GENDER EQUALITY IN LEADERSHIP
A strategy for gender equality in leadership in the South Australian Public Sector
While women comprise the majority of public sector employees, and despite considerable progress over the last 10 years, women continue to be underrepresented in executive positions in the South Australian public sector. Many capable, hardworking women are not fulfilling their potential, particularly when it comes to senior leadership roles.

Gender equality in senior decision making is key to creating a public sector representative of the community it serves, and in turn creating a fairer society.

And it is simply good business sense – there is clear evidence that having more women in leadership and decision-making roles leads to improved operational and financial performance, increased innovation, and enhanced organisational reputation. By not fully drawing on the leadership talent of women, we are selling ourselves and our community short. Building an inclusive public sector will drive our innovation and we can model inclusive practices to the State’s private sector. South Australia’s economy is in a period of transition and can be supported by increased growth driven by the adaptive and agile mind set achieved through a diverse workforce.

Across the public sector we have some very dedicated groups and individuals championing gender equality in leadership and working to create the conditions and cultures that enable both women and men to thrive. We understand that there is a shared frustration that women’s representation in leadership hasn’t increased as much as it could have, despite ongoing targets and that some of the barriers that existed ten years ago still exist today. However, there is still a genuine momentum for change.

Now is a time for us to recalibrate, learn from what has been working and disrupt the status quo. No one agency has it all right. But together we can share our insights, pool our resources and dismantle barriers.

Collaborating across government and focussing on action will help us turn our aspirations into reality. The public sector must be an exemplar to South Australian businesses and demonstrate the use of gender equality as a business enabler. We must show that gender equality in leadership is achievable and makes a powerful positive difference to the productivity, effectiveness and potential for innovation in our public sector.
Our Commitment...

We, the members of the Senior Management Council, commit to the implementation of the strategies outlined in this Gender Equality in Leadership Strategy.

We will be accountable for actively supporting and championing gender equity principles and promoting gender equality within our agencies and throughout the whole public sector. We will drive the changes and model the behaviours and actions needed to advance the cause.

We commit to gender equality in leadership the public sector

Ingrid Haythorpe
Attorney-General’s Department

Rick Persse
Department for Education and Child Development

David Brown
Department for Correctional Services

Tony Harrison
Department for Communities and Social Inclusion

Scott Ashby
Department of Primary Industries and Regions South Australia

Mark Duffy
Department of State Development

Erma Ranieri
Commissioner for Public Sector Employment

Sandy Pitcher
Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources

Dr Don Russell
Department of the Premier and Cabinet

Grant Stevens
Commissioner of Police

Vickie Kaminski
Department for Health and Ageing

Michael Deegan
Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure

David Reynolds
Department of Treasury and Finance
Introduction

A strategy for gender equality in leadership in the South Australian Public Sector

In 2003, Target 52 in South Australia’s Strategic Plan was set to have women comprising half of the public sector employees in executive levels (including Chief Executives) by 2014 and for this to be maintained thereafter. At that time, 29% of executives were women.

After more than ten years, while significant progress has been made, the South Australian Public Sector has failed to achieve this target. As at June 2015, 45% of executives in the South Australian public sector were women, and only 37% of the South Australian Executive Service (SAES) cohort were women.¹

This is despite the business case for women in leadership roles being well established.

The reasons for not achieving the target might include an inconsistent approach to targets and other measures aimed at increasing women’s participation as leaders in the public sector, or gender equality initiatives becoming a low priority.

At times, the underrepresentation of women in executive roles has been attributed to women’s lack of aspiration to seniority. In 2011 an employee survey of the South Australian public sector executive feeder group showed that proportionately equal numbers of male and female respondents aspired to become executives.²

On 31 July 2015, 200 senior public sector leaders attended the Driving Innovation and Growth: The Diversity Dividend Forum. This group identified the following as the top 5 organisational barriers preventing them from advancing gender diversity:

- Unconscious bias
- Leadership commitment
- Organisational culture
- Recruitment and promotion process
- Workplace flexibility.³
Gender Equality and Gender Equity

What is the Difference?

*Gender equity* is the process of being fair to women and men. To ensure fairness, strategies and measures must often be available to compensate for women's historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from otherwise operating on a level playing field.

*Gender equality* means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.

Equity leads to equality
Vision
The South Australian public sector is a role model for gender equality in driving productivity and innovation.

Mission
To build and maintain inclusive public sector leadership, where women and men are equally represented, valued and rewarded.

Benefits
• Improved organisational and financial performance
• The South Australian public sector workforce is representative of the community it serves
• The South Australian public sector reflects the attributes of a Modern Public Sector.

Key Levers
Drawing upon current research, workplace studies, workforce statistics, and feedback from public sector women and men, three key levers have been identified as integral to achieving gender equality in leadership:

• Leadership Accountability – Chief executives and senior leaders need to be accountable for actively supporting gender equity principles and advocating gender equality within their organisations.

• Empowered Workplaces – Workplace cultures need to be supportive of women, encourage flexible work practices, and recognise and address gender biases.

• Talent Pipeline – Talent definition and identification, access to development opportunities, and leadership capability models need to be gender-equitable and bias-free for employees at all levels.

Consultation
This strategy complements the Achieving Women’s Equality: South Australia’s Women’s Policy released by the Office for Women. The Office for Women and the Equal Opportunity Commission have been consulted in its preparation.

Public sector agency representatives have also been consulted and their feedback has been incorporated in this final document.
Key Levers

1. Leadership Accountability

2. Empowered Workplaces

3. Talent Pipeline
Leadership Accountability

The most important factor in ensuring equal access and removing obstacles to leadership opportunity and advancement for women is a commitment from the top

Where we are now

• 56% of participants at the Driving Innovation and Growth: The Diversity Dividend Forum believed that gender diversity was not a priority in their organisation, or were unsure whether it was a priority. Leadership commitment was also identified by participants as one of the top five organisational barriers to them advancing gender diversity and “people in power with old ways of thinking” was seen as a key individual barrier.³

• In Australian businesses, the more senior a female becomes, the higher the gap in wage patterns.⁴ ⁵ As at August 2014, South Australian women earned 16.7% less than their male counterparts.⁶ This figure includes women in the South Australian Public Sector, but pay equity data specifically for the public sector workforce is not currently reported on in order to assess or evaluate this in the public sector context.

Where we want to be

Chief Executives and senior leaders actively support and advocate gender equity within their organisations and are role models for good practice across the public sector. Public sector employees at all levels understand that achieving gender equality in leadership is a priority.
How we will get there

Principles, targets and measures that reflect gender equity and equality will be incorporated into all Government agencies’ business plans and practices. It will be the responsibility of the Chief Executive to ensure these are met.

**Actions**

- Conduct a gender pay gap analysis of public sector data to identify the gender pay gap, and in what levels, roles or agencies the gap is more prevalent. Develop a strategy to address the pay gap according to findings. (Office for the Public Sector in conjunction with the Office for Women)

- To support succession planning, Chief Executives prepare a list of individuals who are suitable to replace them. The list must be at least 50% women and can include people who are external to the public sector. This list will support succession planning and can be drawn on for acting opportunities.

- Examine the influence of the budgetary environment and central controls for executive numbers on the achievement of Target 52.

- Develop a reverse mentoring program where aspiring female executives reverse mentor men in senior management to reduce barriers and enhance leaders’ understanding of women’s experiences in the public sector. (Office for the Public Sector)

- Engage leaders to develop “safe-to-fail” initiatives for gender equity. (Office for the Public Sector)

**Measures**

- Gender pay gap (through further research as above)

- Proportion of women in executive roles (monitored using annual Workforce Information Collection).

**Outcomes**

- Chief executives and senior leaders are seen as champions for gender equity

- Gender equity is recognised as a business imperative for agencies and the public sector

- The influence of budgetary climate on the achievement of Target 52 is resolved

- Reduced or no gender pay gap within the public sector

- Women are equally represented in executive roles.
Empowered workplaces

“In the long term, creating a more flexible, diverse and inclusive Public Sector workforce will generate productivity, increase workforce participation and improve workplace culture” – Flexible Workplace Futures project (SA Public Sector 2014)

Where we are now

- Unconscious bias, organisational culture, and workplace flexibility were among the top five barriers to advancing gender diversity, as identified by participants at the Driving Innovation and Growth: The Diversity Dividend Forum. 3

- To date, initiatives to improve gender equality in leadership have often been led by women. Research shows that these initiatives are more likely to succeed when they are driven by men and women. 7

- Women are more likely than men to be the primary carers of their children and therefore require flexible work arrangements. In 2011, the Executive Feeder Group Survey found that the belief that they could not access flexible work arrangements as an executive was a significant deterrent to respondents aspiring to executive levels for both genders, but women chose this reason more frequently than men. 2

- When executives evaluate the leadership performance of male and female colleagues, they are 25 times more likely to comment on the woman’s gender. 8

- One in five Australian women experience harassment in the workplace. 9 Further investigation is required to identify the incidence within the South Australian Public Sector.

- 50% of women who are victims of domestic violence need to change their working conditions to escape their attacker or because of the low self-esteem it causes. 10

Where we want to be

- A bias free workplace in which employees, managers and leaders support gender equality through their statements, actions and decisions.

- Flexible, family-friendly working is accessible to all.

- A safe workplace for all.
How we will get there

Develop a supportive culture for women in the workplace that recognises and addresses gender biases, and encourages flexible work practices.

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<td>• Present a Summit to empower both male and female current and aspiring leaders to drive inclusive leadership (Office for the Public Sector)</td>
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<td>• Design, pilot and progressively roll out an education program focused on challenging unconscious bias, including practical tips and reference to multiple characteristics i.e. race, disability, sexuality, in addition to gender (Office for the Public Sector)</td>
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<td>• Engage men and develop their role in achieving gender equality (Office for the Public Sector/ Gender Equality in Leadership Steering Committee)</td>
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<td>• Promote and encourage the use of the Flexible Workplace Futures Package tools and training for managers (Office for the Public Sector/ Equal Opportunity Commission)</td>
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<td>• Evaluate employee uptake of flexible working arrangements and work life balance (Office for the Public Sector)</td>
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<td>• Research the levels and nature of harassment in the public sector and the different experiences between genders and implement remedial actions (Office for the Public Sector)</td>
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<td>• Ensure every State Government department becomes an accredited White Ribbon Workplace (Equal Opportunity Commission)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Implement a policy to protect and support victims of domestic/family violence, facilitating the provision of up to 15 days special leave with pay (Office for the Public Sector).</td>
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<td>• Employee perceptions of unconscious bias, flexible working arrangements and work life balance as measured by the High Performance Framework and agency based employee survey results.</td>
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<td>• Men recognise their role and are active in achieving gender equality</td>
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<td>• Consistency in access to flexible work practices across the public sector and improved work life balance</td>
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<td>• Women believe they have equal opportunities to be promoted to leadership.</td>
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Talent Pipeline

The problem is not the lack of female talent, rather the leaky pipeline

Where we are now

- As at June 2015, women comprise 68% of all public sector employees, but more men progress at every level to comprise 55% at executive level (and 63% of SAES).1

- Public sector women report that there are structural and cultural barriers to equitable career progression for women and, as a result, female talent ‘leaks’ from the career progression pipeline at a higher rate than male talent. Some of the reasons include:

  > Women are not afforded the same opportunities for development as men, which can prevent them progressing up the talent pipeline. As at June 2015, more than two thirds of the public sector’s total expenditure on training and development was spent on men. This is despite men comprising just under one third of the workforce.1

  > ‘Merit based’ processes often favour male schema which means that decisions about legitimate leadership are routinely biased against women and in favour of men. ‘Recruitment and promotion processes’ were identified by participants at the Driving Innovation and Growth: The Diversity Dividend Forum as one of the top five barriers to advancing gender diversity.3

  > Women (and men) don’t see evidence of women holding senior positions, which impacts their assessment of whether women are suitable for such roles.

  > Initiatives have been focussed on changing female employee’s characteristics so they will thrive in male dominated workplaces, as opposed to improving workplace culture to support inclusive leadership.

  > Two thirds of men believe that women have equal opportunity to be promoted to leadership and governance positions, yet less than a third of women agreed.11

- As at 1 January 2015, women comprised 48% of member positions and 40% of chair positions on State Government boards and committees.4 Membership on boards and committees is a recognised career path to executive positions and research shows increases in the representation of women on boards, drives an increase in female representation in management.

Where we want to be

Talent definition and identification, access to development and leadership capability models are gender-equitable and bias-free for employees at all levels. Women are provided with access to leadership development and leadership roles to the same extent as men.
How we will get there

Recruitment and employment practices include sustainable initiatives that attract, develop and retain women along the talent pipeline.

**Actions**

- Set and track gender equality targets for women at all levels of the talent pipeline (Office for the Public Sector/agencies).
  > Revise recruitment policies and training to ensure gender neutral practices and procedures:
  > 50/50 representation of women on selection panels – where the panel is made up of three panellists, there should be at least one woman, and the third panellist should be selected according to suitability of the role. Panellists do not need to be more senior to the role being advertised and can be stakeholders from outside of the public sector.
  > All candidate pools are diverse and, where possible, include equal numbers of men and women
  > Align service agreements with recruitment agencies to the policy
  > Job advertisements use inclusive language (agencies).

- Present a suite of programs to strengthen the leadership and management skills of aspiring and current female leaders at all levels

- Publicly celebrate female role models and achievements to showcase the public sector as an exemplar of gender equality in leadership (Office for the Public Sector)

- Pilot a Sponsorship Program where women are proactively supported through career progression (Office for the Public Sector)

- Partner in industry programs for aspiring women leaders to broaden opportunities (Office for the Public Sector)

- Support and encourage public sector women as members of boards and committees (Office for the Public Sector with Office for Women/agencies).

**Measures**

- Women and men have equal access to development opportunities (monitored through the Workforce Information Collection)

- Increased number of women in the leadership feeder groups (monitored through the Workforce Information Collection)

- Representation of public sector women on State Government Boards and Committees.

**Outcomes**

- A larger, more diverse leadership talent pool.
Governance

The Commissioner for Public Sector Employment will lead the implementation of the Gender Equality in Leadership Strategy. Progress against the actions of the Strategy will be reported in the Commissioner’s annual State of the Sector report.

The Strategy complements the Achieving Women’s Equality: South Australia’s Women’s Policy that is being led by the Office for Women.

A cross-government Steering Committee will support the Commissioner in implementing the Strategy. Committee members include:

- Valuer General, State Valuation Office, Department of Planning Transport and Infrastructure (Chair)
- Commissioner for Public Sector Employment (Deputy Chair)
- The Under Treasurer
- A representative from Senior Management Council
- A representative from the Chiefs for Gender Equity
- Chief Executive, Lifetime Support Authority
- A Deputy Chief Executive
- Commissioner for Equal Opportunity
- Director, Office for Women
- Manager, Leadership, Office for the Public Sector
- Representative of the Premier’s Council for Women.

Executive support for the Steering Committee will be provided by the Office for the Public Sector. Current membership details are available from the Office for the Public Sector website.
References

1. The South Australian Public Sector Workforce Information Collection 2015.