



# WIRE's financial wellbeing projects and services

## A THEORY OF CHANGE

Prepared by Zuleika Arashiro, March 2022



## Acknowledgement of Country

WIRE acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the traditional and only custodians of country across Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to maintain their wisdom and rich culture – the oldest continuous culture on the planet – having survived genocide, dispossession and colonisation. We recognise their continued connection to land, waters and culture, and pay our respects to their Elders past and present.

Sovereignty has never been ceded. This land always was and always will be Aboriginal land.

## Acknowledgements

This paper has been enriched by the knowledge and generosity of WIRE's staff. In particular, the Financial Capability Project Team, the CEO, Julie Kun, and Dr Nilmini Fernando. Thank you to Skye Davey for their editing and design expertise.

We are also grateful to the external stakeholders who were interviewed for this work. They are in different industries (banking, community sector, government, and academia) and know WIRE's trajectory well. Their contribution was critical to understanding what makes WIRE's work unique in the financial capability space.

We acknowledge the women, non-binary and gender-diverse people who share their stories with WIRE. Theirs are stories of resilience, strength, and skill — all essential to navigating the complex systems required to financially survive. It is their experiences that have evolved our understanding of financial wellbeing and continue to inform our work.

# WIRE's financial wellbeing projects and services: A theory of change

## Introduction

WIRE's theory of change is our approach to building financial capability and financial wellbeing for women, non-binary and gender-diverse people. Our theory of change is part of a fifteen-year journey, and nearly four decades of experience and practice based on the WIRE service delivery model. This theory of change and our assumptions refer to an Australian context only — as such, we refer to the dominant culture as being western.

Our goal is that the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people have fairer and more equitable access to income and are empowered to control their financial lives.

We hope providing this insight into our work will inspire government services, utility, finance, banking and community organisations to act by commencing or extending a theory of change within their own organisations that works to reduce and eliminate the systemic causes of financial marginalisation and values people's strengths and knowledge, enabling women, non-binary and gender-diverse people to access inclusive systems and build their financial wellbeing.

WIRE's theory of change is ambitious and evidence-informed, built on the premise that change is possible but not easy. We see our role as an awareness-raiser, provider of information and well-considered, evidence-informed solutions. We understand the complexity of financial wellbeing and know that access to financial wellbeing is interwoven with people's relationships to the dominant culture and systems, as well as their access to knowledge and skills.

Our theory of change is underpinned by a core belief that **financial wellbeing must be tackled from every angle — from working with the individual to build their financial knowledge and confidence, to changing culture and systems to remove barriers** to financial wellbeing.

We know we cannot do it alone. We value working with others in collaboration, including those experiencing the harm, and ensuring their voices and experiences are elevated. We must also work with allies who seek to create change, from funders and organisations working in the financial wellbeing space, to influencers and decision-makers who can effect lasting change.

## WHY FOCUS ON FINANCIAL WELLBEING?

Financial wellbeing in Australia is gendered. Women have more cultural and systemic barriers that impede financial wellbeing than men. In addition, the financial wellbeing of non-binary and gender-diverse people is mostly overlooked by Australian research and data collection.

Since WIRE commenced in 1984, we have seen the ongoing financial inequity faced by women, non-binary and gender-diverse people in Australia's industrial relations system, welfare system, and cultural assumptions and norms, which result in poverty, homelessness and violence.

In 2022 the statistics still tell a story of inequity:

- The full-time average weekly ordinary earnings for women are 13.8% less than for men.<sup>1</sup>
- 15.7% of Australian women will experience financial abuse in their lifetime.<sup>2</sup>
- Just under 60% of recent migrants are female – and less likely to be employed full time than their male counterparts. Meanwhile, they are also 7% less likely to be employed than women born in Australia.<sup>3,4</sup>
- Employees in female-dominated industries such as healthcare and social assistance are paid significantly less than employees in male-dominated industries.<sup>5</sup>
- Women are more likely to be in casual employment than men: 25.5% of all female employees in Australia are casual compared to 19.7% of male employees.<sup>6</sup>
- Raising children accounts for a 17% loss in lifetime wages for women.<sup>7</sup>
- For migrant and refugee women, women with disabilities, and LGBTI women, gender-based discrimination is intensified and inequality is compounded by racism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia. For example:
  - Underemployment is much higher for migrant and refugee women.<sup>8</sup>
  - Women with disabilities and men with disabilities have different economic opportunities, with disabled women less likely to be in the paid workforce than disabled men.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.wgea.gov.au/terms/gender-pay-gap>

<sup>2</sup> Kutin J, Russell R & Reid M. (2017). *Economic abuse between intimate partners in Australia: prevalence, health status, disability and financial stress*. (p.16) Aust N Z J Public Health. doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.12651.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.vic.gov.au/gender-equality-baseline-report/intersectionality-gender-inequality>

<sup>4</sup> <https://junkee.com/migrant-women-workplace/323714>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.genvic.org.au/resources/gender-equity-statistics/>

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> [http://sydney.edu.au/business/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/44107/OECDEU\\_migrant\\_women\\_and\\_work.pdf](http://sydney.edu.au/business/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/44107/OECDEU_migrant_women_and_work.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> <http://wwda.org.au/about/snapshot/>

- According to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence, LGBTI people experiencing family violence are regularly rendered invisible in the family violence system.<sup>10</sup>

### WHY A THEORY OF CHANGE?

A theory of change encourages deep observation of the system — how power is distributed, how decisions are made, the coalitions for and against any given change, and how change is likely to happen in the system. It enables an exploration of assumptions, to deeply observe data and see where power is being exerted. It enables the inclusion of lived experience that, if left unexamined, may obscure nuanced, subtle responses and solutions. It enables deep enquiry and the possibility of finding new partners and champions that can create positive change. A theory of change prevents an automated response and provides a set of ideas and assumptions that can be tested and evaluated in cycles, leading to an ongoing process of refinement and improved practice.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.rcfv.com.au/MediaLibraries/RCFamilyViolence/Reports/Final/RCFV-Summary.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <https://oxfamapps.org/fp2p/what-use-is-a-theory-of-change-6-benefits-and-some-things-to-avoid/>

## Theory of change

WIRE's financial wellbeing projects and services address the financial marginalisation and financial insecurity women, non-binary and gender-diverse people face. We work from an intersectional feminist standpoint with an understanding that to achieve meaningful change, we must value people's strengths, enable them to navigate existing systems, and act to transform the systemic causes of their financial marginalisation.

### THE PROBLEM

Many women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experience hardship because of the economic marginalisation and financial insecurity they face in Australian society.

### OUR PREMISE

WIRE's work on financial capability and financial wellbeing is based on the premise that the main cause for the financial insecurity the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experience is **lack of access to basic and regular income and exclusion from government social infrastructure and support**. For this reason, WIRE understands that we can only achieve the impact we aspire to if, in addition to skills and knowledge to control their financial life, the most marginalised gain access to income in a fairer and more equitable way.

WIRE acknowledges that many men also experience financial hardship and face structural barriers to achieving financial wellbeing. We support action that reduces the discrimination and prejudice that people of all genders experience.

### THE ROOT CAUSES OF FINANCIAL INEQUITY

Our long-established practice and research have provided consistent evidence that women, non-binary and gender-diverse people's financial difficulties are rarely the result of individual fault or poor skills with money management. Instead, **the causes for their money problems are often found in the gendered power systems** to which they relate to, and which affect their economic opportunities, relationships, and decisions at every stage of their life course. We believe the same to be true for non-binary and gender-diverse people. We see financial inequity as a social justice issue in which inequity needs to be reduced and eliminated.

WIRE's theory of change on financial wellbeing locates the root causes for the financial and economic inequalities of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people in the power hierarchies and intersecting forms of oppression that are sustained by the **colonial, white supremacist, patriarchal, capitalist system** we live in. These systems

**prevent women, non-binary and gender-diverse people from accessing a minimum level of income, regularly, in a fair and equitable way.**

WIRE's intersectional feminist approach recognises that these systems define degrees of privilege and exclusion between people, based on social markers that include but are not limited to gender. They privilege the cis-gender, white, able-bodied male at the top of the social hierarchy. Through institutions and social norms, these systems attempt to normalise oppression and inequalities. Characteristics such as race, ethnicity, class, disabilities, sexual orientation, age, or migrancy, become the basis through which these systems produce complex forms of marginalisation that cannot be understood in isolation from each other.

## OUR DESIRED IMPACT

WIRE uses the evidence accumulated from research and practice through our financial wellbeing projects and service delivery to contribute to **a future in which the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people have fairer and more equitable access to income**, and are empowered to control their financial lives.

The impact can be seen and assessed as actively working to:

- Reduce and eliminate financial inequity by minimising points of harm throughout Australia's financial systems and western dominant cultural understandings
- Equip people to manage harmful systems and western dominant cultural practices that create financial inequity
- Support people to repair and rebuild once damage has occurred, so they can recover from financial harm.

## OUR PRINCIPLES

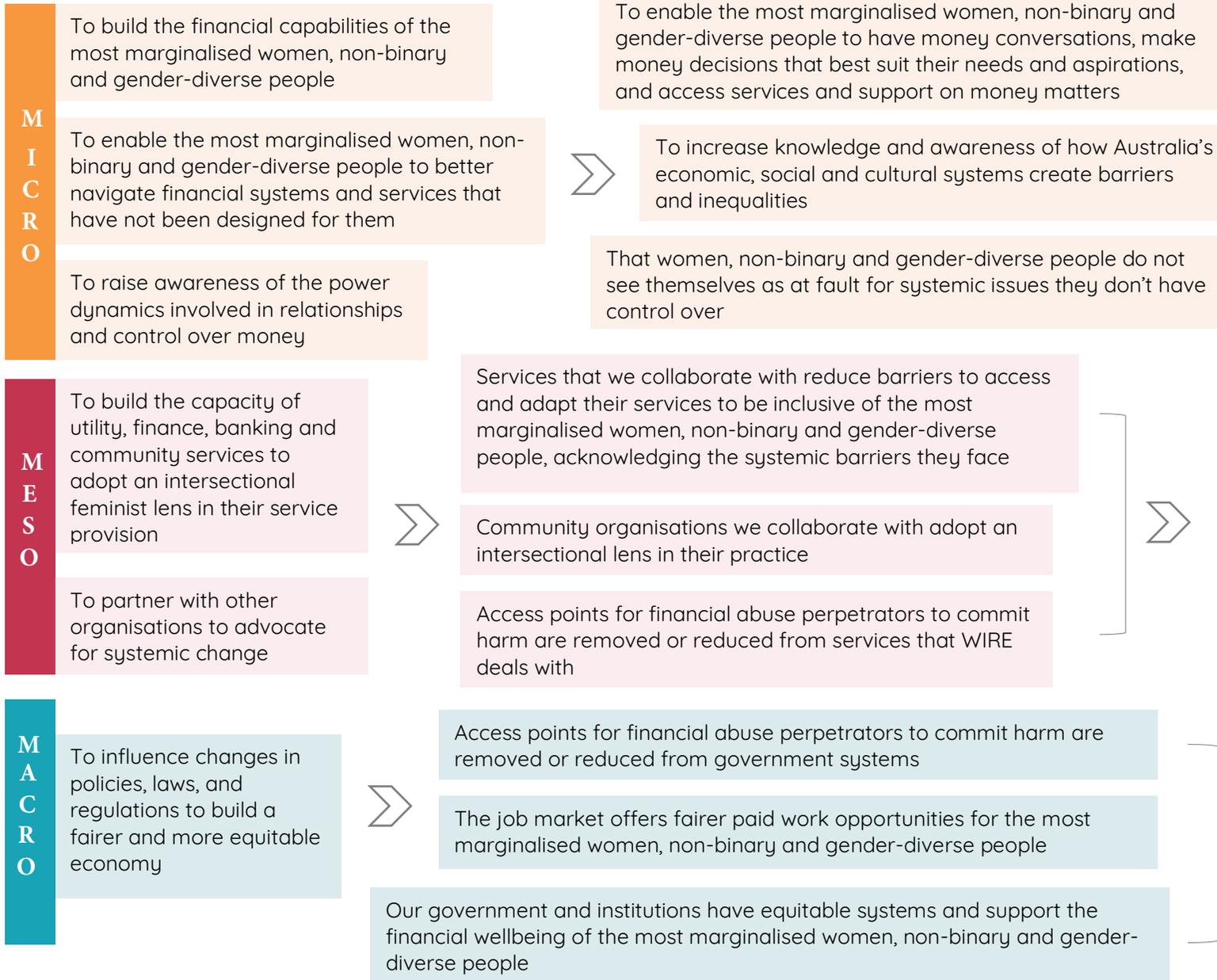
- **Intersectional feminist:** We acknowledge upfront the interlocking systems of power that produce oppression and discrimination.
- **Person-centred:** We place the people we support at the centre, listen deeply and value their knowledge.
- **Strength-based:** We value people's experiences, respect their values and priorities, and acknowledge their agency.
- **Trauma and violence-informed:** We recognise the ongoing accumulated impact of experiences of violence and abuse.
- **Relational ethics:** We value authentic collaboration and mutual trust in the relationships we develop.

**Premise:** Inadequate access to basic and regular income and exclusion from government social infrastructure and support is the main cause of financial insecurity among the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people. Government policies and laws that distribute opportunities unequally across society deeply shape the financial behaviour of individuals, creating layers of privilege and disadvantage at a micro, meso, and macro level.

**Transversal goal:** To shift the narrative from the dominant focus on individual behaviour and deficits towards strength-based narratives that place the voices and experiences of the most marginalised people at the centre, and identify and seek to eliminate the structural barriers that contribute to their financial insecurity

## Goals

## Outcomes



**Impact:** The most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people have fairer and more equitable access to income, social services and infrastructure support, and are empowered to control their financial lives.

<p><b>MICRO LEVEL:</b></p> <p><b>Service users and members of the public who participate in WIRE trainings and programs</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASSUMPTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased financial capability through an intersectional feminist, strength-based approach enables people to gain more control over their finances and financial decision-making</li> <li>• There are paid work opportunities in the job market for those who undergo training and search for a job</li> <li>• If provided in the right way, individuals seek, and are open to receiving information that will build their financial skills, knowledge and confidence</li> <li>• People that experience the highest levels of discrimination are the most financially excluded</li> <li>• WIRE programs and trainings reach the most marginalised groups</li> <li>• The WIRE service delivery model is effective</li> <li>• Systems and culture that impact on individuals are not static and can change</li> <li>• While there are significant structural factors that inhibit financial wellbeing, there are some actions individuals can take to improve their financial wellbeing within the constraints and limitations placed upon people.</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>IMPACT</b></p> <p>Women, non-binary and gender-diverse people have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increased money management confidence, skills and knowledge</li> <li>• Increase in skills, knowledge and confidence in accessing financial and welfare support services</li> <li>• Increase in knowledge and skills in accessing the job market and finding employment</li> <li>• Increased sense of self as a competent financial decision-maker.</li> </ul> <p>And:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Women, non-binary and gender-diverse people can recover and build financial wellbeing after a financial shock or chronic financial harm has occurred</li> <li>• The most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experience increased financial wellbeing.</li> </ul>

GOALS	INPUTS (ACTIVITIES)	INTERMEDIARY OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build the financial capabilities of the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• To enable the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people to better navigate financial systems and services that have not been designed for them</li> <li>• To increase recognition of the power dynamics involved in relationships and control over money</li> <li>• To shift the narrative from the dominant focus on individual behaviour and deficits towards strength-based narratives that place the voices and experiences of the most marginalised people at the centre, and identify and seek to eliminate the structural barriers that contribute to their financial insecurity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Financial capabilities education for women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• Employment support</li> <li>• Individualised support and referral services via phone, online and face-to-face, using the WIRE model</li> <li>• Free legal advice on separation and divorce, in collaboration with legal professionals</li> <li>• Free financial guidance clinic</li> <li>• Information seminars targeting financial capability</li> <li>• Co-design of information and education resources</li> <li>• Information provided in culturally appropriate ways.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service users and program/training participants are better equipped to navigate the financial system and services required to enhance financial wellbeing</li> <li>• Service users and program/training participants are more skilled and confident to talk about money issues in their relationships</li> <li>• Service users and program/training participants are more confident to make money decisions and see themselves as independent and strong financial decision-makers</li> <li>• Service users and program/training participants are better able to identify the barriers in systems that negatively impact on their financial lives</li> <li>• Service users have the information and support to make informed decisions about their relationships in relation to finances.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>RELATIONAL OUTCOMES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WIRE's resources are considered safe, relevant, and useful by the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people in our community</li> <li>• Service users and program/training participants feel safe in their interactions with WIRE</li> <li>• Service users and program/training participants feel heard by WIRE</li> <li>• Lived experience advocates have a positive experience of co-design with WIRE.</li> </ul>	<p>Women, non-binary and gender-diverse people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are more confident to have money conversations, make money decisions that best suit their needs and aspirations, and access services and support on money matters</li> <li>• Are aware of how Australia's economic, social and cultural systems create barriers and inequities</li> <li>• Do not see themselves to be at fault for systemic issues they don't have control over</li> <li>• Have financial safety within their personal relationships.</li> </ul>

**MESO LEVEL:**

**Organisations  
(community sector,  
financial services,  
funding bodies,  
individual government  
agencies)**

**ASSUMPTIONS**

- Utility, finance, banking and community and government services are open to changing their practices and policies to better serve the most economically marginalised groups
- Utility, banking and community and government services trust the quality of WIRE's training and resources
- Individual organisations provide a safe and supportive work environment for their workers to align their practices with what they learn in WIRE's trainings
- WIRE's relationship with other organisations and funding bodies is based on collaboration
- WIRE is able to build trusting relationships with private sector and community services to enable an environment for collective change.

**IMPACT**

- Australia's financial systems and western dominant cultural understandings have reduced points of exclusion, becoming more inclusive and accessible to women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experiencing financial harm and exclusion
- Organisations and government agencies have systems in place to support women, non-binary and gender-diverse people to repair and rebuild once damage and financial harm has occurred and recovery is needed
- WIRE can demonstrate the positive impact of the collaborative strategic partnerships it has entered into. In particular, services we work with/who utilise our materials can demonstrate:
  - Their increased awareness of the financial wellbeing barriers facing women, non-binary and gender-diverse people
  - That they have a plan to reduce the financial wellbeing barriers facing women, non-binary and gender-diverse people
  - An intersectional understanding of the financial wellbeing barriers facing women, non-binary and gender-diverse people
  - That they will undertake action that improves financial wellbeing for women, non-binary and gender-diverse people
- Marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experience increased financial wellbeing
- WIRE increases our number of collaborative advocacy partnerships.

GOALS	INPUTS (ACTIVITIES)	INTERMEDIARY OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To build the capacity of utility, banking and community services to adopt an intersectional feminist lens for their service provision</li> <li>• To partner with other organisations to advocate for systemic change</li> <li>• To shift the narrative from the dominant focus on individual behaviour and deficits towards strength-based narratives that place the voices and experiences of the most marginalised people at the centre and identify and seek to eliminate the structural barriers that contribute to their financial insecurity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Professional development training using intersectional feminism and WIRE's service delivery model to develop the capacity of staff working with people around financial decision-making, including those that support victim-survivors of family violence and providers of financial services and information</li> <li>• Development of capacity-building resources for professionals</li> <li>• Collaborative projects to advance the economic security and financial wellbeing of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• 'Soft advocacy' through relationships with external partners and stakeholders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trained workforce from other organisations are equipped to support their service users and employees in increasing their financial wellbeing through a trauma-informed, strength-based, intersectional feminist approach</li> <li>• Utility, banking and community services WIRE works with identify WIRE as the reference organisation on best practices to address the intersection of family violence, financial abuse, and financial capability of the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• Collaborators and funding bodies consult with WIRE on how to better support the financial capabilities of marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• Peer organisations join WIRE on collaborative advocacy for systemic change.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services that WIRE collaborates with reduce barriers to access and adapt their services to be inclusive of the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people, acknowledging the systemic barriers they face</li> <li>• Community organisations we collaborate with adopt an intersectional lens in their practices</li> <li>• Access points for financial abuse perpetrators to commit harm are removed or reduced from services that WIRE works with.</li> </ul>

<p><b>MACRO LEVEL:</b></p> <p><b>Policies and laws (Victoria and national level), free market economy, welfare system</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ASSUMPTIONS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving financial wellbeing for all women, non-binary and gender-diverse people requires systemic changes</li> <li>• WIRE's research and advocacy is known in the sector</li> <li>• There is political will and ideological openness in the government to discussing economic reforms that promote a more equitable and fair economic system from a gender lens</li> <li>• The lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic with regard to intersectional inequalities are learnt and policymakers commit to emergency responses that are adequate to assist the most marginalised groups.</li> </ul>
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>IMPACT</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• WIRE can pinpoint positive shifts in systems and processes that improve financial wellbeing for women, non-binary and gender-diverse people. In particular, WIRE can demonstrate:             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ That our work has created an increase in motivation and actions by governments and institutions to create and support more equitable systems that build the financial wellbeing of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>○ That our work has increased support for change that will enable more equitable systems that build the financial wellbeing of women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Systems and dominant western cultural understandings that are inequitable are removed and replaced with new systems that build and foster financial equity and social justice</li> <li>• Decision-makers within governments and financial institutions make decisions that increase financial equity and build financial wellbeing for marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• Marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people experience increased financial wellbeing.</li> </ul>

GOALS	INPUTS (ACTIVITIES)	INTERMEDIARY OUTCOMES	LONG TERM OUTCOMES
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To influence changes in policies, laws, and regulations to build a fairer and more equitable economy</li> <li>• To shift the narrative from the dominant focus on individual behaviour and deficits towards strength-based narratives that place the voices and experiences of the most marginalised people at the centre, and identify and seek to eliminate the structural barriers that contribute to their financial insecurity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research that values and centres the lived experiences of marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• Evidence-informed policy and advocacy that makes a persuasive case for change</li> <li>• Advocacy partnerships</li> <li>• Projects that promote and advocate for change</li> <li>• The use of service delivery case studies to strengthen advocacy.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organisations and experts refer to WIRE's research and invite WIRE to speak in specialised forums</li> <li>• WIRE is invited to public hearings on matters related to women's financial wellbeing, financial abuse, and economic security</li> <li>• Funding for services for victim-survivors of family violence is ongoing and reflects the government's understanding of the need for integrated, culturally safe supports</li> <li>• Financial service providers engage with WIRE and adopt our recommendations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Our government and institutions have equitable systems and support the financial wellbeing of the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• The job market offers fairer paid work opportunities for the most marginalised women, non-binary and gender-diverse people</li> <li>• Access points for people that perpetrate financial abuse to commit harm are removed or reduced from government systems.</li> </ul>



[wire.org.au](http://wire.org.au)

