



Burnet
reach for the many

Burnet Institute Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) Cygnet Award application: institutional context

January 2025



Image: Stacey Edwards (Taungurung/Boon Wurrung/Bunurong) 'Bunjil The Creator' 2021, acrylic on canvas.

Acknowledgement of Country

Burnet Institute board, staff and students recognise the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we live and work.

We are proud to acknowledge the Boon Wurrung people of the Kulin Nations as the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which our head office is located and recognise their strong and ongoing connection to Country. Recognising the ongoing impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, our position as a leading medical research institute demands that we strengthen our commitment to close the gap in health outcomes.

About the artwork

Bunjil is the creator of the Kulin Nations. He takes the shape of a wedge-tailed eagle. Any guests of the Kulin Nations have to follow 2 rules: to obey the laws of Bunjil, and to not harm the children or land of Bunjil.



This artwork was created through The Torch, a not-for-profit organisation that provides art, cultural and arts industry support to First Nations people currently in, or recently released, from Victorian prisons.

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About Burnet Institute

Established in 1986, Burnet Institute is a leading Australian-based medical research and public health organisation headquartered in Melbourne. It is an accredited international non-government organisation (NGO). With a dedicated workforce of more than 550 staff members and more than 60 students, Burnet also extends its reach through offices in Myanmar and Papua New Guinea (PNG) and its programs across Asia, the Pacific, and Africa.

Our vision

A more equitable world through better health.

Our purpose

To create and translate knowledge into better health, so no-one is left behind.

Our values

Respect, equality, inclusiveness, diversity.

Governance, accountability and funding

Burnet is governed by a board of directors, operating in accordance with its constitution. The current board comprises of 11 directors, including 7 men and 4 women, and is chaired by a woman. The board's composition brings together a diverse array of expertise across academia, public health, business, law, and accounting, ensuring effective governance.

Burnet's executive committee, which meets monthly to guide the Institute towards its strategic goals, has made significant strides in enhancing gender balance over the past 2 years. As of August 2024, the executive committee, including the CEO, consists of 8 women and 5 men, totalling 13 members.

Burnet secures funding through competitive, peer-reviewed grants, and commercial contracts, supplemented by state-government infrastructure support. Additionally, Burnet is the only medical research institute in Australia to hold full accreditation with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) as an international non-government organisation and receives program funding from them. Other funding sources include philanthropic donations and sponsorships.

Burnet's strategic planning

Burnet's strategic planning is guided by our 10-year strategy, Burnet 2030. This strategy builds on Burnet's proven research strengths and experience in addressing global health challenges.

The strategy focuses on:

Research programs

Burnet is working to strengthen interdisciplinary research to address global health challenges, focusing on key areas such as Disease Elimination, Health Security, and Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health. Strategic investments support flagship initiatives including Eliminate Hepatitis C Australia, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, and Know C-19, alongside new initiatives such as the Burnet Diagnostics Initiative and research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Environment

Burnet aims to create a top-tier research environment and bolster operations in Australia, Myanmar, PNG and the Pacific. Burnet's participation in the Australian Institute for Infectious Disease as a foundation partner will enhance its research capability and increase the contribution and impact it makes.

People

Burnet seeks to be a leading workplace with a strong ethical foundation, investing in job security, gender equity, and opportunities for emerging talent while fostering a culture of respect, equality, inclusiveness, and diversity.

Burnet projects and initiatives align with the objectives of Burnet 2030, ensuring a cohesive approach to advancing global health and translating new knowledge into practical health system responses.

Global reach and focus

Burnet is at the forefront of research and public health initiatives across Australia and Asia, the Pacific and Africa. In PNG and Myanmar, Burnet projects are implemented directly by country office staff in collaboration with key government agencies, partners and collaborators. These efforts are supported by technical and project management expertise from Burnet's Melbourne office.

About Burnet Institute

Technical disciplines

Burnet staff are organised into 3 core technical disciplines:

- **Life Sciences:** encompassing immunology, infectious diseases, virology, microbiology, and biochemistry.
- **Public Health:** covering epidemiology, disease surveillance, evaluation, data analysis, and modelling.
- **International Development:** focusing on health systems strengthening, implementation, and community engagement.

Thematic programs

Burnet's work is structured around 3 primary thematic programs:

- **Disease Elimination:** targeting HIV, viral hepatitis, malaria, and tuberculosis.
- **Health Security and Pandemic Preparedness:** enhancing global preparedness for health crises.
- **Women's, Children's and Adolescents' Health:** aiming to improve health outcomes for these vulnerable groups.

Burnet's working group structure and support system

To support its diverse programs, Burnet operates over 20 working groups (WGs), each focusing on specific thematic programs and technical disciplines. Each WG is comprised of research staff and is supported by dedicated professional staff. Additionally, Burnet employs professional staff across other critical organisational functions, including information technology, finance, an executive team and other essential support services. This integrated structure ensures both the specialised needs of the WGs and the overall operational requirements of the Institute are efficiently managed.

Institutional demographic profile:

key factors for attraction, retention,
and progression

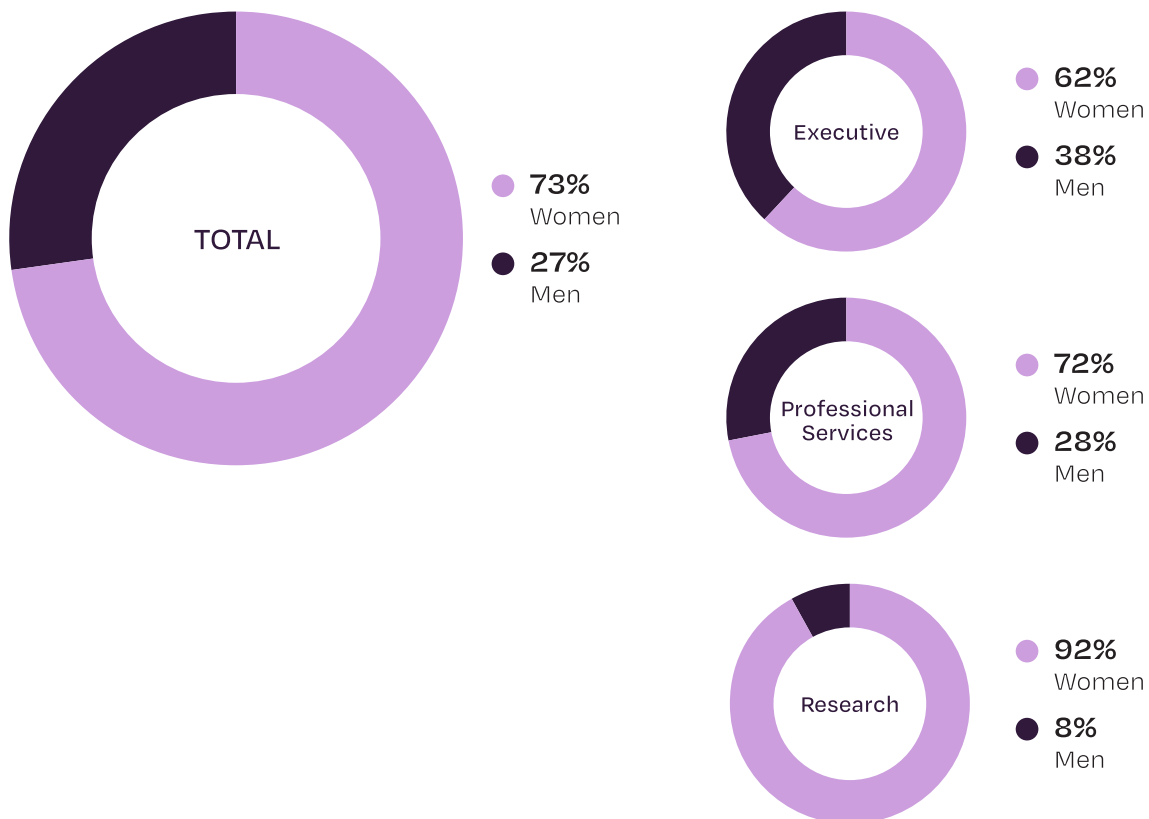
Institutional demographic profile: key factors for attraction, retention, and progression

In 2024, Burnet’s Melbourne office employed 372 staff members and hosted 67 students, consisting of 257 women, 115 men, and 2 people who identified as non-binary. Due to confidentiality reasons, data for the 2 non-binary individuals may be excluded from some data represented in the diagram below.

Gender demographics by work area

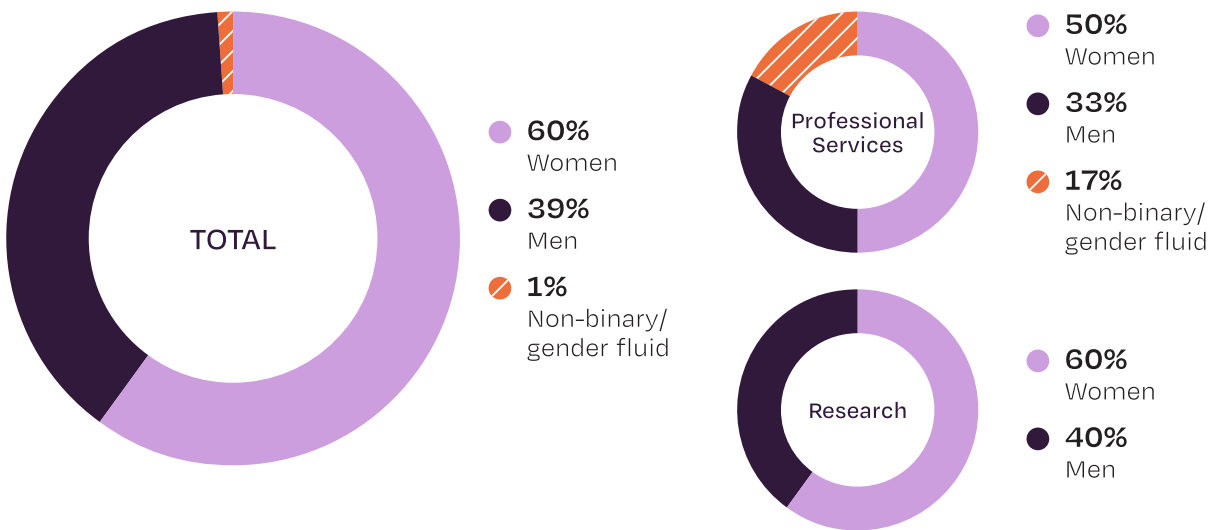
Professional Services

Women make up most of the professional services workforce, including 92% in research roles. Overall, 73% are women and 27% are men. Women hold 62% of executive roles and 72% of professional services roles, showing strong representation across all levels.



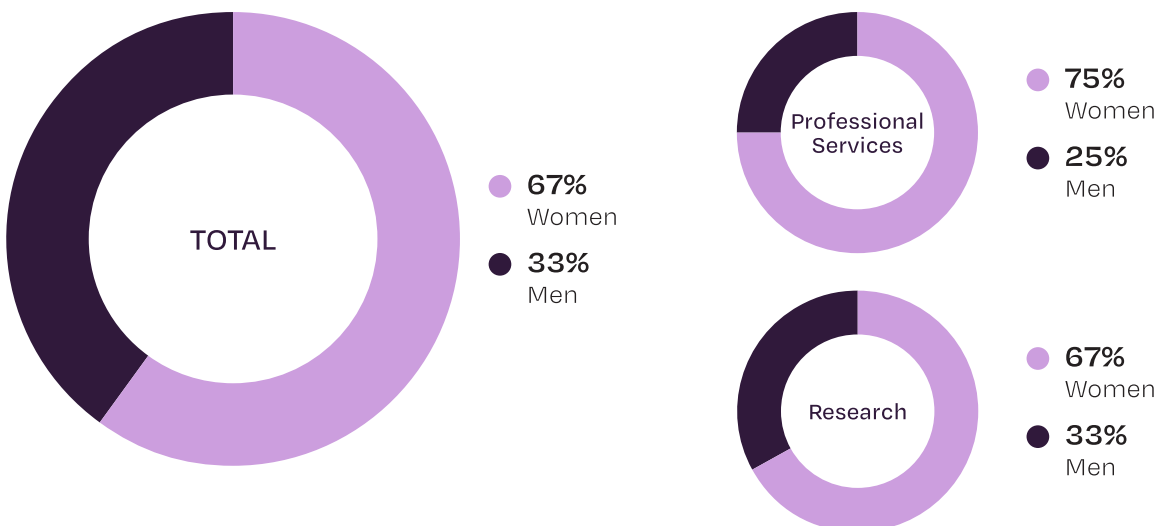
Public Health

In Public Health, women make up 60% of the workforce, men make up 39%, and staff that are non-binary or gender fluid make up 1%. Women lead in research roles (60%) and make up 50% of professional services roles, where non-binary/gender fluid staff represent a notable 17%. Gender diversity is more balanced here than in other work areas.



Life Sciences

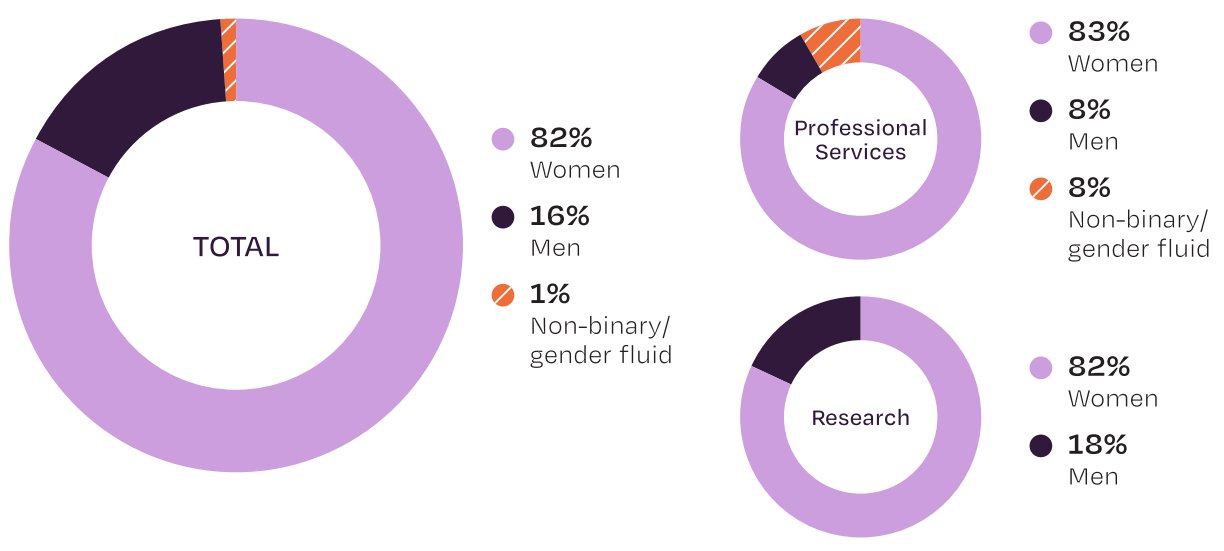
In Life Sciences, women make up 67% of the workforce and men make up 33%. Women hold 75% of professional services roles and 67% of research roles. This shows strong representation across both types of positions.



Institutional demographic profile: key factors for attraction, retention, and progression

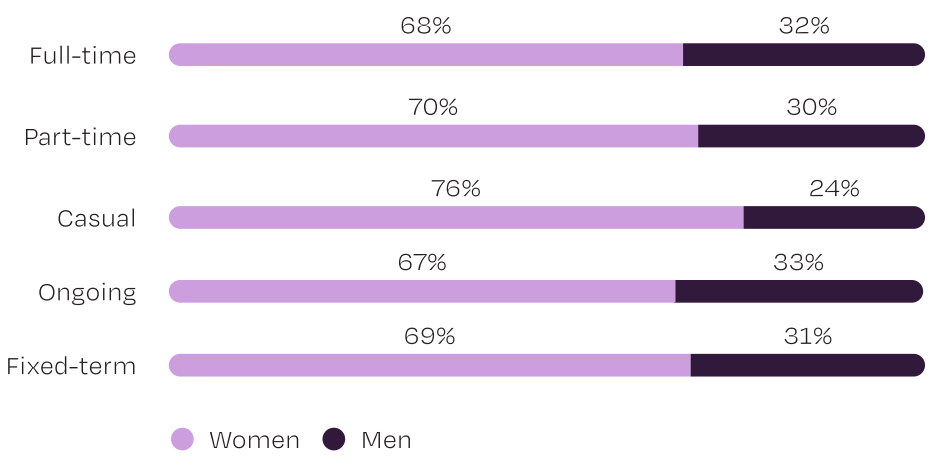
International Development

In International Development, women make up 82% of the workforce, men make up 16%, and staff that are non-binary or gender fluid make up 1%. Women are the majority in both professional services and research roles, with 83% and 82% respectively, showing strong representation and some gender diversity.



Employment breakdown

Across all employment types, women are the majority. They hold 68% of full-time roles, 70% of part-time roles, 76% of casual roles, 67% of ongoing, and 69% of fixed-term roles. Men make up a smaller portion in each group, ranging from 24% to 33%.

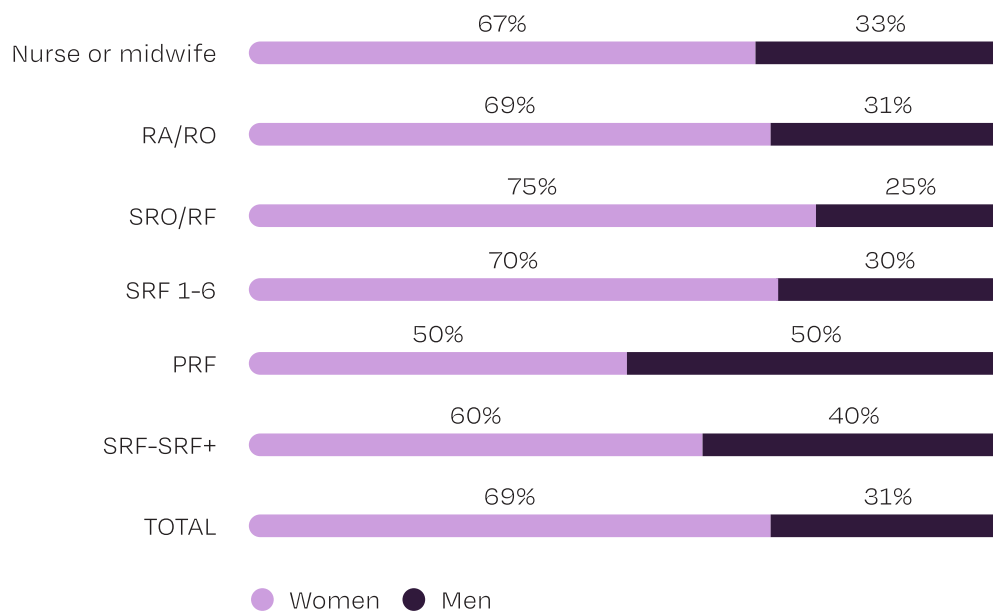


Staff classification by gender

The following diagrams include salary classification data for full-time, part-time and casual staff engaged in the Melbourne office only (unless otherwise stated).

Classification level (research)

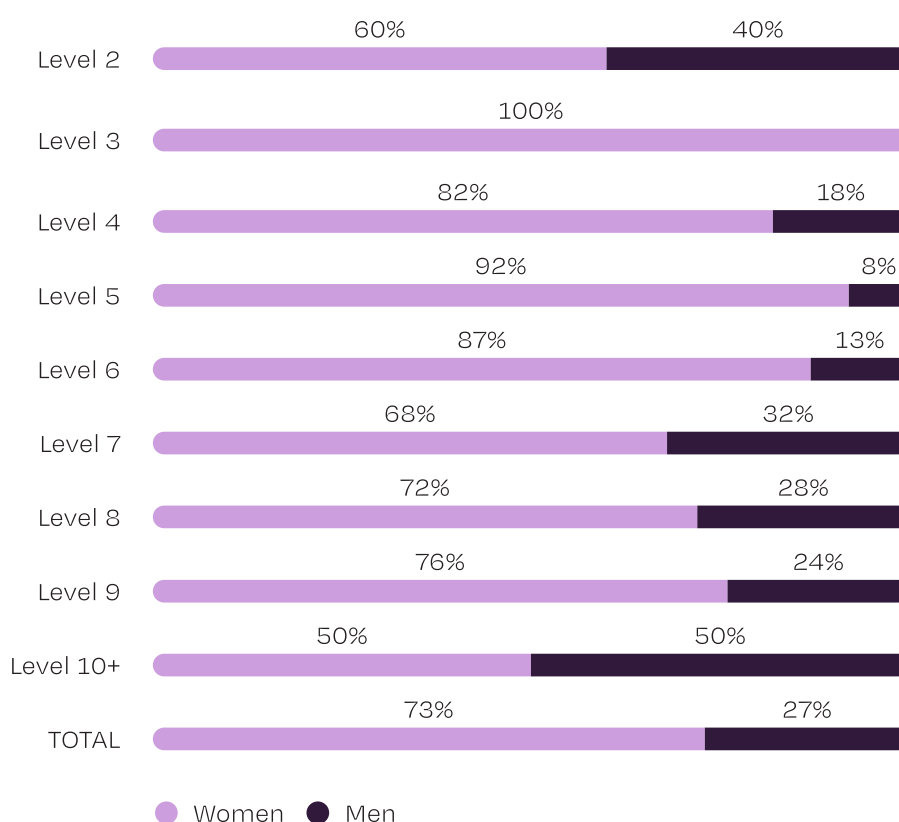
Women hold 69% of research roles overall. They are the majority in most roles, including 75% of SRO/RF and 70% of SRF 1–6. Gender balance is even at the PRF level (50/50), while men are more represented at senior levels like SRF–SRF+ (40%).



Institutional demographic profile: key factors for attraction, retention, and progression

Classification level (professional services)

Women hold 73% of professional services roles overall. They have stronger representation than men across most levels, especially at salary classification levels 3–6. Level 10+ is evenly split between women and men. This shows strong representation throughout, with more balance in senior roles.

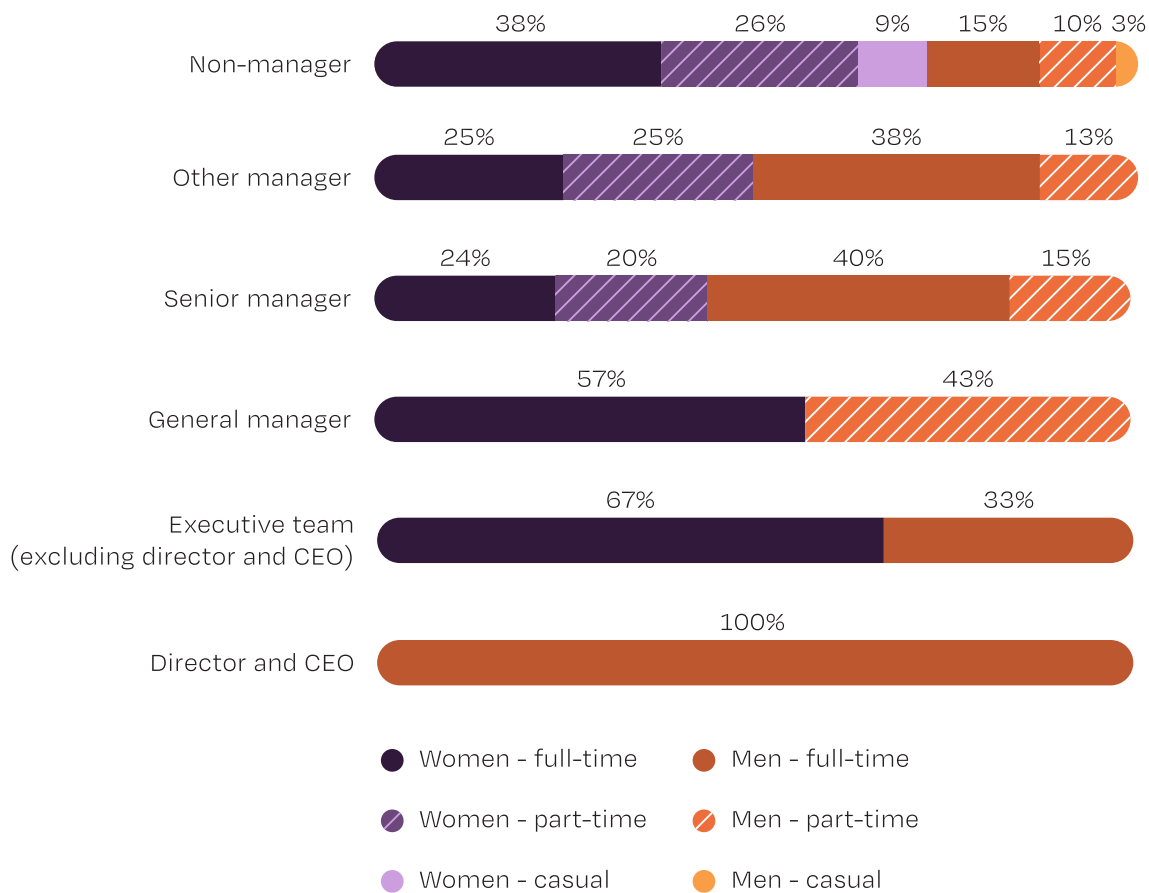


Managerial positions breakdown

Across 6 levels of management, staff work in a mix of full-time, part-time, and casual roles. Gender representation varies by level and employment type, and noticeable trends emerge as roles become more senior. Women are well represented across all levels, especially in part-time roles at lower and middle management, and in full-time roles at the senior executive level. Men are more likely to be in full-time roles at lower levels and a man currently holds the most senior position in the organisation (director and CEO).

- Non-managers are mostly women. Women make up a total of 73% of this group: 38% are full-time, 26% are part-time, and 9% are casual. Men make up 28%: 15% are full-time, 10% are part-time, and 3% are casual.

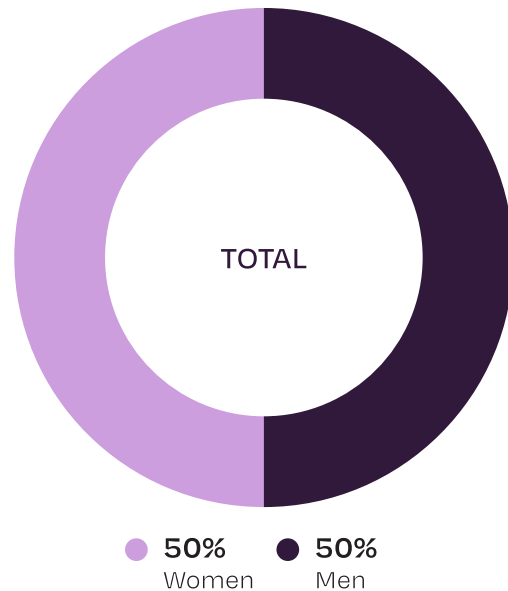
- In the other manager group, women and men are more evenly split. Women make up 50% overall, equally divided between full-time (25%) and part-time (25%). Men make up the remaining 50%, with 38% being full-time and 13% being part-time. There are no casual staff at this level.
- Among senior managers, women make up 44%: 24% are full-time and 20% are part-time. Men make up 55%: 40% are full-time and 15% are part-time. There are no casual staff in this group either.
- At the general manager level, 57% are women in full-time roles, and 56% are men in part-time roles.
- In the executive committee (excluding the director and CEO), 67% are women and 33% are men, all in full-time roles.
- The director and CEO role is held by a man working full-time.



Institutional demographic profile: key factors for attraction, retention, and progression

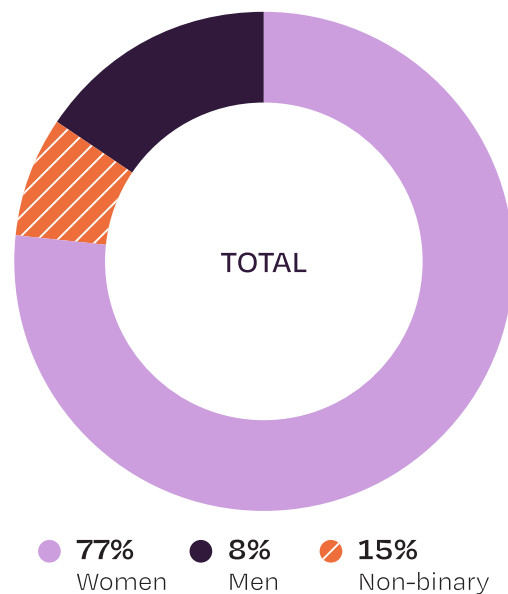
Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Just over one per cent of staff identify as being Aboriginal, evenly split between women and men. No one identified as Torres Strait Islander.



Disability

3.5 per cent of staff have self-identified as living with disability. Out of these, 75 per cent are women, 8 per cent are men and 15 per cent are non-binary. This shows that most staff who said they have a disability are women.



Burnet's multinational workforce

Burnet's Australian-based workforce includes staff with nationalities from more than 50 countries including Albania, Argentina, Armenia, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Greece, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Lebanon, Malaysia, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Samoa, South Africa, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine, United Kingdom, United States of America, Vanuatu, Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Parental leave statistics

In the 2023/2024 period, out of the 18 people who took parental leave, one staff member did not return, representing approximately 5.6 per cent. The remainder, 94.4 per cent, returned to work.

Gender	Number of people	Total parental leave days	Total working weeks
Women	12	640.5	128
Men	6	213.72	42.74
Total	18	854.22	170.84

Carer's leave statistics

In 2024, Burnet saw a growing number of staff taking leave for adult caregiving and/or childcare. Of 204 staff members who took carer's leave, 9 cared for both adults and children; 17 cared for children only; and 48 cared for adults only.

Gender	Number of people	Total carer's leave days	Average days per person
Women	73	166	33.2
Men	37	278	55.6
Total	110	444	88.8

Commitment to diversity and inclusion: integrating core values into strategic objectives

One of the strategic objectives under the Burnet 2030 Strategy is to “Build and support a culture based on our key values of Respect, Equality, Inclusiveness & Diversity.” This commitment extends throughout all Burnet activities. Burnet’s Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) efforts are focused on 3 main areas: workplace culture, research and development work, and advocacy and communication. These efforts are managed by the gender equity, diversity, and inclusion (GEDI) committee, which ensures that D&I considerations are integrated into every aspect of Burnet’s operations, from internal functions and field activities to partnerships and public communications.

The GEDI committee meets every 2 months and provides quarterly reports to the executive committee and an annual report to the board. The committee’s advocacy has led to the appointment of a diversity and inclusion manager, the establishment of three subcommittees — reconciliation action plan, disability inclusion and LGBTIQ+ — and the approval of a significant annual budget for D&I activities. The subcommittee coordinators are supported by this budget, dedicating one day a week to advance their goals. For example, the RAP subcommittee is very involved with the development of Burnet’s Innovate RAP this year, the disability inclusion subcommittee has overseen the development and the launch of Burnet’s pioneering disability action plan — making Burnet the first medical research institute in Australia to have such a comprehensive plan — and the LGBTIQ+ subcommittee is in the early stages of working towards Australian Workplace Equality Index (AWEI) accreditation.

Burnet’s management structure reinforces the importance of D&I, with GEDI chair, Professor Caroline Homer, being a member of the executive committee. Professor Homer was recently promoted to deputy director of gender equity, diversity and inclusion. As a sponsor of the GEDI committee, Professor Homer is supported by the diversity and inclusion manager, who serves as the GEDI committee’s service officer. Together, they support the chairs and secretariats of the subcommittees and oversee the implementation, tracking, and reporting of various D&I action plans, including the reconciliation action plan (RAP), disability action plan (DAP), and gender equity action plan (GEAP). This collaborative effort ensures that these plans are effectively carried out and regularly reported to the board and executive committee.

In line with these efforts, Burnet has been reporting annually to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency Australia since 2016 and achieved bronze status in the SAGE Athena SWAN Charter in 2020.

The path to Athena SWAN: from bronze to future goals

Burnet became a member of the SAGE Athena SWAN program in 2016. For nearly 4 years, the Institute was dedicated to advancing gender equity, diversity, and inclusion. Despite the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, in early 2020 Burnet proudly received bronze accreditation.

This achievement marked a significant milestone in Burnet's comprehensive self-assessment and first in-depth examination of D&I within the Institute.

Today, Burnet continues to build on this foundation, with D&I efforts concentrated on 3 main areas: workplace culture, research and program work, and advocacy and communication.

The SAGE Athena SWAN action plan themes related to Burnet's workplace culture and advocacy and communication D&I pillars include:

- staff information systems
- parental leave support
- diversity and inclusion governance and leadership structure
- recruitment
- onboarding
- promotion
- career development
- remuneration.

Since receiving bronze accreditation, Burnet has experienced significant growth, restructuring, and transformation. These efforts have led to substantial changes across all identified themes, focusing on sustainable structural improvements rather than ad hoc or short-term solutions. Burnet has introduced numerous measures, established robust progress tracking, and ensured rigorous internal stakeholder management.

Burnet is committed to improvement. As part of the upcoming SAGE cygnet application, progress will be highlighted in several key areas including:

- parental leave support
- culture change
- onboarding
- recruitment.

For further information or enquiries,
please contact:

Professor Caroline Homer AO

Deputy Director, Gender Equity,
Inclusion and Diversity
email caroline.homer@burnet.edu.au

Ella Shellshear

Diversity and Inclusion Manager
email ella.shellshear@burnet.edu.au

Australia

85 Commercial Road
Melbourne, Victoria, 3004
phone + **61 3 9282 2111**
email info@burnet.edu.au

Overseas

Burnet has offices or representatives in
Australia, Papua New Guinea and Myanmar,
and also contributes to research and public
health programs in many other countries
across Asia, the Pacific, Africa, Europe,
and North America.

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