

OUR GENERAL ELECTION 2024 MANIFESTO

We are the Agenda Alliance: bold, ambitious feminists, representing over 100 women and girls' member organisations. We champion those women and girls who are at the sharpest end of inequality – experiencing what women with lived experience call multiple unmet needs.

Multiple unmet needs are often interconnected, complex and gender-specific. They may include contact with the criminal justice system, poverty, using substances to cope, having no recourse to public funds and having no safe place to call home. For many women and girls these challenges are underpinned by extensive experience of abuse and violence throughout their lives. Public services don't work in joined-up ways to address these problems, and can cause further harm – so women and girls' challenges just end up getting worse.

We all want society to be safer and more functional – polling tells us that the majority of Britons, whoever they vote for, think public services are in a very bad state. We need to commit to boldly reimagining what this support should look like, rather than papering over the cracks, to stop completely preventable issues causing lifelong cycles of harm to women and girls.

This General Election, we're calling on candidates from all political parties to back a central ask: that the next government creates a dedicated Secretary of State for Women and Girls.

Women and girls deserve someone to champion their needs, matching the seriousness of multiple unmet needs with serious political resource.

They deserve someone to work across systems and siloes to design preventative, holistic and gendered interventions.

A SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS SHOULD:

Centre prioritisation and prevention:

A cross-cutting, Cabinet level women and girls' representative will work across government departments to embed early intervention and hold them accountable for ensuring that all policy responds to gender, age, culture and trauma as a matter of course.

Share their power:

Women and girls with lived experience have the answers to so many persistent policy problems – but they are so rarely included. This role should hold a core focus on designing future solutions alongside women and girls with lived experience, from consultation to legislation, service delivery to service evaluation.

Champion the sector:

After decades of declining investment in vital services, women and girls need high level political advocacy to bring departments together and address the distinct issues the specialist sector supporting them faces. We need funding models which embed full-cost recovery and articulate the cost-savings of prevention, and provide ring-fenced resource for by-and-for organisations.

If we are bold enough to address gendered multiple disadvantage with fresh eyes, the returns will be huge.



WHY NOW? THE CASE FOR CHANGE

"Policymakers need a kick up the butt. They need to do something, and they need to do it fast otherwise there are going to be so many more disadvantaged women; more suicides, homelessness, child removal. It needs acting on and it needs acting on fast."

Nici, member of Agenda Alliance's Women's Advisory Network

At the moment, women and girls face single issue policy responses which try and address their problems one at a time, ignoring the connections between them.

Far too often, women experiencing discrimination and misogyny are stigmatised,

treated by public services as just 'victims'; 'criminals'; 'bad mothers', 'addicts', 'poor' or 'useless'. These labels stick, and they ignore the fact that women and girls experiencing multiple unmet needs are whole individuals, who are hopeful, inspiring, joyful, aspirational and caring.

Women and girls with lived experience of these challenges imagine a society where their potential is realised, through services that recognise their gender, culture, age and histories of trauma.

They need someone to champion that vision at the highest levels of politics.

Political focus on the issues women and girls face has been diluted for too long: since the inception of these roles, the ministers assigned to support women and girls have only had a position in Cabinet because they also hold other full-time government roles, such as Home Secretary; Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport; or Secretary of State for Business and Trade.

Responsibility for this vital work shouldn't be a bolt on to another more senior role.

The specialist services supporting women and girls are working flat out, but so many vital community services are at risk.

Just 1.8% of recorded grants in 2021 were awarded to women and girls' organisations; over half of these grants were for less than £10,000.

Organisations are struggling to patch together funding from multiple, often short-term, sources. Some face pressure to provide mixed-sex or generic services to maintain funding or contracts, and smaller, specialist organisations are routinely disadvantaged by all funding processes. This picture makes it incredibly challenging to effectively meet gendered complex needs.

A focus on preventing harm and intervening early is critical.

Women and girls know what is needed: early intervention from relational, cross-cutting services which provide gender-, age-, culture- and trauma-responsive support.

Only by intervening earlier can we reduce pressure on crisis responses and change women and girls' lives long-term – but we are talking about big changes to the shape of how support is delivered. Without senior political backing, effective, gendered prevention won't have a lasting transformative impact.

Stand with Agenda Alliance, as we call for the creation of a Secretary of State for Women and Girls.