

## TRANSCRIPT OF EVENT

# 2021 INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY DIGITAL WORKSHOP OPENING REMARKS

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CAROLINE EDWARDS: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to today's event. I'm here to welcome you to International Women's Day Digital Workshop on the shared benefits of an equal future in a COVID-19 world. My name is Caroline Edwards. I'm the Associate Secretary of the Department of Health, and I'm also an IPAA ACT Councillor. I'm very pleased to open the first International Women's Day Digital Workshop, which has been delivered in partnership with the 50/50 Foundation by 2030 Foundation, and we're coming to you from their special IPAA studios here in Barton.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: To start this event, I would, of course, want to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we're meeting, the Ngunnawal people, and also to the Traditional Owners of those lands on which those listening and Zooming in might be located. I pay my respects to Elders past, present, and emerging and acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who've tuned in today with a special shout out to wonderful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who we know are the bedrock of their nations and of our community.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Can I start by acknowledging our esteemed speakers? We've got today Trish Bergin, who's a Co-director of the 50/50 Foundation, and also professor Kim Rubinstein, who is the other Co-director of the 50/50 Foundation. Welcome to both Trish and Kim. Many people will know Trish from her former public esteemed service. She held senior executive positions within the APS, most recently leading the Office for Women in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. She's also worked at the senior executive service level within other Commonwealth portfolios, including Finance, Education and the Employment portfolio. In the private sector, Trish has held General Manager and Regional Director level positions with listed companies, such as SMS Management and Technology and Hudson Global Resources in Canberra. For 11 years, Trish ran her own thriving small business, working with clients to implement organisational strategy, facilitate change, and facilitating leadership development program. A fantastic depth of experience for this discussion today.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Professor Kim Rubinstein's academic and professional reputation as a legal scholar and leading gender equity advocate is second to none. From 2006 to 2015, she served as Director of the Center for International and Public Law at ANU, and was a Founding Convener of the ANU Gender Institute. Kim has completed two Australian Research Council Grants as Chief Investigator and is the recipient of numerous awards, including a listing in the Financial Review's *100 Women of Influence* for her work in public policy and awarded the inaugural Edna Ryan Award for leading feminist change in the public sphere. Kim is also a fellow of the Australian Academy of the Social Sciences and a fellow of the Australian Academy of Law. I'm beginning to feel a bit intimidated here.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Can I also acknowledge our IPAA staff and Future Leaders assisting us today with note-taking, and especially all of you who are attending today's digital event and who we hope to engage with over the coming months and years on these important issues?

CAROLINE EDWARDS: For the overview of our event today: I will start with some opening reflections from our panel. They'll convene a workshop to work through the issues in greater detail, and there'll be a summary of the group's discussions at the end. There'll be some time for networking in small groups before we reconvene for closing remarks. Just before we get underway, I just wanted to make a few remarks on the importance of International Women's Day, and particularly in this year, 2021. International Women's Day marks an opportunity for us to reflect on where we've come from and what our place is in society today. There is always a question about the other 364 days, but we're working on those. I would say that this year International Women's Day falls within a public discussion in Australia, which is both high profile and distressing for many.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Clearly the issues that arise in our workplaces all over the nation, and particularly here in Canberra, are in the spotlight and many people are discussing and debating and ruminating on the way women are treated in the law and what happens to them in their workplace and how we can make sure that women are safe in their workplaces in the community. I'd also acknowledged for that for many women in Australia, the events of recent weeks have been very distressing and I would call out to anybody who's feeling under pressure or distressed by the recent events to seek out support and help, and to really reassure you that there are many of us who want to listen and that you are not alone. In that regard, I'm sure I'm not alone in saying that I pledge to support and believe. So thank you all for your attendance.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Moving on to the content of today's discussion. I wanted to welcome Trish and Kim, and we might get some opening reflections, and we might start with you, Professor Kim.

KIM RUBENSTEIN Thank you very much, Caroline, and really to acknowledge and affirm the Traditional Owners of the land on which we're meeting and say how delighted I am to be here with my Co-director Trish Bergin, and to be partnering with IPAA on this occasion. It is a wonderful opportunity to be working together on very common objectives. Part of what we wanted to do on this sort of post COVID, working towards the new future, moving forward rather than backwards, is to really reflect on how we managed during COVID and what we can learn from COVID. So one of the things that I thought I would start off by reflecting on is that Trish and I actually started in our roles in February of 2020, just really a month before COVID set in. Neither of us had actually met each other before, even though our worlds are connected, although Trish's daughter had babysat my children. We'd worked out in some contexts, but we hadn't ever worked together before and we were coming together to be co-directors.

KIM RUBENSTEIN Now, there is another whole story which would take more than my five minutes to share with you today about how that evolved, but the co-directorship position is one that has really benefited us in our ability to cope with the way we dealt with COVID. I think it has been an affirmation of our commitment to the idea of leadership being shared and how COVID was such a reminder of how individuals need to work together in times of difficulty, but not only in times of difficulty, but that there is something about leadership and being able to have a shared leadership role that reaffirms for all individuals in our working lives and in our personal lives how the balance between the two is fundamental to the ways in which we engage with all the different pressures that exist in managing ourselves as human beings holistically.

- KIM RUBENSTEIN: So the flexible workplace environment became one in which we could coordinate together in terms of our leadership, but also to work with our new team. So two of our new team members started after lockdown. So we really only met and started working with them online and that, of course, had its challenges, But it also meant that we were all in it together on an equal footing, as it were, in terms of managing that scenario. Yeah, so that's a theme that I'd like maybe to come back to at the end, but co-leadership, which was something that we started pre-COVID has been affirmed during COVID and is one that I certainly think we'll want to be able to promote more and more in terms of our public sector.
- CAROLINE EDWARDS: Thank you. I'll move to your co-director to co-comment. Please, Trish.
- TRISH BERGIN: Thanks very much, and I too would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we're meeting today, and pay my respects to their Elders past, present, and emerging, and to welcome and to affirm the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are in our audience today. Look, I couldn't agree with Kim more. I think one of the best ways that we were able to cope as a new team was through both shared leadership, but also in terms of having everybody on a level playing field so that we ensured that we had everybody's ideas. I think a lot of us have worked in those environments occasionally where it seems like only the person who's paid the most in the room is entitled to have the good ideas. It was certainly a really great environment and a leveling environment in which we could actually take that forward.
- TRISH BERGIN: Our first real, I guess, focus as a team was to really start thinking about the sort of the drivers for gender equality, particularly gender equality in leadership, because the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation, our objective, our vision is that women will be equally represented in leadership by the year 2030 across the public realm. So we started really unpicking that, and I guess it's relevant to today because so much of what played out over COVID are the things that are really standing in the way or offer opportunities for us to really start to address gender inequality, particularly in leadership. One of the first areas I think we focused in on looking at research, and due to COVID, was if you can't have kind of equal sharing of the load at home in the private sphere, how on earth can you expect to have women equally sharing the load in terms of being leaders as well?
- TRISH BERGIN: During COVID, we initiated some research that Kim and our post-doctoral fellow, Dr Pierre Row, initiated, which was looking at who's doing the work. What are you doing in the home when you're in lockdown and you've got a three-year-old and maybe a six year old or something, and you're both trying to work from home, or one of your careers has been completely upset? So we've really focused in on the need to shift some of those norms, the behaviors around sharing the home chores, the caring and so on, and thinking about that's a fundamental driver in terms of addressing gender inequality, is shifting those norms about who does the caring, who does the earning and how that happens.

TRISH BERGIN: So that was really looking at society. Our second area was really looking at the economy. Who's really impacted acted by COVID and how, and generally looking at issues around inequality of the gender pay gap, the superannuation gap, a whole range of those sorts of things and saying, "Well, if we're to actually share the benefits, how do we address that?" It was particularly interesting, I think in COVID, when you look at some of the stats that show that women bore the brunt of the economic recession that followed, in the first instance, for a whole range of reasons, so were much more impacted in terms of those who were of work due to the fact that they were in hospitality and a lot of those sort of industries that were immediately hit and have taken ... They've bounced back, but they haven't recovered to the same extent that that men's jobs have. So I think that's a really interesting area.

TRISH BERGIN: Finally, and I won't keep going on, but finally, we look at the whole area of sharing of power. I guess that's really relevant to a lot of the debates that are going on at the moment and how it is that we encourage women into leadership positions, how we have those pipelines, how we have those different models of leadership that have women more able to see themselves in it, and for us to actually think of women as leaders. I think the APS is so far ahead in this area, because it's just ... I think the latest stats have shown that the APS is well ahead in terms of its gender balance and increasingly so in the senior executive ranks. So there's a lot going there, but for the rest of the society, that's not quite the same. So to summarise all of that, we've kind of focused on the need that we have to share the load at home and share the care, we have to share the benefits, so the economic benefits, and we have to really share the power to be able to address gender inequality.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Thanks very much, Trish. There's a lot resonating in there for everyone. I have to say my own leadership journey last year, I completely failed to do all the things that I advise you to do. I let my health go. I was never home. I didn't look after my family. Now, in retrospect, the success we've had with COVID, probably a year of doing that is warranted, but I guess that reminds me that we all also need to be gentle with ourselves when our gargantuan workloads do not allow us to do all the things we wanted to do. I'd also like to shout out. In my instance, I had an early 20s unemployed daughter who stepped up, I didn't even know she could cook or clean, and really stepped in to support the family and so on. So we spent a lot of time talking about young people, but can I just shout out how wonderful young people and young women are in Australia?

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Just before we go into the workshop, we've talked a lot about what we know was the disproportionate impact of COVID on women in employment, in their homes, and not to mention for those for whom home is not a safe place, the concern we had about people being locked in their homes, but there are benefits, and in particular for our own workplace, the benefits are for everybody, but in particular women of the flexible work arrangements, which were brought in all of a sudden, but which in many places are being retained. Maybe we could comment on how you think that's gone down and what the opportunities are before we move on.

TRISH BERGIN: No, absolutely. I might go first and then you can carry on. I think that's been absolutely one of the both silver linings, as you say, of the COVID time, is that it finally made us realize that so much of our work can be done flexibly, whereas in the past, I think we kind of knew it intellectually that it should be possible, but it just went against the grain in a lot of ways to really think, "Oh, if people aren't onsite as much, then clearly that's not the right thing." So I think that has showed us a lot about that, and I think it's also highlighted the fact that for many, many families, it's highlighted the fact that ... For instance, I know a family whose ... the male breadwinner lost his work through the recession and his partner was a health worker, so all of a sudden she was having to really step up and get out and work.

TRISH BERGIN: So from that point of view, their whole family just flipped its sort of traditional kind of pattern. They've said they'll never go back completely to the binary one doing one and one doing the other, that they really want to expose that or continue that level of flexibility that is shared. I think it's up to workplaces and I think we've seen so much innovation. It's just wonderful to see right across the board how that is possible, but it can also still be a bit of a sticking point. There are still some areas, I think, that still find it a bit hard to take up that flexibility. What do you think?

KIM RUBENSTEIN: I think this is an instance where leadership is so important in terms of the message coming from the leadership in general, is to supporting staff in finding flexible working environments that both benefit the environment, the work environment, but also benefit them as human beings. I think one of the biggest challenges, again, is to stress and emphasise that this is not just about improving things for women, but also about improving things for men, and that men sharing the load at home is not just a burden but an opportunity for them to have better relationships with those ... Either their children or the caring environments that they're in, and that that in itself is enlarging their brains in ways that enable them to be better participants in our workplaces, because they're practicing the nature of those responsibilities in relationships, which hopefully benefits society as a whole, not just the workplace.

CAROLINE EDWARDS: Fantastic. Thanks very much, Trish and Kim, that's a great launching pad to move on. So now we're going to move to the workshop stage and we're going to call upon all of you to put on your innovative shoes and come up with ideas and ways forward so we can really use what is and what has been as a way to launch forward to make the world benefit for everyone. So I'm going to leave you in the capable hands of Trish and Kim to run the workshop, and happy International Women's Day to everyone.