

dya.

building global communities

Your sons may fare better than your daughters

Exploring the systemic barriers in career development and economic outcomes for Australian women as they age

DEBORAH YOUNG

JUNE 2025



Your sons may fare better than your daughters.

This report explores the systemic barriers faced by women in Australia, particularly in relation to career development and as they age. It highlights the persistent pay gaps, underrepresentation in leadership, and the compounding effects of career interruptions, gender bias, and inadequate support for health and caregiving responsibilities. The paper calls for a cultural shift, grassroots advocacy, and bold leadership to create visible pathways for women to thrive.



About the Author

Deborah Young is a global community builder, founder, advisor, tech and diversity advocate. Most importantly she's mother to two sons and a daughter in law. She has 30 years experience working in financial services, tech advocacy and was an Advisory Committee member and founding CEO of The RegTech Association. Deborah has an Executive MBA (Global) from UTS Business School, is a member of Chief Executive Woman and Australian Institute of Company Directors. Deborah sits on industry advisory committees and is a regulatory innovation tech ambassador. She is principal of her own advisory practice Deborah Young Advisory. Deborah lives in Sydney, Australia.

dya.

building global communities



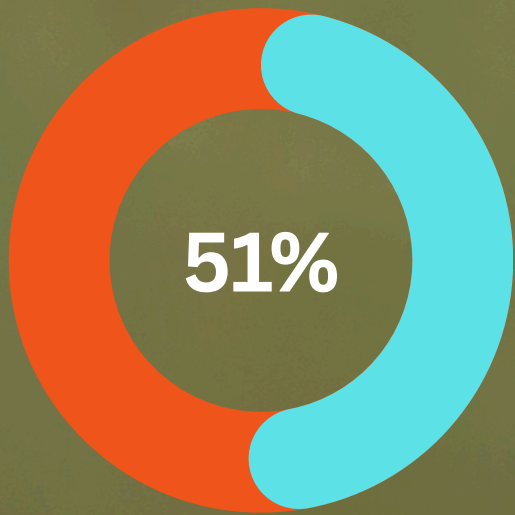


The data is clear

The data is clear: despite educational gains and growing workforce participation, women in Australia continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their career progression, financial security, and overall well-being—especially as they age. From persistent pay gaps and underrepresentation in leadership, to the compounding effects of career interruptions, gender bias, and inadequate support for health and caregiving responsibilities, the odds remain stacked against women across every stage of life.

A typical female career lifecycle can be impacted by a variety of factors driven by societal and cultural norms, the economic environment and interruptions at various points in a woman's career. But let's start this paper with some data gathered from various sources to help us begin to understand where we are at and why if we don't change, our sons may fare better than our daughters. For noting, this paper uses averages and the author accepts that this isn't representative of every industry sector.

How does it look at a macro level?



Women represent more than half of the workforce



In Australia, women now outnumber men in higher education, 51% of the workforce are women who most often enter the workforce with higher qualifications, yet they will find it harder to be promoted – in particularly from ages of 30–40s during child-bearing years. They will earn on average 21.7% less than their male counterparts, will have their career interrupted more significantly and are far less likely to hold leadership roles.

According to the Association Superannuation Funds Association (ASFA) in a report in 2023, women will have on average 23% less superannuation than men. Women will be more likely to work part time through necessity.



Women earn less by

21.7%



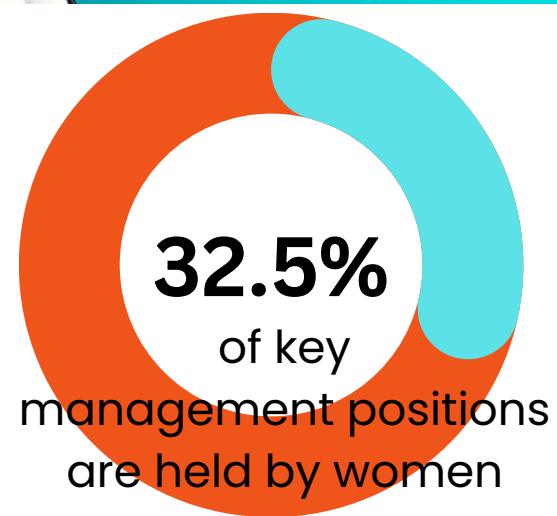
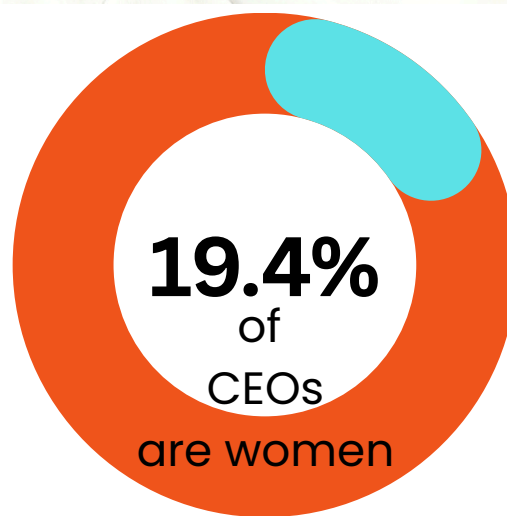
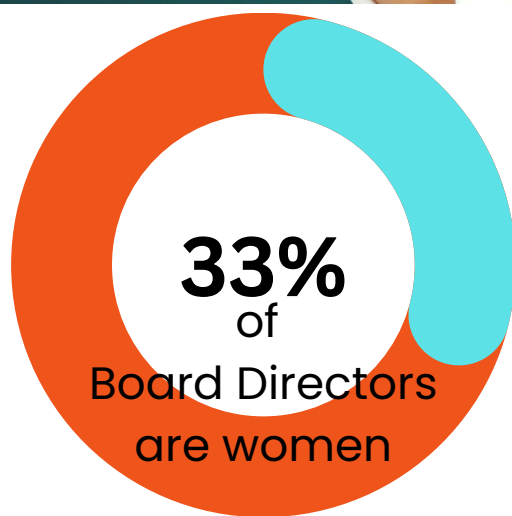
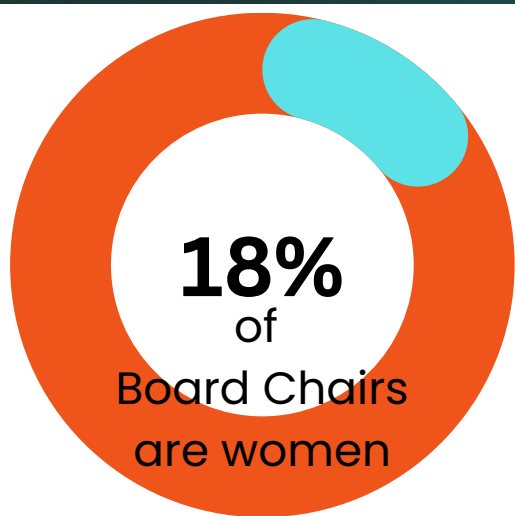
Women have less super by

23%

dya.

building global communities

What's happening in business?



Let's take a look at who is leading the show from a business perspective. In Australia 18% of Board Chairs are women, 33% are board members, 19.4% are CEOs, and 32.5% hold key management positions. There's strong cultural biases that exist, for example as women move through the mid-senior ranks and age, they may be perceived as not being present (due to working flexibly at home, part time or on parental leave), as they age perceptions may endure that older women are over experienced and less tech savvy, whereas their male counterparts may be seen as more present, distinguished and experienced. Menopausal and other female health-related challenges are slowly being recognised but still not well supported.

Gender norms do also come into play, with a Deloitte Access Economics report pointing to potential growth in Australia's economy by \$128 billion by abandoning stereo typical gender norms, however a 2023 Plan International survey revealed 17% of people believed gender equality was no longer an issue and that it had gone too far.

The tech industry

dya.

building global communities

“You can’t be what you can’t see.”

Marian Wright-Edelman

In 2023, according to the Australian Department of Industry Science and Resources, we are seeing positive momentum in girls making up the majority of STEM subjects in Year 12. STEM university enrolments for girls increased by 31% between 2015 and 2021 and completion rates grew by 15% from 2020 to 2021. In 2022 the gap in women’s and men’s pay in STEM industries was 17%. In STEM qualified industries, 23% of senior management and 8% of CEOs are women.

According to RMIT’s Women in Tech report 2025 with Deloitte Access Economics, in Australia there is a shortage of skilled tech workers. Women make up only 30% of tech workers with reasons for this low percentage given as workplace culture, lack of skilling pathways, gender norms, bias and discrimination. Women are commencing the career path with qualifications and then we are losing them along the career spectrum.

According to a report by Deloitte in 2022, only 22% of Australia’s tech companies are founded by women and furthermore only 0.7% of all private

start-up funding in FY22 went to solely female founding teams, despite funding increasing over the preceding period. There’s acknowledgement that structural change and coordinated efforts need to be actioned to address these challenges.

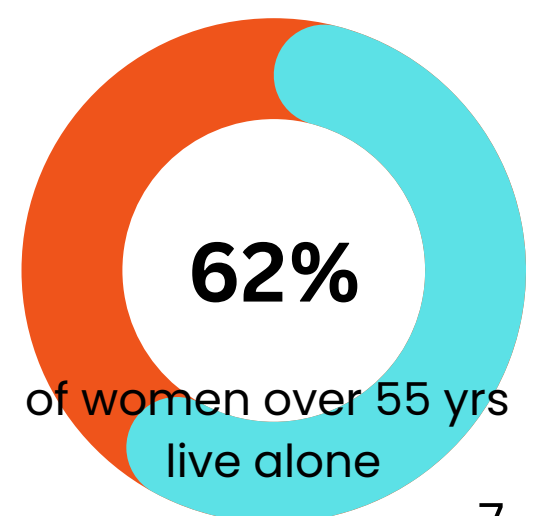
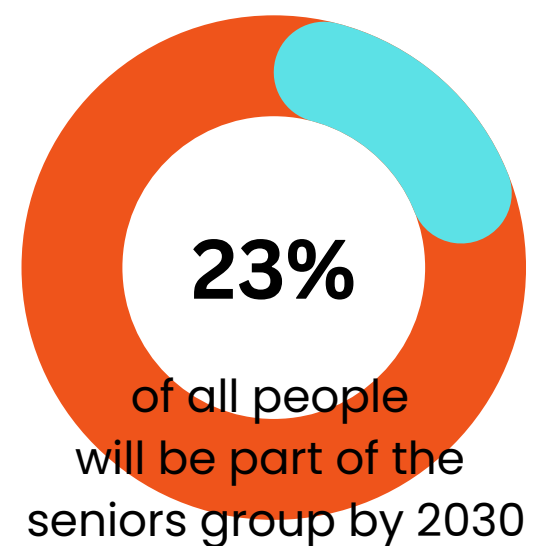
The author’s own experience working with the technology industry, women do need encouraging to step up and speak out, it’s harder to get balanced diversity of voice (age, experience, orientation and gender) – we do have to try harder, send more invitations, frame job ads differently and say “No” for example to the next all male conference panel or call it out when that’s the case. Visibility is so important. Marian Wright-Edelman encouraged representation and role models in achieving one’s potential by stating, “you can’t be what you can’t see.” Story-telling and visibility is key.

More women living alone in an ageing population

Women have higher rates of widowhood according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the majority of Australian people living alone are women. In 2021, 62% of people aged 55+ living alone were women, compared to 38% men. Women live longer than men by 4.1 years. According to Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australia's population is ageing due to increasing life expectancy and declining fertility rates. Both the number of people at the older ages is growing and older people are representing an increasing share of the total population (CEPAR 2021). By 2026 it is expected that older people in Australia will make up between 21-23% of the total population (ABS 2018).

dya.

building global communities



The future and avoiding poverty

dya.

building global communities

Women post 50+ may have more energy now, their ambition, combined with experience and skill set should prime them for the work force not hinder them but there's more chance that they are economically challenged. Based on an Australian study by Povertyandinquality.acoss.org.au from 2018, the poverty rate for households with a female reference person or main earner is almost twice as high 19.2% as when the main earner is male 10.2%.

According to Finder Research, The State of Women's Wealth in Australia, author Pascale Helyar-Moray OAM discusses "Women over 50 often continue to feel the pressures of the 'sandwich generation', as well personal upheavals and career shifts. They tend to fall into two broad categories; either they are looking to upskill, seek promotions, or invest to secure their retirement. Or, particularly those experiencing separation or divorce, are rebuilding from scratch. For a rising number of women, financial setbacks in later life are leading to far greater consequences—particularly homelessness."

According to the Australian Government's www.genderequality.gov.au, 'change is needed at a community level – with families, educators and community leaders modelling positive attitudes and challenging rigid ideas about gender in homes, educational institutions and neighbourhoods.'

In this country we have an ageing population, women will have less super than their male counterparts, do not currently enjoy parity in earnings and their likelihood for promotion is less. We suffer through a variety of health-related challenges and just keep on pushing through with little support or discussion. If we choose to do nothing, daughters, mothers, sisters, aunts, cousins, daughter-in-laws should accept that they will earn less and be in danger of not reaching their full glorious potential with financial health and general wellness going into their senior years. We as a community, need to do more.

Answering the call

dya.

building global communities

Grey Matters is an AI-powered app delivers highly personalised longevity plans, helping individuals thrive in the second half of life.

“We’re focused on addressing the longevity paradox. The reality is whilst people are living longer, those extra years don’t always come with greater wellbeing, purpose, or security. As this report makes clear, women often face the brunt of reduced opportunity, financial vulnerability, and increasing invisibility as they age. For men, the challenges may look different, with social isolation and loneliness becoming more pronounced in later life. At Grey Matters we are redesigning the second half of life to ensure that everyone, regardless of gender, can live not just longer but better. That means creating new systems of health, wealth, connection, and contribution.”

**Claire Canham, Global CIO and Founder
Grey Matters**

The author has co-founded alongside Claire Canham, a women’s leadership ‘forum whose salons are designed to elevate discussions around these data points. We intend to foster discussion salons that elevate the issues with values of care and courage to get to the systemic transformation required for change. But it starts with us surfacing the discussions and bringing the right data to the table with our connections in the NED and leadership arenas.

Reach out to the author if you would like to know more.



Conclusion: A call for collective courage and systemic change

dya.

building global communities

Yet, this is not a story of despair—it is a call to action.

The data is clear: despite educational gains and growing workforce participation, women in Australia continue to face systemic barriers that hinder their career progression, financial security, and overall well-being—especially as they age. From persistent pay gaps and underrepresentation in leadership, to the compounding effects of career interruptions, gender bias, and inadequate support for health and caregiving responsibilities, the odds remain stacked against women across every stage of life.

The tech industry, while showing promise in education, still loses women along the career pipeline due to cultural and structural challenges. Older women, particularly those over 50, face heightened financial vulnerability, with many navigating career reinvention, caregiving pressures, and the risk of poverty or homelessness in later life.

Change is possible, but it requires more than policy tweaks or isolated initiatives. It demands a cultural shift, grassroots advocacy, and bold leadership. It means challenging outdated gender norms, amplifying diverse voices, and creating visible pathways for women to thrive—not just survive.

We must invest in storytelling, mentorship, and inclusive leadership. We must support platforms like Grey Matters and initiatives like the women's leadership salon to foster dialogue, data-driven advocacy, and systemic transformation. As Marian Wright Edelman said, "You can't be what you can't see." Let's ensure the next generation of daughters can see—and become—leaders, innovators, and financially secure citizens. The future is not fixed. It is shaped by the actions we take today. Let's choose to act—with care, courage, and conviction.

References

dya.

building global communities

[WGEA Gender Equality Scorecard | Latest results employer reporting](#)
[ASFA calls on Government to close retirement savings gender gap - ASFA](#)
[WGEA-Employer-gender-pay-gaps-report-FINAL.pdf](#)
[The state of STEM gender equity in 2023 | Department of Industry Science and Resources](#)
[Older Australians, Demographic profile - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)
[The state of women's wealth in Australia](#)
[Rate of poverty by gender \(% of men and women\) - Poverty and Inequality](#)
[rmito-insights-2025-researchreport-women-in-tech.pdf](#)
[Foundation: Gender attitudes and stereotypes | Working for Women](#)
[Accelerating women founders | Deloitte Australia](#)
[Chief Executive Women Advocacy and Resource Pack](#)
[www.greymatters.com.au](#)
Linkedin posts: Your sons may fare better than your daughters. Parts [1](#), [2](#), [3](#) and [4](#).

Contact

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/deborahmyoung/>

Follow

<https://www.linkedin.com/company/deborah-young-advisory>

