

7. WOMEN'S BUDGET STATEMENT

Overview

The 2008-09 Women's Budget Statement focuses on ACT Government initiatives delivered, either in the 2007-08 financial year or announced as part of the 2008-09 Budget, that directly impact upon issues facing women and girls in the ACT.

This chapter aims to evaluate the achievements across Government in relation to issues specifically affecting women. Progress is measured against the six key themes of the ACT Women's Plan outlined below. Together, these objectives provide a framework for the development and coordination of effective and responsive policies, programs and services for women in the ACT that focus on:

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

This statement demonstrates the way in which the ACT Government is continuing its commitment to advance the status of women and girls in the community.

New 2008-09 Budget Initiatives

Representation and Recognition

- Building and Maintaining ACTPS Capacity - \$2.461 million over four years.
- Centenary of Canberra - \$4.3 million over four years.

Good Health and Well-being

- Women's and Children's Hospital - \$90 million.
- Increased Demand in Older Person's Services - \$4.209 million over four years.
- Specialised Children and Young People's Equipment Loan Service - \$0.608 million.
- Mental Health Growth and Promoting Recovery - \$8.452 million over four years.
- Reinstatement of the Sports Loan Subsidy Scheme - \$0.781 million over four years.
- Physical Activity Targeted Population Program - Disability and Ageing - \$0.612 million over four years.

Safe, Inclusive Communities

- West Belconnen Children and Family Support Service - \$0.845 million over four years.
- Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support Service - \$2.466 million over four years.
- Water Concessions - \$1.861 million over four years.
- ACTION Gold Pass as part of the Surrender Your Licence Initiative - \$0.5 million over four years.

Economic Security and Opportunities

- Strengthening the Community - \$1.950 million over four years.
- Energy Industry Levy - Essential Services Consumer Council Additional Funding (cost neutral) - \$0.876 million over four years.

Flexible Education and Training

- Early Childhood Schools - \$5.395 million.
- Moving Forward - Transitions, Careers and Vocational Learning - \$3.440 million over four years.
- VET Growth to Meet Skills Shortages through User Choice - \$4.169 million over four years.
- Nursing and Midwifery Scholarship Scheme, a component of the larger Workforce Initiatives which is funded at \$1 million over four year.

Representation and Recognition

The ACT Government recognises the importance of fostering an inclusive community in which women play an integral part in decision-making bodies and processes, in recognition of their wide ranging contributions to the ACT community.

In addressing this issue, the Government continues to support a number of initiatives to increase women's representation within the community and to recognise their contribution to community life in the ACT.

New Initiatives

The *Building and Maintaining ACTPS Capacity* initiative will have a positive impact on women's representation both now and into the future. The initiative supports the development of a diverse and productive leadership group, with targeted training programs to support the promotion of more women into senior positions.

Ongoing Initiatives

The *Centenary of Canberra* in 2013 provides a unique opportunity to celebrate the role of women in developing Canberra as the national capital, including Marion Mahony Griffin's widely recognised role in the city's winning design. The development of a significant suite of events and activities to celebrate this important milestone will offer numerous opportunities for women to become active participants in the planning and performance of this significant event. Commensurate with these opportunities, gender balance and the impact of the 2013 program on women are primary considerations in planning for Centenary celebrations.

The Audrey Fagan Scholarship program seeks to support women leaders in the ACT by providing financial assistance for further study. Launched in March 2008, Audrey Fagan Scholarships are 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 or victim support. Administered by the Office for Women, this program complements the Women Directors Scholarships program, aimed at enhancing the skills of women on boards.

The Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) Women's Committee continued to meet throughout 2007-08. The current membership of fifteen people includes five men and ten women. The Women's Committee will sponsor a series of 'Women in Leadership Roles' seminars in 2008.

TAMS continues to deliver the Women's 2008 High Performance Coaching and Officiating Scholarship Program. Scholarships with a total value of \$0.030 million were awarded to seven female coaches from a variety of sports in 2007-08.

Good Health and Well-being

Women and girls have particular health needs at different times in their lives, which are further impacted by a number of socio-economic, environmental and cultural factors. In recognition of these needs, a wide range of programs and services will continue to be provided and implemented to promote healthy lifestyles and support the welfare of women in the ACT.

New Initiatives

The new *Women's and Children's Hospital* will include a co-located Neonatal Intensive Care Unit, the Paediatric Unit and Maternity Unit at the Canberra Hospital (TCH), which will provide continuity of care. The new Hospital will also include gynaecological services, gynaecological triage and fetal medicine.

The 2008-09 Budget initiative *Increased Demand in Older Person's Services* recognises that amongst older populations, women are the largest demographic group. Service enhancements will benefit older women in the ACT through the provision of a targeted dietetic service in the Acute Care of the Elderly Unit at TCH; the provision of expert allied health services to provide greater access to counselling, occupational therapy and physiotherapy; and increased access to equipment services to support people in their own homes. Importantly, in addition to recognising women as direct recipients of these care services, support is also provided to women in their capacity as carers, an often unrecognised role. Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003 data indicates that 71 percent of primary carers are women.

The *Mental Health Growth and Promoting Recovery* Budget initiative will focus on mental health awareness, prevention and peer support, as well as parenting skills during the perinatal and early childhood periods, a role primarily undertaken by women. Similarly, additional funding will be provided for enhancing the capacity of families to develop healthier attachment relationships and improving the resilience of preschool children and their parents. These services will also be supported through the Brindabella and Majura Women's Groups.

The Government will provide mental health promotion/prevention, peer support and parenting skills for parents in the perinatal and early childhood period at Brindabella and Majura Women's Groups.

Women's participation in physical activity and organised sports is a component of two new initiatives in 2008-09. The *Reinstatement of the Sports Loan Subsidy Scheme* will provide funding to allow the Sports Loan Subsidy Scheme (SLISS) to be reintroduced within the Sport and Recreation Grants Program. The Program offers sporting organisations the opportunity to be somewhat self-sufficient in funding their capital work improvements on leased private sites. The initiative promotes access to services and facilities to support healthy active lifestyles for all members of the community through well designed and maintained sporting facilities.

Women represent the majority of people captured within the older persons, and persons with disabilities demographics in the ACT. The *Targeted Population program - Disability and Ageing* initiative aims to contribute to a healthy, safe and diverse ACT community, where persons with a disability and older adults are provided access and encouraged to participate in targeted physical activity programs.

Therapy ACT continues to provide parent education and family support programs for families with a child with a disability. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report on Children with a Disability (2006 update) reports that 91 per cent of primary carers are mothers who are therefore the major focus of these programs. Therapy ACT will also commence the *Specialised Children and Young People's Equipment Loan Service* initiative in 2008-09. This initiative will enable children, young people and their carers to trial and loan appropriate equipment to improve their participation in the community.

Ongoing Initiatives

The Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination program, introduced in 2007, has been well received by the community and immunisation providers, with a high coverage rate for all target groups being achieved. The 'catch-up' program for girls in all ACT high schools and colleges, both public and private, has been expanded to capture all women and girls up to 26 years of age, with administration through General Practice facilities. The schools program will be completed at the end of 2008 and the vaccine will be available for the 'catch-up' groups (12-26 years) until the end of June 2009. The vaccine will continue to be available on an ongoing basis to all Year 7 girls through the school immunisation program.

Women prisoners within the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC), scheduled to open in the second half of 2008, will have access to female medical practitioners upon request (dependent on the degree of the emergency). In addition, the Women's Community Centre is designed to allow women to access health services, education and other programs, in a culturally appropriate and private environment.

Responsive Housing

Responsive housing means providing affordable, accessible and appropriate housing for members of the community in need. The ACT Government is working to increase the availability of affordable housing, which will directly benefit women, particularly women on low incomes. Responsive housing initiatives provide housing and support related services from crisis accommodation through to affordable home-ownership strategies.

The Affordable Housing Action Plan is assisting all Canberrans to access more affordable housing in the rental and ownership markets. As women are more at risk of being unable to access affordable stable housing, specific measures in the Action Plan have been included to improve housing security for women in the ACT by:

- increasing the supply of affordable land to the market;
- providing new house and land packages priced between \$0.2 million and \$0.3 million;
- undertaking a major expansion of community housing to deliver an additional 480 affordable dwellings over five years;
- making more effective and targeted use of public housing;
- encouraging institutional investors to help increase the supply of private rental dwellings by 200-400 homes in the first instance;
- ensuring the supply of sufficient land to meet the increasing demand for aged accommodation;
- promoting land rent and shared equity schemes, including for public and community housing tenants; and
- introducing targeted stamp duty concessions.

In its third year, the Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative provided crisis accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence over the Christmas/New Year period. In 2007-08, the program provided crisis accommodation for more than 50 women and children. The initiative utilises a collaborative approach between and within the ACT Government and the community sector. An evaluation of the Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative has been conducted. Recommendations will allow the ACT Government to further develop evidence-based policies and practices for crisis accommodation options for women and children escaping domestic violence.

The AMC has been designed to include a women specific area with amenities targeted to the needs of women prisoners. This includes accommodation that will allow for young children to be accommodated with their mothers.

Safe, Inclusive Communities

The ACT Government recognises that a safe and inclusive community for women requires the protection of women's rights, freedom from violence, involving women in decision making and valuing diversity. In 2008-09, the ACT Government will deliver a number of initiatives aimed at building safe, inclusive communities promoting inclusion and diversity, and enabling women and girls to fully participate in society.

New Initiatives

In 2008-09, the ACT Government will provide on-going funding for the *West Belconnen Children and Family Support Service* initiative. This initiative will improve outcomes in key target areas (education readiness and attainment, employment, health and wellbeing, safety, community engagement and social connectedness) and reduce intergenerational transfer of disadvantage for individuals and families living in the West Belconnen area. The initiative will have a positive benefit for women, who are over-represented in a number of groups at risk of economic and social exclusion, such as early school leavers, families with multiple and complex needs, families involved in the child protection system and low income households.

The ACT Government will also provide funding to implement the *Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Support Services*, targeting an identified group of vulnerable Indigenous families. The project was set up to develop and foster an integrated and coordinated approach to service delivery across identified health, education and family support services. It focuses on at-risk Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's education, health and wellbeing and aims to improve outcomes for these children and youth, and their families, particularly in regard to strengthening the children's transition to school and their transition from primary to high school.

The current ACT Government concessional rebate on the water supply charge will be extended to include Health Care Card holders, Temporary Protection Visa holders and asylum seekers.

The extension of the *Water Concessions* to Health Care Card holders will have significant benefits for women who are overrepresented in low-income households. The rebate is expected to cost around \$1.9 million over four years and will commence on 1 July 2008.

ACTION Gold Pass as part of the Surrender Your Licence Initiative will enable residents who have surrendered their drivers' licenses to travel for no charge on ACTION Buses. This initiative, together with the newly funded Community Mini-Bus Service, will facilitate greater access to the community for women who experience social isolation in their later years as their capacity to drive becomes more limited.

Ongoing Initiatives

In November 2007, the ACT Government provided nearly \$4 million over four years to the Department of Justice and Community Safety and non-government agencies to commence specific sexual assault reforms. These included:

- improved victim support through the development of the Wraparound Program, which will create a coordinated approach to victim assistance and support, and provide a continuous level of support to victims throughout the criminal process;
- the establishment of off-site remote witness facilities to enable victims of sexual assault to give evidence away from the court precinct;
- an upgrade for the Supreme and Magistrates court to improve the CCTV facilities and provide state-of-the-art equipment;
- a multimedia victim information package to be developed by Victim Support ACT, that will provide victims with information about investigation, prosecution and court process and victim support;
- the expansion of prosecution resources;
- a law reform specialist to work with justice agencies to accelerate legislative reform in areas such as pre-recorded victims statements; and
- the development of accredited inter-agency training and evaluation in relation to the reform initiative.

The ACT Government also announced the establishment of Victim Support ACT in November 2007. The agency brings together the Victims' Services Scheme and the Victims of Crime Coordinator's Office to improve victim service delivery in the ACT. The agency is a 'one-stop shop' for information, counselling and physical therapies, practical support and assistance with justice processes. The Government made an additional \$0.581 million available in the 2007-08 Budget to support the new agency in providing a 'seamless' service with reduced waiting times for victims seeking to access counselling.

There are a number of existing government funded services that victims may access which include:

- several victim assistant/liaison positions located within the police and criminal justice agencies;
- the Child at Risk Health Unit and the Forensic and Medical Sexual Assault Care, both located at TCH;
- the Restorative Justice Program and the Family Violence Intervention Program; and
- the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, Domestic Violence Crisis Service, and Victims of Crime Assistance League.

The Coordinating Committee of the Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) is a multi-award winning collaboration between criminal justice and community agencies. It aims to promote victim safety and offender accountability for those matters that are reported to police and proceed to prosecution. The FVIP celebrates its tenth anniversary in 2008. To acknowledge this milestone a major international conference on Family Violence and Specialist Courts will take place in mid 2008.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services commissioned an audit of policies and procedures in place within Housing ACT to guide further development in its service provision to women and children escaping domestic violence. Housing ACT has implemented a number of policy and program changes as part of its ongoing commitment to quality improvement in relation to this area. These include:

- the inclusion of domestic violence as one of the seven categories determining eligibility for access to priority housing;
- the Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative includes a nominal peppercorn rent of \$5 per week to acknowledge the financial difficulties faced by women and children escaping domestic violence;
- the development of policy that determines debt incurred as a result of domestic violence is not a barrier to re-entry into public housing; and
- the development of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS).

Through the ACT Arts Fund's Community Arts Funding category, the ACT Government regularly supports a wide variety of women's groups for one-off annual activities. Projects supported in 2008 include the Majura Women's Group, the Brindabella Women's Group and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre. The Community Arts Funding category will again be delivered in 2008-09.

Economic Security and Opportunities

Economic security is a major factor influencing choices and outcomes in the lives of women and girls. Economic security can mean different things to women at different stages. Women's economic security and access to opportunities are addressed in a range of ACT Government initiatives, including the promotion of flexible workplace practices.

New Initiatives

A *Community Sector Portable Long Service Leave Scheme* will be established in 2009-10. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates that the profile of workers in community services occupations is predominantly female. In 2006, 87 per cent were females, a similar proportion to 2001 (88 per cent), but much higher than the total workforce in 2006 (45 per cent).

Implementation of measures to respond to the recommendations of the ACT Skills Commission will assist women seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce. Through improved access to vocational education and training, there will be a focus on improving access for groups who experience significant barriers to these opportunities, including women.

The *Essential Services Consumer Council's* (ESCC) budget will be enhanced in 2008-09 to ensure that the Council continues to be able to provide high quality services to members of the Canberra community. The work of the Council is particularly important for women. In its 2005-06 Annual Report the ESCC published a client gender analysis based on a count of new hardship clients of the Council between 1 July 2001 and 30 September 2005. This data reveals that 64.1 per cent of clients are female.

Ongoing Initiatives

The Women's Return to Work Grants Program was launched on 5 February 2008. The aim of the program is to assist women to achieve increased financial independence by helping them prepare for, obtain and maintain employment after full time child rearing responsibilities. Grants of up to \$1,000 are available for women on a low income, with a focus on using the grant for training purposes.

The Department of Justice and Community Safety is reviewing workplace policies to address discrimination and increase the employment of women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. During 2007-08, the Department of Education and Training (DET) published a revised employee grievance resolution policy and procedures incorporating guidance on dealing with workplace discrimination and harassing behaviours. The new policy has been supported by training courses, which have been well attended by staff.

The review of the TAMS Women's Workplace Action (WWA) Plan commenced in December 2007 with the commitment to develop a new WWA Plan by mid 2008. To date, the WWA Plan has had an internal focus, in that it comprehensively considers issues for women working in TAMS. It is intended to extend the scope of the Plan to include programs and services that meet the needs of women and girls. Consultations will be conducted with women's groups in the ACT to identify issues and gaps in service delivery.

Flexible Education and Training

The ACT Government is aware of the key role that education plays 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.

New Initiatives

User Choice is a national policy governing the flow of public funds to registered training organisations for training of Australian Apprentices in a range of Vocational Education and Training qualifications at entry level (Certificate II) and higher-levels (Diplomas and Advanced Diplomas). The purpose of User Choice is to make vocational education and training more responsive to the needs of industry and employers. The majority of commencements in the ACT in 2007 were in the Community Services and Health industries, areas which predominantly employ women, as well as Building and Construction.

More than 90 per cent of nurses and midwives in the ACT are female. The demand for skilled, experienced nurses and midwives is strong and it is predicted to rise exponentially in coming years. There is a clear need to more adequately support the education and development of ACT Health nurses and midwives to ensure a sustainable future workforce. A recent independent evaluation of the *Nursing and Midwifery Scholarship Scheme* demonstrated its effectiveness as a recruitment and retention strategy. The 2008-09 Budget will increase the level of funding available to support postgraduate education of ACT Health nurses and midwives. This is funded as part of the ACT Health *Expanded Workforces Initiative*.

Four *Early Childhood Schools* will open in 2009 in Scullin, Narrabundah, Lyons and Isabella Plains. These schools will develop as early learning and development centres and will provide integrated services for children (birth to eight years) and their families. In addition to Preschool to Year Two classes, these services will include childcare, family support services and a range of other services that support children's learning, health and wellbeing. Through the support of children and families, the centres will provide a nurturing environment to support the ongoing challenges of parenting. The additional childcare services will also assist women to return to the workforce.

Ongoing Initiatives

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 projects 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 2007-08, 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
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, to receive training opportunities and skills recognition.

In consultation and collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the Yurauna Centre at the Canberra Institute of Technology and the Gugan Gulwan Aboriginal Youth Corporation, a community project has been developed to support cultural development and career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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.

DET will take a lead role by mentoring and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls into the program, purchasing individual VET programs at the appropriate level and managing project resources.