



Australian Capital Territory

Budget

2026–27

Women's Budget Statement





Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

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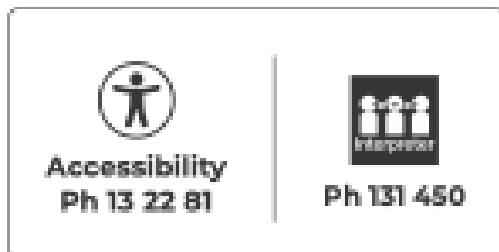
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Minister's Foreword



As the Minister for Women, I am proud to present the 2026–27 Women's Budget Statement. Since 2019, the Women's Budget Statement has reflected our commitment to continuing to improve how gender is considered in budget processes across government. The Statement recognises progress toward gender equity takes time and needs ongoing focus and investment. It also recognises new funding builds on existing work already underway, which continues to support women, girls and gender-diverse people to live the lives they choose.

The 2026–27 Budget continues this work, with major investments which will strengthen the health and wellbeing of women and girls. This includes new health centres and modernised facilities, expanded perinatal mental health supports, improved reproductive health services, and continued enhancements to

maternity care. These initiatives will help ensure everyone can access the care they need, when they need it, no matter their circumstances.

Our commitment to preventing and responding to domestic, family and sexual violence remains unwavering. This Budget delivers sustained funding for critical frontline services, specialised programs and legal supports which protect women's safety and dignity. These investments reinforce our long-term efforts to end violence in all its forms.

We are also focused on expanding opportunities for women in the workforce. This includes initiatives which support women to enter, stay, and progress their careers in both traditional sectors and male-dominated fields where women continue to be under-represented. Every step we take to remove barriers to women's economic participation creates a stronger, more resilient and more equitable economy.

Access to secure, safe and affordable housing is a fundamental human right. This Budget continues significant investment in housing and homelessness services, ensuring more women and families have the stability they need to thrive.

Alongside these investments, work has commenced on the ACT's next Plan for women, girls and gender equity, which will continue to build upon the achievements made under the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026* and its 3 action plans. Commencing in 2027, the new Plan will reflect priority areas for action over the next 10 years, to build a more equal, accessible and safe Canberra for women, girls and gender diverse people.

This work will be supported by the newly established ACT Women's Advisory Council for Gender Equity, a group of outstanding women appointed to provide strategic advice to Government. In collaboration with the Council and through inclusive community consultation, the next Plan will reflect the lived experiences of Canberrans and guide our ongoing efforts to advance gender equity.

Taken together, the initiatives in this Statement reflect a shared vision for a more equal Canberra – one where every person in our community can participate fully, feel safe, and reach their potential.

Marisa Paterson MLA

Minister for Women

Women and girls in Canberra

Population

247,944

Women and girls in the ACT as of 2025.²



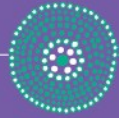
51%

of the total population.¹



4,400

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls (1.9% of the total in 2021)³



Multiculturalism

29%

born overseas

25%

spoke a language other than english at home in 2021⁴

ACT 2025 Survey of Women's Health⁵

Self-rated Health

36%*

'Fair' or 'Poor'



29%*

'Very good' or 'Excellent'



Mental Health

Two thirds

treated for or diagnosed with a mental health condition at some time.



- **Most common:** Depression & Anxiety (incl. perinatal)
- **Next most common:** Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

GP Access & Barriers



89% of respondents had been to a GP in the last 12 months.



Cost and appointment availability remain barriers to accessing medical care

Disability

48,900

women and girls with a disability in 2022

54%

of people with a disability in the ACT are women and girls⁶

Work & Economy

Weekly Earnings

\$2,183

(compared to \$2,306 for men in 2025)⁷



Gender Pay Gap

5.6%

gender pay gap across the ACT Labour Force (compared to 11.5% nationally)⁸

Unpaid Work

Childcare

59,000

women provided unpaid childcare (46,100 men in 2021)⁹



Disability, ageing & health

26,000

women provided unpaid assistance (18,500 men in 2021)¹⁰

Domestic work

Women undertake the majority of high-hour unpaid work¹¹

30+hrs

18,823 women
5,783 men

15-29hrs

31,073 women
15,943 men

LGBTIQA+ population in the ACT

Between

20,300 - 45,400

People



5.7%¹² - 10%¹³

of the ACT population (estimate cannot be disaggregated by a gender binary).

Higher Education



Bachelor's degree or higher in 2025¹⁴

54% vs. **45%**
women men

Safety & Housing

Safety

42%

having experienced physical and/or sexual violence since the age of 15¹⁶

Homelessness & Housing

Homelessness services¹⁷

56%

women accessing specialist services in 2023-24 (vs **44%** men)



Social Housing¹⁸

61%

of households have women as primary tenants in 2024 (**7,200** households)

Single parents

Women make up the majority of single parents in the ACT in 2021¹⁹



12,900 vs. **3,700**
women men

Workforce and Industries¹⁵

ACT labour force participation rate is²³

71% vs.
women

75.2%
men

Construction industry²⁰

2,900
women vs **16,900** men



Health care and social assistance²¹

25,200
women vs **9,000** men



Education and training industry²²

19,400
women vs **9,000** men



1. ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics)(2025) *National, state and territory population*, ABS website.
2. ABS (2025) *National, state and territory population*, ABS website.
3. ABS (2021) *Census of Population and Housing*, ABS website.
4. ABS (2021) *Census of Population and Housing*, ABS website.
5. WCHM (Women's Centre for Health Matters) (2025) *Survey of women's health in the ACT*, WCHM.
6. ABS (2022) *Survey of Disability and Carers*, ABS website.
7. ABS (2025) *Average Weekly Earnings*, ABS website.
8. Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) (2025) *The ABS gender pay gap data*, Australian Government.
9. ABS (2021) *Census of Population and Housing*, ABS website.
10. ABS (2021) *Census of Population and Housing*, ABS website.
11. ABS (2021) *Census of Population and Housing*, ABS website.
12. ACT Government estimate using ABS Estimates and characteristics of LGBTIQ+ populations in Australia, ABS website 2024.
13. Rainbow Health Victoria (2020), *Research Matters: How many people are LGBTIQ?*, Rainbow Health Victoria. [Note - this is a generally accepted estimate. Census data is not available].

14. ABS (2025) *Highest educational attainment*, ABS website.
15. The most common industry of employment for both men and women in the ACT is public administration and safety. However, for women the second most common industry is healthcare and social assistance followed by education and training. For men, the second most common industry is professional, scientific, and technical services followed by construction
16. ABS (2022) *Personal Safety*, Australia, ABS website.
17. AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare)(2025) *Specialist homelessness services 2023-24: Australian Capital Territory*, AIHW.
18. AIHW (2025) *Housing assistance in Australia*, AIHW.
19. ABS (2021) *Census of Population and Housing*, ABS website.
20. ABS (2026), *Labour Force, Australia*, Detailed, ABS website.
21. ABS (2026), *Labour Force, Australia*, Detailed, ABS website
22. ABS (2026), *Labour Force, Australia*, Detailed, ABS website.
23. ABS (2026), *Labour Force, Australia*, (seasonally adjusted series), ABS website.

Overview

Everyone deserves an equal opportunity to thrive, regardless of gender. The ACT Government is committed to advancing gender equity through targeted policy, investment and gender-informed budgeting.

Each year, all budget proposals undergo a gender impact analysis to evaluate their impact on various priority cohorts, including women and girls. The findings from this analysis and assessment inform and support decision-making for the Budget. Key initiatives which promote gender equity, particularly those benefiting women and girls, are highlighted each year in the Women's Budget Statement.

Initiatives are categorised by the themes – health and wellbeing, safety and inclusion, leadership and workforce participation, housing and homelessness, and access to appropriate services – which align with the priority areas for action in the *Third Action Plan 2023-26* under the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26*.

Canberra continues to lead Australia in many areas of gender equity. The ACT has one of the lowest gender pay gaps and among the highest workforce participation rates for women in the country. Women in the ACT also have strong educational outcomes, with a higher-than-average proportion holding university or postgraduate qualifications. While these achievements show real progress, significant challenges remain.

Women are more likely than men to experience poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, be victims of domestic, family and sexual violence, and experience higher rates of financial insecurity, housing stress and homelessness. At the same time, rigid and outdated gender roles continue to affect everyone. Men often face pressure to prioritise work over family life, while women are still expected to take on most unpaid domestic work, often alongside paid employment.

These challenges are not experienced equally. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability, LGBTIQ+ women, women from multicultural backgrounds, women on low incomes and single mothers face overlapping barriers which intensify inequity.

Although women's workforce participation has increased, it continues to be lower than that of men. This is driven by factors such as occupational segregation, the undervaluing of work in female dominated industries, and time taken out of the workforce for caregiving.

Reader's guide

The Women's Budget Statement does not seek to list all funded initiatives that are assessed as directly and indirectly benefiting women and/or girls in the ACT, rather it provides a snapshot of specific initiatives that improve lives, wellbeing and/or outcomes for women and girls.

Throughout the Women's Budget Statement, the terms '**women**' and '**girls**' are used in an inclusive way, referring to everyone who sees themselves as a woman or girl, including trans and gender diverse people. The ACT Government is committed to making sure all policies, programs, and services are inclusive and reflect the diversity of our community. This means understanding and responding to the different needs people have based on their unique identities and experiences.

Intersectionality is an idea which helps understand how power structures create barriers and shape different lived experiences. It shows how aspects of a person's identities and experiences - like gender, race, culture, disability, age, sexual orientation, or mental health - can overlap and affect how they experience and are treated by the world. The ACT Government

recognises some women and girls experience additional challenges and barriers to participation. That is why the Women's Budget Statement uses an intersectional gender lens when reviewing budget proposals.

Where possible, efforts have been made to include the most recently available **data**. Because of limits in how data is collected, this Statement mostly reports information based on sex rather than gender and is predominantly limited to a gender binary of women/men. When using data collected on sex recorded at birth, we use the terms "female" and "male." To ensure accuracy, we use the same terms as the original data sources; however, these sources may define women and girls differently from the ACT Government. It can be difficult to access detailed gender-based data in the ACT due to our small population. This makes it even harder when trying to look at data through an intersectional lens. In many cases, gender-specific data, especially when combined with other characteristics, is not available at the ACT level. Sometimes, reporting on small groups is not possible as it could risk identifying individuals or communities.

Housing and homelessness

Safe, stable and affordable housing is essential for wellbeing and independence. It supports participation in work, education and community life.

According to the *2024–25 Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report*¹, 57 per cent of new homelessness clients in the ACT were women. This reflects a range of factors including:

- lower lifetime earnings;
- caring responsibilities;
- experiences of domestic and family violence;
- disability;
- age; and
- parenting arrangements.

An increasing number of older women are accessing homelessness services - 219 in 2024–25, more than double the number recorded in 2020–21. This trend reflects lifelong economic disadvantage, rising housing costs and limited housing options later in life putting older women at greater risk of poverty.

The ACT Government continues to invest across the housing system from homelessness services to public and affordable housing and pathways to home ownership.

Approximately \$12 million of funding per year is targeted at homelessness services under the 5-year National Agreement on

Social Housing and Homelessness. This investment is supporting new housing options for women and children escaping domestic and family violence. Local organisations - Marymead CatholicCare Canberra & Goulburn, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and Yerrabi Yurwang Child & Family Aboriginal Corporation – are working together to deliver crisis and transitional accommodation, with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. These homes are supported by wraparound services funded by the ACT Government, which provide safety, stability and access to essential supports.

Woden Education First Youth Foyer, launched on 4 May 2026, provides accommodation for young people aged 16 to 24 years old who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness, and are engaged with education. The Foyer includes 20 self-contained apartments, including three suitable for young single parents and their children as well as shared spaces for study, learning, and community activities.

¹ AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2025). *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2024–25*, AIHW.

The ACT Government is also improving access to affordable rental options for women on low and moderate incomes, including older women, single mothers and women living alone, by focusing on increasing the supply of public, community and affordable rental homes. For example, the Affordable Community Housing Land Tax Exemption Scheme provides a 100 per cent land tax exemption to property owners who rent their property at less than 75 per cent of the market rate through a registered community housing provider. As of December 2025, there were

267 Affordable Community Housing Land Tax Exemption Scheme properties.

The ACT Government is also committed to supporting the delivery of affordable housing in the ACT and growing the community housing sector. The 2025-26 Budget provided an additional \$20 million for the Affordable Housing Project Fund, bringing the total funding to \$100 million. Over 800 new affordable rental homes will be supported through the Affordable Housing Project Fund pipeline.

Case study: A pathway from renting to home ownership

The Ginninderry Women's Housing Initiative is an innovative build-to-rent-to-buy project designed to help financially vulnerable women achieve long-term housing security. Delivered at Strathnairn in the ACT, the initiative provides affordable rental homes with a supported pathway to ownership over a 10-year period.

The initiative enables women to build financial independence by shifting from short-term housing assistance to a stable, future-focused model. It addresses concerns shown in national data that single women face a high risk of housing stress and homelessness.

Eligible single women aged 25 to 45 can rent a newly built home at below 75 per cent of market rent. This reduced rent creates the financial capacity to save for a deposit while providing security of tenure. Between years 6 and 10, participants can choose to purchase the home using their savings and, where needed, a share of the property's capital growth to support access to finance.

The benefits for participants include housing stability, predictable costs and a realistic pathway to home ownership that would otherwise be out of reach. The initiative also reduces financial risk by aligning eligibility settings with standard lending requirements.

The initiative is delivered through a partnership between the ACT Government and Community Housing Canberra, which owns and manages the properties through a dedicated entity. Construction was completed in April 2026, with tenants moving in from May 2026. The key measure of success will be the number of women who successfully transition from renting to owning their home.

Investment from 2026-27

Increasing supply

In this Budget, the Government is investing in a range of measures to increase housing supply, access and choice. The *Housing Budget Statement 2026-27*, released alongside the 2026-27 Budget, includes a detailed summary of the ACT Government's housing initiatives.

In the 2026-27 Budget, the Government is continuing to invest in fulfilling the housing needs of the most vulnerable community members, with over \$360 million for an additional 450 public housing dwellings. More than half of these homes are being put forward for funding by the ACT Government through the Housing Australia Future Fund.

The 2026-27 Budget allocates \$55.9 million to complete the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program. This will support the program to achieve the committed target of 1,000 property renewals and 400 net portfolio growth by June 2027. More than 65 per cent of tenants in public housing are women, so growing the portfolio supports more women into safe, secure and appropriate housing. In addition, \$37.4 million to complete the Social Housing Accelerator Program will support the delivery of 58 additional social housing dwellings by June 2028.

Upgrades and support for tenants

Women represent a significant proportion of those currently on the Housing ACT

waitlist. Investment in the ACT's public housing system will provide significant benefits to these women.

Funding of more than \$183.4 million over 4 years from 2026-27 for repairs and maintenance will ensure public housing is adequately maintained. Improved housing conditions can reduce health risks and stress. Timely repairs also enhance safety for women and children, particularly survivors of domestic and family violence where secure housing is critical. The delivery of Domestic Violence Upgrades services for public housing will be led by Infrastructure Canberra (iCBR) in the 2026-27 financial year. iCBR has developed an Implementation and Operational Readiness Plan to guide the transition of these services, with a focus on quality and tenant experience for these works, assisting women and children who reside in public housing to feel safer in their homes via the provision of additional safety and security measures where required.

A budget allocation of \$5.2 million for the Housing Crisis Support Fund initiative over 2 years from 2026-27 will support women in low-income and single-parent households to maintain housing stability, reduce financial stress, and lower the risk of homelessness by providing rent relief and targeted crisis payments. Women represented 57 per cent of previous rent relief recipients.

Safety and inclusion

Domestic, family and sexual violence remains the most significant factor affecting the safety of women and girls in the ACT. The ACT Government is continuing to invest in building an accessible, coordinated system across prevention, early intervention, response and recovery.

The 2026-27 Budget establishes secure funding for critical domestic, family and sexual violence responses for victim-survivors and behaviour change programs for people who use violence. It provides investment in targeted domestic and family violence supports for children and young people, migrant and refugee women and LGBTIQ+ people, as well as sexual violence supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, ensuring tailored, appropriate supports exist, while not losing sight of the essential work of preventing future violence.

This work ensures we build a community where all people feel safe and included in their homes, relationships and workplaces.

The recently launched 10-year *ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy 2026-36* provides a whole-of-system, evidence-based framework which reflects both existing Government priorities, and future reforms. This approach aligns with national frameworks, including the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children*

2022–2032 and Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036, supporting coordinated action across jurisdictions.

Substantial investment, supported by the Safer Families Levy, continues to be made in domestic, family and sexual violence frontline services, including investing in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to deliver culturally safe, community-led services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children.

Significant investment is also supporting a more integrated service system. The establishment of Sexual Assault Advocates to support victim survivors in their engagement with the justice system, as well as collaborative forums like the Wraparound program and the Family Violence Safety Action Program close gaps and promote safety. Public education campaigns on affirmative consent and coercive control aim to raise awareness of domestic, family and sexual violence in our community and prevent future harm.

Case study: Multicultural Hub Canberra Domestic and Family Violence Service

Since 2022, the ACT Government has funded the Multicultural Hub Canberra (MHub) Domestic and Family Violence Service which provides domestic and family violence services for women and their children from multicultural backgrounds in the ACT.

The service provides culturally safe, responsive, wraparound support to multicultural women, young people and children who are at risk of, or experiencing, domestic and family violence. This includes culturally appropriate case management and counselling, emergency brokerage, advocacy and access to education, employment and social support networks.

The service was established following consultations with women from multicultural backgrounds and community leaders. These consultations highlighted significant barriers to accessing mainstream services, including cultural stigma, language barriers and a lack of culturally appropriate responses.

Since its launch, the service has demonstrated strong outcomes. MHub has received over 500 formal referrals for support, including self-referrals from women in the community who have heard about the service from friends and family, demonstrating that such offerings help to promote open discussions within communities about domestic and family violence.

In 2025-26, 158 women received support through the service including 80 women on temporary visas.

The service addresses a critical service gap by improving awareness of the supports available to multicultural women and providing safe, trusted pathways to assistance. To date, support resources have been developed in 25 languages.

The MHub Service staff are trained in culturally responsive, trauma-informed practice to ensure effective service delivery. Collaboration is central to the model, with strong referral pathways now established with police, health, legal, homelessness and community services, enabling coordinated and effective responses to domestic and family violence for multicultural women and families across the ACT.

Investment from 2026-27

Accessible and appropriate services

The 2026-27 Budget provides \$44.2 million over 4 years to support frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services across the ACT. This funding will strengthen critical frontline services so victim-survivors can access the supports they need when they need them.

This investment establishes secure funding for critical domestic, family and sexual violence supports, providing a stable foundation for ongoing reforms which will be delivered under the ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy. As well as funding core domestic, family and sexual violence crisis response services, the funding continues targeted investment for children and young people and migrant and refugee women, while introducing new funding to establish an LGBTIQ+ domestic, family and sexual violence program. There is also funding to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people impacted by sexual violence.

This initiative includes \$1.6 million over 3 years to maintain the Safer Families Assistance Grants scheme to provide vital financial support to people experiencing domestic and family violence to establish or sustain a family home.

The 2026-27 Budget also includes funding of \$14.8 million over 4 years to continue community sector legal advice and access to justice for people experiencing vulnerability or disadvantage. This includes ongoing funding for the Women's Legal Centre Mulleun Mura program which provides family law advice and representation to Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander women experiencing domestic and family violence, and the Women's Legal Centre Family and Employment Law Practice. This will ensure continued access to specialist legal assistance in family, employment, domestic, family and sexual violence matters.

Legal Aid ACT will receive \$2.2 million over 4 years including a one-off base funding increase of \$1.5 million in 2026-27. This will enable the Commission to continue to provide legal assistance for people who are experiencing a range of legal matters including those relating to domestic, family and sexual violence. Fifty-nine per cent of services provided by Legal Aid relate to family law and family violence were provided to women.

An \$18.9 million funding boost for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions from 2026-27 will improve the prosecution of matters involving women as victims, strengthen access to justice for women in the ACT, and reduce the risk of further harm through justice system processes. This includes funding to continue the delivery of the Director of Public Prosecution's Witness Assistance Service (WAS). The WAS supports victims in sexual violence matters, who are mostly women and girls. This improves the experience of victims and witnesses through practical assistance in the justice process and trauma-informed support from within the prosecution agency, who are vested with achieving justice on their behalf. This service increases victim safety, boosts confidence in the process, reduces matter withdrawals, and stabilises case progression.

Building system foundations

The 2026-27 Budget includes \$3.6 million to deliver key elements of the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy's First Action Plan. This includes \$939,000 to establish a Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Sector Network to support workforce development and provide independent, coordinated sector advice on priority reforms, including from the domestic, family and sexual violence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expert advisory group.

This initiative also includes \$1.7 million over 4 years to establish an Information Sharing Coordinator function under the Information Sharing Scheme. The Information Sharing Coordinator will support implementation of the Domestic and Family Violence Information Sharing

Scheme when it commences in November 2026 and will provide an important oversight and guidance role to agencies using the scheme.

In addition, \$684,000 over 2 years for Risk Assessment and Management Framework training, will embed risk assessment practice across government and non-government workforces and support successful operationalisation of the Information Sharing Scheme.

The Government is also investing \$248,000 to scope an ACT primary prevention infrastructure model, to accelerate efforts to prevent violence before it starts.

The *2026-2027 Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Budget Factsheet* provides further detail of new and continuing initiatives to address domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT.

Health and wellbeing

The 2025 Women's Health Matters *Survey of Women's Health in the ACT*² highlighted both progress and ongoing challenges in women's health and wellbeing.

Women reported improved access to abortion care and welcomed recent reforms in maternity services. At the same time, women identified continued barriers to timely care, particularly for perinatal mental health, gynaecological conditions such as endometriosis, and navigating complex health services. The survey also reinforced the importance of culturally safe, inclusive and respectful care which responds to the lived experience of women at every stage of life.

Women in the ACT also report higher rates of mental health concerns and greater difficulty maintaining healthy lifestyles, such as engaging in regular physical activity. Despite often having higher health service needs, women also report finding it more challenging to access GPs, specialists and mental health professionals than men, particularly due to affordability and time constraints. These challenges are most pronounced for women, people aged 30 to 49, carers and single parents.³

The ACT Government is making targeted investments to address these issues through a range of initiatives that enhance access, safety and quality of care.

Improving access to reproductive healthcare remains a key priority. Since its introduction, the ACT's no-cost abortion scheme has delivered free surgical and medical abortions, and long-acting reversible contraceptives for people who have had an abortion. The scheme reflects the ACT Government's long-standing commitment to reproductive rights and accessible health care.

The ACT Government is focused on maternity care reform, which is woman and birthing person centred, supporting midwifery led continuity of care, including developing culturally safe Birthing with Country models of care for First Nations women and babies. The ACT is the first jurisdiction to recognise babies in the calculation of mandated maternity staffing ratios, now implemented across Canberra Health Services. These reforms aim to strengthen midwifery workforce capability, sustainability and retention, while improving health outcomes and care experiences for women, birthing people and babies, and build on initiatives delivered under the *Maternity in Focus First Action Plan*.

² WCHM (Women's Centre for Health Matters) (2025) *Report on the 2025 Survey of Women's Health in the ACT*, WCHM.

³ Schirmer, J, Carroll, S and Dale, M (2025) *Living well in the ACT region: Understanding the changing wellbeing of Canberrans 2019-2024*, WellRes Unit, Health Research Institute, University of Canberra, Canberra.

Mental health reform is another central focus with the strengthening of perinatal mental health services a key area of investment. The Stepped Continuum of Care for Perinatal Mental Health, including planning for a residential perinatal mental health unit, is underway. Ongoing investment in the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre, the Perinatal Mental Health Alliance, and culturally safe First Nations perinatal case management supports coordinated, trauma-informed care for families.

In addition, the ACT Government is expanding gynaecological services to improve access to diagnosis and treatment for conditions such as endometriosis and chronic pelvic pain. Work is underway to reduce wait times at the Canberra Endometriosis Centre and strengthen specialist care pathways which have been in place since 2007. These initiatives recognise the significant impact chronic gynaecological conditions can have on women's physical health, mental wellbeing and participation in daily life.

Case study: Expanding maternity services for timely, specialist care

Canberra Hospital has expanded maternity services to improve the experience, access and safety for women and pregnant people at all stages of pregnancy. This includes establishing a dedicated Early Pregnancy Service, enhancing the Maternity Assessment Unit, and transitioning the Fetal Medicine Unit into a complete Maternal Fetal Medicine service. Together, these initiatives represent a shift towards more coordinated and woman centred maternity care. They reduce reliance on emergency departments and ensure women and pregnant people are assessed in dedicated, appropriate clinical environments by skilled maternity and obstetrics teams.

The Early Pregnancy Service addresses gaps in early pregnancy and maternity care by providing timely alternatives to emergency presentations and early access to midwifery and specialist pathways. Women and pregnant people benefit from faster access to care, clearer communication, improved safety and a more compassionate experience during vulnerable times such as early pregnancy loss, abortion care or pregnancy complications. It provides care up to 13 weeks and 6 days' gestation for women experiencing miscarriage or undergoing abortion care.

The Early Pregnancy Service has introduced a clinical leadership role, including a Midwife Early Pregnancy Service Coordinator, and collaborates with midwifery care programs, general practice, emergency services, Aboriginal health services, and community organisations such as MSI Australia, Red Nose and Bears of Hope.

It has encouraged improved patient flow, fewer emergency department presentations, clearer prioritisation based on clinical urgency, and a reduction in complaints related to wait times. In its first 18 months, the Early Pregnancy Service received 181 referrals and 61 admissions.

The Maternity Assessment Unit operates as a 24/7 service as the main entry point for maternity concerns from 12 weeks gestation through to the postnatal period. Staff are trained in maternity triage using the Birmingham Symptom-specific Obstetric Triage System. The introduction of this system improves maternity care by providing a standardised, colour-coded, 4 category triage system to quickly identify high-risk pregnant people. This approach recognises the increasing complexity of modern pregnancies and the growing demand for unscheduled maternity care.

The Maternal Fetal Medicine service provides a broader scope, covering both maternal (pregnant person) and fetal (baby) health and supports pregnant people with complex medical or fetal conditions. The new Maternal Fetal Medicine midwifery coordinator position has helped pregnant people with a complex pregnancy to navigate their care.

Investment from 2026-27

The 2026-27 Budget supports the delivery of high-quality, accessible healthcare for all Canberrans, and supports the wellbeing of healthcare staff as well as patients and their families.

Accessible services

Funding of \$4.1 million over 4 years from 2026-27 to operate the new South Tuggeranong Health Centre in Conder will improve access to care closer to home in Canberra's south. The centre will support delivery of community-based services, including paediatrics and services that support prevention, early intervention and management of chronic illness. This is expected to particularly benefit women, who are more likely than men to experience long-term health conditions. Women also make up a significant proportion of the health workforce and will benefit from the employment and economic opportunities associated with expanding services in Canberra's south.

The Budget invests \$3.9 million over 4 years to expand high risk breast cancer screening at North Canberra Hospital. This will improve access to publicly funded surveillance imaging, early diagnosis and intervention and support services, benefitting approximately 450 women in the ACT aged 25 to 60 who are at high risk of breast cancer, as well as priority groups, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, among whom breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer, multicultural women, and women with disability, who often face barriers to accessing timely preventive care.

Funding of \$626,000 over 4 years from 2026-27 will support ongoing public maternity reform including delivery of priority actions under the *Maternity in Focus: Second Action Plan 2026-2029*. Pregnant people will benefit through improved clinical outcomes, strengthened continuity of care, and a clear commitment to listening to their voices and lived experiences in maternity service design and delivery. Midwives, who are predominantly women, will also benefit through initiatives to strengthen midwifery workforce capability, sustainability, and retention.

Continued implementation of no-cost abortion services, including additional funding of \$835,000 in 2026-27, will support ongoing service demand. This ensures women and pregnant people in the ACT can access timely, no-cost abortion care, reducing delays, stress and potential health risks. It also improves health equity for women who are not Medicare-eligible and may otherwise face barriers to essential reproductive healthcare, supporting a more inclusive and responsive health system.

Inclusive services

To continue to support perinatal mental health, \$1.2 million in expense funding over 4 years from 2026-27 has been allocated for grants to community sector organisations to deliver a culturally grounded perinatal mental health safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and birthing people who experience higher rates of psychological distress, antenatal mental health conditions, and barriers to culturally safe care.

Leadership and workforce participation

Supporting women to be financially secure and succeed at work helps build a stronger economy for everyone in the ACT. Financial independence also enables women to make decisions about how they live their lives and creates opportunities to leave violence.

Due to the persistence of gender role stereotypes in society, women can face additional challenges in balancing work and caring responsibilities and are more likely to have lower-paid or insecure jobs.

Women are also under-represented in many higher-paid and fast-growing areas such as construction, science and technology, engineering, mathematics, and trades. These jobs play a key role in building infrastructure, driving digital change and supporting the move to a net-zero economy. Increasing women's participation in these sectors is important to help close the gender pay gap and ensure the ACT has the skilled workers it needs for the future.

Responding to these challenges requires building fair and inclusive workplaces, improving pay and conditions in women dominated industries and opening pathways into non-traditional industries.

The ACT Government recognises the jobs of the future will need a highly skilled workforce. Supporting women into these

roles requires sustained investment across education, training and workforce entry points, starting early and continuing throughout life. Through initiatives such as User Choice (Australian Apprenticeships), Skilled Capital, Free TAFE and direct training delivered through the Canberra Institute of Technology, the ACT Government is strengthening access to vocational education and training aligned with the ACT's skills needs.

The Government is also implementing projects under the National Skills Agreement and will release grant programs including Adult Community Education programs, improving Vocational Education and Training Completions programs and Closing the Gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These initiatives help women gain the qualifications needed to enter the workforce while also addressing critical skills gaps in the ACT workforce.

In addition to broad training pathways, targeted programs help women enter emerging sectors. Scholarships at the

Canberra Institute of Technology, including *Brighte Pathways* and *Global Power Generation Women in Renewables*, provide financial aid, mentoring, and leadership opportunities. These are helping more women gain qualifications and careers in renewable energy.

Improving participation also requires focused action in historically male-dominated industries. The ACT Government prioritises women's participation in construction and trades, where demand is high and gender imbalance persists. Programs like the Understanding Building and Construction Program Try-a-Trade, support women to enter, remain and progress within the sector. The Pathways Hub will also provide pathways and tailored training for women, building skills and connecting them to jobs across the construction industry. It will broaden opportunities for women to build meaningful careers in the construction sector.

However, access to training and jobs alone is not enough. Women's economic empowerment also depends on workplaces that are safe, respectful and inclusive. Sexual harassment, discrimination and poor workplace culture

continue to disproportionately affect women, particularly in male-dominated industries. These experiences can undermine workforce participation, retention and career advancement. The ACT Government is addressing these barriers through Respect at Work ACT reforms. This includes the introduction of a positive duty under the *Discrimination Act 1991*, requiring organisations to take proactive steps to prevent discrimination, sexual harassment and unlawful vilification. Since April 2025, ACT Government entities have been subject to this duty, with broader obligations applying from April 2027. These reforms are supported by education, compliance and reporting functions undertaken by the ACT Human Rights Commission and are designed to drive genuine cultural change across workplaces.

Progressive implementation of the *Culture Standard for the Construction Industry* in Territory-funded construction projects is driving safer, more respectful and inclusive workplaces for everyone. This strengthens opportunities for women by supporting greater participation, retention and leadership in a positive, equitable industry culture within the ACT construction sector.

Case study: Try-a-Trade program expanding across the ACT

The Understanding Building and Construction Program Try-a-Trade builds awareness and participation in the building and construction industry. Delivered in ACT public high schools, it provides an early introduction to these opportunities and supports more young women and gender-diverse students to view jobs in construction as real career options.

Understanding Building and Construction Program Try-a-Trade was piloted in 4 ACT public high schools in 2022. It expanded each year from 2023 to 2025 to include more schools because of strong student interest. As a result of its success, the program will continue to expand to 10 high schools across the ACT in 2026.

The program has a 2-pronged approach to address the longstanding structural and cultural barriers which limit the participation of women in the construction industry.

Year 8 students (all genders) complete a 10-lesson sequence introducing the construction industry, career pathways and required skills.

Year 9 and 10 girls can elect to undertake a semester-long program which combines classroom learning with hands on industry engagement. This includes Try-a-Trade days at the Canberra Institute of Technology, industry work experience, industry guest speakers, industry-recognised training (such as White Card, Asbestos and Silica Awareness), and information sessions for parents and employers.

ACT workforce and participation data highlighted persistent under-representation of women in construction. By embedding construction learning early, the program helps demystify the industry. It challenges outdated perceptions and enables students to test career options in a supported environment – leading to more confident decisions about future study and employment pathways.

Students have said it has given them a positive perception of the construction industry.

One student reflected on the value of industry exposure, saying *“One thing that I enjoyed about the program was being able to go on work experience with a carpentry company to see how I felt about that job as a possible career in the future.”*

Another highlighted the importance of skills recognition and supportive industry interactions, *“I feel like I am good at working with my hands and doing practical things as well as theory things. Everyone in the industry that I’ve met have been really nice and supportive.”*

The Understanding Building and Construction Program Try-a-Trade is an outstanding example of what can be achieved when there are strong partnerships across government, industry, training providers and schools.

Investment from 2026-27

Supporting the workforce

Investment of \$10.2 million from 2026-27 to 2029-30 to improve regulation of the early childhood education and care sector will benefit the women dominated workforce by supporting women's workforce participation, reducing care-related employment interruptions and enhancing economic security.

Building skills and opportunities

The Budget also invests in building women's skills through training and education.

Extension of Free TAFE with the allocation of \$32 million over 6 years from 2026-27 will boost women's access to training and

increase workforce entry and economic security. Enrolment data shows 55.7 per cent of enrolments in this program identified as women.

The Budget provides \$3 million in 2026-27 to progress deliverables under the approved Electric Vehicle TAFE Centre of Excellence, helping to build the workforce capability required for the transition to a net zero economy. A known barrier to women in non-traditional fields is the confidence to start in a male dominated field. Establishing entry level training for women-only cohorts allows students to build basic skills and enter the workforce with confidence. Work placements within the pilot program will provide vital networking between potential employers and students, providing pathways to employment.

Appropriate and accessible services

Every person should have access to safe, inclusive and appropriate services. This is essential for wellbeing, quality of life, and social and economic participation.

This is especially important for people with intersectional needs, who may experience language or cultural barriers, disability, have caring responsibilities, or mistrust of services and government agencies.

The ACT Government is progressing a range of initiatives which support equitable access to services and inclusive spaces.

Access to essential health and hygiene supports has been strengthened through the continued implementation of the *Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023*. Implementation of the legislation commenced in 2023 and free period products are available at a range of locations across the ACT. In 2025, the initial pilot expanded to participating ACT Government schools, public hospitals and health centres, and Canberra Institute of Technology campuses. Period products also continue to be available at public libraries, ACT Courts and ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, Child and Family

Centres, the Child Development Service, and the Housing ACT Service Centre.

The Government also continues to upgrade sporting facilities to be more accessible for women, supporting increased participation by women and girls. To date, 40 community sport pavilions have been upgraded. Planned future upgrades will extend the program to Chisholm, Ainslie, Hughes, Reid, Griffith, Kaleen and Macquarie.

Inclusive urban design is being supported through the continued application of the Gender Sensitive Urban Design Framework and Toolkit. This framework has informed upgrades to local shops and active travel infrastructure helping to ensure public spaces are safer, more accessible and welcoming for everyone.

To improve safety in public spaces, transit officers on public transport are managing antisocial behaviour and occupational violence on buses and at interchanges.

Case study: Cycleway builds confidence on Canberra's streets

The Garden City Cycleway is a major active travel project in Canberra's inner north, delivering a safe and connected walking and cycling route between suburbs including Watson, Downer, Hackett, Dickson, Ainslie, and Braddon, and the city centre.

The project uses a combination of shared paths and active travel streets to support everyday trips to schools, shops, green spaces and work, as well as recreational use.

The cycleway represents a shift towards gender sensitive urban design by recognising women experience public spaces and transport differently. The project addresses well documented barriers which limit women's participation in walking and cycling, particularly concerns about personal safety, poor lighting, isolated routes and infrastructure that does not reflect women's everyday travel patterns, such as multipurpose and caregiving trips.

The benefits for the community include safer, more comfortable and more legible routes which support walking, cycling and scooting for people of all ages and abilities. Features such as improved lighting, raised crossings and wider paths directly respond to safety and confidence concerns identified by women and less confident users.

This aligns with ACT Active Travel and Gender Sensitive Urban Design objectives. Effectiveness is measured through staged delivery, improved connectivity, safety upgrades, usage trends and community feedback. Stage 1 has largely been delivered, providing a continuous high-quality route between Braddon and Ainslie, with further extensions funded and underway.

Participation data shows increased cycling for transport in recent years, indicating growing confidence and everyday use across the network.

Investment from 2026-27

Budget allocation of \$1.2 million to continue the *City Precinct Renewal Program 2026-27* will improve safety, accessibility and inclusion in Civic through upgraded lighting, paving and urban design.

Funding of \$11.5 million in upgrades to the public realm, including new shop upgrades at the Kippax, Cooleman Court, Chisholm and Kingston group centres, with improvements to support amenity, inclusion upgrades to lighting, paving and urban design. Further investments of \$2.8 million will support upgrades to a range of sportsgrounds and facilities across the ACT, including upgrades to women's changerooms, lighting and fields that support sports clubs to enjoy facilities across the ACT.

An additional investment of \$977,000 in 2026-27 in the Future of Education Equity Fund will support students facing financial barriers to learning. Women will also benefit as they are more likely to care for children and experience financial pressure, particularly in low-income and single-parent families.

Funding investments in the Emergency Material and Financial Aid service and food relief services, with over \$1 million invested over 2 years, will enable delivery of around 4,000 instances of emergency assistance to vulnerable clients and ensure essential food relief for members of the community. This will provide an important safety net for women, who comprise 66 per cent of clients, allowing them to continue to provide for themselves and their families, and to live in dignity.

The Budget allocates \$688,000 over 4 years to continue the Gender Pathways Peer Navigation Service. The Service provides trans and gender diverse people with resources and referrals on social, legal and medical gender affirmation.

Funding is also provided to continue community sector legal advice and access to justice for vulnerable people. This includes funding of \$1.3 million over 4 years from 2026-27 for 2 Disability Liaison Officers in Victims ACT and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and ongoing funding of \$1.3 million to provide interpreting services for community members experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence seeking legal assistance and engaging with the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions as witnesses in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence proceedings.