

Wednesday October 24, 2012

Research highlights need for gender targets for super fund boards

The peak body for Australia's \$500 billion not-for-profit superannuation funds, **the Australian Institute of Superannuation Trustees** and **Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA)** are calling for super funds to appoint more female directors.

Commenting on the release of research into the experiences of female directors of super funds at **AIST's Fund Governance Conference in Melbourne** today, **AIST CEO Fiona Reynolds** said AIST was encouraging all funds to move to gender diversity of at least 40% within the next five years, with current levels of women directors of not-for-profit funds at around 21%.

"This research shows that the current crop of female trustee directors is extremely well-qualified, experienced and skilled. There simply is no excuse for not having more females represented on super fund boards," Ms Reynolds said.

Ms Reynolds said some funds – typically those serving male dominated industries – had no female representation and would need to cast the net wider when it came to recruiting female directors.

"We know that women retire with significantly smaller superannuation than men. Having gender diversity on the board will not only lead to better decision making, it will ensure that more is done to address the gender gap in retirement savings."

Speaking at the conference, **EOWA Director, Ms Helen Conway** said 25 years had elapsed since Australia first introduced affirmative action legislation to deal with barriers to women's workforce participation. She endorsed AIST's target of having 40 per cent of board positions held by women by 2017.

"There are still significant issues 25 years on – there remains an unacceptably low level of women in leadership positions on boards and management. Organisations need to address their pipelines of female talent, and set numerical targets at the top levels to bring about change," she said.

Ms Conway said the workforce participation rate of women, at 59%, was "relatively low" and placed Australia mid-level when compared with other OECD countries.

"A big issue is the gender pay gap, currently at 17.5 %, which has significant implications for women both while they work, and in their old age."

"Not only do women earn less than men during their working lives, but importantly, and sadly, it's a big issue for women in retirement."

"Women retire with substantially lower retirement funds than men. We see that 70 per cent of single aged pensioners are women, and we see that women are two and a half times more likely than men to live in poverty in their old age.

"There is also some recent data that older women are making up a greater percentage of the homeless. After 25 years, there's still a big journey in front of us," Ms Conway said.

Key findings: AIST Oct 2012 research 'The inside story: women on boards'

- **Majority tertiary qualified:** 96% of women have completed a bachelor's degree;
- **Previous experience important:** Almost 90% of women had previous or current experience of being on another board or committee.
- **Better than corporate sector:** Current % of females on not-for-profit super fund boards is 21%, compared to 15% on top ASX companies
- **Need to work harder:** Women directors believe they have to work harder for their position on a board just because they are female;
- **No time for a break:** Most women who become directors have taken little or no career break in order to reach their positions;
- **Who you know:** 30% of women were appointed to their current board positions directly through someone that they know;
- **Training important:** Over 80% of women undertake a minimum of 30 hours of super-rated training per year;
- **Boy's club barrier:** Many women directors think super is a 'boys' club', creating a difficult environment for women to become noticed, promoted and supported in career advancement towards a trustee director role.

Further media enquiries:

AIST CEO Fiona Reynolds and EOWA director Helen Conway are available for interviews.

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AIST is the peak industry body for the \$450 billion not-for-profit super sector which includes industry, corporate and public sector funds covering the super interests of nearly two-thirds of the Australian workforce.

EOWA is an Australian Government statutory authority that administers the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999.