

Women

A close-up portrait of a man with short, light-colored hair, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and a red and blue striped tie. He is looking slightly to the right with a serious expression. The background is dark and out of focus, with some bokeh lights.

RANN
Gets Results
2006

Women

Foreword

A message from the Premier

My Government is committed to the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of social, political and economic life.

Achieving this will require strategies that foster opportunities for women to take part in a wide range of activities. I am proud of what we have achieved and look forward to maintaining the momentum.

I want South Australia to be known as a family-friendly place. To achieve this in South Australian workplaces where there is a predominance of working women, we need to promote a balance between work and family life.

Promoting participation requires that women are confident in exercising their rights as citizens, and in expressing and achieving their aspirations. Feeling safe and secure is the first step to achieving participation in our community.

The Government has adopted a comprehensive Women's Safety Strategy. Released on International Women's Day 2005, the strategy outlines a five-year approach to ensuring safety for women within the community.

The conviction rates of rape are unacceptably low in South Australia. A re-elected State Labor Government will conduct a comprehensive overhaul of South Australia's rape, sexual assault and domestic violence laws in order to improve these rates.

The Government has released a discussion paper titled *Review of South Australian Rape and Sexual Assault Law*. The law needs to be brought up-to-date to ensure that victims of sexual and domestic violence receive the protection and support they need.

Similarly, we will finalise the reform process to update our equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation to reflect current community standards and expectations.

Mike Rann
Premier

Women: Safety and Opportunity

Achieving the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of social, political and economic life is a core commitment of the Australian Labor Party.

In its first term, the Rann Government concentrated on improving services to women, including better health and education, improved training and employment opportunities, and safety through increased spending on police and women's shelters.

A re-elected Rann Government will continue to improve services and expand the opportunities for women to participate in all areas of activity in this State.

In a second term, Labor will comprehensively reform and expand equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation in order to improve access to appropriate remedies to discrimination and harassment.

Women's safety is a top priority for the Rann Government. Women and children have a fundamental right to live without the fear of violence, in the domestic as well as other spheres.

We are determined to strengthen legal protections and support for women who are threatened by violence.

Our Achievements

The Rann Government has worked to improve women's employment, participation, wellbeing and safety. Our achievements include:

- widespread consultation with women throughout South Australia, resulting in the Women's Futures Report, which is a significant step in identifying Statewide issues for women, and how these issues can be addressed.
- the establishment of the Premier's Council for Women, which has been a significant in ensuring that women have a strong voice at the highest levels of Government. The Council provides advice to the Premier and the Minister for the Status of Women. It has a critical role in placing women's interests at the heart of the State planning process.
- the appointment of more women to boards and committees to achieve our *Strategic Plan* target of 50 per cent of women on State Government boards and committees.
- funding for supported and emergency accommodation increased to \$4.3 million.
- the introduction of the *Acts Interpretation (Gender Balance) Amendment Act* in July 2005, which ensures that non-Government organisations include women representatives when nominating positions on Government boards and committees.

- the release of Our Commitment to Women's Safety, a whole-of-government framework to ensure that women who experience or fear violence are able to seek protection and have access to effective legal remedies. We have funded community education programs and projects. These include the development of an accessible Domestic Violence Restraining Order booklet, a highly successful two-day domestic violence conference, the YWCA's 77 Pairs of Shoes exhibition, and significant work undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal groups in regard to family violence.
- the Court Support Program, launched in December 2005, to provide support, companionship and information to women going through the Family Court.
- the Promoting Women's Safety through Integration conference in December 2005.
- investing \$210 million extra into child protection through the Keeping Them Safe package. This initiative includes the Strong Families, Safe Babies program; increased therapeutic and counselling services for children and young people recovering from abuse; ten transitional linked-care homes; updated child protection curriculum and teaching materials in schools; and the retraining of school staff in mandatory notification.
- improved training opportunities for women. The South Australian Vocational Education and Training System has the highest course pass rate for women of any State in Australia (87.7 per cent in South Australia compared with 77.7 per cent nationally).
- School-based apprenticeships to give choices other than university to young people. These school-based apprentices have doubled in number since the Rann Government took office, and 56 per cent of such places are filled by young women.
- seeing employment of women in South Australia, in trend terms, increase by 18,300, including 12,900 in full-time jobs. Over the same period, rates of unemployment among women, seasonally adjusted, fell from 6.6 per cent to 5.3 per cent.
- the Women's Health Policy, released on International Women's Day 2005. This is a guiding document that outlines principles for increasing women's involvement in the development of health services.

Our Strategy

The Women's Safety Strategy outlines the Government's commitment to create safer communities for all South Australians. Responses across four key areas (prevention, service provisions, protection and performance) are crucial to achieving this goal.

Employment programs such as Parents Return to Work have been very successful with women who have left the workforce to have children. This program enables job seekers to update their skills.

The Government will continue to improve access to education, training and employment for women.

The Premier's Directory will continue to be updated, to help ensure that women are appointed to Government boards and committees.

We will continue to improve women's health services and networks around the State.

Our plan for rape and domestic violence law reform

Conviction rates in rape cases in South Australia are unacceptably low. When the Rann Government was elected, only 17.6 per cent of rape cases referred to court resulted in a conviction. In some cases, outdated laws and procedures have contributed to offenders escaping responsibility for their crimes.

The Rann Government will comprehensively overhaul South Australia's rape, sexual assault and domestic violence laws to improve conviction rates.

The way victims of sexual assault are treated in the court process also will be addressed.

The Rann Cabinet has already approved a number of changes to the law that will help resolve these problems. These changes will:

- require courts to make special arrangements for victims of sex-offences giving evidence.
- prevent the accused from personally cross-examining the alleged victim.
- protect victims from improper, harassing or humiliating questioning.
- prevent the accused from having unrestricted access to prosecution material that is sensitive, or infringes on the privacy of victims.
- allow a transcript of witnesses' evidence, or an audio-visual recording of the evidence, to be admitted at a retrial to avoid victims having to endure giving evidence on the same topic again.
- allow the court to admit evidence of out-of-court statements of victims who are children, or have a mental illness or intellectual impairment, without the victims having to go to court to give oral evidence.

More needs to be done to stop sexual violence against women.

The Rann Government will undertake widespread public consultation with a view to determining the feasibility and community acceptance of:

- recording children's evidence for later use, at trial, to overcome evidentiary difficulties caused by delays.
- creating a specialist division of the District Court to hear cases of sexual abuse of children.
- replacing the offence of persistent sexual abuse with a new offence of involvement in a sexually abusive relationship with a child in order to overcome difficulties in proving specific acts of sexual abuse of a child over a protracted period.
- ensuring in legislation that consent to sexual activity means free and voluntary consent, not acquiescence under threat of harm, deprivation of liberty, or while unconscious, drugged or asleep.
- extending criminal culpability for rape to cases where the victim did not consent and the offender did not bother to consider whether the victim was consenting or not.
- allowing courts to admit similar-fact evidence in more cases, and to try cases together where the offender's propensity to commit sexual offences is relevant to the trial.
- preventing judges from giving inappropriate warnings about the evidence of alleged victims of sexual offences, where there has been a delayed complaint.

To assist the consultation process, a detailed discussion paper commissioned by the State Government in November 2005, and prepared by an independent criminal barrister, has been released.

The *Review of South Australian Rape and Sexual Assault Law* is so comprehensive that a separate focus is needed for matters relating to domestic violence and restraining orders.

A re-elected Rann Labor Government will commission a further discussion paper to canvass detailed, specific proposals that will strengthen the law relating to domestic violence and restraining orders.

These could include:

- authorising police to remove temporarily an alleged perpetrator of domestic violence from the home to defuse the situation and prevent abuse.
- recognising cumulative breaches of domestic violence restraining orders, and providing corresponding escalating penalties.

“Work-life balance”

The Rann Government recognises the difficulties facing many South Australian parents – in particular, women – in balancing work and family commitments.

That's why the Government's population policy has stressed the need to improve the lifestyles of South Australians by actively encouraging family-friendly work practices.

In a second term, we will establish a Work and Life accreditation and award scheme for South Australian businesses that adopt flexible work practices. Accredited businesses will be entitled to use this award when marketing their products and seeking new business.

In its drive to foster a positive balance between work and family lives, the Rann Government provides a \$1200 return-to-work credit for eligible parents, for approved education and/or training, for part payment of first-year HECS, for childcare while taking part in training, and/or for materials required for an approved course.

It also has provided childcare scholarships to attract more qualified childcare workers and combined childcare facilities with school at the Sturt Street Community School. Notwithstanding these initiatives, in a second term we will continue to pressure the Federal Government to increase the number of childcare places for South Australian families.

The Government will promote Voluntary Flexible Working Arrangements in all Government departments to increase access to these arrangements for families.

Such arrangements include purchased leave, flexitime, compressed weeks, part-time, job share and working from home.

This will provide public sector workers with the ability to balance work and family life.

Chief executive officers of all Government departments will be required to promote these arrangements to their workforce, ensure that every effort is made to facilitate requests from employees to access these flexible arrangements and to report back to their Minister on a six-monthly basis.

In a second term, the Rann Government also will:

- develop and implement plans for key industries to ensure growth in jobs, especially full-time jobs, and for unemployment to remain at or below the national average in South Australia.
- continue consultation with Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse women to ensure strong communication with, and links to, Government services and networks.
- support the Women's Legal Service and ensure that the effects of the Federal industrial relations laws are monitored to make sure women are not discriminated against, and to monitor the rate of casual employment of women.
- expand the Premier's Women's Directory.
- undertake specialised searches to identify potential female candidates for vacancies on boards and committees with low female representation.

- increase governance scholarships in the public sector to women from the community.
- work with chief executives to identify public sector women with suitable skills for boards and committees.
- promote changes to the *Acts Interpretation (Gender Balance) Amendment Act* to highlight the positive benefits of involving more women in leadership roles.