

## 9 WOMEN'S BUDGET STATEMENT

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### Overview

This 2006-07 Women's Budget Statement articulates the Government's vision and continuing commitment to advance the status of women and girls in the ACT.

The key strategies guiding ACT Government initiatives in 2006-07 are linked to the six objectives for achieving and supporting the vision contained in the *ACT Women's Plan*. Together these objectives provide a framework for the development and coordination of effective and responsive policies, programs and services for women in the ACT:

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

### Representation and Recognition

The Government continues to support a number of initiatives to increase women's representation and to ensure that women's 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 includes 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 Government promotes recognition of women through the annual International Women's Day Awards that acknowledge women who have made significant contributions in the community, as well as individuals and organisations who have had a role in progressing the status of women in the ACT.

The ACT Women's Grants Program assists individuals and groups to develop activities to improve the status of women. In 2005-06, the grants program funded:

- a major research initiative which will receive \$14,000 to examine the experience of victims of family and sexual violence within the criminal justice system;
- a financial support program, which will receive \$12,000 to assist tenants of Havelock House with a range of living expenses during times of crisis or extreme financial hardship;

- a program to support isolated Muslim women to gain an ACT drivers licence, enabling them to transport their families and other community members to essential services and assisting them to become more involved in community activities;
- a leadership program run by the Canberra Environment and Sustainability Resource Centre which aims to increase the representation of women in senior management roles within the environment sector;
- skills development workshops run by the Belconnen Community Service to create pathways for women who would like to return to the workforce;
- a project to build the capacity of the *Women for Better Mental Health Group* convened by Inanna Inc, to provide advocacy support to women dealing with mental health issues; and
- a series of workshops for young women to improve their general health and wellbeing and enhance their understanding of the causes and effects of domestic violence.

The ACT Women's Register is maintained as a method of supporting and encouraging women to nominate for appointment to government and non-government boards, committees and statutory authorities. The ACT Government Boards and Committees Handbook supports the Government's commitment to achieving 50 per cent representation of women on its boards and committees.

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.

Women are making a significant contribution as firefighters in the ACT. Further development of the recently established Women Firefighters Network will take place over the coming months looking at goal setting and creation of networking opportunities such as forming linkages with the policewomen's network.

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. The WiRC also provides a community calendar on women's support and networking groups in the ACT and coordinates the International Women's Day program of events in the ACT.

The Consumer Advocacy and Quality Service Unit has been established within the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DDHCS) as a mechanism for listening to and advocating on behalf of clients, including women and girls, on complex service issues.

The Department of Territory and Municipal Services' (DTMS) Women's Action Plan provides a structured framework to ensure needs of women in the workplace are better met. Some of the projects proposed for 2006-07 are:

- establishing an integrated Women's Leadership program including mentoring and gender awareness training;
- hosting a seminar series of *Women in Leadership Roles*; and
- promoting women as community role models.

## Good Health and Wellbeing

Provision of accessible services and supporting healthy lifestyles for ACT women are high priorities for the Government. A wide range of affordable, accessible and appropriate programs and services will continue to be provided to ensure that the health and wellbeing needs of women in the ACT are met.

In 2006-07, ACT Health will provide an enhanced program for Perinatal and Infant Care. This is an innovative collaboration of Mental Health ACT with The Canberra Hospital, Women's Health Service, Child Youth and Women's Health (Community Health) and Child and Adolescent Mental Health. The perinatal program will enhance links between maternal and child care, child and family services and mental health. The program will take advantage of the opportunity to intervene early and thus reduce the presentations of pre and post natal depression among women and positively influence the life course of infants and mothers. It builds on the outcomes of the Beyondblue Postnatal Depression Project and has the capacity to develop into an infants' mental health early intervention program.

The *ACT Primary Health Care Strategy*, which will be finalised in 2006-07, outlines a plan for the delivery of safe, high quality, efficient health care and proposes actions such as sustained home visiting for families with children at risk with complex needs, and the introduction of a program to reduce smoking in pregnancy.

Through the implementation of the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Family Wellbeing Plan*, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service and ACT Health will increase the scope of maternal and child health services according to identified need, and strengthen promotional programs to increase awareness of services and self-responsibility for maternal and child health.

Services for younger women such as generalist nursing, midwifery and maternal and child health services will continue to be provided at the Junction Youth Health Service. The media literacy program, which focuses on body image issues, and the development and delivery of the *Any Body's Cool* body image and eating disorder behaviour program will continue in schools.

Targeted education and clinical sessions will be provided for women of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to increase the rate of cervical screening, improve coordinated services to support women during pregnancy and the early years of childhood, and provide targeted services to support young women who are parenting.

ACT Health continues to provide services specific to women including postnatal and early childhood parenting support, lactation advice and other health services for women including well women's clinics, cervical screening, screening for early detection of breast cancer, and counselling and medical services for women affected by violence.

The *Women and Mental Health Reference Group* has been established within ACT Health to guide further development of mental health services for women.

Child and Family Centres in Tuggeranong and Gungahlin offer accessible parenting, family support and early childhood development services for women with young children.

Ongoing funding of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre will enable these agencies to continue to support women and children who experience violence and to address the causes of violence through community education. The Government will work in partnership with the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to provide support groups for survivors of sexual abuse.

The Women's Information and Referral Centre (WiRC) provides information, referrals and targeted services, including domestic violence and sexual assault support programs, and develops relationships with at-risk and marginalised communities. The Community Calendar for Women promotes parenting programs and provides information on programs for women that focus on personal development, including assertiveness, stress management and self confidence, and groups and courses that enhance women's health and wellbeing.

The Housing ACT *Community Linkages Program* assists the good health and wellbeing of women through funded activities such as women's groups and community garden and healthy eating projects.

Specific actions in the education area include the *School Education Alcohol and Drug Program*, a multidisciplinary model in counselling and welfare services which provides a youth worker in each high school, and promotion of a *Healthy Students Program* to improve health and fitness in ACT government colleges.

## **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.

Substantial consultative processes undertaken through the Ministerial Housing Advisory Forums, the ACT Ministerial Housing Consumer Forum and Housing Summit inform key housing issues affecting women in the ACT. The processes include consultation on affordability, choice and safety and security.

Safe, appropriate, accessible and responsive housing assistance options are provided through the social housing sector. Actions from the *Youth Homelessness Action Plan* will be implemented for young women who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

A poverty proofing trial will be incorporated into the mid-point evaluation of *Breaking the Cycle – the ACT Homelessness Strategy*. The trial aims to ensure programs or policies positively contribute to the reduction of poverty and social exclusion and that government decisions do not increase the causes, impacts or levels of poverty.

The *Community Linkages Program* funds agencies to provide a sustainable tenancies service, which is aimed at developing early intervention strategies to assist people to maintain their tenancies. The public housing application and assessment processes will be improved through changes to the Housing ACT entry point, Gateway Services.

For women escaping domestic violence, a debt to public housing is no longer a bar to re-entry to public housing, and arrangements for application of debt relief will be promoted for female tenants or applicants who have experienced domestic violence or financial hardship. Women make up 52 per cent of those on the highest priority waiting list, and those who are experiencing or are at serious risk of domestic violence are granted the highest priority access to housing under the formal priority arrangements determined under the *Public Rental Housing Assistance Program*. Housing ACT is developing a Domestic Violence Assistance Manual, for use by Housing managers and community organisations, which consolidates the existing housing program, policies, procedures and support for women experiencing or at risk of domestic violence. Policy linkages will be developed in response to women's supported accommodation and housing needs through Funding Agreement Management Plans.

## **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.

In 2006-07 there are a number of programs aimed at building safe, inclusive communities and overcoming exclusion and diversity to enable women and girls to fully participate in society.

Police and criminal justice responses to violence against women will be improved through:

- continuing the commitment of specialised police training on domestic violence;
- maintaining specialised positions within ACT Policing, the Office of the Director of Public Prosecution (DPP) and the Magistrates Court to deal with domestic violence;
- maintaining a separate Family Violence list and case management hearing system for alleged family violence offenders which takes account of the need for fast tracking and the sensitivities of these cases;
- maintaining a separate Protection Orders list at the Magistrates Court; and
- improving the Memoranda of Understanding arrangements and protocols between ACT Policing, DPP and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and other key criminal justice agencies in response to family violence.

In 2006-07 the Government will conduct a review of the *Victim Services Scheme* to further enhance safety for women in the ACT. Collaborative relationships between ACT Health, the ACT Policing Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team (SACAT), the DPP and Care and Protection Services will be enhanced through continuation of joint education and training opportunities for agencies.

The Government will also progress procedures for the management of family violence offences and reform legislation relating to sexual offences in the ACT by inserting a new part into the *Criminal Code 2002*. In developing sexual assault reform, the Government will consider, among other things, the report *Responding to Sexual Assault – the Challenge of Change*. The Government has also endorsed the Domestic Violence Prevention Council developing an implementation plan for service standards on working with people affected by domestic violence.

Violence prevention and education activities for families with identified risk factors will include enhanced support and a universal home visiting program for all new mothers.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services will undertake consultations in 2006-07 with key stakeholders who have knowledge, expertise and an interest in girls' and women's issues to assist in the development of policy and practice models to meet the specific needs of girls and young women in the new Youth Detention Centre.

The ACT Crime and Urban Design Resource Manual recommendations will be implemented through ongoing Neighbourhood Planning projects. Safety issues that are raised as part of the neighbourhood planning process will be addressed through inclusion in the completed Neighbourhood Improvements Program.

Annual surveys will be undertaken by the Department of Territory and Municipal Services as part of a commitment to research and develop initiatives such as measuring the level of satisfaction with taxi and bus services to ensure that public transport services take account of the needs of women and enhance safety.

The *Discrimination Act 1991* will be reviewed to ensure, amongst other things, its effectiveness in protecting women's rights. Women's rights advocates will be included in the biannual Human Rights Community Forums to be managed through the ACT Human Rights Office. It is anticipated that these advocacy organisations will provide submissions to the Attorney-General's review of the *Human Rights Act 2004* identifying issues that are important to women in the context of the review including consideration of economic, social and cultural rights.

A range of programs such as the *Community Linkages Program* and the *Multicultural Grants Program* fund community development activities that help build the community and that support women's groups. The *Carer Recognition Grants Program* provides funding to support carers, the majority of whom are women, through a range of initiatives such as respite, practical assistance, skill development and information.

## **Economic Security and Opportunities**

Economic security and access to opportunities is 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.

The Women's Information and Referral Centre (WiRC) will deliver information sessions on Managing Personal Finances two to three times a year for all women, including those who are in receipt of pensions or benefits, older women and women with a disability. The Government will also work in partnership with colleges and youth services to provide *Managing Personal Finances* seminars to young women in years 11 and 12.

The ACT Human Rights Office will continue to investigate complaints of unlawful discrimination in employment and conciliate where appropriate. Information and education will be 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. Women volunteers with the Rural Fire Service will be surveyed to determine whether they have experienced any of the difficulties often associated with belonging to an organisation that is traditionally male dominated.

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services has engaged the department's first female Indigenous cadet, and 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 a *Workplace Discrimination and Harassing Behaviours Policy and Guidelines* that will be followed up with a training program for staff.

The ACT Government's *Work and Life Balance Policy* recognises and supports family friendly initiatives for female employees such as positive management of maternity/parental leave and provision of space and accommodation to support nursing mothers.

An online Business Advisory Service is available on the ACT Government's Canberra Business Advisory Service (CanBAS) website that provides 'static' news and interactive business tools. The online advisory service will better target the needs of home-based and micro-business operators, approximately 30 per cent of whom are women, by providing more flexible information and training options 24 hours a day. Women in businesses may now opt to access these services outside 'normal' business hours, allowing them to better balance work and family responsibilities.

## **Flexible Education and Training**

Education can play a key role in achieving 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 Government will support programs aimed at assisting young mothers to continue with or re-engage in schooling, such as the *Canberra College Cares* program, which provides an alternative educational service for young carers, pregnant and parenting students. The Government will also provide quality learning programs at the Hindmarsh Education Centre for young women in detention, and continuation of the *Training Pathway Guarantee* program which enables school leavers to access vocational training. Ongoing skills development programs will be made available for mature workers.

WiRC will provide basic computer and internet information sessions to women who have little or no experience in those areas, in particular women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and older women.

Young women will be supported and encouraged to consider IT studies and opportunities in schools and colleges. Young women will also be supported to undertake work placements to gain experience in the IT field and to undertake School Based New Apprenticeships.

Leadership development opportunities will be provided to female Indigenous students under the *Indigenous Leadership/Mentoring Program*. This program is funded by the ACT Government from 2004 to 2008 and provides mentors to support students to remain in school through years 10 to 12.

The Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) has offered the first course in Australia on training for Allied Health Assistants at the Certificate IV level. The course offers competencies in Occupational Therapy Assistant, Physiotherapy Assistant and Speech Pathology Assistant. Female students are also enrolling for places in non-traditional trades at CIT such as the Certificate II in Automotive Vehicle Body through the *NRMA Insurance Jumpstart Autobody Scholarship* program.

WiRC's Community Calendar will provide 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 will also provide a specialist library to complement the learning gained at groups and courses and will publish information about courses for women on the DTMS Intranet, on the WiRC website and in the Community Calendar for Women. Through Communities On-line and in partnership with an external contractor, WiRC will provide personal and professional development courses for women.

The ACT Library and Information Services supports flexible education and learning through the wide range of material that is made available for women of all ages.