

On the 21 August 1943, Dame Enid Lyons becomes the first woman ever elected to the House of Representatives.<sup>1</sup> A milestone in every sense, setting a tone of female empowerment on the back of universal suffrage. On the 2 July 2016, 73 years later, Linda Burney becomes the first Aboriginal woman elected to the House of Representatives.<sup>2</sup> In 116 years of Parliament, one Indigenous Australian woman is elected to the Lower House, this is an injustice to all woman and a terrifying display of not just the patriarchy but the Non-Indigenous patriarchy governing Australia. Surely, since federation Indigenous women have reached milestones such as being elected to the Lower House however, for it to have occurred 73 years after the first Non-Indigenous woman is a clear display of the dichotomy that must be addressed.

By this information, it becomes clear that Australia suffers the plights of a broken history. With the temptation to discuss when women gained the vote, in this project a clear distinction must be made between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous women for their histories are so vastly different. This dichotomy in quality of life extends into a current context in which the Indigenous and Non-Indigenous gender pay gap is more pronounced than ever. The Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health delineates that for an Indigenous woman to earn as much as a Non-Indigenous man she would need to work two days for every one of his.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, in 2012–13, the median equivalised gross weekly household income for Indigenous adults was \$465 compared with \$869 for non-Indigenous adults.<sup>4</sup> Pushing almost double the income, Non-Indigenous privilege is exhibited here in its rawest form. This income inequality has various other implications. It is commonly known that low socioeconomic status is related to other issues including health care or a lack of access thereof and can also predispose one to domestically violent tendencies.<sup>5</sup> This is made evident in statistics of domestic violence where the Productivity Commission's 2011 Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage report depicts that Indigenous women and girls are 31 times more likely than Non-Indigenous girls to be hospitalised due to domestic and

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Electoral Commission. (2015). *Electoral Milestones for Women*, AEC, Canberra, viewed 24 July 2017, [http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Australian\\_Electoral\\_History/milestone.htm](http://www.aec.gov.au/Elections/Australian_Electoral_History/milestone.htm).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Lambert, L. (2010). Gendered Wage Gap even more Pronounced for Aboriginal Women. *Pimatisiwin A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*. 8 (2).

<sup>4</sup> Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. (2014). *2.08 Income*, Canberra, viewed 22 May 2017, <https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/indigenous/Health-Performance-Framework-2014/tier-2-determinants-health/208-income.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

family violence related assaults.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, in the 2017 Closing the Gap Prime Minister's report it is emphasised that imperative in the campaign to end disparity between not just Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people but Indigenous and Non-Indigenous women is "*an acknowledgement that the rates of family and domestic violence for Indigenous women far outweigh that of their non-Indigenous counterparts*". Therefore, it is made evident that socially there is a great dichotomy between the life experienced by Indigenous and Non-Indigenous women and herein lies the question of how this translates into policy.

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<sup>6</sup>Australian Government Productivity Commission. (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage*, Canberra, viewed 17 July 2017, <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage>.