



21 January, 2025

Women councillors have broken through the forty percent barrier!

For the first time women represent more than four out of every ten elected councillors across Australia.

However, Australian Local Government Women's Association National Treasurer Coral Ross AM said whilst the milestone should be celebrated, there is still a long way to go to reach parity.

"We are delighted to have broken the barrier, but an analysis of the figures show that women's representation is uneven and has remained static or even fallen in some States," said Ms Ross.

"There are several questions that we need to ask in Australia. Why, when the first woman was elected to local government in Australia way back in 1919, are we still nowhere near parity?"

"Why are many women who get elected, opting not stand for re-election? And, thirdly, why aren't these figures collated nationally to provide up-to-date data on women in government so that we can analyse it, promote it and try to improve it?" Ms Ross said.

The forty percent barrier was broken following Council elections in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria this year.

In all jurisdictions, except for South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, women represent more than 40 per cent of the elected councillors – in 2023 only Victoria and Tasmania were above forty percent.

However, the increase in women's representation has not been linear. And interestingly in the recent New South Wales elections, a lower percentage of women candidates were elected compared to men – normally women are elected at higher rates than men.

A year ago, 39.29% of councillors were women. Today that has risen to 40.14%. Victoria still leads the country despite dropping to 43.16% (from 43.8%), Tasmania follows on 42.5%, Queensland 42.21%, New South Wales 40.5%¹, South Australia 39.97%, Western Australia 39.61 and the Northern Territory 33%.

Today's Australian figures are an improvement on the Year of Women in Local Government in 2010 when 28.4% of councillors were women and 2015 when 31.12% of councillors were women, or 36.77% in 2020.

However, there is a very different picture when looking at individual States. For instance, In 2010 35.2% of councillors in Queensland were women, but this dropped to 29% in 2015 and it took two elections before women were at the 2010 levels and it was not until 2024 that women broke the 40% barrier.

¹ Based on analysis by the Local Government NSW

And the Northern Territory has been in a steady decline since 2010, when 37.3% of councillors were women.

An analysis by ALGWA has shown that when there is Government funding for election forums aimed at women the number of women elected to local councils increases. In Victoria the number of women elected declined in 2008 and 2024 - the only elections when the State Government has not provided funding for forums.

The number of women elected in the Northern Territory rose to the highest percentage in the country following Federal funding to ALGWA to hold forums. Without similar forums over the past 15 years the numbers have steadily declined.

For several years New South Wales had the lowest percentage of women councillors. But in 2021 and 2024 the State Government provided funding to both ALGWA and Women For Election Australia to run forums and in two elections the State has increased from below 30% to now just over 40%.

The number of women elected in Tasmania, Western Australia and South Australia also increased following forums ran by ALGWA and others.

“The evidence is clear. Without funding for election forums, the number of women elected to council drops.

“Whilst it is an achievement to finally have forty per cent of councillors being women, we need to reach parity. To do that, we need to increase the numbers of women standing, then once they’re elected, find ways to ensure they run for re-election.

“We can come up with as many programs as we like but unless we change the culture and structure within councils, we will continue to have this revolving door. At these rates parity may not be reached for decades,” she said.

Ms Ross travelled overseas in 2020 on a Churchill Fellowship which focused on the need to improve gender equality in local government by electing more women. She found more than 70 programs and over 50 initiatives to get women elected.

“One of the best initiatives to find candidates was “Ask Her To Stand”, which operates in the US, UK and Canada. This is a great way for people to suggest a woman who would be a good councillor.

“Overseas evidence shows there is an increase in the number of women elected following programs to get elected. There are so many because they work,” she added.

Women in Local Government

State	2024	2020	2018	2015	2010
Australia	40.14	36.77	34.94	31.12	28.40
QLD	42.21	37.00	32.50	29.00	35.20
VIC	43.16	43.80	38.10	34.00	30.00
NSW	40.50	39.50	29.50	27.00	27.00
SA	39.97	35.40	35.40	29.00	24.30
WA	39.61	39.30	36.21	31.60	
NT	33.00	33.00	33.00	36.00	37.30
TAS	42.50	39.90	39.90	31.00	23.50



Timeline Women in Government in Australia

- 1902 - Women were given the right to vote and stand in the Commonwealth of Australia, a first for the world.
- 1919 – Susan Benny was the first woman elected to local government in Australia at Brighton Council in South Australia (any tier of government).
- 1921 – Edith Cowen was the first woman elected to state government in Australia.
- 1943 – Edith Lyons was the first woman elected to the Federal Government (House of Representatives).
- 1943 – Dorothy Tangney was the first woman elected to the Federal Government (Senate).
- 1951 – The Australian Local Government Women’s Association was created.