



Australian
Human Rights
Commission

Pursuing Implementation of Wiyi Yani U Thangani

Dialogue Paper One



**Wiyi Yani
U Thangani**

Women's Voices
SECURING OUR RIGHTS
SECURING OUR FUTURE



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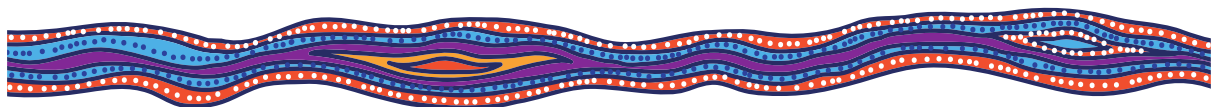
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Background to Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Stage Two and the roundtables and dialogue paper series

Overview of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* project and report

The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)* project is a multi-year initiative led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, June Oscar AO. Stage One of the project involved engagements with over 2,000 First Nations women and girls from 50 locations in urban, regional and remote Australia, including senior elders, girls from 12 to 17 years of age, women in prison and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, Sistergirl and Brotherboy (LGBTQIA+SB). Informed by their voices, Stage One is culminated in the [Wiyi Yani U Thangani \(Women's Voices\): Securing our Rights, Securing our Future 2020 Report](#) (the Report) and the accompanying [Community Guide](#).

The Report is an expansive whole-of-life report. It explores issues through a well overdue First Nations gender-lens, from justice and child protection to health, social and emotional wellbeing, service delivery, housing, disability, access to country and economic participation. Throughout each chapter of the Report, the strengths, priorities and aspirations of women and girls are defined. The Report also catalogues the profound inequalities experienced by First Nations women and girls in every aspect of their lives. It provides the evidence that these inequalities are perpetuated and entrenched by mainstream systems and structures that have marginalised the voices of First Nations women and girls for generations. Women and girls have described how these current systems take a punitive and interventionist response to issues associated with inequalities and conditions of poverty. Consequently, issues of social harm, trauma, rates of child removal and incarceration are made worse.



A major message throughout every chapter of the Report is that **structural change** and systemic reform is needed, on a large-scale, in order to combat and overcome inequalities and intergenerational harms and trauma. Structural change is described below in further detail. For this structural change to be genuine and meaningful, the priorities and aspirations of First Nations women and girls must inform the development of laws, policies and workplace practices and processes. The intention being that systems, which emerge from these structural changes, become reflective and responsive to the holistic and interconnected lives of First Nations women and girls, and their families, communities and all of society.

We are articulating this as the need to embed **First Nations gender justice and equality** across all policy domains from the government to organisational levels. This term is defined and explored in greater detail below.

Stage Two: Background and the roundtable and dialogue series

Stage Two of *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* is about beginning the processes of responding, and exploring how, to implement the priorities of First Nation women and girls. It is about taking the first steps in considering the actions needed to shift structures away from punitive responses towards responses that are enabling and grounded in the lived realities and expertise of First Nations women and girls.

To achieve this, every aspect of the Report needs to be responded to overtime. Actions across every sector, and the structural changes to support these actions, need to be identified and progressed so implementation of the Report is effective. This is long-term work that has to be sustained. That is why the Report recommends a National Action Plan to advance the health and wellbeing of First Nations women and girls.



As a first step in doing this work and putting the building blocks in place for a National Action Plan, Stage Two will take a targeted approach—focusing on pinpointing actions and structural changes across **four key priority areas** (described below). These areas, broadly related to First Nations women's self-determination and the importance of their culture and knowledge systems, are considered foundational in the development of systems that are responsive to First Nations women and girls. It is intended that this work will provide an example for identifying actions, structural changes and accountability and monitoring mechanisms, to be used in developing responses across all areas of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* Report. The work of structural change is inherently complex. We know how hard it is and that is why Stage Two explores how to do it, so we can make structural change accessible and possible for others to implement.

As part of this work, we will also develop the language to better articulate the issues—it will give us language around how to talk about the problems we want to address and how to respond. This paper begins this formulation of language with definitions of First Nations gender justice and equality and structural change.

To begin this significant and complex work, we are bringing together a diverse range of thought leaders and experts, in a series of roundtables, to provide their insights and expertise on progressing structural change, embedding First Nations gender justice and equality and identifying the actions and change needed in the four key priority areas, as well as how to effectively monitor progress and hold stakeholders accountable.

The first roundtable will be informed by this dialogue paper and accompanying workbook. Following this, a further two iterations of the dialogue paper will be developed to inform the next roundtable discussions. The final iteration of the dialogue paper will set the foundation for dialogue at the National Summit and development of the National Action Plan. The final paper will help guide implementation of *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* and the critical actions identified throughout Stage Two, to be used by a range of stakeholders from community members and organisations, to government and the private sector.

Papers and resources produced as part of this work will be made publicly available on the Australian Human Rights Commission and *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* websites.



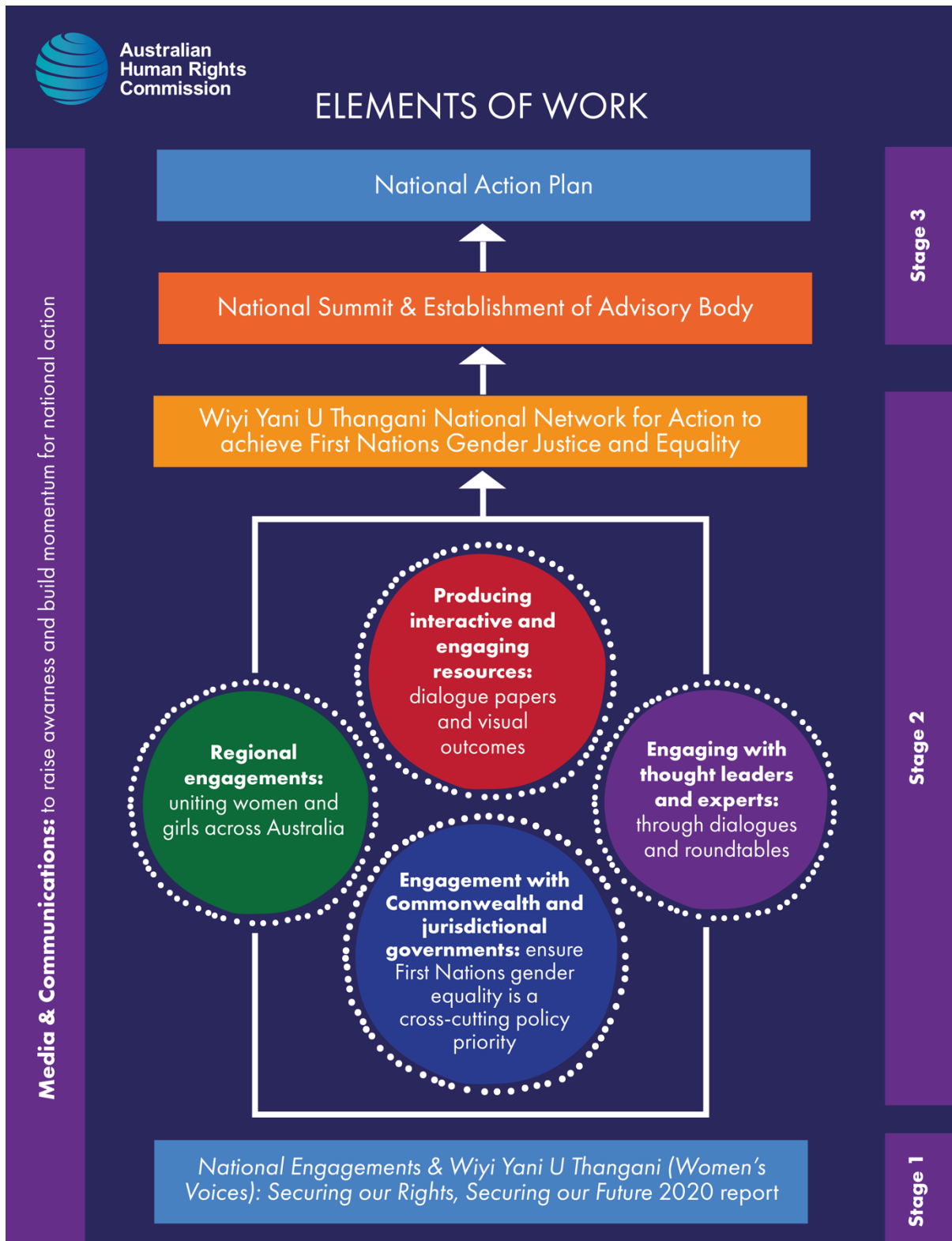
Stage Two: elements of work

Stage Two is about responding to First Nations women and girls' priorities and aspirations. To progress this work, we are engaging with a range of stakeholders to:

- Progress the status of First Nations gender justice and equality as a crosscutting priority for policymaking at all levels
- Identify and articulate key structural reforms to advance First Nations gender justice and equality through implementation of alternative ways of working, the formulation of targets, and the development of measurement and accountability mechanisms across four key priority areas; and
- Build support and capacity for a National Summit and National Action Plan process focused on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to take place in 2022.



The intersecting and interrelating elements of Stage Two work can be seen in the diagram below.



***Wiyi Yani U Thangani* overarching recommendations**

Stage Two responds to the seven overarching recommendations made in *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* Report and set the foundations for recommendation one. These are structural reform recommendations—they address the systemic issues raised by First Nations women and girls that are pivotal to improving their lives and outcomes across a whole range of domains.

- 01** A National Action Plan on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls

All Australian Governments commit to the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Action Plan to address the challenges, priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.
- 02** Conduct a National Summit and establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body

The Australian Government fund a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Summit to design the key elements of the National Plan and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body to lead and implement the National Action Plan and retain a monitoring role to hold all governments to account.
- 03** Empowering women's leadership on the ground

All Australian Governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations, as well as business, NGO and education sectors to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' leadership. This includes embedding gender equality as a key principle and targets to increase the representation of First Nations women across workplaces and in decision-making roles.
- 04** Protecting, supporting, and reviving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and knowledge systems

All Australian Governments urgently invest in community-led approaches to enable women and girls to exercise their cultural rights to practise, transmit and preserve our Law and ceremony, languages, knowledges and cultural practices.
- 05** An urgent focus on healing from intergenerational trauma

The Australian Government recognise the importance of understanding and addressing intergenerational trauma to closing the gap across all socio-economic and cultural indicators of wellbeing. This includes by investment in community-led healing initiatives and a national healing and trauma-informed workforce development strategy.
- 06** National action to eradicate racism

The Australian Government commit to action to address racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including women and girls. This includes developing a national anti-racism framework with targets and accountability measures, data collection and public awareness raising activities.
- 07** Local and regional focused engagement

The Australian Government focus its engagement and service delivery practices with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and their communities at the local and regional level. This requires 'needs mapping', directing funds to target the root causes of inequality, evaluating the impacts of funding decisions on women, supporting capacity-building and the full involvement of communities in research and evaluation.

Dialogue Paper and Roundtable One

This first dialogue paper provides an overview of Stage Two and its elements of work that aim to progress First Nations gender justice and equality. In this paper, we review and critique concepts of gender equality, the gaps in the mainstream definition that exclude First Nations women and girls and consider how to define an Australian First Nations women and girls understanding of gender equality.

It then considers and expands on what is meant by structural change—detailing what is needed to transform current conditions and to meet and realise the rights and aspirations of First Nations women and girls over time.

This paper also identifies four cross-cutting priority areas that, if invested in, have the potential to provide alternative sustainable approaches that advance the wellbeing of First Nations women and girls. The four key priority areas are each covered in further detail in the accompanying workbook for Roundtable One. A large focus of Stage Two will consider the goals, targets and indicators that could be developed to correspond with the identified actions across each area. This is to ensure that we create a framework of accountability and develop the right mechanisms to measure progress which reflects an interconnected and holistic approach to advancing wellbeing.

This dialogue paper is intended to stimulate discussion, generate ideas and encourage readers to reflect on their own practices. It is hoped that the reader uses the paper as a tool to consider how to approach implementation of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* report throughout life, in places of work and when making and setting policies. The paper is by no means complete, but part of an iterative processes to exploring how to do implementation effectively.



Defining First Nations gender justice and equality

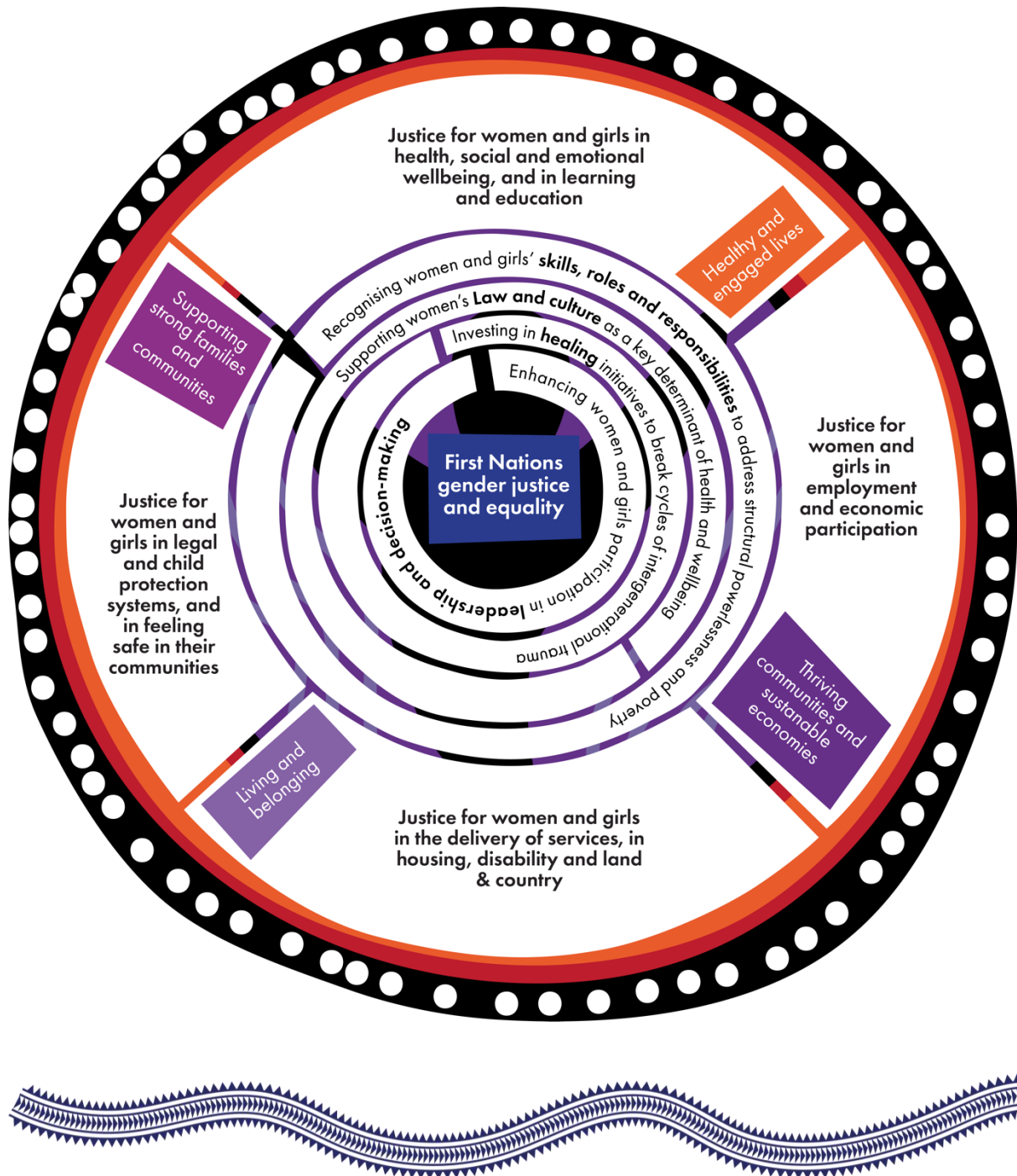
What do we mean by First Nations gender justice and equality?

First Nations gender justice and equality is the full self-determination and realisation of the rights of First Nations women and girls. It is about ensuring that First Nations women and girls have equal access to the resources which can enable them to determine the institutions and systems—the policies, laws and programs—that govern and shape life.

In this specific context, gender justice and equality centres on the lived experiences and knowledges of First Nations women and girls. Gender justice recognises that it is the experiences and worldviews of First Nations women which are key to combatting, and healing from, injustices and inequalities. Embedded in this, is the knowledge that multiple voices must be embraced to dismantle structures that marginalise First Nations women and girls with the view of reconstructing systems from the ground-up that are inclusive, fair and just.

Crucially, a movement for First Nations gender justice and equality is not about making Indigenous and non-Indigenous men and women the same. Instead, it is ensuring that First Nations women's identities are recognised and equally valued and respected to all other peoples in society. Fundamentally, **to achieve a gender equality which benefits all society, justice must be guaranteed for First Nations women and girls in all areas of life**—from education, the economy, health, anti-discrimination and anti-violence work, to service delivery, land management, housing and much more.

The below diagram describes how First Nations gender justice and equality is an essential piece to all health, social, economic and land justice movements. First Nations gender justice and equality is about centering those who experience heightened marginalisation in terms of gender, race, sexuality and class to truly achieve justice across all areas of life.



Understanding gender

To know why gender justice and equality is needed, it is important to understand what gender is and how inequality is formed. More broadly, gender is largely understood as a construct, strongly tied to social expectations of being a man, woman, or another gender. Expectations of female and male characteristics and roles can be rigid but can also vary considerably over time and between peoples, cultures and nations¹. For the purpose of the dialogue papers the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) uses the following definitions of gender equity and equality which inform the Report:

Gender equity is the process of being fair to men and women. To ensure fairness, measures must often be put in place to compensate for the historical and social disadvantages that prevent women and men from operating on a level playing field. Equity is a means. Equality is the result.

Gender equality means that women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and for contributing to, and benefiting from, economic, social, cultural and political development. Gender equality is therefore the equal valuing by society of the similarities and the differences of men and women, and the roles they play. It is based on women and men being full partners in their home, their community and their society.²

By extension “gender justice entails ending the inequalities between women and men that are produced and reproduced in the family, the community, the market and the state. It requires mainstream institutions—from justice to economic policy-making—to be accountable for tackling the injustice and discrimination that keep women excluded”³.

Intersectional discrimination and inequalities

Today, gender discrimination and inequality between men and women exists in all nations on earth, meaning that no contemporary society has achieved equality for women.⁴ Through a combination of behavioural norms and social, economic and political structures, gender stereotypes and discrimination are reinforced. The socio-economic inequalities that become entrenched as a result, disproportionately impact Black, Brown and Indigenous women, girls and LGBTQIA+SB peoples, everywhere.⁵

Gender inequality is commonly defined as the 'unequal value afforded to men and women and an unequal distribution of power, resources and opportunity between them'.⁶

Throughout *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* women and girls stressed how this power imbalance is made worse along racial and cultural lines. For First Nations women and girls, the gender inequality they experience, intersects with sexism, racism, classism, political and economic disempowerment, discrimination against their indigeneity and marginalisation of their knowledges and worldviews. Mainstream policy approaches rarely pay enough attention to intersectionality and the gendered dimensions of racism or cultural marginalisation, other than a few important exceptions.⁷

For First Nations women and girls, their experience of gender inequality goes beyond the different values afforded to men and women. **It is also the unequal value and distribution of power afforded to Western voices, knowledge, and institutions, over the knowledges of First Nations women and society, since colonisation.** The brutality of colonisation was enacted through the establishment of largely patriarchal institutions, which upturned and attempted to erase Indigenous peoples and their civilizations. Through dispossession and disempowerment, and often targeted acts of gendered violence such as rape and removal of children, Western racialised and gendered hierarchies were imposed. The status of First Nations women, as equals to men in pre-colonial society, was drastically re-cast.

Today, women and girls have described how it is this history of structural discrimination and inequalities which has caused intergenerational conditions of poverty—extreme overcrowding, inadequate income security, lack of access to good education, health care and meaningful employment. These conditions were frequently defined as the drivers of harm and violence in their lives. Throughout *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* women and girls stressed that equality is not just about changing behaviours but dismantling the structures that *reproduce* discriminatory behaviours.

Reasserting Indigenous conceptions of gender

Throughout *Wiyi Yani U Thangani*, women and girls defied the Western racialised and gendered stereotypes of them as victims, or overly aggressive and in need of support. Instead, they defined themselves as survivors, who are resilient, determined and empowered. They spoke of occupying central roles as the carers and nurturers of extended families, as well as the breadwinners and leaders who keep communities and economies functioning. Changing the mainstream gender equality narrative by reflecting the strengths, as identified by First Nations women and girls throughout the Report, is critical to overcoming inequality and marginalisation and improving life for everyone.

As stated in a recent Aboriginal Gender Study research paper, Aboriginal conceptions of 'gender equity are broader than current Western understandings which focus on individual rights to access power and resources'. Aboriginal conceptions are, 'founded in equal responsibility [between men and women], with the ability to control gendered spaces, as well as ... reciprocal relationships, and collective responsibilities.'⁸

Key international frameworks for gender equality and the rights of First Nations women and girls

Indigenous women globally have long been a part of advocating for and informing how their rights should be understood and realised. They played an active part in the negotiations to form the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).⁹ Indigenous women's rights are protected by all the provisions within UNDRIP. In particular, Articles 21(2) and 22(1)¹⁰ give special attention to the rights and needs of Indigenous women, and that States should guarantee that Indigenous women are protected against all forms of violence and discrimination.

Although UNDRIP has been endorsed by the Australian Government, it has not been implemented into Australian law, policy and practice. More broadly, the rights of all women and girls are protected in Australia, to varying degrees, under the responsibilities and obligations mandated by international human rights instruments.

Conventions such as the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Beijing Declaration and Platform to Action (BDPA), Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs), and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) do provide comprehensive frameworks and principles for the promotion and protection of the rights of women and girls. However, these instruments rarely pay enough attention to the distinct needs of Indigenous women and girls, nor to the gendered dimensions of racism and marginalisation against Indigenous women and girls.¹¹ Despite the international architecture for gender equality-related policy and mechanisms, Australia remains on the backfoot in translating these rights into systemic change, particularly for First Nations women.

Victoria Tauli Corpuz, The Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, stated on her country visit to Australia in 2017:

"In view of the ongoing difficulties in harmonizing international human rights obligations in federal, state and territory legislation... a more comprehensive human rights legislative framework would provide stronger protection for the rights of indigenous peoples."¹²

The Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	Beijing Declaration and Platform to Action (BDPA)	Women’s Empowerment Principles (WEP) and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
<p>CEDAW provides the foundation of the rights of women in international law. Upon signing CEDAW, Australia adopted the <i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984</i> (Cth) (SDA), enshrining the text in domestic law, and in 2020, Victoria became the first state to strengthen this commitment through the <i>Gender Equality Act 2020</i> (Vic). In 2017, both the United Nations CEDAW Committee and submissions to <i>Wiyi Yani U Thangani</i> drew attention to the multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, including those that are structurally and institutionally entrenched in Australia forming intergenerational cycles of poverty and disempowerment. While the SDA does provide legal protections, it has shown limitations in addressing systemic discrimination and does not recognise the compounding challenges placed on culturally diverse women and girls.¹³ This has created social and legal barriers for women to challenge and dismantle systems that affect them.</p>	<p>Unlike CEDAW, BDPA is only incorporated in Australia under soft law instruments. In the 26 years since its conception, federal and state and territory governments have released strategic agendas, frameworks, and action plans, including the <i>National Action Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children</i>, focusing on supporting the lives of women and girls, in line with BDPA priority areas— safety, health and wellbeing, leadership, and empowerment. Despite encouraging progress, however, the status of women and girls across these priorities remains underwhelming. As highlighted by the 2019 <i>Beijing+25 National Review Report</i>,¹⁴ this is a particular concern for First Nations women as existing policies and frameworks are yet to reduce gaps in areas where First Nations peoples are overrepresented, including violence against women and girls, and women’s economic participation.</p>	<p>WEPs and SDGs provide actionable targets and indicators packaged under high-level principles and goals, respectively, to advance gender equality. Significantly, Goal 5 of the SDGs is dedicated to women’s empowerment and gender equality. Both the WEPs and SDGs require voluntary reporting on progress by businesses (WEPs) and the Federal Government (SDGs) as an accountability mechanism and to track pathways forward.</p> <p>Despite six years of progress, in 2021 Australia has only achieved one SDG, Goal 3: Good Health and Wellbeing. While this goal is fundamental to the rights of First Nations women and girls, and communities, it does not adequately acknowledge the unique challenges faced by First Nations Peoples. A clear message throughout the <i>Wiyi Yani U Thangani</i> consultation process was that prioritising culturally safe and inclusive ways of approaching health and wellbeing is necessary to meet the needs of Indigenous peoples and work towards ways of healing from trauma.</p>

Why is a National Action Plan essential to achieving First Nations gender justice and equality?

01

A National Action Plan on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls

All Australian Governments commit to the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Action Plan to address the challenges, priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

Australia does not currently have a nationally consistent or coherent approach to responding to First Nations women and girls, nor the national mechanisms in place to measure and achieve the many dimensions of gender justice and equality.¹⁵

In an AHRC review of fourteen national policy frameworks that address First Nations and/or gender-based disadvantage either as core elements or as important focus areas, ten explicitly reference gender equality, three define gender, and only two—*Fourth National Action Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children*¹⁶ and *National Action Plan: Women, Peace and Security*¹⁷—define gender equality in full. Nevertheless, both these definitions are conflated with sex and do not acknowledge conceptions of gender framed around First Nations identities and values.

When strategies include gender-sensitive approaches they are more effective in improving outcomes for all people—children, women and men.

Without a dedicated and holistic focus, the experiences, needs and aspirations of First Nations women and girls are obscured which undermines the matters that affect their lives and—as a result—mitigating the efficacy of policies meant to support them.

This nationwide systems deficit can be best addressed through the development of a co-designed National Action Plan that defines and progresses First Nations gender justice and equality. This Action Plan would enable a consistent and holistic approach to advancing the wellbeing of First Nations women and girls throughout Australia.

A National Action Plan will support policymakers to develop First Nations gender-sensitive policies and gender-mainstreaming approaches to improve all policy frameworks throughout Australia including, but not limited to, the Closing the Gap Strategy. It will also strengthen the governance and accountability across governments to developing First Nations gender-responsive public policy.

For the purpose of Stage Two and helping to guide this type of policymaking, the AHRC uses the following definitions.

The UN and the OECD have highlighted that policies are often gender-blind meaning that they can be biased toward preferencing men and other privileged groups, which can further marginalise women and Indigenous peoples.

A gender mainstreaming approach is about acknowledging and rectifying this by,

'...the (re)organisation, improvement, development and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and at all stages.'¹⁸

Gender mainstreaming has a wide range of positive effects on policy-making. It:

- Leads to better informed policy-making through challenging the assumption that policies are gender neutral and will therefore lead to fairer allocation of resources and greater transparency
- Makes all policy-makers responsible for the inclusion of a gender equality perspective and introduces a learning process of paying attention to the broad effects of policies on peoples' lives, aiming at both men and women
- Brings gender equality into mainstream society—making it visible and is expected to change negative attitudes.¹⁹



Taking the next steps: Structural change

What we mean by structural change

Embedding First Nations gender justice and equality across our systems, institutions, laws and policies to enhance the lives of First Nations women and girls requires widespread **structural change**.

We acknowledge that First Nations societies have, for a long time, been leading the way in structural and systems change and social impact—working to decolonise how we imagine systems and systems change and reasserting Indigenous systems and ways of thinking, doing and being. Throughout the dialogue paper series, we will explore and develop First Nations conceptions of systems change. The below is an introduction to approaching structural and systems change predominately based on the findings from *Wiyi Yani U Thangani*.

Structural change is more than siloed efforts to reform different aspects of a system—it is reimagining and rebuilding a system from the ground up. As writer, feminist and activist, Audre Lorde famously described, “a master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house”.²⁰ This reflects what First Nations women and girls have said time and time again, that we cannot look to the system that has created this imbalance and disharmony to fix the issue, we must look to the knowledges and strengths of First Nations women and girls to build a new system.

Within systems change, multiple actors have shared responsibility and accountability, from First Nations women and girls, to communities, Indigenous organisations, governments and non-government organisations. As such, it is critical to ensure there is clear understanding and capability of all actors to connect on the issue, in order to cohesively respond. This requires the framing of the issue by those most affected, First Nations women and girls, to achieve the right outcome.

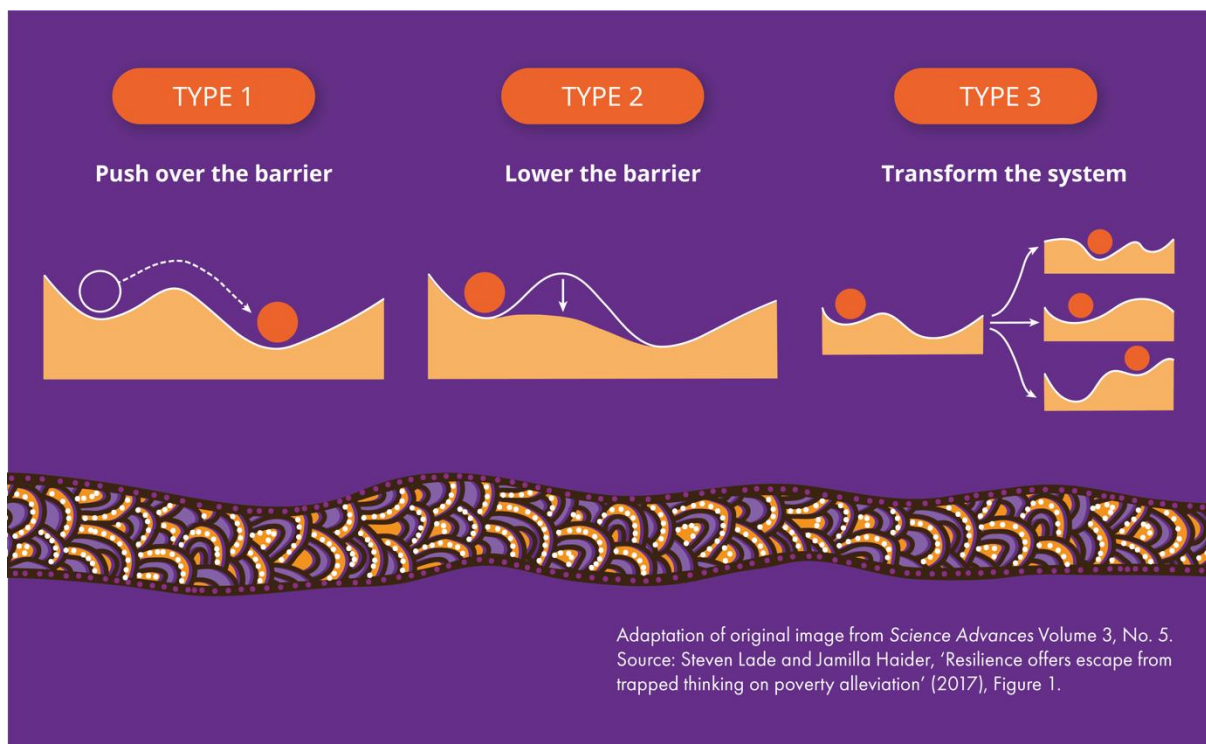
This framing and understanding of the issue is required across all structural change. Take the issue of violence against women for example, framing it in the paternalistic way as “we need to protect our women” does not target the true issue. The issue must instead be framed from the position of those truly affected. Women, in this example, are not saying “you need to protect us”, instead they are framing the issue as “you need to give us more agency to control the spaces in which we exist.”²¹

For First Nations women and girls, structural change has been framed as moving away from a deficit-based model based on patriarchal assumptions and racist ideologies towards a strengths-based approach that acknowledges their distinct skills and knowledges, recognises truth-telling as essential to healing, and fully respects and ensures their participation in decision-making.

Structural change takes working across different layers and points of intervention—both small scale and large scale—simultaneously. Whilst reforming policy or legislation, at the same time we must be addressing the deeply held cultural beliefs and values that are reinforcing and holding up legislation and policy.²² As such, we change the shape of the system as well as change beliefs and values within the system.



Changing the shape of our systems and institutions are key to structural change. It takes more than just inserting women into the already existing systems or institutions. Doing this—although a critical and significant step—is unlikely to significantly change the shape of the system that has created the conditions of oppression. We must transform the system—embed new, different and multiple perspectives to change how the system functions to give us a new way of seeing the world, beyond the business-as-usual approach. The below 'ball-and-cup' diagram²³ represents the different types of change:



The above diagram shows us that Type 1 and 2 are changes within the business-as-usual system itself. Type 1 might be women going into the system (pushing over the barriers) and Type 2 might be positive discrimination laws that lower the barriers for women to enter into the system. Prioritising a mainstream approach for achieving gender equality such as this will only bring about a narrow focus to measures—such as anti-discrimination measures in the workplace, or measures to improve women's workforce participation or career development—will only narrowly achieve outcomes. Whilst these are important measures that need to happen, when taken alone and implemented in the current system, the system itself will not fundamentally change. In Type 1 and Type 2 changes, whilst the circumstances and the status of some women will change, others may continue to be left behind.

Type 3 is instead about transforming the system and changing its shape through embedding the lived experiences and knowledges of women, particularly women most impacted by the harms and marginalisation generated through the current system. *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* emphasises that structures and systems must change in response to what women and girls' lives are like and what they need, on the ground, in order to improve their lives and that of their families. The Report highlights many case studies and pathways forward for investing in models of work that are designed and controlled by First Nations women, as alternatives to the current system. This includes such things as birthing on country models, or healing programs as respite support and diversion for families away from the justice system. To change the shape of systems, we need the formation of policies, legislation and funding arrangements to be responsive to these models and approaches, to support women and girls and change life trajectories toward positive outcomes.

When reflecting on this information, we encourage the reader to think about the practical actions that can be taken, at work and in life, to shift structures and over time change the shape of systems.

A targeted focus

Ultimately, structural change for First Nations women and girls simply cannot be achieved through a single policy framework or strategy. It requires generational change that continues to grow and be sustained over time.²⁴ We must look beyond reforming isolated issues and move towards holistic, integrated approaches that address the causes of inequality. As such, the focus of Stage Two is about progressing actions across **four key priority areas**, which have been identified throughout *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* as key to enhancing the lives of First Nations women and girls and driving equality when effectively invested in.

Progressing these four areas involves identifying the structures and models that currently exists or that should exist, on the ground that effectively respond to these areas, and articulating the structural shifts required at all levels of government to ensure these are responded to, embedded and sustained. This involves working with grassroots community members and organisations, governments, key individuals and the private sector.

Through this, it is the intention that we will begin redressing power imbalances, reshaping the service delivery environment and foster collective action for political transformation, as well as establish a foundation for a National Action Plan and momentum for a National Summit.

Four key priority areas



Throughout roundtable discussions, we will explore the necessary supports and structures to make progress across these four key areas.

These priorities have been selected because they pervade all areas of women and girls' lived experience. Women and girls identified a persistent lack of investment and commitment to supporting First Nations women and girls' solutions in these spaces and as such, they have been the significant drivers of inequality. However, if effectively invested in, these areas will drive First Nations women's equality and participation significantly and empower them to pursue reforms and solutions identified across all other domains of their lives.

Crucially, these areas take an intersectional gendered approach and centre First Nations women and girls. We know this is fundamentally about women's self-determination—we must put women and girls in the driver's seat to lead and design the gender-sensitive policy initiatives that will shape their lives. We know women are critical to healing families and communities and breaking cycles of intergenerational trauma—women are the ones leading this work. We know the fundamental importance of women's knowledges and Law not only to their health and wellbeing but to all Australian society. We know, where services and supports are lacking, women are filling the gaps, and this is continuously unrecognised, undervalued and underpaid.

These cross cutting issues are broadly captured and responded to in the major findings in the [Opening chapter of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report](#) as well as in the seven overarching recommendations.



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