

# ACT WOMEN'S BUDGET STATEMENT 2020-21



COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on women in the ACT. Across Australia, women are more likely to have lost their jobs and are more likely to have taken on the bulk of unpaid work at home, including childcare and home-schooling. Women are also more likely to be employed in our frontline service positions, in hospitals, schools, in professional caring roles and in insecure, casual or part-time work. While initial labour force outcomes for women in the Territory have been relatively better than those around the country, we know that more needs to be done to support secure employment at equal pay for women across the Territory.

These issues are not new, but the inequality experienced by women has been highlighted by the pandemic. The ACT Government, through the 2020-21 Budget, seeks to support those most impacted by the pandemic, including by advancing women's economic security,

safety, health and wellbeing. The ACT Government continues to demonstrate its commitment to gender equality, as articulated in the *ACT Women's Plan 2016 - 2026*.

# Strengthening Women's Economic Security and Access to Housing

A key part of achieving gender equality is ensuring women's economic independence. Several measures in this Budget will enhance access to housing and homelessness supports for Canberra's most vulnerable households. Women are over-represented among those in need of housing and homelessness services and women are the primary beneficiaries of increased funding for initiatives including:

- › Increasing emergency accommodation funding through OneLink. In the last year, women have made up the majority of new clients for OneLink<sup>1</sup>, which provides services and referrals for those experiencing or at risk of homelessness. This additional funding will provide temporary accommodation to people experiencing homelessness during or due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- › Expanding specialist homelessness service capacity, including funding for Mackillop House to continue to expand its services providing accommodation for women experiencing homelessness in the ACT;
- › Additional funding for systemic advocacy in the housing sector;
- › Extension of residential tenancy relief, offering rebates to landlords who offered rent reductions for tenants impacted by COVID-19;
- › The commitment to extend the Canberra Relief Network (CRN). Research indicates that in Australia, women are more likely than men to experience food insecurity, and the emotional toll of food insecurity is also greater for women than men<sup>2</sup>. The CRN provides food and non-perishable essential items to vulnerable community members and was introduced in response

to the pandemic. The network provides hampers of non-perishable food as well as feminine hygiene products and baby supplies to those that need them; and

- › The Vulnerable Household Energy Support Initiative, which will deliver energy efficiency upgrades to social and public housing as well as interest free grants to low income owner-occupiers and landlords. This initiative will have a positive gender impact, recognising that women make up the majority of social housing occupants and are over-represented in low-income households. Women in the ACT have overall less resilience to climate change-related extreme events, reporting being less able to afford to keep their home cool during heatwaves.<sup>3</sup>

## Preventing and Responding to Family Violence/ Women's Safety

The ACT Government continues to build on its work preventing and responding to domestic and family violence. In addition to the ongoing efforts as part of the ACT Women's Plan 2016-26, the Government has committed to additional funding to support these efforts, including:

- › More frontline domestic violence and rape crisis services, including additional support for the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and the Domestic Violence Crisis Centre. Research indicates that for many women, the pandemic coincided with the onset or escalation of violence and abuse. In a May 2020 survey of Australian women<sup>3</sup>, two-thirds of women who experienced physical or sexual abuse by a current or former partner since the start of the pandemic said the violence had started or escalated in the three months prior to the survey; and
- › Continuing the Health Justice Partnership, delivering support

for new parents experiencing domestic violence. The Health Justice Partnership program places lawyers in maternity and early childhood services across the ACT to offer early intervention and support in domestic and family violence cases.

## Supporting Women's Health and Wellbeing

The ACT Women's Plan 2016–2026 noted that education, employment and income, and safe and affordable housing all contribute to health and wellbeing. Further, research consistently shows that low socioeconomic areas have the worst health outcomes, and the highest rates of avoidable death. As women tend to be concentrated in lower wage positions or industries and are more likely to be in unpaid caring roles, the health burden of these social determinants is even greater for women. Women are also more exposed to marginalisation and discrimination, and more likely to be socially isolated or victims of past trauma. All are common barriers to women accessing the necessary resources to ensure good health and wellbeing.

Under the First and Second Action Plans, a significant amount of effort is being directed to improving health outcomes for women. In particular, the Second Action Plan includes actions specifically directed to mental health. This has never been more important, with the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent increase in the burden being placed on women related caring and remote learning having a profound impact on the mental health of women in the ACT. In 2020, women in the ACT recorded a significant decline in their personal wellbeing.<sup>ii</sup> The 2020-21 budget commits to further mental health support through the Mental Health Support Package, providing additional funding for a range of service providers.

1. OneLink quarterly reports, Jul 2019-Jun 2020 - <https://www.onelink.org.au/how-we-work>

2. Foodbank report - <https://www.foodbank.org.au/women-bear-the-brunt-of-hunger-in-australia/>

3. Australian Institute of Criminology Statistical Bulletin - [https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/sb28\\_prevalence\\_of\\_domestic\\_violence\\_among\\_women\\_during\\_covid-19\\_pandemic.pdf](https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-07/sb28_prevalence_of_domestic_violence_among_women_during_covid-19_pandemic.pdf)

i. Longitudinal Survey ACT Resilience to Climate Change Report - [https://www.environment.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0019/1316521/Longitudinal-Survey-ACT-Resilience-to-Climate-Change-Report.pdf](https://www.environment.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/1316521/Longitudinal-Survey-ACT-Resilience-to-Climate-Change-Report.pdf)

ii. Living well in the ACT region: exploring the wellbeing of ACT residents in 2019-20 -

[https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/institutes/health-research-institute/files/files-living-well-in-the-act/Living-well-in-the-ACT-region\\_Part-1\\_Indicators\\_7Dec2020.pdf](https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/institutes/health-research-institute/files/files-living-well-in-the-act/Living-well-in-the-ACT-region_Part-1_Indicators_7Dec2020.pdf)