

8. WOMEN'S BUDGET STATEMENT

Overview

The 2007-08 Women's Budget Statement outlines the various ways in which the ACT Government is delivering on its commitment to advance the status of women and girls and provides an opportunity to highlight achievements across ACT Government agencies against the six key themes of the ACT Women's Plan:

- representation and recognition;
- good health and wellbeing;
- responsive housing;
- safe inclusive communities;
- economic security and opportunities; and
- flexible education and training.

Relevant ACT Government initiatives in 2007-08 are linked to these six themes. Together, they form the framework for the development and coordination of effective and responsive policies, programs and services for women in the ACT.

This year has seen the ACT Office for Women relocate to the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services. This relocation strengthens the Department's and the Office's ability to integrate policy and practice.

Representation and Recognition

The ACT Government supports initiatives to increase women's representation within the community and to ensure their contribution to community life in the ACT is recognised. These initiatives strive to overcome discrimination and achieve equity of access to opportunities to develop skills and to participate in decision-making. Representation and recognition involves raising the profile of women and women's issues in the community, ensuring women gain access to participate in power structures and removing barriers to achieving genuine equality.

The inaugural ACT Women's Summit was held on 30 August 2006. The Summit involved 25 representatives from ACT community organisations and ACT Government agencies. Outcomes of the summit will inform the Government's agenda and future policy directions. The Summit will be a biennial event.

In April 2007, the ACT community was saddened by the death of Ms Audrey Fagan. As the first female Chief Police Officer in the ACT, Ms Fagan brought to the position a great depth of operational experience, a record of academic excellence and a commitment to social justice.

In memory of her outstanding contribution, the Government will establish the Audrey Fagan Foundation Scholarship program at \$60,000 per annum. The Scholarship will be open to Canberra women in leadership positions working in law enforcement, care and protection,

allied health areas or providing professional or social support in areas involving domestic violence of victim support, and will be administered by the Office for Women.

The Government promotes recognition of women through the annual International Women's Day (IWD) Awards. The awards acknowledge women who have made significant contributions in the community, as well as individuals and organisations who have had a role in improving the status of women in the ACT.

This year, in recognition of Engineers Australia declaring 2007 the Year of Women in Engineering, the IWD Awards also recognised the achievements of women who have contributed to the ACT community in the engineering field.

The ACT Women's Grants Program helps individuals and groups develop activities to improve the status of women. In 2006-07, the program funded:

- a series of educational seminars for women aimed at improving their economic security;
- an information and publicity campaign to raise awareness of domestic violence and support women facing violence;
- a project providing opportunity for women with an intellectual disability or mental health issues to work with a music therapist and create a musical production;
- two support groups for newly arrived Sudanese and Chinese women; and
- a leadership training program specific to the needs of multicultural women.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Women (MACW) is appointed by the Minister for Women and provides strategic advice to the ACT Government on issues affecting women in the ACT. It also provides a link between the Minister and women in the ACT community.

The ACT Government is committed to increasing the representation of women on boards, committees and statutory authorities in the ACT. To support this commitment, the ACT Government has set a target of fifty per cent representation of women on Government boards and committees.

As women make up just over half the ACT population, it is vital that they are encouraged to participate in and contribute at all levels in the community, including in decision-making roles. The ACT Women's Register is a database of women of different backgrounds, skills and experiences who have an interest in nominating for appointment to government and non-government boards and committees. Government and non-government organisations can access the Register when seeking potential candidates.

The ACT Women's Director Scholarship Program aims to develop the knowledge and skills of women in the ACT by funding a number of positions in directorship courses offered by the Australian Institute of Company Directors (AICD).

Each year the Program provides four scholarships from two courses (Directors Essentials and Company Directors) which are conducted by arrangement with the AICD.

Three meetings are held each year with Women with Disabilities to address issues affecting women with disabilities. This commitment ensures that issues such as individual support packages, Disability Access guidelines and work readiness programs are discussed and potential improvements identified.

In November 2006, the Department of Territory and Municipal Services launched *Women in the Making of Canberra* as part of Celebrate Heritage 2006. This project promotes women's place in the history of Canberra and honours women and women's organisations that have made a significant contribution to the development of Canberra.

Good Health and Well-being

Women and girls have particular health needs at different times in their lives, as well as socio-economic, environmental and cultural factors that impact on their health and well-being. In recognition of these needs a wide range of affordable, accessible and appropriate programs and services are provided to promote healthy lifestyles and support the welfare of women.

The ACT invests significantly in the provision of antenatal services. Approximately \$10 million is spent each year to support services at The Canberra Hospital and Calvary Hospital, as well as specific services targeting disadvantaged groups including the Indigenous Midwifery program.

The *Antenatal Care for Mothers at Risk* project, commencing in 2007, has been developed in response to the Murray-Mackie study into infant deaths and near deaths in the ACT and is a partnership between Child Protection Services (CPS) and ACT Health. It looks at pre-birth and post-birth risks to babies whose mothers are on Opiate Replacement Therapy and/or have a significant mental illness. A focus of the project is on strong communication and collaboration between key agencies when a mother is receiving antenatal care, tight planning when she is to be discharged with the baby and assertive follow-up until the youngest child in the family is two years old.

ACT Health funds a number of programs in government and non-government services that aim to improve participation in physical activity to reduce the risk of ill health and promote community engagement for at-risk groups. Some examples of projects involving women are:

- the Community Outreach Falls Prevention project includes improving access for older women to community based exercise programs; and
- the Post and Ante Natal Depression Support Group (PANDSI) offers the 10-week PUMP Program (Promoting Ultimate Maternal Potential) that includes stretching sessions, massage, health and fitness assessments, a personal exercise prescription and dietary analysis and nutritional advice.

In October 2006, Arcadia House Withdrawal Centre (managed by Directions ACT and funded by ACT Health) accepted only women, and children under 10 years old, into the seven-day detoxification program. This pilot was intended to ensure women had the opportunity to access a recovery program in a safe and supportive environment.

In 2007, the human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination was made available for the first time. The initial 'catch-up' program will offer the vaccine to girls in all ACT high schools and colleges, both public and private, over the next two years. The vaccine will then be available on an ongoing basis to all Year 7 girls through the school immunisation program.

The *Children and Young People (Amendment) Act 2007* introduced pre-natal reporting in the Territory. This legislative amendment will enable pregnant women and other family members to receive help and support in relation to issues that may affect the unborn child,

thereby reducing the likelihood that the child will need statutory care and protection intervention after birth.

Screening for early detection of breast cancer has contributed to a steady decline in the annual average age standardised mortality rate from breast cancer per 100,000 women, in the ACT, over the last five years. A television campaign to show women the effectiveness of breast screening via mammogram compared with self-examination commenced in the ACT and South Eastern NSW on 11 February 2007. The campaign encourages all women aged 50–69 years to have a mammogram every two years.

Agencies across the ACT Government continue to explore ways to work together and provide coordinated services for women, including the establishment of:

- a pilot project between the Child and Family Centres and Care and Protection Services to provide a wrap around, integrated and strengths based model of service delivery to families with children aged between birth and 2 years old living in Gungahlin and Tuggeranong; and
- a bilateral project under the National Agenda for Early Childhood to improve outcomes for vulnerable and at-risk children and their families. Ten non-government services and three government departments have come together to reform and strengthen the human service delivery system across the universal, primary and secondary prevention and tertiary continuum.

The Women's Information and Referral Service (WiRC) provides a high quality, free, confidential referral service that gives women access to information to enable them to make informed choices. WiRC is often the first point of contact for women, sometimes in crisis, who need information about a particular issue or topic, who want to know about services available for specific needs, or who want to talk over a problem.

Increasing girls' and women's participation in sport and recreation opportunities is supported by the provision of Women's High Performance Coaching Scholarships through the ACT Academy of Sport, supporting programs targeting women and girls through the Sport and Recreation Grants Program and by facilitating the ACT Advisory Committee on Women in Sport and Recreation.

Responsive Housing

Responsive housing for women includes: safe places for women and girls at risk; safety nets and other mechanisms to enable capacity and resilience building for women living in poverty; the provision of support to female-led households; and the accessibility of appropriate, affordable housing including access to safe places during periods of homelessness. A number of Government initiatives focus on delivering responsive housing for women, including access to services and other mechanisms to overcome adversity such as managing poverty.

Women who are experiencing, or who are at serious risk of domestic violence are given the highest priority for public housing assistance. Women make up 52 per cent of those on the highest priority waiting list.

An external consultant is currently being engaged to audit all Housing ACT policies in relation to women, especially those escaping domestic violence. At the completion of the audit, a recommendation will be made regarding the best way forward in terms of

implementing new, or consolidating existing housing program policies, procedures and support for women. Housing ACT will incorporate the findings of the audit in the development of the *Domestic Violence Assistance Manual*, which will be used by Housing ACT managers and community organisations.

Following an initiative by the Chief Executive of the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services to establish a women's services round table, the Department convened a group of expert community sector members to progress a project on responses to domestic violence examining pathways into and out of homelessness services for women and children experiencing domestic violence. This project will address the issues of coordinated service responses for women with or without accompanying children in need of supported accommodation because of domestic violence. This work is informing service system reform across homelessness services.

The Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative was again implemented over the 2006 Christmas/New Year holiday period to provide crisis accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence. This program provides vital support to women and children who are at increased risk of violence and homelessness over this period. In 2006 37 adults and 27 children were provided with crisis accommodation and support.

Safe Inclusive Communities

Making communities safe and inclusive encompasses preventing violence, overcoming prejudices and stereotyping of women, involving women in decision-making, acknowledging human rights and embracing diversity.

The Victims of Crime Coordinator (VoCC) provides independent statutory advocacy for victims of crime within the ACT criminal justice system.

A majority of clients in contact with the Coordinator are women and most of the offences involve physical or sexual assault. Overwhelmingly, victims request a higher degree of acknowledgement and respect from justice agencies. The Coordinator works to ensure victims know their rights and responsibilities as witnesses, to ensure victims are enabled to participate in the processing of their cases and to ensure victims receive services and support.

Services for victims of crime are a high Government priority. One of the significant responses by Government to improve victim service delivery has been the recent review of the Victims Services Scheme (VSS). The VSS is primarily responsible for the provision of recovery and counselling services for victims of crime, with the majority of clients being women. The Government accepted the VSS review's recommendation to relocate the VSS from the health sector to the justice sector. The transfer was completed in January 2007.

The purpose of the relocation was to enable a better integration of benefits available in the VSS and to further reduce the risk of service gaps to victims. To further minimise the risks and to ensure a more integrated response, the Victims of Crime Coordinator (VoCC) is now responsible for the overall management of the VSS. This is a logical extension of the VoCC's advocacy and educational role, enabling the Coordinator to bring together in the justice sector as many victim-focussed resources as possible.

Victims of sexual assault are a particular priority for the Government. A reference group has been established to examine and implement the recommendations of the *Responding to Sexual Assault: the Challenge of Change* report. This is a joint report prepared by the

Director of Public Prosecutions and ACT Policing, providing a comprehensive review of current practices in investigation and prosecution of sexual assault cases in the ACT.

The reference group comprises high-level representation from ACT Policing, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Courts, the VoCC, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, ACT Treasury, Department of Justice and Community Safety, the ACT Bar Association, the ACT Law Society, Legal Aid Office and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. The group will develop a plan for implementation and advise Government on priority areas for reform, including funding priorities, to enhance the criminal justice response to sexual assault victims. The outcomes arising from the reference group's deliberations will benefit not only future responses to sexual assault victims, but all victims of crime who come into contact with the criminal justice system.

The Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) is a major inter-agency partnership within the ACT. The program aims, within the criminal justice system, to improve victim safety and provide opportunities for offender accountability and rehabilitation.

The Canberra Institute of Technology has in place a number of initiatives aimed at improving safety on campus for women:

- 'When warm is too hot' is a DVD for students outlining exactly what harassment is and the policies in place to overcome it;
- 'Safety at Reid campus' outlines information on the CIT website in a story-like manner where students can follow the dilemma of a student and see what the options are in terms of safety at night. This section of the website outlines the full range of safety procedures at the campus; and
- 'Play it Safe', a CIT website designed particularly for young women. It has information about safe everyday living, relationships, social life, housing, managing house accounts and studying in Canberra.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services provides ongoing funding to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Canberra Rape Crisis Service (CRCC) to support women and children who experience violence. In 2007 the CRCC, in partnership with the Department, is running a publicity campaign 'There's Nothing Sexier than Consent'. This campaign highlights that any unwanted sexual activity is sexual violence.

Economic Security and Opportunities

Economic security and access to opportunities are critical in supporting lifestyle choices and decision making for women. Women are at greater risk of experiencing poverty than men and strategies need to be in place to minimise this risk. Women's economic security and access to opportunities are key priorities for the ACT Government.

In 2007-08 the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services will establish a grants program for women from Indigenous, culturally and linguistically diverse or low-income backgrounds to support their return to work.

This initiative will provide grants to 200 women of up to \$1,000 to fund practical support in returning to the workforce, supporting them to attend short courses or pay for childcare to attend interviews, as well as more formal training or education including Recognition of Prior

Learning (RPL). It may also provide support for transport costs or the purchase of equipment, clothing or textbooks directly related to the woman's return to work.

The ACT Human Rights Commission continues to investigate complaints of unlawful discrimination in employment and conciliates where appropriate. Information and education is provided to employees and employers about their rights and obligations under the *Discrimination Act 1991*. The nature and volume of workplace discrimination complaints will also be monitored in light of concerns about possible impacts on women of the new Federal WorkChoices system.

The Department of Justice and Community Safety is reviewing workplace policies to address discrimination and increase the employment of Indigenous and female staff. The Department of Education and Training is developing 'Workplace Discrimination and Harassing Behaviours' Policy and Guidelines that will be followed up with a training program for staff.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services supports the YWCA leadership program by referring requests from ACT Government agencies seeking expressions of interest from women with disabilities who have participated in the YWCA leadership program to participate on a range of boards and committees

In 2007 the Office for Women sponsored ten young women to attend the national YWCA 'Changin it lovin it' conference in Melbourne on 13 and 14 April.

As part of a series of national roundtables, a roundtable held in Canberra looked at women's recent experience of the WorkChoices legislation and what refinements and modifications were needed to protect vulnerable workers. Recent studies on the impact of WorkChoices point to potentially significant effects on working women, especially those who are most disadvantaged in the labour market.

Flexible Education and Training

Education can play a key role in achieving genuine equality for women. The Government recognises the importance of providing women with access to high-quality education and training that is relevant and flexible.

The Strategic Priorities Program (SPP) is a Vocational Education and Training (VET) program funded jointly by the Territory and the Commonwealth. Through this program, VET programs are funded for women in equity and target groups. These groups are identified both nationally and locally to address industry skills shortages and inclusiveness, and to attract or retain workers in the workforce. Additionally, SPP funded programs offer women the opportunity to have their existing skills and knowledge formally recognised.

In 2006-07, training initiatives were purchased through the SPP totalling more than \$2.5 million. These initiatives will provide opportunities in VET for:

- mature aged women returning to work;
- women who are carers;
- women in small/micro business, by providing access to flexibly delivered training; and
- Indigenous women and girls, to receive training opportunities and skills recognition.

In consultation and collaboration with the Indigenous community, the Yurauna Centre at the Canberra Institute of Technology and Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation, a community project has been developed to support cultural development and career pathways for Indigenous women and girls. The project objectives are to improve the confidence of young Indigenous women to pursue further education, provide opportunities for cultural leadership development and promote successful career pathways.

The Department of Education and Training will take a lead role by mentoring and supporting Indigenous women and girls into the program, purchasing individual VET programs at the appropriate level and managing project resources.

WiRC's Community Calendar provides women with information about groups, courses and workshops held in the community to enable them to take up opportunities for personal development, training and recreational activities. WiRC provides personal and professional development courses for women and information sessions on relevant topics. The Centre also has a specialist library to complement the learning gained in groups and courses. Information about courses for women and information sessions is promoted on the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services Intranet, on the WiRC website and in the Community Calendar for Women.