



YACTION

ISSUE 1 | AUGUST 2017



Welcome to YAction!

We are excited to launch our new publication that shines a light on the advocacy of YWCA Canberra, likeminded organisations, and the issues that are important to our community.

So whYAction?

Advocacy is core to what YWCA Canberra does - women must be the crucial actors in any attempt to achieve gender equality.

This publication is about bringing the voices, initiatives and efforts of activists and organisations to the fore - we hope that by doing this we will increase awareness of critical issues and present opportunities for collaboration that our members, friends and supporters can get involved in.

Ultimately, we hope to strengthen a movement that works together to achieve gender equality in the ACT, as we believe that this will take a society wide effort.

In this edition we:

- Unpack the issue of older women and homelessness, and what needs to be done to address this in the lead up to the ACT Housing Summit.
- Delve into non-digital forms of abuse and how this is impacting young people, particularly young women in our community.
- Speak with university on-campus leaders, in light of the recent release of the Australian Human Rights Commission's damning report into sexual abuse on campus.
- Cast a gendered lense on the recent ACT Budget.
- Highlight opportunities for you to get involved in our ongoing advocacy and campaigning.



OUR POLICY FOCUS: OLDER WOMEN AND HOUSING IN THE ACT

Single older women increasingly face housing instability and homelessness in the ACT. 2015-2016 saw a 17.5 per cent increase in older women seeking help from homelessness services - twice the rate of growth in the general population. However, older women are still largely invisible from the official figures and so the size and scale of the problem is not yet fully comprehended.

In response to this, YWCA Canberra, along with the ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) documented the evolving body of knowledge on older women, and their pathways into homelessness. Our focus was on older women who are aged 45 years and over, experience homelessness or housing stress, and live in the ACT.

Through this process we looked at the research available, gaps in the research, and from this we developed high level recommendations for possible next steps for service providers and policy makers.

So what did we learn?

Women's vulnerability to housing stress is unquestionably a gendered issue: a longer term consequence of gender bias and ingrained structural inequality, women experience what the Human Rights Commission refer to as 'accumulative poverty'. That is, years of unpaid caring, wage inequalities, less secure work tenure, and insufficient superannuation, which compromise a women's resilience in later life.

For an older woman who may experience later life 'shocks' such as a relationship breakdown, death of a partner, illness or loss of employment - these can mean the difference between making ends meet and losing a tenancy.

Older women's homelessness tends to be more complex than the stereotypical image of the homeless man who sleeps rough. Women will often adopt survival strategies that disguise their homelessness, such as partnering up, sleeping in cars or taking jobs that include housing.

They are prone to cycles of homelessness as short term solutions become unsustainable. When women are on the streets, they generally hide from view as a survival strategy and so they can be invisible to traditional methods of street counting.

Lack of safe, affordable and appropriate housing options is a significant barrier to women exiting homelessness. High costs of private rental is a significant cause of homelessness in the ACT: [Anglicare's 2017 rental affordability snapshot](#) found that out of the 1,280 private rentals surveyed online, only 24 properties were affordable to single aged pensioners. Besides one granny flat and an apartment listed in Queanbeyan, the rest were shared houses.

There is also a gap in service delivery with many women's homelessness services targeted towards domestic and family violence, and are unsuitable for older women who do not necessarily have complex needs or require support.

In the [Home Truths](#) report published by ACT Shelter in 2014, Penny, an older woman with lived experience shares her story. "At one point I had nowhere to go. It was overwhelming and embarrassing for me. I didn't have the financial ability to pay private rent in combination with the lack of places available. I had applied for affordable housing - but didn't earn enough to be eligible. I was shocked to realise that I was actually homeless."

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In her journal article, [Addressing older](#)

[women's homelessness: service and housing models](#), Dr Maree Petersen says different

trajectories towards homelessness or housing insecurity call for more refined responses.

She says a variety of solutions are required to address the issue, all of which must address the social and economic factors that contribute to older women's vulnerability. "It's about being able to understand there are different ways of thinking about homelessness and we can't make assumptions," she said.

In a [series of interviews conducted by ACT Shelter](#), older women expressed a desire for housing programs that focus on secure tenure, rather than mechanisms that enabled them to buy their own homes.

Most women talked about the importance of their home life being equipped to cater for their broader life, which often involved caring for grandchildren or adult children, or the ownership of pets.

Outdoor spaces and a spare room were identified as important considerations. Along with these, independence, autonomy and security were the most common priorities.

Immediate actions must address the lack of affordable and appropriate housing solutions for women, and prioritise their need for stable housing. These solutions must prioritise proximity to a woman's existing social networks and access to health care and services, as these are intimately linked to better health and wellbeing overall.

The potential flexibility of the new [National Housing and Homelessness Agreement \(NHHA\)](#) provides the ACT Government with the opportunity to design a program that is responsive to older

women's needs. Consulting older women in this planning process will be critical to ensuring that this cohort is considered in its design.

Later this year, the ACT Government will hold the Housing and Homelessness Summit, bringing representatives from the public and private sectors together to further investigate homelessness and housing affordability in the ACT.

The summit presents a crucial opportunity to specifically address the unprecedented number of older women facing these issues here in the ACT, and develop adequate, long term public policy responses in direct consultation with women with actual lived experience.

In the lead up to the Housing Affordability Summit in October, YWCA Canberra is calling on the ACT Government to commit to a focus on housing models for older women that acknowledges their many different pathways into homelessness, and therefore their housing needs.

The ACT Government has just announced a [consultation process](#) in the lead up to the Summit, and it is crucial that women's voices are heard through this process. We will work to ensure that women are represented throughout this process, and encourage you to get involved in the process of shaping a more inclusive and realistic housing strategy for the ACT. You can download the ACT Government's Discussion paper and add your voice [here](#).





TAKING ACTION ON TECHNOLOGY-FACILITATED ABUSE

The evolution of technology has redefined personal relationships and how intimacy is expressed. Image sharing between two consenting people, can be a normal, contemporary form of sexual expression in romantic and other relationships.

However, there is also darker side of these technological advances, with social media platforms becoming the new frontier in the way that women experience violence and sexual abuse.

The non-consensual sharing of intimate images, historically known

as 'revenge porn' involves a spectrum of technology-facilitated abuse that is more than just a 'relationship gone sour' scenario. This kind of activity can include a range of serious crimes - from up-skirting to revenge porn websites, where perpetrators may

encourage public shaming and harassment of the victim (commonly referred to as virtual mobbing).

This emerging legal issue requires a multifaceted approach that works to not only protect the rights of young people and women, but to shift our current culture away from victim blaming.

Current laws in Australia produce distorted outcomes for victims and perpetrators alike. Young people can be placed on the sex offenders list for consensual activity, for possessing an image of a minor. And victims are often left with no recourse for justice.

In response to these issues, the Council of Australian Government's (COAG) [called on all states and territories to adopt a uniform approach](#) that meets the requirements of our modern society.

In response to this, The ACT Greens recently launched a [consultation process](#) asking for perspectives from local Canberra groups and organisations.

YWCA Canberra developed a [submission into the consultation process](#), grounded in our work with young people, with input from the Youth Coalition of the ACT's network of youth engagement professionals.

Below we share what we learnt along the way.

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The non-consensual sharing intimate images is an issue particularly relevant to young people, with LGBTQIA+ community and young women adversely affected.

In 2014, YWCA conducted a [nation-wide survey of young women](#)

[and girls](#) aged between 15-30 years, called She Speaks. Out of the 1600 respondents, 34 per cent said they had received uninvited and/or unwanted indecent or sexually explicit text messages.

YWCA Canberra's [Respectful Relationships](#) Program Coordinator, Heidi Zajac, states that “technology-facilitated abuse is another way to both objectify women and act out violence against them. Sharing intimate images without a person's consent can be emotionally and mentally harmful to the victim. The incidence of non-consensual sharing of intimate images demonstrates that gendered violence continues in our society.”

When our team spoke with a group of youth workers about this issue, it became apparent that

young people are largely unaware of the law, which currently states that anyone under the age of 18 who consensually or non-consensually creates, sends, or receives an intimate image can be charged with child pornography and placed on the ACT sex-offenders register.

YWCA Canberra's Youth Programs Team Leader, Ciara Duggan, states that "the current laws can be very confusing to young people in relation to receiving or taking an image, as these laws are different to sexual intercourse laws for the same age group."

"Not only are the laws confusing, but young women also often feel pressured into sending intimate images to impress a boy. In the instance where her image is shared non-consensually, there is a cultural tendency towards self-shaming where victims believe they should just "get over it" if their image is shared without their knowledge or consent."

Under the current law, young people are unlikely to seek justice because of the associated shame and fear of the reactions of their family and peers. Even when victims do understand the law, they do not want to be responsible for putting their peers on the ACT sex-offenders register.

In meeting with youth engagement professionals, one youth worker commented that "In many instances, I hear young people say 'well it's their fault for sending nudes in the first place.' Not only does this compound the victim's guilt and shame, it excuses the perpetrator whilst sending a dangerous message that there are no repercussions for these types of crimes. It also makes victims less likely to come forward, and tells young people, especially females, that they should be ashamed of their body."

When we asked if and why the law should be changed, one youth worker stated that "At the moment we have a whole culture around digital intimacy that requires changing. Young people aren't adequately considered under the current laws, nor are the immense recent changes in digital and social media. The current laws, as they are, can

have damaging immediate and long term effects, for both the victims and perpetrators."

YWCA Canberra's Youth Engagement Officer, Annie-Lea Rowley, agrees that current laws need to change. "Amending the law would allow young people to give consent when sharing intimate content of themselves, and may help to remove the fear of prosecution and victim shaming that is systemic in our society."

Educational programs are also necessary to bring about a cultural shift away from victim blaming, and they must address the root causes of sexual assault and the objectification of women.

In some instances, alternative sentencing measures could be utilised, such as restorative justice and community service, for low and first time offences, which would encourage more victims to come forward.

YWCA Canberra Executive Director, Frances Crimmins, states that "primary prevention and education are required to change current toxic attitudes that lead to gender based violence. I strongly encourage the government to amend the law quickly to protect young people and women, and I commend all victims who have the strength to seek justice and speak out against perpetrators of digital violence."

The passing of the Crimes (Intimate Image Abuse) Amendment Bill 2017 is a positive step in that it makes it an offence to share intimate images without a person's consent. However, in order for this law to be effectively implemented, the community, parents, teachers and young people need to fully understand it. We are calling on the ACT Government to ensure that adequate resources are directed towards education and public awareness, so that the law is fully accessible to those who seek legal recourse.

If you have been the victim of non-consensual sharing of intimate images, contact the Office of the [eSafety Commissioner](#), or your local [Legal Aid](#) office.

CHANGE THE COURSE: ADDRESSING SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON ANU CAMPUS

Last week the Australian Human Rights Commission released its [landmark report](#) into the nature and extent of sexual assault and harassment on campus.

The findings have legitimised the long fought battle of activists and vindicated those survivors who have felt ignored by their institutions for decades. Students across the country have taken to the streets to demand justice and to call on Universities to take swift and bold action.

The data paints a particularly bleak picture of ANU, with the rates of sexual assault double the rate of universities nationally, and with over half of ANU students having experienced some form of sexual harassment in 2016.

We caught up with on-campus leaders, ANUSA's President James Connolly & PARSA's President Alyssa Shaw, to get their perspectives on the survey results and what they are calling for.

Can you provide us with some background on this issue of sexual assault on campus?

It's important to remember that sexual assault is not a new issue. ANU's Student Association (ANUSA) and the Post Graduate and Research Association (PARSA) have been working for years to address the toxic cultural issues on campus, the lack support for survivors and the inadequate accountability for perpetrators of sexual violence, all of which have enabled this issue to persevere.

What advocacy and student engagement is happening address this issue?

The Student Associations advocacy has centred on two key areas 1) addressing the systemic issues that have allowed sexual violence to become rampant in universities and 2) upholding the dignity of survivors.

Both Student Associations have worked with the ANU to get the university to fund an external, independent review of ANU's policies on sexual assault and sexual harassment with a view to producing a centralised policy. With the release of the report, student organisations hosted a Speak Out event to provide a platform for survivors and supporters to demand change. A safe space was also organised on campus to enable students to access various forms of support including legal advice.

With news that the ANU has appointed a sexual assault counsellor, ANU has been called a leader in this space. Would you say this is true?

This is a positive initiative that I'm immensely proud to have been a part of and these positive developments are a direct result of ongoing student advocacy and activism.

It also true to say that this should have been done years ago. The fact that this is being celebrated reflects on the broader university sector and just how much more needs to be done before universities show they're taking this issue seriously.

ANU has committed to measures that address the need to support survivors, which we welcome. Now the ANU needs to move beyond support for survivors, to investigating allegations and ensuring justice in order to end sexual violence

What else can the university do to address the on-campus sexual assault?

ANUSA and PARSA are making a number of demands that have now been issued to ANU. These demands are underpinned by two core principles: to create culture of belief for survivors and a zero tolerance approach for perpetrators. We believe that this can be achieved by:

- Engage in a process of restorative justice: The ANU must make amends for its past and present mishandling of incidents and acknowledge that this has silenced survivors & failed to hold perpetrators to account.
- Establishing a centralised sexual assault and harassment policy as well as a centralised office to respond to reports of sexual violence in all forms.
- Resource and fund specialised staff to properly support student survivors and responders.

You can access the full list of recommendations [here](#).

What are you calling for and what can others do to support your goals?

Students can play a powerful role in holding the ANU accountable in any way they feel comfortable. They can write and email the ANU Executive demanding action on any of the above reforms, because we need to keep up the pressure and remind them that this issue isn't going away.

The ACT Government also has obligations under the Human Rights ACT and can play a powerful role in influencing the university to strengthen its responses, as well as funding prevention strategies. Systemic change will require a society wide effort to shift the culture that perpetuates these behaviours both on and off campus.

To find out more about YWCA Canberra's position on this issue, read [Frances Crimmins, Executive Director's opinion piece](#) in this week's Canberra Times.



THE 2017/2018 ACT BUDGET – HOW DID WOMEN FAIR?

In July this year, the ACT Government handed down the [2017-2018 budget](#), and we have since undertaken an analysis of what the implications are for local women, girls, and their families.

In our [Pre-Budget Submission](#), we called on the ACT Government to appropriately resource the Office for Women, and for the Policy and Cabinet Division of the Chief Minister Treasury and Economic Development Directorate to drive this agenda across Government departments. So, we were naturally concerned to learn that in this budget round, the implementation of the Women's Plan (the Plan) did not receive a single dollar of funding in its first year.

The Plan is intended to be a guiding framework for a whole-of-government approach to addressing key issues impacting women and girls in the Territory. It delegates responsibilities to each ACT Government directorate, allowing them to achieve their own gender equality outcomes, and to apply a gendered analysis to understand how all government policies and programmes impact women.

These are all crucial and significant steps towards addressing gender inequality in the ACT. Our concern is that given the implementation of the first year of the Women's Plan has gone unfunded, how will the Government ensure this work is prioritised within directorates?

In more positive news, it was encouraging to see that the ACT Government reaffirmed its commitment to addressing domestic violence by continuing funding for the [Safer Families Package](#), with the announcement that the [Family Safety Hub](#) will now link up existing family violence services to provide a more holistic and integrated response for women experiencing violence. This is a necessary initiative that will benefit women, allowing them to access required services in a complex system.

We continue to advocate for the ACT Government to invest in primary and secondary prevention strategies to ensure that we tackle the root causes of domestic violence. This firm stance is backed by international evidence, demonstrating that violence is preventable, which is crucial to the long-term goal of achieving gender equality.

A critical component of this work is to tackle negative cultural norms and gender stereotypes among young people and children.

The ACT Government's commitment to tackling bullying, particularly experienced by LGBTQI+ students, is evident in their sustained funding to the Safer Schools package, and the establishment of the Office for LGBTQI+ Affairs.

Social and emotional learning components are important in tackling bullying in the playground, however, a holistic curriculum would address gender norms and their relationship with violence. An example of this is YWCA Canberra's [Respectful Relationships](#) program, which has been proven to promote more egalitarian relationships, which are characterised by shared decision-making and reduced violence.

To achieve these longer-term outcomes beyond the playground, the ACT Government must commit to

implementing a holistic curriculum that is part of a broader strategy in preventing violence.

We are calling on the ACT Government to proactively include women in the future of this city, and to ensure they are equal contributors and beneficiaries to Canberra's growth and expansion.

Gender equality cannot wait - future budgets

will continue to fail women until a regulatory approach is taken where all decisions are considered through a gendered lens.

We will hold the ACT Government accountable to the commitments it has made to women. We were able to use the post-budget process to raise these concerns when our Executive Director, Frances Crimmins provided evidence to the [ACT Estimates Committee](#) earlier this year.

We are working closely with the Office for Women to design two forums targeting leadership and policy professionals across all ACT Government Directorates.

These events will provide a critical platform for key government stakeholders to come together to discuss the most effective strategies in achieving gender equality, and how individual directorates can take leadership on this across their diverse work areas.

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EVENTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Country to Canberra's [2017 Leadership Competition](#) is now open and it's bigger than ever before!

Young Women Speak Out (YWSO) is running an advocacy and campaigns program for young feminists. YWSO is about creating space for young women to identify the issues that matter to them and to take action for progressive change. [Applications are now open](#) until the 23rd of August. You can read all about it on our blog where we [interview with Project Leads Amy Blain and Hannah Gissane](#).

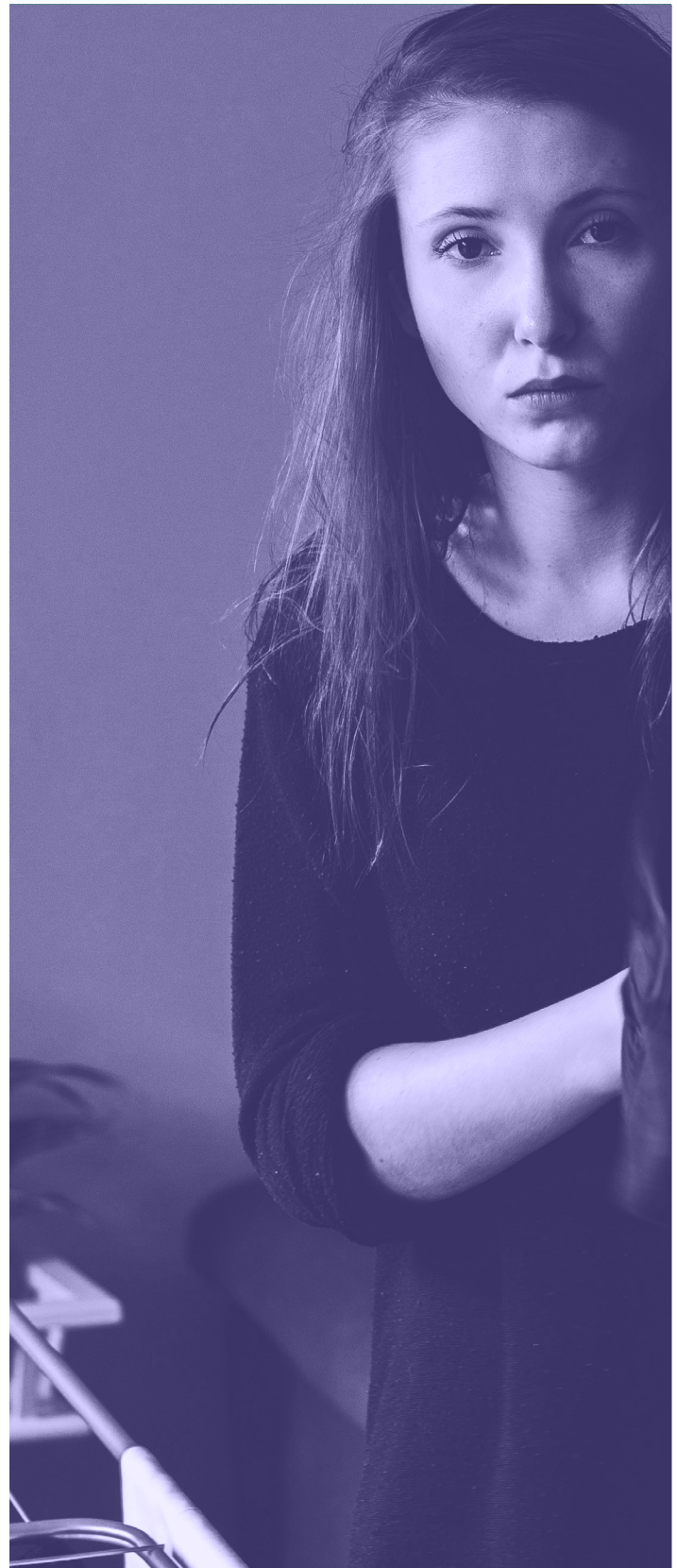
Are you looking to effectively mobilise and build community engagement in your campaigns? The Change Agency is accepting applications for its [Fellowship community organising program](#).

Passionate about women's rights and global change? Apply for a one-year or short term-internship with the [World YWCA in Geneva](#).

Are you a talented writer and eager to share your views on gender equality with the world? Then you should consider applying to be part of our [new blogger series](#).

Women's Centre for Health Matters is running a [housing affordability forum](#) on the 13th September. The information we receive from women at the forum will be included in WCHM's submission to the Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on Planning and Urban Renewal Inquiry into Housing. You can RSVP by calling 02 6290 2166 or by [email](#).

[For Purpose Connect](#) is a networking event for people working for purpose. On Thursday September 14th, Mark Chenery from Common Cause Australia will be talking about the use of values and frames in messaging.



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