



WGEA Review Team - Consultation
Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear WGEA Review Team - Consultation

AbbVie Pty Ltd welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the review of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* (WGE Act) and provide comments on the efficacy of the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA).

We have responded to each of the questions outlined in the consultation paper and would be delighted to share our perspectives at any consultation forums.

Should you have any questions, please contact our HR Director Nicolas Goncalves at

[REDACTED]

Yours Sincerely,

Chris Stemple
VP and General Manager
AbbVie Pty Ltd



Question 1: Are the functions and powers of WGEA appropriate for promoting and improving gender equality in the workplace? How effective is WGEA in achieving its functions to promote and improve gender equality in the workplace including by enabling relevant employers to report on the gender equality indicators, developing benchmarks and reports, undertaking research, education, and leading practice programs, and contributing to the public discussion on gender equality?

Making progress towards and achieving any business imperative, including gender equality, requires a baseline of current performance, a deep understanding of the underlying issues, an evidence-based projection of what 'good' looks like and a plan to get there. You simply can't improve gender equality if you don't have a firm grasp of the composition of women throughout your organisation, and a plan for removing any barriers that inhibit women and men from equally thriving.

We believe WGEA's remit to require relevant employers to report on the gender composition of their workforce and governing bodies, pay gaps, and the policies, strategies and practices they have in place to address inequities, has been essential for ensuring more organisations understand the imperative of data-informed, evidence-based approaches to this issue. At AbbVie, we have found the comparative organisational wide pay data very useful. For organisations with significant inequities or at the early stages of their plans to improve [REDACTED] ces and support to guide their plans. The Agency's unique dataset has been essential for maintaining media and public interest in and understanding of the issue.

AbbVie has also been an active participant in the Agency's Employer of Choice for Gender Equality program, having received the citation for several years. This citation is an important symbol of our commitment to creating inclusive workplaces. We raise concerns about the arduous nature of the application process in subsequent questions.

We believe the Agency's functions and powers focused on reporting and advocacy is appropriate. In our experience, creating workplaces where women and men have equal opportunities to lead and do great work also requires a core belief in the potential of people and the importance of a trusting and supportive culture, led from the top. This belief and leadership commitment cannot be legislated. Rather, WGEA's current functions and powers enable the critical starting point to gather the data and baseline performance, setting organisations up to do the harder work of nurturing a culture that enables greater equality.



Question 2: What is your experience of what works to improve gender equality in your workplace?

AbbVie benefits from working in the female dominated industry of life sciences, where a passion for people and purpose of addressing some of the world's toughest health challenges organically attracts women.

But it's more than our industry advantage that ensures we attract and retain men and women at near-equal rates throughout the organisation. It's our commitment to creating a great place to work, built on trust, collaboration, transparency, and excellence that is most important. Linking these attributes to our mission of improving patient outcomes is key.

These values are in our DNA, which makes our work on Equity, Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EED&I) a central component of our core philosophy – not a bolt-on that's relegated down the list of priorities.

Several people and culture initiatives have been essential for achieving and sustaining this outcome:

- A leadership commitment to the belief that all employees should be able to bring their whole selves to work, and that their contribution is valued. In the rare occasions where employees don't demonstrate these values, we move quickly to address the issue.
- A culture of transparency underpins our high trust culture. General Manager and Vice President, Chris Stemple, meets with a small group of employees eight times a year for informal, open discussions about life at AbbVie. Chris' perceptive leadership style means any issues can be surfaced and addressed while the routine practice of meeting with employees sets a tone of openness that others follow.
- We embed our 'ways of working' into performance appraisals in the belief that how you achieve results is as important as the results themselves.
- Embedding a culture that enables the full suite of flexible working has been essential for supporting parents who are primary carers. Trusting our people to do great work in the way that suits them and focusing on employee outcomes - not time spent in the office – is key.
- We routinely analyse our pay data to ensure there are no unjustifiable differences in pay between men and women doing work of the same value.
- We offer generous benefits that reflect how we value people, including numerous global and local awards and recognition programs, generous leave allowances, parental leave programs and wellbeing programs.
- Our Mental Health Reference Group offers practical tools to support our people and recently launched a new online program to help our people with resilience and coping strategies.
- We have strong employee feedback loops so that issues can be quickly surfaced and addressed
- We have a well-resourced EED&I committee which governs our program of activity with a focus on celebrating our differences within AbbVie and across the communities we serve. This includes celebration of International Women's Day, PRIDE and culturally



significant events like NAIDOC week and Chinese New Year, and important social movements like Black Lives Matter.

You will notice in this list of initiatives, it is our genuine commitment to ensuring everyone at AbbVie can reach their full potential and love working here that has been most important to us achieving gender equality.

How do you currently engage with WGEA and use the reporting process and their resources to improve gender equality?

Our primary engagement with WGEA is as an Employer of Choice. We have enjoyed working with the communications team to access several profiling opportunities for AbbVie where we can share our experience with creating an inclusive culture. We believe that external advocacy of best practice gender equality initiatives is important in rising the tide across the life sciences sector and beyond.

The reporting process has prompted deeper thinking and action in several areas, particularly around pay equity.

What changes, if any, would you like to see in the areas of future focus for WGEA to further promote and improve gender equality over the next ten years?

We encourage the Agency to review its EoCGE citation process to address the burdensome nature of the process and rigid requirements it imposes. We understand the rigidity reflects the need for standardisation, however we believe the current citation criteria fails to reflect the different circumstances organisations face. For example, AbbVie currently enjoys near gender balance across its organisation and engagement levels above 90%. But to meet citation criteria, we were required to complete 67 pages of data that required a significant time investment, and a dedicated resource from our side for several weeks to compile all necessary data. This acts as a disincentive to innovation and fails to capture what matters most – the lived experience of our people.

We encourage WGEA to create more communities of practice with their EOCGE employers. Forums where we can learn from other's successes and failures are invaluable to informing our thinking and improving our approach.

We would also like to see the Agency take a lead on some of the challenges that are bigger than any individual organisation. Occupational segregation is a prime example and for AbbVie that is best represented in our heavily female dominated roles like administration. Given the importance of inclusion to achieving and leveraging gender equality, we encourage the Government to consider ways of measuring initiatives organisations have in place to support this area.



Question 3: Should the coverage of the Workplace Gender Equality Act be further changed? Specifically, should the definition of 'relevant employer' be expanded? If so, would additional considerations need to be factored in for new reporting employers?

While changes to coverage doesn't affect AbbVie, we would welcome the inclusion of the public sector in the reporting regime and the dataset given the sector has traditionally excelled in this area.



Question 4: Are the gender equality indicators (GEIs) in the Workplace Gender Equality Act, and the data collected with respect to the GEIs, appropriate to promote and improve gender equality? How could they be improved?

As previously mentioned, we would welcome a GEI on inclusion, best captured by the reporting questionnaire. The level of detail captured on pay equity and flexible working is a useful reference point. These questions require organisations to think more deeply about their approach to these areas, which leads to better practice.

We also encourage ways to better capture appointments, promotions and exits year-on-year. The movement of talent through an organisation provides a more powerful picture of who's thriving and who's not.

Finally, we would welcome the inclusion of reporting on organisational-specific targets that is currently captured in the EOCGE reporting process.



Question 5: In addition to gender, should WGEA collect other data on diversity and inclusion criteria on a mandatory basis, to enable a more nuanced analysis of men and women’s experiences in the workplace? If yes, please specify criteria (eg cultural and linguistic diversity, disability, age, location of primary workplace). If not, why not?

Capturing employee-specific data on areas like ethnicity and disability would be fraught with privacy issues and be overly burdensome for employers to capture. However, we support more comprehensive data on ‘gender’ so that it reflects a wider spectrum of gender identity. We note several of our employees were disappointed to see the 2021 Census missed the opportunity to capture this data.



Question 6: How could data be better collected and/or used by WGEA to promote and improve gender equality? Should there be some form of pay transparency – should remuneration data in some form be public?

We note the challenges WGEA has had with the reporting platform and welcome plans to improve its ease of use.

We support greater transparency of pay gap percentages and note several other countries including the UK and Spain have already moved in this direction. While WGEA's standardised format of pay data doesn't reveal true pay gaps in like-for-like roles, transparency would incentivise organisations to take a deeper look at the by-level and organisational-wide pay gaps the Agency could report. Note, we do not support transparency of pay amounts as this is confidential and proprietary.



Question 7: Are there changes that could be made to the Workplace Gender Equality Act that would help reduce the regulatory burden on relevant employers while continuing to enable WGEA to promote and improve gender equality? Should other data sources, such as Single Touch Payroll data, be used by WGEA instead of employers providing the same data to two Government agencies?

We welcome better integration between Government reporting bodies like the ATO and support the use of Single Touch Payroll data as a first step in the process with a requirement that employers validate data and any final interpretations and calculations.



Question 8: Could the minimum standards be expanded to improve the way they drive practical gender equality outcomes in workplaces? What would employers need to do to implement these changes in their workplace? Should Minimum Standards apply to all reporting employers, not just those with 500 or more employees?

A minimum standard should be aspirational and provide an incentive for employers to improve. Given 100% compliance with the current minimum standard, we believe this current minimum standard is inadequate and we encourage Government to strengthen these parameters by setting them on areas where employers are currently underperforming.

We note the experience in Spain is instructive to driving action on key areas. Spain recently enacted measures that required companies that employ 50 or more people to release employee salary information and file a four-year strategy for balancing the number of male and female employees at their company or pay a €187,000 fine.



Question 9: Are the compliance mechanisms in the Workplace Gender Equality Act, and consequences for non-compliance, effective to promote and improve gender equality? If not, how could they be improved?

We note the impact of the current consequence for non-compliance is not evenly felt across employers. For AbbVie, our license to operate depends on our relationship with Government. We suspect most employers don't have the same dependence on government relationships and contracts to exist.

We encourage the Government to consider more equally applied mechanisms like a fine proportionate to company turnover. For example, Spain's General Law on the rights of disabled persons and their social inclusion states companies employing 50 or more workers are obliged to employ at least 2 per cent of employees with disabilities. In exceptional circumstances, they can claim exemption provided that alternative measures are applied such as donating to organisations that support the employment of people with disabilities. Those companies that don't comply with any of the obligations may be penalised with fines of up to €6,250.