



# WOMEN IN BUSINESS

## SPECIAL REPORT





# Call for combined effort on gender

WA companies are making workplaces more equitable but more change needs to come from those at the top.

**MOVEMENT:** Christina Matthews says everyone faces barriers of some sort. **Photos:** Gabriel Oliveira



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## 4-PAGE FEATURE

**A**S an executive in a sport historically focused more on men's participation than that of women, **Christina Matthews** said she was often perceived as a good administrator for women's cricket, rather than a good administrator.

Ms Matthews, the Western Australian Cricket Association's chief executive since 2011 and a veteran of 20 Test matches for Australia, said it took a lot to prove her

worth and find people willing to give her an opportunity.

"I think everyone faces barriers of some sort, there's no doubt," Ms Matthews said.

"You don't recognise it as much when it's happening as much as when you look back on it.

"Having spent most of my life in cricket, yes, there were barriers because people saw cricket as a male-dominated environment.

"Like in a lot of things, you had to work twice as hard to get there."

During her time at the WACA, Ms Matthews has helped increase female participation in cricket by 550 per cent in WA, and in December 2019 secured \$30 million in federal funding to renovate the WACA Ground.

She said there had been massive societal change throughout her lifetime.

"When I was a kid there were high-profile women in some

sports but not CEOs; so I looked at them, how they had done things, what they did, the influence they had, how they were talked about and sort of just worked through that," Ms Matthews said.

"So there have been enormous changes, but not nearly as many as there should've been."

## Gender changes

Various statistics show how WA workplaces are progressing on achieving gender equity.

Figures released in mid-February by the Australian Bureau of Statistics show the national gender pay gap at 13.9 per cent, a 0.1 percentage point fall over the past six months.

According to the 2019 Women's Report Card by the Department of Communities and the Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre, the WA gender pay gap was higher at 21.8 per cent.

The gender pay gap was at a similar level in 2001, showing little improvement over the past two decades.

The report said the state's higher gender pay gap had been attributed to the significance of the mining, resources and energy sectors being dominated by males, workplace culture, lower numbers of WA women in senior roles, the impacts of WA's isolation on family support and access to childcare.

Meanwhile, the **Australian Institute of Company Directors'** 2018 target for 30 per cent female representation on ASX 200 boards was met a year late, in December 2019, while last month the institute reported an average 30.7 per cent representation on boards nationwide.

Despite these incremental gains, however, 100 companies failed to reach the 30 per cent

target, 35 companies had one female director and five companies had none, including WA-based Silver Lake Resources.

Perth-based NRW Holdings didn't have any women on its board until it appointed non-executive director Fiona Murdoch in late February.

Non-executive director and former Chief Executive Women president **Diane Smith-Gander** said the 30 per cent target was not good enough.

"The only target with any integrity is the representation that we are in the population, which is 50-50," Ms Smith-Gander told Business News.

**21.8%**  
**WA'S GENDER PAY GAP**  
Source: Dept of Communities & BCEC

# equity



**THE TOP:** Tania Cecconi says change needs to come from an organisation's leadership team.

provided an example of a good domestic violence policy, Ms Cecconi said.

Programmed identified senior executives who staff could call if they needed help escaping domestic violence.

"Within the first five months of that policy being launched, five phone calls were made by five women," Ms Cecconi said.

"They called up these executives and they were given cash, mobile phone, a laptop and accommodation, literally in the middle of the night from these executives.

"That gave them space to escape but also they were provided leave and paid leave to work through what happened, but at the same time ensured a degree of safety.

"These women, in all cases, were at risk of being counselled out of the business for poor performance."

Ms Cecconi said changes like this needed to come from an organisation's leadership team.

"I think that's where it needs to start and that's where we are seeing it start, and where we are seeing it being accelerated: from the top," she said.

"You can have as many people agitate for change for equity for the sake of equity but it's the CEO ultimately, who is using

their influence to build a better performing team, better leadership, better decision-making, better thinking by having better diversity."

Ms Smith-Gander, whose high-profile career includes roles as a consultant, a general manager in banking, and as a non-executive director for organisations including Wesfarmers, Tourism WA and Broadspectrum, said that given men still held most of the positions of power, they needed to decide things had to change.

"That's the broad thing; it's the men," she said.

"Male Champions for Change, CEOs for Gender Equity, it's the people with power who can make the decisions, and women need to prepare themselves as they have always done.

"I think women's role is to change the aspiration. Be a bit more courageous in the conversations we are prepared to have about what we would like to do and how we would like to do it."

**RAC Insurance** chief executive Andrew O'Hara is a member of **Male Champions for Change**, a group that encourages men in leadership roles to step up beside women.

Mr O'Hara said he joined Male Champions for Change because the initiative takes a pragmatic

“ The only target with any integrity is the representation that we are in the population, which is

**50-50** - Diane Smith-Gander

approach and focuses on shared learnings across sectors and organisations.

"On a personal level, I also want my children to grow up in a world where they have access to equal opportunities irrespective of their gender and diversity," Mr O'Hara told *Business News*.

He said his views on gender equity had changed since he joined the group.

"I always viewed gender equity as a significant social and corporate issue, however, this work has really deepened my understanding of just how complex and far-reaching the impacts really are and that there won't be a positive shift without sustained and ongoing effort," Mr O'Hara said.

"The first action we undertake as Male Champions of Change is face-to-face discussions with team members at all levels and genders, to better understand the barriers women face in progressing to senior leadership roles.

"This was an eye-opening experience and I was grateful to my colleagues who shared their experiences."

RAC's Gender Equity Group is working to implement the Gender Diversity Action Plan, focused on eliminating bias, enabling flexible work and addressing pay inequity.

"Flexibility was a consistent theme that arose in my discussions with colleagues and will be a key focus area for me moving forward," Mr O'Hara said.

**BNIQ**.com.au *Diane Smith-Gander*

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**LEADERS:** Amanda Cleaver (left), Dana Henderson, Jocelyn Young and Vicki Rasmussen head WA's major medical research bodies. **Photos:** Matt Biocich

# Collaboration key for research

The female leaders of four major medical research foundations are using experience from their diverse backgrounds to improve medical research in the state.

## Madeleine Stephens

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THE leaders of the state's medical research foundations are choosing collaboration over competition, meeting regularly on Fridays to discuss how their organisations can cooperate.

Charlie's Foundation for Research executive director Vicki Rasmussen, Spinnaker Health Research Foundation chief executive Dana Henderson, Raine Medical Research Foundation director Amanda Cleaver, and RPH Research Foundation chief executive Jocelyn Young have prioritised working together to improve healthcare in Western Australia.

Ms Rasmussen said the meetings were about collaborating, building networks, and ensuring the foundations weren't duplicating research.

"One of the things has been that we have been too isolated and too siloed previously," Ms Rasmussen told *Business News*.

"There are too many opportunities that are potentially going to go unmet if we don't collaborate better, and I think we are putting ourselves in a really exciting position with some of the projects that are coming up.

"Donors don't want to see duplication, don't want to see replication ... they want to understand that we are all at least talking to each other and having respectful conversations and, where possible, collaborating.

"They don't expect us to be merging or having one big giant organisation, but they do want us talking to each other."

The group's members also exchange management advice

and provide feedback on one another's ideas.

Dr Cleaver said she had provided Ms Young with advice about grant management processes and databases, and helped Ms Rasmussen with grant review processes.

"Vicki has helped me rattle tins for one of our events in Raine Square also," Dr Cleaver said.

"But when we meet we just talk about what we are doing and provide feedback [and] advice where we can."

With backgrounds as diverse as sports physiotherapy, fundraising, business development and medical research, the four women have different stories and took different pathways to the top.

Before Ms Young was appointed chief executive, she was a board member of RPH

Research Foundation and sat on a panel interviewing candidates for her future role.

When the board found there were no suitable candidates, Ms Young offered to step into the position for three months but, with a previous career as a sports physiotherapist, no research background and a small child at home, didn't consider herself for the permanent position.

"[I thought] I'm not a researcher, I don't have that research background, so therefore it's not appropriate," Ms Young told *Business News*.

"But the reality is, going through the interview process, not everyone ticks all the boxes, they just can't; it's not possible to have this breadth of experience in one person, so I think there probably was a bit of imposter syndrome.

"The reality is that when you take on a CEO role you're not going to have strengths in every area, and you need to fill those gaps with the right people."

Ms Young said she decided to take the role for six months to make sure she was the right fit, and discovered she loved it.

"I think it is a good story for young people and particularly young women," she said.

## Timing, family

With a career as a fundraising professional, Ms Rasmussen said she was ambitious and running an organisation was always part of her career plan.

"It was just timing," she said.

"It was looking for the organisation that really did fit with where my passion was sitting and medical research was one of those, through my other experiences."



**COMMUNICATION:** Jocelyn Young says there is a disconnect between what men and women hear about gender equity.



**FEEDBACK:** Amanda Cleaver says the group's members give each other advice.



**PROBLEM:** Dana Henderson says gender inequity is everyone's issue.



**COLLABORATION:** Vicki Rasmussen says donors expect medical research organisations to work together.

**44.5%**  
AUSTRALIAN WOMEN  
AGED 25-29 WITH A  
BACHELOR'S DEGREE

Source: ABS

women aged between 25 and 29 are better educated than their male counterparts, with 44.5 per cent of women holding a bachelor's degree compared to 32.2 per cent of men.

"I find it very alarming that we are over-represented in the undergraduate degrees and then very poorly represented at the executive level," Ms Henderson said.

"I think there is a leadership opportunity for women to really take that next generation through."

To create an equitable workplace, Ms Henderson said it was essential the issue was viewed in a broader context than simply being a 'women's issue'.

"It is a whole-of-community conversation and a loud, articulate conversation, not just a nod of agreement when asked if gender equity is important," she said.

"It is a conversation that needs to happen at every level of society and it needs to start early.

"Not just with those ambitious enough to try to rise to leadership, but with everyone, male and female, so that our girls and women know they can and our men and boys support them."

Ms Young agreed and said women in leadership conferences and groups provided a great support network, but needed to have all-inclusive CEO networks to solve the issue.

"I often go to these women's breakfasts and someone once asked me for feedback and they said, 'How was the breakfast?' and I said, 'It was fantastic except there were no men, we are preaching to the converted'.

"It's probably a slightly different prevailing view than the commonly held view that we need to come together as women and we need to stay strong ... but ultimately, if we want to work and play together, we need to come together.

"And men need to be hearing the same things that the women are hearing.

"That for me is a disconnect."

“ I find it very alarming that we are over-represented in the undergraduate degrees and then very poorly represented at the executive level

- Dana Henderson

Originally a medical researcher, Dr Cleaver found the funding environment competitive and taking time out to have a family could put her on the back foot.

"As a researcher, you're just trying to survive and get your pay cheque because you are trying to apply for competitive funding constantly," Dr Cleaver said.

To give her options before having a family, Dr Cleaver enrolled in an MBA course and took a job in research development at The University of Western Australia.

More recent changes to policy have ensured the decision to have a family alongside a research career is more

achievable, with time taken out of the workforce considered by funding bodies.

"In the research area it is difficult because you have to maintain that competitive advantage, so the NHMRC and other national sources of funding have now got career disruption criteria within all of their grant programs," Dr Cleaver said.

### Accidental career

Ms Henderson was a stay-at-home mother before re-entering the workforce.

Working at Murdoch University and Perth Festival before becoming chief executive at Spinnaker, Ms Henderson told *Business News* she was never

“ They [donors] don't expect us to be merging or having one big giant organisation, but they do want us talking to each other

- Vicki Rasmussen

very certain about a career plan, she fell into it instead.

"This was a fabulous door that opened with a very passionate board who convinced me this was my next best move, and I'm glad they did," Ms Henderson said.

### Select group

The four women are among the small number of female chief executives and directors in WA.

Ms Henderson said the more senior roles she had taken, the more evident it became to her that men and women were treated differently in the workplace.

"I've noticed more issues with gender and I think that's

probably again because there are fewer executives who are women, so you are not sitting at the table with like-being-like," she said.

"I find that's an interesting scenario, not just because there's an imbalance in the way that I'm treated but there is an imbalance in the perspectives or the traits you might bring to the table."

According to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, the health sector is Australia's most female-dominated industry; despite this it has a gender pay gap of 15.8 per cent, suggesting women are still not progressing to leadership roles.

Australian Bureau of Statistics data from 2019 found young

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