**The Road to Recovery Must Be Gender Responsive**

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The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted men and women differently. Women have shouldered the economic impact, so much so that the pandemic economic downturn is being called a she-cession.

Even without the pandemic, WA has a large economic gender gap, with women receiving less pay, less superannuation and less employment than they would like. The bias towards investing in male dominated industries and large and small businesses also plays its part. Violence against women – which has increased in the COVID-19 environment – is driven by and further entrenches gender inequality.

Government has a fundamental role to play in rebuilding the economy, especially after disaster. Job creation stimulus, investment in public infrastructure building and the growth of public sector workforces are important strategies for delivering gender equality. The spending choices of governments after a catastrophic event determine the opportunities for individuals, families, communities and the entire State.

This is why it is imperative that the WA Government builds back better from the virus by delivering a gender equal recovery plan. To do this, we have to deal with what was going wrong before the virus and address how COVID-19 has exacerbated those inequities.

We have a chance to put gender equality at the centre of the recovery and correct the gender unequal nature of the expenditure so far. This presentation is also an opportunity for the community services sector to reflect on its role in promoting gender equality in the community, and, ultimately the safety, health and wellbeing of women in Western Australia.