



ACT Government

2003-2004 BUDGET

STANHOPE GOVERNMENT DELIVERS SEXUAL OFFENCES RESPONSE PROGRAM

The Stanhope Government has funded the development of a new Sexual Offences Response Program, which will improve the investigation and prosecution of sex offences, by ensuring all Government Agencies work cooperatively together.

Chief Minister and Attorney-General Jon Stanhope said the development of the much-needed program aligns with the *Strategic Plan for Criminal Justice 2002-2005*, recently approved by Cabinet and will help his Government build a better system to tackle a variety of sexual offences.

The new Program will:

- Initiate legislative reforms that support fair investigative practices;
- Employ advances in technology to support the detection and investigation of crime;
- Provide advocacy services for persons with specific needs;
- Quickly and fairly managing cases through the courts;
- Implement victim-inclusive practices and policies; and
- Review and reform criminal law and procedure to meet current needs, in particular the exploration and promotion strategies for the more effective prosecution of persons charged with sexual assaults

The development of a Sexual Offences Response Program delivers on Labor's 2001 Election promise as presented in 'Labor's Plan for Justice and Community Safety', including "access to information", the provision of "better facilities for women and children victims and witnesses in the court system", "the improvement of recording of criminal statistics", and "the development of case management processes within the court system to reduce delays".

"Several recent Reports and Inquiries* have shown a strong need for an improvement in the way in which the criminal justice system responds to the incidence of sexual assault in the ACT," Mr Stanhope said.

"In particular, reform is needed in how police investigate reports of sexual offences, and the way in which all Government agencies respond to the abuse of children to ensure trauma is kept to a minimum.

"Better victim support has long been needed and will be improved by this new program.

"While the medical and forensic needs of victims are well served at the moment, my Government has chosen to develop and fund this Program because there is no current integrated criminal justice system response to allegations of sexual assault that meets the therapeutic needs of victims.

"The developed program is likely to see several initiatives incorporated into the new Program, including video-taped interviews of child and adult victims, the coordination of

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therapy and treatment for victims to compliment the criminal justice response, and the training of police and prosecutors to maximise the effective and complete collection and presentation of evidence.

“After wide consultation and incorporating expert advice, I am now confident that victims of sexual offences will have a system that responds to their needs in a sensitive and just manner,” Mr Stanhope said.

Senior officers from the Australian Federal Police, Director of Public Prosecutions and Victims of Crime Coordinator have been consulted in the preparation of this proposal. It is anticipated that consultation on the examination of appropriate models will occur with other government and non-government agencies including:

- Family Services;
- Canberra Rape Crisis Service;
- The Women’s Legal Service;
- The Child at Risk Assessment Unit;
- Forensic and Medical Sexual Assault Centre;
- Department of Health;
- Domestic Violence Crisis Service;
- The Office of Courts Administration;
- The Office of Women’s Status;
- Adult Corrective Services;
- The Victim Services Scheme;
- The Juvenile Justice Service;
- Domestic Violence Prevention Council; and
- Therapeutic service providers within the community.

“This wide consultation is being undertaken in order to ensure that the proposal at the end of the investigation period delivers a fully integrated program without duplication of services. The Sexual Offences Response Program will run for a 12 month period, with results reported to the Government.

“After the Report is reviewed by the Government, a final and comprehensive model will emerge that places the ACT criminal justice system at the forefront of successful and appropriately sensitive schemes to handle sexual offences,” Mr Stanhope concluded.

\$180,000 in funds has been provided in the budget for the development of the Sexual Offences Response Program. Recurrent funding is likely to be sought in the 2004-05 Budget to implement a multi agency program to ensure more efficient and effective investigation and prosecution of sexual offences in the Territory.

Statement ends.

* Director of Public Prosecutions (Annual Report 2001 – 2002), the Victims of Crime Coordinator (Sexual Offences – The Response of ACT Policing, March 2002), the ACT Law Reform Commission (2001), and Morgan Disney (Developing a Strong Interagency Approach to Sexual Assault Services for Children and Young People in the ACT, December 2001).