

Questions for Federal Candidates in the 2010 Election

A commitment to a National Women's Health Policy

A gendered approach to policy development across government departments.

Socialist Alliance fully supports a gendered approach to women's health. Health promotion, medical statistics, policy, research and treatment have long been dominated by a gender blind approach but thankfully this is slowly changing. Women do have different experiences of health – different cancers breasts /cervix, more likely to die from strokes, injury rates in elderly women are higher than those of men of same age. A gendered approach is important but also needs to include the other layers of diversity in women's lives such as Aboriginality, Culturally and Linguistically Diversity, sexual preferences, age, abilities and class.

The need for a national health plan (to address)

Bulk billing

Hospital waiting lists

GP shortages (especially female GP's in Tasmania)

Dental/Oral Health

And the dilemma of competing demands of investment in health promotion and prevention and the immediate needs of primary health service delivery

Continued investment in Women's Health including a significant increase in funds for Hobart Women's Health Centre in its role in health promotion and prevention in Tasmania

The Socialist Alliance would ensure the availability of adequate funding for Community Health Centres (CHC) providing comprehensive primary health care, focussing initially on areas of greatest need. Funding would be made available to general practitioners working in poorer areas to convert their practices to community health centres, with the doctors and other health professionals working in salaried positions within the public service.

Democratic joint committees of medical professionals, other health workers and members of the community will be established to coordinate the CHCs. The community will be fully involved in the process of establishing and administering the CHCs.

The Socialist Alliance will establish Women's Health Centres providing access to contraception, abortion and cancer screening facilities.

Prevention of ill health will be primary in our policies. The promotion of healthy living styles will be promoted by special campaigns.

Schools will be funded to promote healthy eating and providing healthy food for children by establishing a free lunch time meal program in all schools.

Strategies for reduction of stress levels and accidents at work places will be formulated.

Free, quality health education and screening programs will be fully funded.

The coverage of Medicare would be extended to include dental care

The Socialist Alliance will expand student positions in tertiary health education faculties to overcome the shortage of health workers in nursing, aged care and general practice, particularly in rural areas.

Mental Health

Implementation of a gendered approach to mental health services, particularly relating to the lack of separate facilities for women in mental health facilities

Increasing support available for professionals such as social workers and psychologists through Medicare

Programs aimed at raising community awareness, reducing stigma and discrimination, and protecting the rights of people living with a mental illness

Increasing transitional support programs for people moving from hospital care to independent community living

Body image issues in the media and the trends of some schools and government to concentrate on weight and obesity instead of a healthy lifestyle

The lack of eating disorders information and services in Tasmania

The prevalence of mental health issues is well known in the community, and it is predicted that depression will become the major cause of morbidity in the next decades. There is also a stigma attached to these conditions. Major primary intervention strategies, education and service networks will be established at workplaces, schools, and within communities to tackle these issues.

* Counselling, psychological and psychiatric services should be made available free of charge in either Community or Women's Health Centres.

* The Socialist Alliance will legislate to protect the right of access to free, quality mental health care, without pressure to conform to traditional gender roles or other social stereotypes. Eg LGBTI

Housing

Increased funding for emergency and supported transitional accommodation

Addressing the debilitating interest repayment associated with the Federal Housing Agreement loan

Increasing availability of affordable rental housing

* Housing is a basic human right that should not be reduced to a commodity only available at the whim of the market. We aim for housing that is affordable, secure, good quality, appropriately located, for all.

* Address spiralling rental price increases by implementing rent control laws similar to those in place in Los Angeles and New York, which limit the amount that rent can be increased and all rents to be capped at a maximum of 20% of income.

* Mandate high standards for private accommodation and require landlords to fix problems and maintain private housing stock in good condition. Nationalise and renovate all substandard landlord holdings.

- * Expand funding to, and support the development of, resident controlled housing co-operatives.
- * Extend rent assistance to low income home buyers for mortgage assistance.
- * Extend rent assistance to those receiving Austudy payments.
- * Increase funding to the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) to a level sufficient to provide crisis accommodation for all who need it, as well as to maintain support services to assist homeless persons into independent accommodation and preventive programs for those at risk of homelessness. Ensure a continuum of support from crisis accommodation through to long-term stable accommodation.
- * Provide high quality, community-based, supported accommodation for people with disabilities or other special needs. Fully fund refuges and other secure emergency accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence.
- * Provide outreach workers to seek out service providers who may qualify for SAAP to guide them through the funding process, in order to ease the onerous bureaucratic requirements that these service providers have to endure in order to get and retain funding.
- * Provide additional funding to community organisations to enable them to provide education, training and housing assistance packages to young homeless people.
- * Provide additional funding for programs which provide support services for the aged homeless including additional funding to ensure greater access to aged care accommodation.
- * State and local governments planning frameworks to legislate for developer allocations of 30% of housing for low rent tenants in major new developments
- * State and local governments planning frameworks must force private developers to allocate 30% of housing for low-rent tenants in every development.
- * Strengthen legislation covering the rights of both public and private tenants, including the right to long-term leases.

Violence against women

Levels of violence against women remain at unacceptable levels despite broad based efforts to address the problem. Why is this so and what further strategies are required?

The high level of violence against women is a societal and systematic problem, which cannot be fully dealt with until there is a societal and systematic change. Sexism remains rampant in mass media and popular

culture, a woman's worth is seemingly measured by her appearance and this objectification has a flow on effect in male's attitude to and actions towards women. If Women are treated inferiorly throughout society (pay rates etc) then it will mean there will be continued high levels of violence towards women, just as there is to other groups who are discriminated against (international students etc)

- * Strengthen and strictly enforce laws against sexual harassment.
- * Restore and increase funding for women's services to ensure ready access to health centres, rape crisis centres, women's refuges and counselling services for all women and their dependants who need them.
- * Launch a community education campaign in the media, schools and all other public institutions to promote positive, non-stereotyped, anti-sexist images of women in all areas of social activity.
- * Repeal all laws against prostitution in order to end the criminalisation and victimisation of sex workers, and publicly fund comprehensive health-care, legal and personal support services, and alternative employment opportunities, for sex workers.
- * Prosecute Australians who profit from the international sex trade and prostitution, and give full protection and rights to victims of the sex trade in Australia.

Employment

Pay equity – measures to address the difference between average wages based on gender
Bullying in the workplace
Superannuation – women's lack of opportunity to accumulate sufficient superannuation to support retirement (esp. with the influx of baby boomers about to retire)
Working Women's Centres – The need to reinstate funding for this service

- * Real equal pay for work of equal or comparable value. The Socialist Alliance supports the ASU campaign for pay equity.
- * Automatic wage indexation that corresponds to real cost of living increases.
- * Increase the minimum wage to a level that recognises that many workers, women and men, are solely responsible for supporting family members.
- * Enterprise bargaining and individual contracts disadvantage women workers, who are more often in less organised sectors, so we call for all wage increases and improvements in working conditions to be automatically generalised across each industry.
- * Extend full-time and permanent employee entitlements (sick leave, annual leave, etc) to all part-time and casual workers on a pro-rata basis.
- * Legislate for and enforce programs in both the private and public sector to encourage and assist more women to be trained and employed in non-traditional jobs.
- * 12 months' parenting leave fully paid by employer contributions to a publicly managed scheme; the right to return to the same job; and generous paid leave to allow parents to take time off work to care for sick children and attend school activities.
- * Enforce anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation to assist Indigenous women, non-English speaking background women and disabled women be economically independent.

* An adequate national retirement “pension” should replace workplace and voluntary superannuation. All would enjoy this entitlement, commensurate with their individual needs and social responsibilities.

* National legislation will provide a government guarantee of the value of all worker contributions and protecting the real value of their wages that have been committed by law to superannuation.

Maternal Health/Midwifery

Birthing choices – What measures are needed to ensure women are able to have options around birthing practices

* Improve availability of women-centred pregnancy care, including state funding and insurance for community based midwifery and birth centres.

Status of Women

The continuing societal, environmental, economic and structural barriers to women's equal opportunities in all aspects of life including employment, housing, education and training, and health and well being.

* A living wage - which enables a decent quality of life, not just survival - for all welfare recipients and their dependents, and automatic indexation of all welfare benefits to cover real cost of living increases.

* A massive expansion of funding for community/employee-controlled, good quality, free child-care services in communities and, funded by employers, in large workplaces; these services to include after-hours, vacation and occasional care.

* No discrimination based on age, sexual preference, marital status or wealth for access to reproductive technologies. Reproduction is a woman's right to choose, and IVF should be available safely, free of charge and on demand through the public health system. Just like abortion, free IVF on demand should be a woman's right to choose. Women in prison be able to use contraception and have access to pregnancy or abortion care if necessary.

* Abolish all taxation measures that penalise families in which women are engaged in waged work.

* Reverse the privatisation of all utilities and other essential services, which has disproportionately adversely affected women and children.

* Expand affordable, good quality, secure public housing so child-raising can take place in a stable environment.

* Socialist Alliance rejects the false argument that banning the hijab is about promoting women's liberation. Many of those who support such a ban show no such concern over sexist advertising or women's low pay. Only Muslim women can make the decision to wear or not to wear the hijab.

* Socialist Alliance commits to campaigning against any proposals to ban or limit by law the wearing of the hijab or burqa, and against informal discrimination in our workplaces and communities.