

## Policy Brief

### Investing in Official Development Assistance

#### Key messages

- Investing in Official Development Assistance is crucial for both global and domestic health equity and gender equity, helping to mitigate global health crises and reduce the strain on Australia's healthcare system.  
Promoting global gender equity through Official Development Assistance contributes to a more stable and prosperous world, benefitting Australia economically and socially.
- Investing in global Indigenous self-determination empowers Indigenous communities to lead their own development, ensuring aid programs are culturally safe, relevant and effective.
- Strengthening the global health ecosystem is essential to protect populations experiencing vulnerability and ensure sustainable development, both globally and domestically, as global health crises can have knock-on effects for health equity and gender equity in Australia.
- Global health resourcing will face escalating strains in coming years. Alliances between governments, philanthropists and civil society will be critical to maintain progress in global health and the Right to Development.
- Platforming Australian parliamentarians and diplomats to lead global conversations on gender equity can significantly advance health policies and practices, globally and domestically.

#### Purpose of this brief

Australian Women's Health Alliance works to articulate the policies and actions necessary to improve health outcomes for women. This brief highlights the importance of investing in gender and health equity through Australian Official Development Assistance.

#### What is Official Development Assistance?

Official Development Assistance refers to government aid designed to promote the economic development and welfare of developing countries. It is provided by official agencies, including state and local governments, or by their executive agencies. This assistance includes both grants and concessional loans. The primary objective of Official Development Assistance is to support the economic growth and social wellbeing of recipient countries, addressing issues such as poverty, health, education and infrastructure development. By fostering sustainable development, Official Development Assistance aims to create a more equitable, healthy and prosperous global community.

#### Applying an intersectional gender lens

Applying a gender lens to Official Development Assistance involves systematically considering the different impacts of aid, recognising that gender dynamics and power imbalances can influence how benefits are distributed and experienced. By integrating gender-responsive approaches into the design, implementation and evaluation of aid programs, Official Development Assistance can more effectively address the specific needs and challenges faced by women and gender diverse



populations. This includes promoting women's economic empowerment, ensuring access to quality healthcare and education and supporting initiatives that prevent gender-based violence.

### Why invest in Official Development Assistance

Australia plays a key role in upholding the Right to Development and advancing gender and health equity globally.<sup>1</sup> Investing in Official Development Assistance is crucial for achieving this, both globally and domestically. Global health crises, such as pandemics, can have far-reaching impacts that transcend borders, affecting health systems and economies worldwide. By supporting global health initiatives through Official Development Assistance, Australia can help mitigate these risks and ensure a more resilient global health ecosystem, also reducing the likelihood of health emergencies that could strain Australia's healthcare system and resources.

Promoting gender equity globally contributes to a more stable and prosperous world, benefitting Australia economically and socially. Gender equality initiatives funded through Official Development Assistance can reduce gender-based violence, improve educational and economic opportunities for women and foster inclusive societies. Investing in global Indigenous self-determination empowers Indigenous communities to lead, ensuring aid programs are culturally safe, relevant and effective. By investing in Official Development Assistance, Australia supports global development and strengthens its commitment to health equity and gender equity domestically.

### How do current policies put a gendered lens on global health?

[Australia's International Development Policy](#) released in August 2023, sets the direction for Australia's development program. It includes targets on climate change, gender equality, disability and LGBTQIA+ rights. The policy emphasises listening, respect and partnership to support a peaceful and prosperous future. It is underpinned by a framework to improve transparency and accountability.<sup>2</sup>

[Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy](#) reaffirms the commitment to gender equality and advancing the human rights of women and girls. It outlines how foreign policy tools can drive gender equality. This strategy emphasises bilateral and regional programs, multilateral engagements and partnerships to promote gender equality globally.<sup>3</sup>

[Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy](#) aims to advance equity and transform lives by removing barriers for people with disability. It integrates disability equity across Australia's international engagement, including foreign policy, development, trade, humanitarian assistance and climate action. It ensures disability considerations are central to development efforts.<sup>4</sup>

[Australia's Humanitarian Strategy](#) links gender equity with disaster preparedness and response. It ensures humanitarian responses are inclusive and address the needs of women and marginalised groups. By integrating gender equality and sexual and reproductive health and rights, Australia provides more effective and equitable support in crises.<sup>5</sup>



### What does this mean for Australia's Official Development Assistance

To effectively address gender, health and disability inequities, Australia must increase funding for programs specifically targeting these gendered policy areas. By prioritising these critical areas, Australia can ensure its aid efforts are both impactful and aligned with global development goals.

Enhancing collaboration and partnerships is essential for the success of these initiatives. Australia should foster partnerships that empower local organisations and governments, ensuring culturally safe and sustainable interventions. Collaborating with multilateral organisations can help leverage resources and expertise, amplifying the reach and effectiveness of aid programs. Such partnerships are crucial for creating long-term, resilient solutions that are tailored by and for the unique needs of each community.

Strengthening alliances between feminist movements, LGBTIQ+ movements and universal healthcare movements can create a unified front against global agendas that drive polarisation and challenge human rights. By working together, these movements can advocate more effectively for inclusive and equitable policies. Prioritising Indigenous self-determination and leadership in these processes will further enhance the effectiveness, reach and impact of aid and development programs. Empowering Indigenous communities to lead their own development ensures that aid efforts are culturally safe and sustainable, fostering true equity and genuine resilience.

### The importance of a global presence

Platforming Australian parliamentarians and diplomats to lead global conversations on gender equity can significantly advance health policies and practices, both globally and domestically. By leveraging their positions, these leaders can advocate for inclusive and gender-responsive policies in international forums, such as the United Nations, the World Health Organization, and the G20. Their active participation helps shape global health agendas, ensuring gender equity is central in health policy discussions.

Australia's leadership in multilateralism can also secure international funding and partnerships for gender equity initiatives, leading to innovative solutions for gender-specific health challenges. Domestically, global engagement provides valuable insights to improve health equity and gender equity within Australia, reinforcing the country's commitment to creating a more inclusive and equitable society for all.

Domestically, international engagement provides valuable insights and partnerships that inform more effective, equitable health systems. This leadership reinforces Australia's commitment to a values-based foreign policy and strengthens its capacity to deliver gender equity outcomes here and abroad. Australia's platforming of political and diplomatic leadership in these spaces is essential to securing global progress on health equity and realising the transformative potential of gender-responsive policy.



## About us

Australian Women's Health Alliance is the national voice for women's health. We highlight how gender shapes experiences of health and health care, recognising that women's health is determined by social, cultural, environmental, and political factors.

## Contact us

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*We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we live and work. We pay our respect to Elders past and present. Sovereignty has never been ceded.*

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## References

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations, [Declaration on the Right to Development](#), United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1986.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [Australia's International Development Policy](#), Australian Government, 2023.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [Australia's International Gender Equality Strategy](#), Australian Government, 2025.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy](#), Australian Government, 2024.

<sup>5</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, [Australia's Humanitarian Policy](#), Australian Government, 2024.