



Australian Government
Australian Public Service Commission

Submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024

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Introduction

Dear Committee members,

The Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024. The APSC notes that the Bill, if enacted, would be an ambitious step forward in addressing the action gap in improving gender equality in Australian workplaces.

We thank the Committee for considering the APSC's views.

About the APSC

The APSC is a central agency within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio. Our purpose is to position the Australian Public Service workforce for the future to ensure it meets the demands and expectations of the Australian Government and people. We aim to continuously improve people management, manager capability and professional development across the Australian Public Service (APS). As a key part of this role, the APSC has responsibility to support quality public sector workforce management, for building public service leadership for the future, for lifting public service capability and to foster trust in public service integrity.

Progress on achieving gender equality

The APSC provides support to APS and other Australian Government public sector employers on a number of key gender focused policy areas, including:

- Workplace relations support, including through administration of the Australian Government's *Public Sector Workplace Relations Policy 2023*; and
- Support to implement the *Australian Public Service Gender Equality Strategy 2021-2026*.

In recent years, the APS has achieved a number of key outcomes in advancing gender equality as a model employer. Through the APS-wide bargaining round that concluded in early 2024, APS agencies have achieved the following minimum standards through their enterprise agreements:

- A forward leaning flexible working arrangements clause that provides all employees the ability to request flexible working arrangements
- Significant improvements in parental leave following the *Review of the Maternity Leave (Commonwealth Employees) Act 1973*, including increases to leave entitlements, access to parental leave without a qualification period and a progressive movement towards equal parental leave for both parents by early 2027
- Access to lactation breaks and suitable facilities for breastfeeding or expressing milk
- Holistic support for employees who are victim-survivors of family and domestic violence, including access to paid leave on an as needed basis
- Employee Assistance Programs, which can be accessed by all employees including where the employee is experiencing Family and Domestic Violence
- A common Respect at Work clause, which recognises that preventing sexual harassment, sex discrimination, sex-based harassment and victimisation in the workplace is a priority. The clause commits agencies to consult with employees and unions in developing, reviewing and evaluating approaches to prevention.

In addition, the gender pay gap for the APS continues to decrease. As reported in the *State of the Service Report 2023-24*, the APS achieved its lowest-ever gender pay gap in December 2023, at 4.5%.

The Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024 and the Australian Government public sector context

The Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Setting Gender Equality Targets) Bill 2024

The Bill's new provisions are likely to be applicable to 38 APS agencies, as well as a number of other large Australian Government public sector employers who do not employ under the *Public Service Act 1999* (Non-APS employers). Should the Bill become law, the APSC would be well positioned to play a role in educating Australian Government public sector employers about their responsibilities under the legislation.