled to a range of supplementary benefits including bereavement payments, funeral benefits, rent assistance, telephone allowance, pharmaceutical allowance and remote area allowance.

INCOME SUPPORT SUPPLEMENT
War widows who have limited means to support themselves may be entitled to receive an income support supplement. The income support supplement is subject to income and assets tests and is currently paid to over 80,000 female recipients.

PARTNER SERVICE PENSION
The partner of a veteran service pensioner may be entitled to receive a partner service pension if they satisfy certain eligibility criteria.

A partner service pension may also be granted to a person who is the widowed partner of a veteran, if the veteran had qualifying service and all other relevant eligibility criteria are satisfied. If a widow of a veteran was receiving partner service pension immediately before the veteran’s death, then they will continue to be eligible for that pension.

Approximately 112,000 partner service pensions are being paid to female partners or widows of veterans.

INCREASE THE BEREAVEMENT PAYMENT FOR PARTNERS OF ABOVE GENERAL RATE DISABILITY PENSIONERS
A bereavement payment is made to the widow/er of an eligible veteran, member of the Forces, member of a Peacekeeping Force, or Australian mariner, to assist the widow/er gradually to adjust his or her financial situation, and to defray costs caused by the bereavement. While the provisions apply to both men and women, the majority of death beneficiaries will be women.
Previously, the amount of bereavement payment under the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 was the equivalent of six pension instalments up to a maximum of 100 per cent of the general rate of disability pension. However, from 1 January 2005, widow/ers of those veterans who were in receipt of the special rate (totally and permanently incapacitated, totally and temporarily incapacitated, blinded), extreme disablement adjustment and intermediate rate of disability pension, receive six fortnightly payments of the actual rate of disability pension that their spouse was in receipt of at the time of death (i.e. the payment is no longer capped at 100 per cent of the general rate). The enhancements to disability pension bereavement payments under the Veterans’ Entitlement Act are worth approximately $14.8 million over four years.

ENHANCED BENEFITS FOR WIDOWS UNDER THE NEW MILITARY REHABILITATION AND COMPENSATION SCHEME

The Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Scheme introduced from 1 July 2004 contains a number of enhancements such as improved compensation for severe impairment or death. While the provisions apply to both men and women, the majority of beneficiaries of death benefits will be women. The enhancements to the scheme are worth $2.6 million over four years.

Compensation for widowed partners, particularly younger widowed partners, has been improved by providing:

- the choice of receiving a death benefit equal to the Veterans’ Entitlements Act 1986 (VEA) war widow’s pension or its lifetime equivalent in a lump sum;
- a payment of up to $1,265.66 for the cost of financial advice obtained to make the choice;
- an additional death benefit for service of up to $105,472; and
- a lump sum of $63,283.20 for each dependent child of the deceased member, plus a regular payment of $69.61 per week if wholly or mainly dependent.

Other improvements include:

- automatic provision of compensation for certain deaths, in line with the provisions of the VEA; and
- a number of related benefits for partners and children as currently provided in the VEA such as free health care through the Gold Card, education assistance for children, and telephone and pharmaceutical allowance.
TELSTRA BUSINESS WOMEN’S AWARDS

The Australian Government continues to demonstrate its firm commitment to women through sponsorship of the annual Telstra Business Women’s Awards. This prestigious national programme is designed to recognise and reward the outstanding achievements of women from all sectors and levels of enterprise. More than 2,600 business women are nominated each year, providing unique business profiling and professional development opportunities.

The Government sponsors an Australian Government Private and Corporate Sector Award for employees in the private and corporate sector or owners with less than 50 per cent share of a business. Women play an important role in this sector, where they account for 33 per cent of Australia’s 1.6 million small business operators.

The Awards have been instrumental in raising broader community awareness of the vital contribution that women make to the Australian economy.

THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR WOMEN IN THE WORKPLACE AGENCY

The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA) works with employers in private, non-government and educational sectors with over 100 staff to educate them on how to provide equal opportunity for all employees. It also administers the Equal Opportunity For Women in the Workplace Act 1999.

In 2005, employers will report for the fifth time under the Act. This satisfies the statutory requirement that businesses with over 100 employees report annually to EOWA on the actions that they are taking to advance the position of women in their organisation, and to demonstrate the outcomes of their workplace programmes. Under the terms of the Act, the agency continues to focus on building business partnerships and relationships with employer groups and individual employers.

In 2005, EOWA will for the fifth time host its Business Achievement Awards to honour leaders in the field of equal employment opportunity. In February 2005, the Agency also awarded EOWA Employer of Choice For Women citations to organisations that are leading the way in their programmes to advance women.

To assist organisations by equipping them with data collected on specific industries, EOWA will disseminate regular reports known as Industry Verticals. The first one to be produced is for the Manufacturing Sector.
In March 2005 EOWA launched a free downloadable pay equity tool on their website to assist employers to establish whether they have a pay discrepancy between women’s and men’s pay. The centrepiece of the tool is a seven step methodology with an Excel spreadsheet that asks employers to download their own pay data and then turns this data into tables that reveal whether there is a pay differential. There are a number of table examples and explanations of what might be occurring in an organisation to cause a pay differential. The tool provides many links to other areas of the EOWA website that assist with addressing the problem. As well as the methodology, the tool includes supporting documents about the costs and benefits of undertaking the analysis, some case studies, case law and a good deal of background information.

In accordance with its ongoing commitment to equality for women in the workplace, the Government will provide $2.7 million in funding to EOWA during the 2005-06 financial year.

OFFICE OF THE EMPLOYMENT ADVOCATE
The Office of the Employment Advocate (OEA) provides specific assistance through its Community Partners Program to women and other employees who may be in disadvantaged bargaining positions. This programme uses Working Women’s Centres and some Community Legal Centres throughout Australia to provide advice and assistance on employment related matters, with priority given to Australian Workplace Agreements. The OEA currently funds five Working Women’s Centres across Australia.

NATIONAL WORK AND FAMILY AWARDS
The Australian Government contributes over $100,000 to the ACCI/ BCA National Work and Family Awards. The awards recognise best practice in work and family, especially those organisations that seek out and respond to their employees’ particular needs while meeting business demands. There was a record number of applicants for the awards held in May 2004. The Australian Federal Police won the 2004 Gold Award. In the 2005 awards, to be presented in November, prizes will be presented in the following categories: Gold Award — Private Sector; Gold Award — Public Sector; Large Business Award; Medium Business Award; Small Business Award; Rising Star Award; and Regional and Rural Award.
AUSTRALIAN TELEWORK ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The Australian Government has established the Australian Telework Advisory Committee (ATAC) to develop strategies to promote an improved work-life balance for Australian workers.

The formation of the ATAC responds to a commitment by the Government to establish a telework and home-based business taskforce consisting of government agencies, industry and small business representatives to advise on options and impediments to the development of telework for employees and businesses. The ATAC will report to the government by February 2006.

WORK AND FAMILY RESOURCES

The Workplace Relations Act 1996 provides the basis for a flexible workplace relations system that provides choice for working parents. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations produces a range of resources to promote awareness and understanding of work and family issues and the range of flexibilities offered through the workplace relations system. The Work and Family website on the Australian Government Workplace Portal provides access to publications, including fact sheets and guides on family friendly working arrangements and information on the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI)/ Business Council of Australia (BCA) National Work and Family Awards. The website also contains a Family Friendly Agreement Clauses Database, a practical and easy to use online tool which provides examples of agreement clauses that can assist employers and employees in developing and implementing family friendly working arrangements.

THE SAFETY OF WOMEN WORKING

The Health and Community Care industry, in which nearly 80 per cent of employees are women, is recognised under the National Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Commission’s National Strategy 2002–2012 as a priority area for occupational health and safety action. The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is working with industry and employee representatives and state and territory governments in progressing work to bring about short and long-term OHS improvements by:

- reducing high incidence and severity risks;
- developing the capacity of business operators and workers to manage OHS effectively;
- preventing occupational disease more effectively;
- eliminating hazards at the design stage; and
- strengthening the capacity of government to influence OHS outcomes.
The Department is furthering the prevention of workplace injury from manual handling by reviewing the national standard for manual handling and supporting guidance materials. Manual handling is responsible for the majority of workers’ compensation claims lodged in Australia, and women working in the health and community care services industry have the highest rate of manual handling related workers’ compensation claims when compared with women in other industries.

Additionally a number of specific actions to prevent occupational disease more effectively are targeting industries in which there is a predominantly female workforce. These include promoting the elimination of powdered latex gloves generally and reduction of use of latex gloves; promoting the substitution of glyceryl monothioglycolate and powdered bleach products used in hairdressing; and developing guidance material on the management of the risks of wet work and risk management approaches within the health, food and construction industries.

**JOB NETWORK**

Job Network provides a range of assistance to help people gain work.

In the 12 months to February 2005, 220,000 women obtained job placements through Job Network. This represented an increase of 47 per cent over the previous corresponding 12 month period and is a reflection of Job Network’s focus on providing employment services to all job seekers on the basis of their individual needs. As at 1 April 2005, Job Network was assisting 845,000 job seekers of whom 43 per cent were women. Job Network assistance can include help in finding work of a part-time nature where needed for family or caring responsibilities.

Women receiving Parenting or Carer Payments or other forms of Commonwealth income support are fully eligible for the full range of Job Network Job Search Support and Intensive Support services.

**NATIONAL AWARD FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT — INCREASING WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION**

In 2005-06, the Australian Government will sponsor a new National Award for Local Government, which will recognise local initiatives that respond to, promote and/or harness the benefits arising from increasing women’s participation in local government and decision-making. The Award will be administered by the Department of Transport and Regional Services.
JOB PLACEMENT, EMPLOYMENT AND TRAINING PROGRAMME

The Job Placement, Employment and Training Programme (JPET) assists young people aged 15 to 21 years who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, to overcome personal and social barriers and achieve greater social and economic participation. Since June 2004, three JPET services have received funding specifically to assist young women and young parents. The JPET programme provided $20.1 million for the 2004-05 financial year and will provide $21.0 million for the 2005-06 financial year.
Women, Media and Information and Communications Technology

WOMEN IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY
The Australian Government is convening a summit to identify and address the barriers which keep Australian women from fully participating in the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) sector. The Women in ICT Summit will be held later in 2005 and will bring together leaders in the ICT sector and educational institutions, with the aim of developing creative solutions to the barriers facing women in the ICT sector.

AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION
The Australian Film Commission (AFC) provides support for the Women Working in Television (WWIT) project which aims to provide opportunities for women across Australia working in television to advance their careers.

In 2005, the AFC is commissioning a publication to coincide with the 50th anniversary of television which will document and celebrate the contribution of women during this period. The AFC contribution to WWIT is $20,000.

AUSTRALIAN FILM, TELEVISION AND RADIO SCHOOL
The Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS) has an Industry Training Fund for Women (ITFW). It was established in 1988 as a national programme designed to upgrade the creative and technical skills of women already working in the film, broadcast and related industries. Since 1994, the emphasis has been directed to women working in areas where they are under-represented. ITFW also supports specialised advanced short courses.
SUPERANNUATION AND FAMILY LAW

Under amendments that came into force in December 2002, married couples who separate are able to divide superannuation by agreement or, where they cannot agree, by court order. Parties are able to determine in what proportions their superannuation will be divided, if at all. In making an order, the court is required to make a decision that is just and equitable in all the circumstances. These reforms fundamentally change the way in which superannuation is treated upon marital breakdown and can ensure that both parties have access to retirement income.

SUPERANNUATION CO-CONTRIBUTION SCHEME AND WOMEN

The superannuation co-contribution scheme provides government matching of personal contributions made to superannuation funds by qualifying employees.

For personal contributions made from 1 July 2004, the scheme provides matching of $1.50 for every $1 contributed, subject to a maximum co-contribution of $1,500 for those qualifying employees on incomes up to $28,000.

For qualifying employees between $28,000 and $58,000, the maximum co-contribution is reduced at a rate of 5 cents for each dollar of income over the lower threshold.

As at 3 February 2005, the Australian Taxation Office had paid out approximately $244 million in co-contribution payments to the superannuation funds of around 450,000 Australians. Approximately 63 per cent of these payments went to women, who received an average co-contribution payment of $570.

These payments related to co-contributions for the 2003-04 financial year, when eligibility for the scheme was based on the Government matching dollar for dollar personal contributions made by persons with incomes up to $27,500, phasing out at $40,000. The Government extended these limits to their current levels in the 2004-05 Budget.
Women’s Programmes

THE OFFICE FOR WOMEN

The Australian Government Office for Women (OfW) was moved to the Department of Family and Community Services in November 2004. This decision was based on the view that the functions of the Office, and in particular the service delivery functions, direct work with community organisations, research and policy development role all sit better in a line department.

OfW continues to be a central point of advice on the impact of policies on women for the whole of government, and other Government departments continue to consult with and involve OfW on issues that affect women.

Importantly, the position of Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women’s Issues has been maintained. The Minister continues to play a role in supporting the Prime Minister and promoting women’s issues across Government and in Cabinet.

INFORMED CHOICES FOR WOMEN

In the 2001–02 Budget the Government provided funding of $5.5 million over four years to develop a women’s information strategy under the Informed Choices for Australian Women initiative. The strategy included:

- the Women’s Internet Portal (www.women.gov.au) which, provides access to federal, state, territory and local government site information relating to women and women’s services.
- the first in a series of career kits for young women, Look Where Science Can Take you, comprising a DVD and a teacher’s resource kit; and
- websites including the Women’s Data Warehouse (www.windowonwomen.gov.au) which provides free on-line access to current and historical information and data about women. Topics covered include Australia’s population, children and families, education and training, health and wellbeing, Indigenous women, women’s safety and work and economic resources.
WOMEN’S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

In the 2001–02 Budget, the Government provided funding of $5.6 million over four years for the Women’s Development Programme for projects that aim to achieve the optimal status and position of women in Australian society.

To support participation in policy development and ensure the Government is aware of issues important to women, four national women’s secretariats are funded. They represent over 60 women’s organisations.

National women’s non-government organisations are eligible to apply for grants and sponsorship funding for projects that are relevant to current women’s issues or for capacity building activities that support the organisation’s viability. In 2004–05, 10 projects and four capacity building grants are being funded totaling $0.6 million.

In addition, capacity building support is being provided to women’s organisations through the production of resource material and funding of training and mentoring activities.

Research on matters of importance to Australian women is being undertaken. The Office for Women funded the Australian Institute of Family Studies to undertake the Fertility Decision Making Project. The purpose of the project was to enhance understanding of the reasons underlying the fertility decisions of men and women aged 20–39 years, both as individuals and couples.

The project produced a research report which provides the first in-depth analysis of the aspirations, expectations and ideals of Australians on the question of whether to have children, or not. The project found that being in a secure and stable relationship with a partner and having a secure, stable and adequate income stream are critical preconditions for most people to have a child or to have more children.

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OTHER WOMEN’S PROGRAMME

The Government is providing $0.6 million in 2004–05 through the Office for Women’s Other Women’s Programmes (OWP) to assist and advance the status of Australian women.

2004–05 saw the completion by the National Capital Authority of the Centenary of Women’s Suffrage Commemorative Fountain which was officially unveiled in December 2004.

A number of publications, events and awards are funded under this programme including celebrations of International Women’s Day and International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women.

TIME USE RESEARCH

Time use surveys are an important source of information about unpaid work: its quantity, its nature, and its distribution by gender and by social and economic factors.

The Office for Women has offered four one-year Time Use Research Fellowships to use ABS Time Use Survey data from a gender analysis perspective. The first two Fellows have completed their Fellowships and the third and fourth Fellows will complete theirs by June 2005.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics will be conducting the next Time Use Survey in 2006.
INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

The Australian Government is providing $16.5 million over the four years 2004–05 to 2007–08 for the Indigenous Women's Development Program. The programme targets the development of the leadership capacity of Indigenous women. It's purpose is to identify, develop and support Indigenous women to take leadership positions in larger numbers. This will enhance the status of Indigenous women within their own and the wider community and encourage Indigenous women to assume leadership positions in substantial numbers and raise the profile of important community issues.

The initiative has three broad components: Indigenous Women's Leadership targets women already making a contribution in their communities and provides leadership development training and opportunities to them; the Men and Family Relationships component provides a forum for Indigenous men to discuss issues facing their families and communities, and to develop strategies for reconnecting men with their responsibilities; and the Networking Indigenous Women element promotes a network of mutual support and fosters links among women.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN'S PROGRAM

In 2005-06 the Australian Government will provide $4.2 million for the Indigenous Women's Program. The Indigenous Women's Program aims to enhance Indigenous women's leadership, representation, safety, wellbeing and economic status.

Activities funded by this grants programme are designed to meet the identified needs and aspirations of local Indigenous women. These activities aim to: support the safety and wellbeing of Indigenous women; provide information about relevant policies, programmes and services; establish and strengthen support networks; support the design and implementation of appropriate and relevant research projects and surveys; and develop publications and reports.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLE IN RURAL INDUSTRIES PROGRAMME

The Indigenous People in Rural Industries Programme provides Indigenous women with the opportunity to apply for the Australian Rural Leadership Programme scholarship offered each year to an Indigenous person.
FAMILY VIOLENCE PARTNERSHIPS PROGRAMME
The Government is providing $37.3 million over four years, from 2004–05, to the Family Violence Partnership Programme. This builds on the government’s commitment to tackling Indigenous family violence and child abuse. Through this programme, the Government is supporting a number of state and territory local projects which address Indigenous family violence, particularly in remote areas.

Indigenous family violence and child abuse continue to have significant negative social and economic impacts on the lives of Indigenous people. Developing local solutions to issues that contribute to violence such as alcohol and drug use is critical to effecting change. It is widely supported that to effect change a strong collaborative approach between governments and Indigenous communities is required.

FAMILY VIOLENCE REGIONAL ACTIVITIES PROGRAM
The Family Violence Regional Activities Program aims to provide practical and flexible support for grassroots projects that have been identified as a local priority to address family violence, sexual assault, child abuse and/or child protection. The programme also seeks to trial new and innovative approaches to reduce family violence in Indigenous communities by promoting and supporting community based organisations to develop community-based ways of reducing and preventing family violence in Indigenous communities. The Australian Government is providing $3.8 million per annum, commencing in 2004, for the programme.

EXPANSION OF FAMILY VIOLENCE PREVENTION LEGAL SERVICES
The primary focus of each Family Violence Prevention Legal Service unit is to provide culturally appropriate assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and children who are victims of violence, including sexual abuse. Providing legal assistance, case work and court support to victims of violence, particularly women and children, is the primary function of the existing 13 units. The units are predominantly located in rural and remote areas of Australia.

The Attorney-General approved the locations for the 13 new Family Violence Prevention Legal Services units in December 2004 (which will bring the total number of units to 26). Research conducted by the Crime Research Centre, combined with stakeholder feedback, identified 13 high need areas which were most in need of family violence services.
TELECOMMUNICATIONS
Australian Government funding of $8.3 million has been committed as part of the Telecommunications Action Plan for Remote Indigenous Communities to improve service levels in the most remote and disadvantaged areas of Australia over a three year period to 2005. The Community Phones Program is developing improved and culturally appropriate telephone services in up to 200 remote Indigenous communities. The Internet Access Program has improved access to internet-based services for 135 communities.

INDIGENOUS VISUAL ARTS

The programme currently supports 43 Indigenous art centres, as well as fostering emerging centres.

INDIGENOUS COORDINATION CENTRES
Indigenous Coordination Centres (ICCs) are a single shop front in urban, regional and remote locations. They will specialise in the delivery of Indigenous specific programmes and be responsible for ensuring that Indigenous and mainstream programmes are integrated. The ICC staff will lead government effort in negotiating Shared Responsibility Agreements by brokering relationships between government and Indigenous communities. Programmes/services will be tailored to meet regional priorities and to strengthen community capacity. Importantly ICC staff will consult and negotiate with local representatives to develop and coordinate innovative responses to local Indigenous needs.
Rural and Regional Women

REGIONAL WOMEN’S ADVISORY COUNCIL
The Regional Women’s Advisory Council was established in 1999 by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services to provide a women’s perspective on issues that affect communities in regional, rural and remote Australia. The Council provides advice directly to the Deputy Prime Minister.

The second Council was appointed in September 2002, and has focused on building stronger communities. The Council encourages informed debate and influences decision-making in seven key areas:

- encouraging lifelong learning;
- ensuring appropriate and accessible health care;
- reducing family violence;
- promoting diversity and inclusion;
- expanding women’s representation;
- encouraging community engagement in the water reform debate; and
- promoting economic development.

The Council seeks the views of women in regional, rural and remote Australia through its members’ professional and community networks, as well as through national and regional events that offer an opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women’s voices to be heard. The Council is supported by a Secretariat in the Regional and Indigenous Policy Branch of the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

WOMEN ON THE MOVE EVENTS
Women on the Move events involve local organisers (generally local councils) working in partnership with the Regional Women’s Advisory Council to seek the views of women, to make recommendations to government, and to provide relevant information and advice to participants.

During 2004–05, women in the Burdekin Dry Tropics region in Queensland, Launceston in Tasmania, and Katanning in Western Australia were invited to provide feedback to the Australian Government through the Regional Women’s Advisory Council on life in regional, rural and remote Australia. These events followed the successful Women on the Move event in Gippsland, a national meeting on ‘women and water’ in Armidale, and an Indigenous Women’s Gathering in Alice Springs. The Indigenous Women’s Gathering was the first time that women from the Council of Australian Government Indigenous trial sites had come together.
WOMEN OF INFLUENCE

The Regional Women's Advisory Council's Women of Influence initiative aims to increase the number of women currently represented in key rural decision-making bodies, including rural industry boards and regional development bodies. The initiative brings together business and industry leaders, academics, women's networks, and community representatives in designing an action plan to increase women's representation.

PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN RURAL INDUSTRIES

During 2004–05, women in rural industries continue to benefit from the Government's Agriculture Advancing Australia package which provides leadership training, support for women's non-government organisations and sponsorship for national and state women in rural industries conferences, including:

- scholarships in partnership with rural Research and Development Corporations under the Industry Partnerships: Corporate Governance for Rural Women initiative to attend the Australian Institute of Company Director's course, and receive coaching and mentoring from industry leaders;

- the “Building the Future, Sharing the Work” initiative to assist national women’s non-government organisations to strengthen their links with mainstream industry bodies through developing partnerships in projects of mutual interest;

- the National Reception for Rural Women, held at Parliament House, Canberra, which recognised and promoted rural women's achievements, and provided an important opportunity for both rural women, Government representatives and industry leaders to meet and establish connections;

- the Young People in Rural Industries Programme initiatives which provide young women (aged 18 to 35 years) with a range of development opportunities, including leadership training, company directors training, study award bursaries, export market development training and mentoring; and

- the Indigenous People in Rural Industries Programme which provides Indigenous women with the opportunity to apply for the Australian Rural Leadership Programme scholarship offered each year to an Indigenous person.
HELPING WOMEN IN NEW AGRICULTURAL INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

In 2004–05, the Australian Government is supporting women in agribusinesses through the Government’s New Industries Development Program, part of the Backing Australia’s Ability initiative. The programme provides the opportunity for women to apply for:

- competitive-based funding assistance for “Pilot Commercialisation Projects” to “incubate” innovative agribusiness ventures that encourage through-chain approaches to new agribusiness development; and
- competitive-based “In Market Experience Scholarships” which enable emerging managers to gain first hand experience in specific areas of business management and new markets. In 2004, six full or shared scholarships were awarded to women helping in the commercialisation of new products, technologies or services.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY TRAINING AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT PROGRAM

The Information Technology Training and Technical Support Program is providing $8.8 million to make basic computer technology training and technical support more accessible for people living in the very remote parts of Australia. To date, eight projects have been funded which are tailored to meet specific local needs and to build on existing resources and infrastructure.

HIGHER BANDWIDTH INCENTIVE SCHEMES

As part of the Government's response to the Regional Telecommunications Inquiry funding was made available for the Higher Bandwidth Incentive Scheme. The scheme is an Australian Government programme providing access to higher bandwidth services for people in regional, rural and remote Australia at prices comparable to those available in metropolitan Australia. This provides women with the choice to access a range of services such as education and health.
Older Women, Retirement and Later Years

AGE PENSION
Age Pension is a payment for people of age pension age who cannot support themselves fully in retirement. Age pension age is currently 65 years of age for men and 62.5 for women. The qualifying age for women is being progressively raised to 65 and will reach that age by 2014.

Around 67 per cent of the population of age pension age receive Age Pension. A further 10 per cent receive a similar payment from the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.

Women have a longer life expectancy and lower qualifying age for Age Pension than men. Subsequently, women comprise the greater proportion of people receiving Age Pension (around 60 per cent). As at June 2004, 65.5 per cent of women receiving Age Pension received the full-rate compared with 61.6 per cent of men.

NEW ALLOWANCES
As part of the Government’s commitment to recognising the contribution made by senior Australians, a new Utilities Allowance is being paid to income support customers who are of Age (or Veteran) Pension age and a new Seniors Concession Allowance to holders of the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card (CSHC) issued by either Centrelink or the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.

Utilities Allowance is intended to assist with regular household costs such as gas and electricity. The Utilities Allowance is an automatic payment of $100 a year for singles and $50 per year for each member of an eligible couple payable in two instalments, one in March and one in September each year. The first Utilities Allowance payment was made shortly after 20 March 2005.

The Seniors Concession Allowance was introduced by the Australian Government in December 2004 for holders of the CSHC to help with household costs. Seniors Concession Allowance is a payment of $200 per year paid automatically in two instalments, in June and December each year. The first instalment was made to existing cardholders in December 2004.

SUPPORTING GRANDPARENTS WHO CARE FOR CHILDREN
Grandparents who are the primary carers for their grandchildren are eligible for up to 50 hours of Child Care Benefit (CCB) per child per week through the waiver of the work, training, study test, compared to 20 hours previously.

Grandparents who are the primary carers for their grandchildren and who receive an income support payment (such as Age Pension or Carer Payment) can receive free child care through the grandparent rate of Child Care Benefit, Grandparent CCB, which provides the full cost of approved child care for up to 50 hours per child per week.
Women and Leadership

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE
In the 2001–02 Budget, the Government provided $2.4 million through the Office for Women to support activities aimed at increasing and promoting women’s leadership. Funding has been targeted towards encouraging leadership activities for women from rural and remote areas and for Indigenous women.

This is reflected in the Sports Leadership programme, a partnership with the Australian Sports Commission, which encourages women to take on leadership roles in sports including coaching and administration, and in support for Indigenous women undertaking recognised leadership programmes.

In addition, work is continuing through the ‘Women on Boards’ project. Activities have included bringing together women with the interest, skills and experience to take up Board positions with current private sector company directors to share experiences and support arrangements.

The Office for Women maintains a database of women interested in positions on Australian Government boards, which is regularly used by public sector organisations to source highly skilled women for possible appointment to boards or other decision making bodies.

SPORTS LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME
Under the Sports Leadership programme, which is a partnership programme with the Australian Sports Commission and the Office for Women, funding is being provided to 192 community sporting projects around Australia in 2004-05. The grant scheme was extended in 2004–05 to include five key areas designed to encourage and support the full involvement of women and girls in all aspects of sport leadership. Categories included women in high performance coaching and officiating; disability sport; women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; women in Indigenous, rural and remote communities; and general sport leadership.

EXECUTIVE WOMEN IN THE AUSTRALIAN PUBLIC SERVICE
The Australian Public Service Commission is a central agency within the Australian Public Service with a critical leadership role in contributing to the future capability and sustainability of the Service. The Commission offers a range of development options aligned with its Integrated Leadership System. Currently the Commission is undertaking a review of the leadership development needs of senior executive women and women in leadership positions in the Australian Public Service.
The review will provide a comparative basis for Commission decisions on leadership and learning courses for executive women. The review will include:

- a snapshot of women-only executive programmes in the public and private sectors (across Australian and Anglo-phone jurisdictions);
- the current thinking underpinning these programmes;
- an analysis of systemic barriers to women’s advancement; and
- recommendations regarding the direction of executive women’s development programmes to start in 2006.

INDIGENOUS WOMEN’S PROGRAM
The Indigenous Women’s Program aims to enhance Indigenous women’s leadership, representation, safety, wellbeing and economic status. [See Indigenous Women for further details].

RURAL AND REGIONAL WOMEN
The Government provides a range of activities to support the leadership and development of women in rural and regional areas. [See Rural and Regional Women for further details].
PARTNERSHIPS AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
The Australian Government has provided $50 million for the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) initiative since 1997.

The initiative has funded over 230 diverse and innovative projects related to domestic violence at the local, regional and national level, and has supported the development of research and the documentation of good practice. It has produced a wide range of publications relating to domestic violence and held national forums covering the areas of children and domestic violence, men and relationships, Indigenous family violence, and domestic violence across the lives of women and girls.

In June 2004, the Prime Minister launched the successful Violence Against Women. Australia Says No campaign, which provides immediate practical support for women experiencing domestic violence or sexual assault. There has been a strong community response to the campaign, with in excess of 42,000 calls to the Helpline so far.

In July 2004, the Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women’s Issues, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, launched a training manual on domestic violence and the workplace for the corporate sector. The Partnerships Against Domestic Violence — A Business Approach initiative has been running since 2001, with a series of seminars being held for the corporate sector each year.

In October 2004, the Office for Women published the results of a commissioned report on the costs of domestic violence to the Australian economy. The study, undertaken by Access Economics, found that domestic violence cost the Australian economy $8.1 billion in 2002–2003.

NATIONAL INITIATIVE TO COMBAT SEXUAL ASSAULT
The National Initiative to Combat Sexual Assault (NICSA) was a $16.5 million initiative established in the 2001 Budget to provide Australian Government leadership in this area of growing concern. Additional funding of $6.7 million to enhance the national campaign for the elimination of violence against women was provided in 2004–05.

The focus of NICSA has been to establish a sound evidence base to ensure effective policy and service responses. Work undertaken has included:

- funding Australia’s participation in the first International Violence Against Women Survey run by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (results from the survey were made available during 2004);
- establishing the Australian Centre for the Study of Sexual Assault;
- disseminating a National Framework for Sexual Assault Prevention; and
- funding for a Personal Safety Survey to produce national data that is comparable with the 1996 Women’s Safety Australia survey on violence against women.
COMBATTING TRAFFICKING OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

On 13 October 2003, the Australian Government announced a $20 million package of measures to combat trafficking in persons. The measures enhance the detection, investigation and prosecution of traffickers, improve the range of support available to suspected victims and help prevent trafficking of persons.

The package includes the Support for Victims of People Trafficking Programme, administered by the Office for Women, which has been allocated $2.7 million over four years to 2006–07. The programme commenced in January 2004 and provides suspected victims of trafficking with individualised case management services that include assistance with, or access to, accommodation, legal advice, counselling, training and social support. Provision of an additional $2.9 million from 2003–04 – 2006–07 has also been made for income support and access to pharmaceutical and medical services.

Other elements of the $20 million package include:

- a 23 person Australian Federal Police Strike Team;
- a senior migration officer position in Thailand;
- reintegration assistance for victims who return to South-East Asian countries; and
- a domestic community awareness strategy to inform and educate target audiences about the crime of trafficking and provide information on how the community can reform it, or seek assistance and support. It should also improve the likelihood that victims of trafficking and other individuals resident in Australia will report the crime to Australian authorities.

The Government has also introduced new visa arrangements for victims and has moved to strengthen existing legislation to comprehensively criminalise trafficking.

FAMILY VIOLENCE STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION IN THE FAMILY COURT OF AUSTRALIA

A strategy was launched in March 2004 addressing five key areas: information and communication, safety, training, managing the dispute and resolving the dispute.

The Family Violence Strategy was needed by the Court given the very high number of matters coming before it that involve family violence. Also the Court found that family violence impacts on all aspects of the Court’s operations and requires an integrated and consistent response. Implementation is expected to be fully achieved by the end of 2005.
The primary outcomes of this strategy are:

- better outcomes for clients of the Family Court with family violence concerns;
- better cooperation and coordination between the Court and community agencies and stakeholder groups;
- mediation services that are responsive to the impact of family violence;
- improved understanding of family violence issues by judges and staff leading to improved capacity to assist clients; and
- improved security for clients, staff and judges.

Comprehensive training for all non-judicial staff will be conducted before the end of the 2004–05 financial year.

SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Programme (SAAP) is the Australian Government’s major response to homelessness, which is jointly funded between the Australian Government, state and territory governments.

Through SAAP, the Australian Government is continuing to assist women and children escaping domestic and family violence, with 20 per cent of all SAAP clients in 2003–04 citing this as their main reason for seeking help. In 2003–04 the Australian Government contributed more than $47 million towards SAAP domestic violence crisis accommodation and support services.

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMME

The National Community Crime Prevention Programme was introduced in the 2004–05 Budget. The centrepiece of the programme is a national community grants fund providing funding for grass roots projects designed to enhance community safety and crime prevention. The Australian Government believes that communities are in the best position to recognise local problems relating to crime and community safety and to find relevant local solutions and has committed $58 million to the programme from 2004–08.

Priority areas include preventing or reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, improving community safety and security and reducing the fear of crime. Further information is available on www.crimeprevention.gov.au.
Education

HIGHER EDUCATION EQUITY PROGRAMMES

As part of the Backing Australia’s Future initiatives, the Australian Government reviewed the existing Higher Education Equity Programmes (HEEP) in 2004 to ensure that equity funding remained focussed on groups experiencing significant educational disadvantage. As a result, from 2005 the Government is funding two new equity programmes — the Higher Education Equity Support Programme (ESP) and the Higher Education Disability Support Programme (DSP).

Women’s access and participation in higher education have increased generally, as well as in non-traditional areas of study. In 2003, women made up 56.7 per cent of the student population, increasing from 54.1 per cent in 1992. In non-traditional areas of study such as engineering, commerce and science, women no longer comprise a designated equity group as targets for participation have largely been met or exceeded. Women are, however, assisted under equity programmes where they meet any one or more of the general equity characteristics, that is, if they are from a low socio-economic status background, a rural or isolated area, a non-English speaking background, or have a disability. The ESP funding also aims to assist in overcoming educational disadvantage associated with gender.

The Government has significantly increased equity funding in 2005 by providing $10.82 million under the ESP and $6.48 million under the DSP.

HIGHER EDUCATION LOAN PROGRAMME

HECS — Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) is based on the existing HECS model and will ensure that no Australian student is prevented or deterred from accessing their chosen course because of an inability to pay their student contribution up front, keeping higher education free for Australian students at the point of entry. This equity measure provides a loan and/or discount to all eligible Australian Government supported students to assist with paying their student contribution.

FEE-HELP is a new loan programme that assists eligible fee-paying students to pay their tuition fees. Under FEE-HELP, eligible undergraduate and postgraduate students attending approved higher education services will be able to obtain a loan to pay their tuition fees, to a maximum of $50,000 over their lifetime.

Students with a HELP loan are only required to make repayments towards their debt when their income exceeds the minimum repayment threshold. This threshold has increased to $35,000 per annum for 2004–05 and will increase to $36,184 per annum (indexed) from 2005–06 onwards. This is a significant equity measure, consistent with the income-contingent nature of the scheme, and will particularly benefit many women and those in lower-paying or part-time employment.
NEW APPRENTICESHIPS

The vocational education and training sector provides Australians with the skills needed to enter the workforce for the first time, to re-enter the workforce, to retrain for a new job and to upgrade skills for an existing job. New Apprenticeships are available in traditional trades, as well as a diverse range of emerging careers, in most sectors of business and industry.

The Australian Government provides funding for the New Apprenticeships programme, including support for employers and New Apprentices. It also funds specific initiatives to help individuals make a successful transition to vocational education and training and to obtain and remain in employment.

Thirty-six per cent of New Apprentices in training at September 2004 were female. To encourage employers to consider a female New Apprentice in an occupation where women do not traditionally participate, an additional employer incentive is available under the New Apprenticeships Incentives Programme. Occupations covered by the incentive include those in the agriculture, building, engineering and automotive industries.

ADDITIONAL PLACES IN THE NEW APPRENTICESHIPS ACCESS PROGRAMME

The Government is providing $51.7 million over five years, commencing 1 July 2005, for an additional 5,000 places per year in the New Apprenticeships Access Programme (NAAP). NAAP assists job seekers who experience barriers to skilled employment to obtain and maintain a New Apprenticeship. Other employment and further education and training are also successful outcomes. Participants receive nationally recognised vocational training that is linked to a New Apprenticeship pathway, job search assistance and support once placed in employment.

COMMONWEALTH TRADE LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP

The Government is providing $106.3 million over five years, commencing 1 July 2005, to provide two tax exempt $500 payments to New Apprentices who successfully complete the first and second year of a New Apprenticeship in a skill shortage trade with a small to medium sized business.
WOMEN’S HUMAN RIGHTS AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION


In particular, the SDA makes discrimination on the grounds of sex unlawful in a range of areas of public life, for example, employment, the provision of goods and services, education, accommodation and in the administration of Commonwealth programmes. The Commission has the power to inquire into, and attempt to conciliate, complaints alleging a breach of the SDA, and alleged breaches of a ‘human right’ as defined under the HREOC Act. The Commission also has an important role in promoting an understanding and acceptance of, and compliance with, anti-discrimination laws including sex discrimination laws.

In 2005–2006, the Government will provide $12.1 million to fund the work of the Commission.

BEIJING PLATFORM FOR ACTION

This year, 2005, marks the tenth anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action, which is a United Nations blueprint for advancing the position of the world’s women across 12 key areas: women and poverty; education and training of women; women and health; violence against women; women and armed conflict; women and the economy; women in power and decision-making; institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women; human rights of women; women and the media; women and the environment; and the girl child.

The Beijing Platform for Action informs both the Australian Government’s domestic agenda for women and our overseas aid programme, and on 2 March 2005 at the 49th Session of the United Nations’ Commission on the Status of Women, Senator the Hon. Kay Patterson, Minister for Family and Community Services, Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women’s Issues reaffirmed the Australian Government’s commitment to this wide-ranging agenda for improving the lives of all women.
CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) is the major human rights treaty for women and was ratified by Australia in 1983. In January 2006, Australia will present its combined fourth and fifth periodic report to the United Nations CEDAW Committee. This will be a valuable opportunity to advise the Committee of significant progress made by Australian women and girls since the last report in 1997, and to discuss with the Committee how the Government will continue to pursue equality for Australian women.
HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM

The Australian Government administers an annual Humanitarian Program which in 2005–06 will provide 13,000 places for people subject to persecution or substantial discrimination amounting to a gross violation of human rights. Women are well represented in the Humanitarian Program, reflecting the fact that more than half of the world’s refugees are women and children. As at 31 March 2005, 48 per cent of visas granted in 2004–05 under Australia’s Humanitarian Program were to female applicants.

In recognition of refugee women in particularly vulnerable situations, the Woman at Risk visa was established as part of the Humanitarian Program. Applicants must be outside their home country, not have the protection of a male relative and be in danger of victimisation, harassment or serious abuse because of their sex. Each year, 10.5 per cent of all refugee category places visas are notionally allocated to the Woman at Risk visa category.

NEW ARRANGEMENTS FOR ASSESSING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE CLAIMS

Australia’s migration programme includes an important safety mechanism enabling people in Australia applying for certain types of permanent residence, including Spouse visas, to continue with their application after the breakdown of their spouse or partner relationship if they, or a member of their family unit, have experienced domestic violence committed by their spouse or de facto partner.

The Australian Government introduced this mechanism to provide an alternative to spouses and partners who might otherwise feel compelled to remain in abusive relationships rather than end the relationship and be forced to leave Australia.

To ensure that only genuine claimants can benefit from the provisions, effective 1 July 2005 arrangements will be put in place to enable the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs (DIMIA) to refer doubtful claims to an independent service provider with expertise in assessing such claims. Where the service provider finds that domestic violence has not occurred, the application will be refused. By eliminating non-genuine claims of domestic violence, DIMIA will be better able to serve genuine victims, most of whom are women in need of a speedy resolution of their immigration status.

Domestic violence contact officers are located at Immigration offices in each state and territory. They are immigration officers who are experienced in handling with sensitivity applications from people seeking permanent residence on the grounds of domestic violence. They provide information on the domestic provisions as well as details of organisations offering a wide range of welfare and legal services.
SUPPORT FOR HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM ENTRANTS

The Australian Government seeks to ensure that people settling in this country under the Humanitarian Program have support and assistance to successfully rebuild their lives. Intensive initial settlement support is provided to humanitarian entrants under the Integrated Humanitarian Settlement Strategy (IHSS). The IHSS provides cultural orientation, initial information and orientation, accommodation assistance, tenancy training, household formation support, and early health assessment and intervention.

Women with low education levels who are the sole head of the family may need more time and support to become fully functional in Australian society. The settlement services provided by the Australian Government are very responsive and flexible to the needs of these women.

FURTHER SUPPORT FOR HUMANITARIAN PROGRAM ENTRANTS AND MIGRANTS

In addition to the intensive settlement support provided under the IHSS, the Australian Government, under the Community Settlement Services Scheme (CSSS) and through Migrant Resource Centre/Migrant Service Agency network, funds not-for-profit agencies to assist with the settlement needs of humanitarian entrants and family stream migrants with low levels of English proficiency, in their first five years. Primarily, agencies provide information and referral services, build linkages with mainstream organisations, and assist small and emerging communities to build their capacity to effectively support members of their community.

Many of those in the settlement services target group are women. The projects approved for funding each year are responsive to the particular needs of these women. In 2004–05, $2.5 million is being provided under the CSSS to organisations to specifically address the settlement needs of women, in particular women from small and emerging communities such as the Afghan, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Kuwaiti, Somali, Sudanese and Kurdish communities.

LIVING IN HARMONY GRANTS

Living in Harmony is an Australian Government initiative designed to promote community harmony, build relationships between people and address racism where it occurs in Australia. The Living in Harmony initiative’s Community Grants Program is designed to develop local solutions against racism at community level. It promotes harmony, brings down barriers between cultures and addresses issues of racism. Grants are available to incorporated, not-for-profit organisations.
Examples of projects with a focus on women include:

- *Underneath We Are All the Same* aims to raise awareness of the contribution of Muslim women to the development of Queensland by publishing a book on the history of Muslim women in Queensland;
- *Believing Women for a Culture of Peace* which aims to target the culture of fear, distrust and open conflict associated with religious and ethnic differences, especially toward women;
- *Bridging Dialogues* will develop a media manual for use by journalists and media outlets/researchers; develop a training module for journalism students and provide media training to Muslim women;
- *My Dress, My Image, My Choice* will hold a series of functions for Muslim women to educate non-Muslims about Islamic dress code and the Islamic religion; and
- *Racism Affects Women’s Health* seeks to reduce racism and prejudice faced by Somali women due to their Muslim dress and in particular the hijab.

**RESIDENTIAL HOUSING PROJECTS AND ALTERNATIVE DETENTION ARRANGEMENTS**

The Australian Government is strongly committed to developing innovative alternative immigration detention strategies for women and children. The Government will provide overall funding of $13.6 million in 2004–05 and 2005–06 for the development of Residential Housing Projects (RHPs) in Sydney and Perth (including increased resourcing and capital injections), as well as alternative detention arrangements. The total increased funding (including the capital component) is $27.4 million over four years.

Significant progress has been made in responding to the special needs of women and children. These initiatives have included the establishment of RHPs, foster care placements with State welfare authorities and community care placements for people with special needs. RHPs were developed as a more domestic and independent family environment for women and children in detention, using housing or motel-style accommodation in a community setting. RHPs are the preferred model for women and children in immigration detention for other than short periods of time.

The Port Augusta RHP, near Baxter Immigration Detention Facility in South Australia, is the only currently occupied facility. This RHP has been operating since November 2003 and has capacity to accommodate 40 women and children, depending on family composition.

Villawood RHP in Sydney is under development and is expected to be available in early 2006.
Women and Australian Aid

AUSTRALIAN OVERSEAS AID PROGRAM

Australia recognises the importance of the equality of men and women as an important
development goal. Sustainable development can only be achieved with the active
participation of all members of the community. Providing equal rights and access to
resources and opportunities for women and girls is crucial to reducing poverty, illiteracy
and disease. Achieving gender equality requires a focus on both men’s and women’s roles.
Australia acknowledges that the goals and priorities for tackling gender equity will vary from
country to country, and should be sensitive to the specific needs and priorities of developing
country partners.

In 2005–06 Australia’s overseas aid programme will continue to promote equal opportunities
for men and women as participants and beneficiaries of development, and mainstream
gender considerations in the planning, design, and implementation of aid activities.

Gender policy objectives include improving women’s access to education, health and
economic resources; promoting participation and leadership in decision making at local
and national levels; and promoting human rights of women and eliminating discrimination
against women.

Gender considerations are incorporated into a wide range of aid activities, in areas such
as good governance, health and education, conflict prevention and peace building, and
human rights. Examples of gender-related aid activities include:

• the Fiji Women’s Crisis Centre, which has been funded since 1991 and will continue to be
  funded for the next five years;

• programmes aimed at reducing people trafficking in South-East Asia, in particular its
  impact on women and children;

• the Solomon Islands Community Support Program, which supports a range of community
development activities and improved policy frameworks that benefit women in the
Solomon Islands. The programme will support the review and updating of the Solomon
Islands National Women’s Policy, strengthen the National and Provincial Women’s
Councils, and support a range of community development projects that directly
benefit women;

• promoting awareness of gender issues in Papua New Guinea under the Law and Justice
  Sector Program, through initiatives including the development of a gender strategy and
  plan of action, support for equal employment opportunity policies and conferences, and
  support for the Law Reform Commission’s implementation of CEDAW;
• in the West Bank and Gaza, support will be provided (2005–2007) to Australian NGOs to work with their Palestinian counterparts to address Palestinian vulnerability to poverty and conflict by increasing economic and livelihoods opportunities for vulnerable Palestinian groups, especially women; and
• the Addressing Gender Violence Fund which, since 2000, has been providing funding to civil society organisations to support their efforts in combating the very high levels of violence against women and girls in South Africa.