

LEADING THE CHANGE: THE PATHWAY TO GENDER EQUALITY



YWCA CANBERRA

About YWCA Canberra

YWCA Canberra is a feminist, secular, not-for-profit organisation that has provided community services and represented women's issues in Canberra since 1929.

We are part of the World YWCA network, which connects 125 countries across the globe. Our rich history of supporting women and girls in Canberra through the Great Depression, the Second World War, and the rapid social and cultural changes Canberra has experienced in recent years, continues to inform and influence our work.

Today we provide quality, innovative services for women, including female-identifying and non-binary people, girls and families in the ACT and surrounding regions. We work in the areas of children's services, community development, housing, youth services, personal and professional training, women's leadership and advocacy.

As a membership-based, non-religious organisation, we encourage the participation of people of all cultures, beliefs and ages in our movement. Strengthened by diversity, we welcome members who are committed to recognising and celebrating the value of every human being.

Acknowledgement

YWCA Canberra proudly recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the right to own and control their cultures, and pays respect around these rights. YWCA Canberra commits to respecting and actively supporting the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and world views.

INTRODUCTION

The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) is in a unique position to Lead the Change in gender equality. With a proud history of progressive public policy, the ACT has demonstrated a propensity for innovation when addressing complex social issues.

The ACT was the first jurisdiction in Australia to enact a human rights act. Legislated in 2004, the Act has an explicit statutory mandate to respect, protect and promote civil and political rights.¹ This legacy continued in 2016 when the ACT led the way in becoming the first jurisdiction to establish gender parity (52 per cent of female-identifying MLAs) in the Legislative Assembly.

Structure and methodology

This Leading the Change report analyses the current status of women in Australia, and more specifically in the ACT across four priority areas:

- Gender responsive government
- Equality in the workplace
- A life free from violence
- Housing security

For each area, the current position of women is analysed and assessed, best practice initiatives and opportunities for change are explored and key recommendations for the ACT context are proposed.

The methodology used in researching and drafting the report is both qualitative – analysing published reports, policies, academic and practitioner research and government commitments – and quantitative – using data retrieved from publically-available sources.

International obligations to advance the rights of women

There are a number of international obligations and commitments relevant to the rights of women and girls. However, the central focus for this report are the targets embedded within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), in particular SDG 5 – *Achieve gender*

*equality and empower all women and girls.*² The YWCA movement is committed to supporting communities and governments to achieve the SDG targets, with an internal target of ensuring ‘100 million women and girls transform power structures to create justice, gender equality and a world without violence and war’ by 2035.³ Supporting the development of societies to facilitate the sustainable inclusion of all women is central to the work of the YWCA movement.

As part of SDG 5, governments have a responsibility to eliminate all violence and discrimination against women and girls (SDG 5.1, 5.2), acknowledge and value unpaid care work and promote a culture of shared responsibility within households by providing progressive social policies (SDG 5.4), enable women’s equal participation and leadership in political, economic and public life (SDG 5.5), and enforce legislation and policies to promote gender equality and empower women and girls (SDG 5.C).⁴

In 2015, Australia endorsed the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and participated in international discussions to shape the goals.⁵ While non-binding, the Federal, state and territory governments have a commitment to progress the agenda both domestically and internationally.⁶ In July 2018, Australia will deliver its first Voluntary National Review to the UN High Political Forum on the progress of the 2030 Agenda.⁷

LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Gender responsive government

YWCA Canberra recommends that the ACT Government:

- streamline strategic oversight of gender equality in the ACT through positioning the Office for Women in the Chief Minister's directorate
- reinstate ACT Women's Budget Statements, including a gendered critique of the impact of budget allocations on the lives of girls and women
- fast track the implementation of the ACT Women's Plan through dedicated resources for the Office for Women with transparent targets and evaluation measures and ensure it is applied across government.

Equality in the workplace

YWCA Canberra recommends that the ACT Government:

- incentivise and support companies to introduce progressive paid parental leave entitlements that encourage shared care arrangements, build a culture that normalises male employee's uptake and supports the development of the bond between mother and child
- enact a Gender Equality Act that is informed by evidence-based international models and includes tangible quotas and targets
- preclude non-compliant employers of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* from tendering for ACT Government contracts. This is currently a Commonwealth Government requirement
- re-consider employers with a history of substantiated sexual harassment claims and breaches of discrimination law tendering for ACT Government contracts.

A life free from violence

YWCA Canberra recommends that the ACT Government:

- adopt a shared responsibility approach to work with ACT-based universities to end endemic sexual assault and harassment on campus by ensuring a consistent approach to primary prevention, with all new students provided with mandatory respectful relationships and consent education that is relevant to diverse student populations
- develop, fund and implement a new *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy* from 2018
- increase funding to specialist women's services, including services equipped to appropriately respond to intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as disability, religion, race, ethnicity and sexuality
- introduce a long-term strategy for primary prevention, including funding mandatory implementation of Respectful Relationships education (including consent education) for all staff and students from kindergarten to year 12 and university settings
- introduce a statutory, positive definition of consent based on the concept of a free and voluntary agreement, into the *Crimes Act 1900 (ACT)*.

Housing security

YWCA Canberra recommends that the ACT Government:

- identifies and addresses the intersectional vulnerabilities of women with disability through targeted consultation and specialist support
- upholds and implements the Livable Housing Design Guidelines for new dwellings
- consult with older women, women with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and sole-parent households to develop innovative housing models that meet their unique needs
- fund specialist and culturally-appropriate housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women escaping domestic violence
- work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address the need for additional Indigenous-led housing support and service provision and fund additional culturally-appropriate training for employees of mainstream housing and homelessness services
- invest in social and affordable rental housing stock to suit the specific needs of large families, including unlocking land to supply affordable rentals
- provides land tax reductions to private landlords who lease their properties to fellow Canberrans at 75 per cent or less of market rates for properties managed by ACT registered community housing providers.

Through the Council of Australian Governments, the ACT Government should support the Federal Government to:

- Develop a National Housing and Homelessness Strategy that includes actions and measurable targets that will create additional social and affordable permanent housing for women, and particularly for older women in each state and territory.
- Implement a comprehensive Federal Government strategy to address the current financial insecurity of older women. To include a review of superannuation policy and legislation, Commonwealth rent assistance and the national income support system.
- Implement a comprehensive Federal Government Strategy to address the underlying causes of gendered economic inequality, including eliminating the wage gap, reviewing the superannuation system, promoting the adoption of measures to redistribute unpaid care, reviewing child care support, desegregating Australia's gendered workforce and increasing women's participation in leadership.
- Establish a Seniors Housing Gateway Program to better address the housing support needs of vulnerable older women. This will include locating a central older persons housing information and support service in each capital city, improve Specialist Homelessness Service responses to older women, expand the Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) Program and improve service integration with the aged care sector.
- Ensure that National aged care policy and programs also address housing adequacy – especially for those programs that are predicated on delivering care services to women in their own homes.
- Develop better national data collection and better data informed responses based on a gendered data collection and analysis. This will inform better policy and strategy for programs that target older women.

A GENDER-RESPONSIVE GOVERNMENT

Introduction

Australia has a proud history of gender-responsive governments. Spearheaded by grassroots feminist community and political activism and supported by the establishment of 'femocrats' within government departments from the mid-1970s, Australia emerged as a global leader in effective gender mainstreaming.⁸ In 1984, Australia was the first country to implement a federal women's Budget analysis – a process which was eventually implemented in all jurisdictions.⁹ These systems existed without significant political challenges until the 1990s.¹⁰ In the ACT, gendered budget analysis was an integral part of the Budget process until 2008, when the last ACT Women's Budget Statement was published.¹¹

This section will explore best practice in gender-responsive governance – namely, gender mainstreaming, budget analysis and policy integration – with a focus on the Australian experience at a national level and within the ACT. A case study on the implementation of gender-based analysis (GBA) to capture diversity indicators and embed GBA across government in Canada will also be featured. Similar to Australia, Canada developed strong gender mainstreaming practices in the early 1970s, long before the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995.

Gender responsive government — theory and practice in Australia

Gender mainstreaming was established as the internationally-recognised best practice strategy for governments to pursue gender equality and the visible integration of gender perspectives in policy development at all levels of government at the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action.¹² Australia's leading work in developing 'national women's policy machinery' throughout the 1970s inspired the United Nation's approach to gender mainstreaming.¹³ Australia's expert-bureaucratic model, which institutionalised gender mainstreaming within the central coordinating unit of government, consequently became a key feature of the international approach.¹⁴

As noted in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the 'necessary conditions' for effective gender responsive government were agreed to be:

- location at the highest possible level in the Government, falling under the responsibility of a Cabinet Minister
- institutional mechanisms or processes that facilitate, as appropriate, decentralised planning, implementation and monitoring with a view to involving non-government organisations and community organisations from the grass-roots upwards
- sufficient resources in terms of budget and professional capacity
- opportunity to influence development of all government policies.¹⁵

However, as commentators have noted, by the 1990s to early 2000s, the dominant neo-liberal political discourse resulted in the 're-prioritisation' of policy agendas, increased emphasis on the role of the individual in social welfare responses and the dismantling of the women's policy machinery within government.¹⁶ The language of 'mainstreaming' facilitated the demise of gender-specific policy analysis (including the provision of gender budget analyses) in Australia with a new political discourse – 'governing for the mainstream'.¹⁷

A decline in the rigour of gender budget statements characterised the early 2000s – focusing on government policy achievements for women rather than whole-of-government policy analysis.¹⁸ Analysis by the National Foundation for Australian Women (NFAW) of the 2017-18 Federal Budget highlighted the difficulty of understanding how national policies affect men and women differently in the absence of gendered analysis.¹⁹ This is similarly reflected in the states and territories, with Women's Policy Units being shifted from central coordination agencies to line agencies with varying degrees of status and resources.²⁰ In the ACT, the Office for Women was moved from the Chief Minister's Directorate to the Community Services Directorate in 2006, where it currently remains.²¹

The last ACT Women's Budget Statement was released in 2008, which provided an overview of government's achievements for women rather than a gendered critique of the impact of budget allocations on the lives of women and girls in the Territory.²² The ACT Government has committed to delivering annual Women's Budget Statements in the second year of the *ACT Women's Plan (2016-26)*. This is consistent with analyses by scholars who have argued that gender mainstreaming strategies, including budget statements, have not been adopted systematically, resulting in inconsistencies in the visibility of gender in government policies nation-wide.²³

Gender-responsive government in the ACT

In 2016, the ACT led the way in becoming the first jurisdiction to establish gender parity (52 per cent of female-identifying MLAs) in the Legislative Assembly. In 2017, the percentage of women represented on government boards and committees reached 48 per cent – the highest of all states and territories.²⁴ There is also a requirement for peak sporting organisations funded by the ACT Government to reach at least 40 per cent of women's representation on their boards over the next three years. The Ministerial Women's Advisory Council – appointed in 2017 and continuing in 2018 demonstrates the ACT Government's commitment to receiving expert advice from female representatives.²⁵

There is opportunity for the jurisdiction to become a national leader in gender equality for women both within and outside the Legislative Assembly. The implementation of the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26* (the Plan) is an important step for the jurisdiction, however, as at 2018, the Plan is yet to be fully resourced for effective implementation.²⁶ While we welcome the ACT Government's recent pre-Budget announcement that it will provide \$696,000 over the next four years to implement key actions under the ACT Women's Plan, YWCA Canberra will continue to advocate for continued and additional resourcing for the Office for Women. With the first year of the First Action Plan (2017-2019) completed, there is little visibility on accountability mechanisms such as evaluation and reporting processes.²⁷ Moreover, the ACT's whole-of government approach to gender analysis is not embedded in

consistent and systematic processes led by the Chief Minister's Directorate.

An agreed priority for executive reform in the Parliamentary Agreement for the 9th Legislative Assembly is a commitment to 'undertake disability and gender impact analysis as part of the [government's] triple bottom line (TBL) framework, and ensure that all relevant staff are trained in TBL analysis'.²⁸ However, as noted in the 2012 ACT Government's TBL Assessment Framework, the undertaking of a gender impact assessment is optional – dependant on whether gender impacts are identified in preliminary assessments.²⁹ The First Action Plan of the Women's Plan includes actions to 'research and develop appropriate Gender Impact Statements for use across Directorates'.³⁰ However, the Action Plan does not specify how the Impact Statements would be used across Directorates, how they would be funded and what monitoring, reporting and accountability mechanisms are in place to oversee their implementation.³¹ Without strategic implementation and appropriate resourcing, such initiatives have limited scope for success.

Best practice and future opportunities

Critiques of gender mainstreaming approaches both within the Australian context and internationally have emphasised the need for the strategy to be 'revitalised' to capture the diversity of women and their experiences.³² Research on gender mainstreaming strategies in Canada and Australia has found that recognition of the diversity of women's experiences, including gender-diverse women and men has been lost through the institutionalisation of gender mainstreaming, lack of funding of women's organisations and lack of nuance in gender analysis.³³ In the ACT, systematic data collection and disaggregation on the basis of gender as well as other intersectional factors such as race, ethnicity, religion, age and disability would enable government to develop nuanced understandings of how policies could impact on population groups. Canada's recent implementation of a gender-based analysis action plan (2016-2020) demonstrates a best practice approach to address intersectionality and diversity within whole-of-government gender analysis strategies (case study one).³⁴

CASE STUDY ONE: Canada's approach to diversity in gender based analysis.

In 2015, the Canadian Government renewed its commitment to gendered budget analysis (GBA) by mandating that the Minister of the Status of Women ensures that government policy, legislation, and regulations are sensitive to the different impacts that decisions can have on men and women.³⁵

The 2016 Office of the Auditor General's Report *Implementing Gender-based Analysis* found that while significant progress had been made since GBA had begun to be applied to government policy 20 years earlier, there were still barriers in ensuring GBA was consistently embedded across government.³⁶ This has since led to the development of a comprehensive *Action Plan on Gender-based Analysis (2016-2020)* focused on achieving gender equality for women, men and gender diverse people across government.³⁷ As part of the Action Plan, an analytical tool (GBA+) was developed to assess how diverse groups of women, men and gender-diverse people experience policies, programs and initiatives.³⁸

GBA+ is operationalised with specific actions, making the plan a powerful instrument for policy change. Actions include mandatory training for GBA+ for government departments, enforcing the application of GBA+ in the initial stages of policy development cycles and ongoing assessment of government departments' implementation of the tool.³⁹

The Canadian GBA approach goes beyond data disaggregation by gender to consider how diverse groups of women, girls, men and boys may be differently impacted by public policy decisions. Since 1985, Statistics Canada, in collaboration with Status of Women Canada, has published a gender-based statistical report, *Women in Canada*, every five years. The reports enable the Canadian government to identify important trends related to key populations (Aboriginal and immigrant women, senior women, visible minority women and girls), workforce participation, educational attainment and unemployment.⁴⁰

Key lessons from the Canadian experience:

- gender-based analysis tools which recognise diversity within women's groups as well as the broader population provide a more comprehensive picture of population dynamics
- disaggregation of data by gender, age, sexuality, race, religion and disability provides an accurate picture of population dynamics
- regular reporting provides government with accurate and evidenced-based data on population trends
- gender-based analysis is a whole-of-government responsibility and is most effective with tangible deliverables and targets for implementation.

Recommendations

That the ACT Government:

- streamline strategic oversight of gender equality in the ACT through positioning the Office for Women in the Chief Minister's directorate
- reinstate ACT Women's Budget Statements, including a gendered critique of the impact of budget allocations on the lives of girls and women
- fast track the implementation of the ACT Women's Plan through dedicated resources for the Office for Women with transparent targets and evaluation measures and ensure it is applied across government.

CONCLUSION

Effective gender responsive government requires strong commitment from within and outside government to developing a gender equal society. The history of gendered policy analysis and the success of past approaches both in Australia and internationally, demonstrates that establishing whole-of-government strategies to address gender equality within the development and implementation of policy is still critical. Research and practice has found that expanding gender-based analysis to include intersectional issues such as sex, race, religion, sexuality, ethnicity and disability delivers more inclusive policy. However, for gender-based strategies to be effective, governments need to provide appropriate resourcing, develop specific and tangible targets and establish visible accountability mechanisms to monitor progress.



EQUALITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Introduction

The workplace persists as a site of discrimination, inequity and harassment for many women across Australia. The most recent gender pay gap statistics from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) revealed that the current gender pay gap for full-time employees sits at 15.3 per cent – a small decrease from 15.9 per cent as at November 2016.⁴¹ Data from both WGEA and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) demonstrate that the gender pay gap favours ‘full-time working men over full-time working women in every industry and occupational category in Australia’.⁴² Data indicates that the gender pay gap has barely shifted over the past 20 years.⁴³

This section explores the state of equality in the workplace for women in Australia and more specifically in the ACT by assessing the impact of unpaid caring roles on women’s workforce participation and by exploring discrimination and harassment experienced by women at work in Australia. Best practice examples of initiatives to promote gender equality in the workplace will be explored, along with opportunities for change.

Gender pay gap and workforce segregation

In the ACT, the gender pay gap sits at 12.6 per cent – an increase of 1 per cent between 2016 and 2017.⁴⁴ The jurisdiction has the fourth lowest gender pay gap nationally, with South Australia leading at 10.3 per cent.⁴⁵ It is important to note that while Canberra is traditionally considered a public service town, 50 per cent of Canberra’s workforce is employed by over 25,000 private companies – where the gender pay gap is typically more pronounced.⁴⁶ The construction industry, one of the fastest growing sectors in the ACT, traditionally has a large gender pay gap nationwide.⁴⁷

In the ACT Public Service (ACTPS), women account for 64.9 per cent of the workforce – 16 per cent higher than the representation of women in the ACT workforce.⁴⁸ However, a gender pay gap still exists in the ACTPS, at a rate of 2.2 per cent (excluding senior executives) and 3.1 per cent (including senior executives). The pay gap within the ACTPS has only decreased 0.5 per cent

between June 2016 and June 2017.⁴⁹ Research into the progress of gender equality in the Australian Public Service (APS) has found that the APS Gender Equality Strategy launched in 2016 has initiated a stronger focus and ‘sparked conversations’ on the importance of gender equality across the APS.⁵⁰ A change in culture and leading from the top, including seeing men in leadership roles adopt flexible work practices, have been noted as critical steps to change culture and embed gender equality within the APS.⁵¹

In 2016, the ACT parliament was the first jurisdiction to achieve gender parity – shaping a pathway for improved gender equality for women. In the 2017-18 Budget, the ACT Government committed \$1 million over four years to develop and deliver initiatives to address the low proportion of women in male-dominated trades, and \$147,000 to the ACT Fire and Rescue Recruitment College to encourage women’s participation as part of the Women in Emergency Services Strategy.⁵²

The ACT Government is developing a Diversity Register which will be supported by a pilot board traineeship program. The register will focus on industries where female representation is low, with sporting associations required to meet the 40 per cent female representation target by 2020. YWCA Canberra has run a similar board traineeship program for over a decade, which has been recognised as best practice by bodies such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

The First Action Plan (2017-19) of the *ACT Women’s Plan 2016-26* (the Plan), commits to investigating procurement strategies that promote gender equity and develop materials to support Directorates and contractors to embed Gender Equity Strategies.⁵³ These deliverables will be outlined in the forthcoming First Action Plan Year 1 Progress Report, due to be published in May 2018.

Challenges to women's participation in the workforce

Unpaid care and flexible working arrangements

The unequal distribution of unpaid domestic labour – also referred to by economists as 'household production' – reinforces unequal gender stereotypes and contributes to the persistence of gender inequality in the workforce.⁵⁴ In Australia, women spend 64.4 per cent of their average weekly working time on unpaid labour, while men only spend 36.1 per cent of their time.⁵⁵ Over a women's life, time out of the workforce (including paid or unpaid parental leave) contributes to an accumulative poverty that leaves women with less than half the superannuation as men at retirement.⁵⁶ According to the 2016 census, women make up 69.1 per cent of all part-time employees and 56.4 per cent of all casual staff in the Australian workforce.⁵⁷ While part time employment is an important feature of flexible working arrangements offered by employers, it is disproportionately accessed by women in order to balance unpaid care responsibilities – having a dramatic impact on their life-long earnings.⁵⁸

Paid Parental leave and Early Childhood Education and Care

Paid parental leave schemes not only help to redistribute unpaid care work between men and women, they contribute to tackling workplace cultures that have historically discriminated against women.⁵⁹ In Australia, corporations are starting to lead the way in terms of introducing paid parental leave schemes.⁶⁰ This is in part the result of the national Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme which opened opportunities for a shared responsibility approach to PPL provisions between government and employers.⁶¹ For example, Westpac led the way in 2010, when it announced up to 39 weeks in superannuation contributions, in addition to its existing parental leave entitlements of 13 weeks superannuation and 13 weeks at full pay.⁶²

Internationally, Iceland introduced a 'father quota' in 2003 to engage fathers and secondary carers in the uptake of parental leave.⁶³ This initiative provides men with a 3-month long non-transferable paternity leave entitlement which is reported to have been successful in helping to change practices and attitudes towards

parental roles and quickly had a 90 per cent uptake rate.⁶⁴

Crucial to balancing work and caring responsibilities is access to quality early childhood education and care (ECEC). Research has found that when women have access to quality and affordable ECEC they return to the workforce, and in Australia, that women's increased participation in the workforce could benefit the Australian economy by 6 billion dollars by 2050.⁶⁵

Sexual discrimination and harassment in the workplace

The Australian Human Rights Commission's (the Commission) 2012 sexual harassment national phone survey, found that 21 per cent of all Australians over the age of 15 had experienced sexual harassment at work.⁶⁶ For women, 25 per cent reported that they had experienced sexual harassment and 90 per cent of female respondents reported they had been sexually harassed by a man.⁶⁷ Reports from men revealed that 16 per cent had experienced sexual harassment at work.⁶⁸ A survey undertaken in 2017 by Unions ACT of 15- 25 year olds, similarly found that sexual harassment at work is a pervasive problem. Seventy per cent of respondents reported having experienced bullying or harassment at work – seventy eight per cent of those respondents were female.⁶⁹

Opportunities for change

There are increasing calls for the utilisation of legal measures to enforce key mechanisms for the advancement of gender equality. The lack of legislation in Australia enabling government to direct its institutions to implement gender equality strategies has been identified as a key weakness of the Australian system.⁷⁰ However, this is changing with the introduction of Victoria's gender equality strategy which articulates the role of law in establishing equal rights and influencing social norms. Among various reforms, the strategy also commits to enacting a Gender Equality Act.⁷¹

A leading best practice approach is Iceland's Gender Equality Act 2008 (case study two).⁷² In 2017, Iceland became the first country to legislate gender pay equity.⁷³

CASE STUDY TWO: A Gender Equality Act in Iceland

The *Act on Equal Status on Equal Rights of Women and Men* aims to 'establish and maintain equal status and equal opportunities for women and men, and thus promote gender equality in all spheres of society.' The Act further states that 'all individuals shall have equal opportunities to benefit from their own enterprise and to develop their skills irrespective of gender'.⁷⁴

Key features:

- Strong institutional features for enforcement and accountability: the Centre for Gender Equality has the authority to administer operations mandated under the Act. The Centre for Gender Equality, Gender Equality Complaints Committee and Gender Equality Council function independently of each other.⁷⁵
- The Gender Equality Complaints Committee examines cases and delivers rulings to determine whether violations of the Act have been committed.⁷⁶
- The Gender Equality Council works with the Centre for Gender Equality and advises the Minister of Social Affairs and Social Security on policy-making matters pertaining to gender equality.⁷⁷
- Organisations with more than 25 employees are required to develop a gender equality program or gender mainstreaming practices into internal policies. Breaches of the Act are reportable and organisations will be fined until they comply with legislation.⁷⁸
- Gender wage equality is specifically addressed – outlining that 'men and women working for the same employer shall be paid equal wages and enjoy equal terms of employment for the same job or jobs of equal value'.⁷⁹

Recommendations

That the ACT Government:

- incentivise and support companies to introduce progressive paid parental leave entitlements that encourage shared care arrangements, build a culture that normalises male employee's uptake and supports the development of the bond between mother and child
- enact a Gender Equality Act that is informed by evidence-based international models and includes tangible quotas and targets
- preclude non-compliant employers of the *Workplace Gender Equality Act 2012* from tendering for ACT Government contracts. This is currently a Commonwealth Government requirement
- re-consider employers with a history of substantiated sexual harassment claims and breaches of discrimination law tendering for ACT Government contracts.

CONCLUSION

Gender equality in the workplace requires concerted effort from both government and employers. Barriers to women's equal participation in the workplace are preventable — requiring legislated commitment to gender equality and the development of progressive workplace practices.



A LIFE FREE FROM VIOLENCE

Introduction

Violence against women, in particular family, domestic and sexual violence, is a pervasive issue in Australian society. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's (AIHW) 2018 report, *Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia*, 1 in 5 women and 1 in 20 men have been sexually assaulted and/or threatened since age 15.⁸⁰ However, violence against women is more concealed – with intimate partner violence considered 'the greatest health risk factor' for women aged 25 to 44 years.⁸¹

This section will provide a current snapshot of violence against women – both in Australia and in the ACT. Best practice program and policy initiatives and opportunities to tackle gender-based violence will also be outlined.

Violence against women — a national crisis

Family and domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness for women and children and costs Australia \$22 billion annually.⁸² Women at greater risk of family, domestic and sexual violence include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, young women and women with disability.⁸³ Alarming, Indigenous women are 32 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence than a non-Indigenous woman.⁸⁴ In the ACT, from 2015-16 the victimisation rate for family and domestic violence (FDV)-related assaults rose by 33 per cent – to 240 victims per 100,000. Women in the ACT were also three times more likely to experience a FDV-related assault within an intimate partner relationship than men.⁸⁵

The Australian Human Rights Commission's (the Commission) *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities* similarly found chilling results. The report found that 72 per cent of female students from the Australian National University and 67 per cent of female students from the University of Canberra reported being sexually harassed in 2016.⁸⁶ Universities' responses to the Commission's recommendations were positive and women's rights organisations will continue to monitor the progress of implementation.⁸⁷ Governments must take a

shared responsibility approach and work with universities within their jurisdictions to address sexual assault and harassment on campus.

Violence against women — coordinated responses

Australia has made significant progress in this area, with governments at all levels committing to tackling violence. Cemented as a national priority through the establishment of the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children 2010-2022* (National Plan), the Commonwealth Government, states and territories have committed to a coordinated approach towards violence prevention.⁸⁸

The ACT has taken steps to embed these goals into state-level strategic frameworks, including the *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011-17* and the 2017-18 *Safer Families Package* of \$23.5 million over four years.⁸⁹ Initiatives funded under the latter, such as a residential behaviour change program for men at risk of using violence and the successful government-led community consultation to develop the Family Safety Hub in 2017 are welcome.⁹⁰ However, the 2017 decision not to re-fund the *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy* – instead supporting 'local initiatives' in line with the *National Plan* - is concerning.⁹¹ Under the *National Plan*, states and territories are required to support systemic domestic violence prevention programs and as Our Watch has found – 'isolated initiatives are not enough'.⁹² While the *Safer Families Package* has been developed to do this, it is funded through a 30 dollar flat rate 'domestic violence levy' imposed on all Canberra households rather than being viewed as a core responsibility of government.⁹³

Increasing funding to specialist women's services, including services supporting women experiencing intersecting forms of discrimination, such as disability, religion, race, ethnicity and sexuality, is also critical to effectively address violence against women. The ACT Government's commitment to this is reflected in the 2016-17 *Safer Families Package*.⁹⁴

Best practice and opportunities for change

Our Watch's research into strategies to eliminate gender-based violence has found that gender inequality and unequal gender norms are key determinants of violence against women. Their research has also found that violence is preventable through complementary public education campaigns, programs, policy and

legislative responses.⁹⁵ In their evidence paper on the inclusion of Respectful Relationships education in schools in Australia, Our Watch established that the education of children and young people in how to develop and maintain respectful relationships is essential to achieve the results of the *National Plan*.⁹⁶

See case study three for an overview of the Respectful Relationships program.

CASE STUDY THREE:

Best practice: Respectful Relationships curriculum

Our Watch recommends that an effective, evidence-based Respectful Relationship (RR) curriculum must address and include seven core elements:

1. address drivers of gender-based violence
2. have a long term vision, approach and funding
3. take a whole school approach
4. establish mechanisms for collaboration and coordinated effort
5. ensure integrated evaluation and continual improvement
6. provide resources and support for teachers
7. use age-appropriate, interactive and participatory curriculum.⁹⁷

An independent evaluation of RR projects in 2008-09 and 2012-13 found that young participants were able to apply learnings to their life and make positive changes in their relationships. Young people also reported that they felt they had learned relationship skills which helped them identify respectful relationships and learn about strategies to implement if they were in unhealthy relationships.⁹⁸

International research into the effectiveness of sexuality education has found that programs which address gender power dynamics in relationships are five times as successful as those that did not.⁹⁹

As noted by Our Watch, the importance of RR programs embedded in systemic primary prevention initiatives within school settings is critical. Whole-of-school approaches to RR include the broader curriculum, school policy, practices, culture and ethos, the working conditions and culture experienced by staff and relationships modelled to students in the broader school community.¹⁰⁰ Whilst Our Watch acknowledges that there are varying understandings of 'best practice' for RR both in Australia and internationally, the core elements identified above and the approach outlined by Our Watch reflect the current evidence-base.¹⁰¹

Australia's commitment to primary prevention education is also reflected in the *Third Action Plan 2016-19* (of the *National Plan*) that commits all states and territories to 'support schools and teachers to deliver age-appropriate and evidence-based respectful relationships education to all school children covering sexual violence,

[and] gender equality issues' as well as other relationship issues.¹⁰²

However, as at 2018, the ACT and the Northern Territory (NT) are the only two jurisdictions that have not funded a respectful relationships curriculum.¹⁰³ There are a range of options

available to ACT government schools to support students experiencing and at risk of using violence, including the Trauma Understanding and Sensitive Teaching in Schools (TRUST) program, social and emotional learning programs and schools' participation in the White Ribbon Breaking the Silence Schools program and the Love Bites program. However, research has found that the most effective programs address issues such as consent, gendered power dynamics and the drivers of gender equality in a systematic way – the core focus of Respectful Relationships education as per the National *Third Action Plan*.¹⁰⁴

Primary prevention is not limited to the education sector. Research has shown that primary prevention initiatives embedded in policy and practice for all areas of public life such as schools, workplaces, in sport, the media and in place-based settings, are a critical part of developing a long-term and collaborative

approach to violence prevention.¹⁰⁵ As noted by Our Watch, adopting an intersectional approach to prevention is critical to appreciate how 'other forms of structural inequality and discrimination intersect with gender inequity to exacerbate violence'.¹⁰⁶

To ensure the ACT is aligned with other jurisdictions, YWCA Canberra also supports the inclusion of a positive definition of consent, based on the concept of free and voluntary agreement, in the *Crimes Act 1900* (ACT).¹⁰⁷ This proposed legislative change, recommended by the Australian Law Reform Commission's 2010 *Family Violence – A National Legal Response* report, comes less than a year after the ACT criminalised the sharing of intimate text images, without consent.¹⁰⁸ These steps forward are commendable and demonstrate a strong commitment to gender equality.

Recommendations

That the ACT Government:

- adopt a shared responsibility approach to work with ACT-based universities to end endemic sexual assault and harassment on campus by ensuring a consistent approach to primary prevention, with all new students provided with mandatory Respectful Relationships and consent education that is relevant to diverse student populations
- develop, fund and implement a new *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy* from 2018
- increase funding to specialist women's services, including services equipped to appropriately respond to intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as disability, religion, race, ethnicity and sexuality
- introduce a long-term strategy for primary prevention, including funding mandatory implementation of Respectful Relationships education (including consent education) for all staff and students from kindergarten to year 12 and university settings
- introduce a statutory, positive definition of consent based on the concept of a free and voluntary agreement, into the *Crimes Act 1900* (ACT).

CONCLUSION

Australia has reached crisis point, with rates of violence against women, in particular family, domestic and sexual violence, at unacceptable levels. Violence against women can be prevented through cultural and behavioural change initiatives systemically embedded in all areas of public life. Whilst governments at all levels have committed to the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children*, coordinated initiatives within jurisdictions are critical to ensure that the *National Plan's* goals can be successfully achieved.



HOUSING SECURITY

Introduction

Appropriate, affordable and stable housing is essential to the wellbeing of both individuals and communities. Housing insecurity and homelessness among women is a significant social policy issue, and is increasing in severity. Women are Australia's 'primary beneficiaries' of housing support services – including recipients of Commonwealth Rent Assistance and public housing.¹⁰⁹ In 2016-17, the number of women (57,547) presenting to specialist homelessness agencies has overtaken the number of men (54,169) for the first time since 2011-12.¹¹⁰ In the ACT in 2016-17, women accounted for more than half of those people accessing specialist homelessness services.¹¹¹ The intersection between gender and violence is central to housing and homelessness and requires gender-responsive policy to appropriately address the diverse and multiple needs of women.¹¹²

Domestic and family violence is the single largest driver for people, in particular women, seeking housing and homelessness support.¹¹³

In 2016-17, women were the largest group of people (at 72,000) who sought homelessness services because of family and/or domestic violence.¹¹⁴ In the ACT, 38 per cent of clients (compared with 21 per cent nationally) sought specialist homelessness services due to relationship/family breakdown.¹¹⁵ An effective gender responsive approach to homelessness must recognise the gendered structures and inherent power relations within housing, resulting in the disadvantaged position of women.¹¹⁶

Women are not a homogenous group, and as such, housing and homelessness services need to reflect the diversity of their needs throughout different stages of their lives. Several groups of women experience high rates of housing insecurity and homelessness. This section will focus on the needs and experiences of four specific groups of women in the ACT including older women, women with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and one-parent families headed by females. Homelessness Australia have identified older women, women with disability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as being at significant risk of

housing stress and homelessness.¹¹⁷ This section will also recommend best practice and gender-responsive housing solutions which address the diversity of needs of women in the ACT and beyond.

Women with disability

Women with disability are one of the most invisible, excluded and neglected groups of Australian society – facing multiple forms of discrimination, structural inequality, poverty and social exclusion.¹¹⁸ Women with disability are faced with compounded levels of discrimination, making them more vulnerable to housing stress and homelessness.¹¹⁹ For this reason, the needs of women with disability must be specifically addressed, separate to other groups of people with disability and other minority groups of women.

In the ACT, there is a shortage of accessible housing for people with disability in the private rental market.¹²⁰ While research on the housing experiences and needs of people with disability is limited, People with Disabilities ACT (PWDACT) argues that housing options for people with disability are generally more limited than for the broader population and emphasise the importance of developing independent housing options in the community.¹²¹

Critical to this is the ACT Government working with the private sector to ensure new homes are built to Livable Housing Design silver and gold levels.¹²² Key drivers for implementation of the Liveable Housing Design Guidelines include Australia's ageing population, the 1 in 5 Australians with disability and those people who acquire disability in older age.¹²³

Older women

Single older women comprise a rapidly growing segment of those experiencing housing insecurity and homelessness. The ABS has found that the number of older Australian women who were homeless on Census night in 2016 increased by 31 per cent from the 2011 Census.¹²⁴ A variety of factors have contributed to the emergence of older single women as a group at heightened risk of housing insecurity, including years of unpaid caring, wage inequities, less secure work tenure, insufficient superannuation, relationship breakdown, death of a partner and the rising cost of living.¹²⁵

While there has been an increased focus on older women and pathways into homelessness, there is little research available on effective housing solutions for older women.¹²⁶ While older women live in shared accommodation on and off, this is considered a last resort and an unstable and short-term solution,¹²⁷ with researchers emphasising the importance of older women having the ability to 'age in place', particularly for long-tenure and autonomous housing models.¹²⁸ They argue houses should be pre-designed for the changing physical requirements of older people as they age and become less mobile.¹²⁹

Consultations undertaken as part of ACT Shelter's 2014 research project exploring older women's housing vulnerability in the ACT found that security of tenure and independent living are of critical importance to older women.¹³⁰ Older women identified that they preferred a

secure townhouse, small house, or cottage, at ground level, with a garden, a second bedroom to care for their grandchildren, and the choice to own pets.¹³¹

Research in Australia and internationally has found that older women's pathways to homelessness reflect a combination of structural and individual factors – breaking the myth that homeless older women are substance abusers, unwell or incompetent.¹³² Structural factors contributing to older women's homelessness are largely a result of life long gender inequality.¹³³ This aligns with findings from both international and Australian research which similarly emphasise the interrelationship between poverty, violence, gender and homelessness and the well-established thesis that homelessness and disadvantaged is experienced differently by men and women.¹³⁴

A national action plan to address older women's homelessness is necessary. Aligned with the recommendations of women's rights organisations and advocates, a gender-responsive strategy should include support which actively prevents older women from falling into homelessness unnecessarily and additional social and affordable permanent housing for older women in all jurisdictions.¹³⁵ Improved data collection, disaggregated by gendered data collection and analysis, will also enable policy makers to make more informed decisions on targeted programs to reduce older women's homelessness.¹³⁶

CASE STUDY FOUR:

Spotlight on YWCA Canberra's housing for older women

YWCA Canberra's houses for older women provide an innovative solution to older women who fall through the cracks of traditional social and affordable housing models. Older women often do not meet the eligibility criteria for much transitional and affordable housing models, placing them at significant risk of homelessness.¹³⁷ For safety reasons, many older women fear going to traditional homelessness refuges and transitional houses.¹³⁸ To meet this need, YWCA Canberra houses provide older women with a safe option which meets their specific needs. As group homes, the houses also provide the women with a much needed safety net and community network, which older women may have lost as a result of their homelessness. Anecdotal feedback from our housing services confirm the powerful impact of this community support on the safety, happiness and wellbeing of older women.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in particular women, are over-represented in national homelessness statistics – 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seeking homelessness are women fleeing family/domestic violence, and 21 per cent of women seeking homelessness support as a result of domestic violence are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.¹³⁹ The correlation between family and domestic violence and homelessness is particularly relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who are 35 times more likely to be victims of domestic violence than non-Indigenous women.¹⁴⁰ In the ACT, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in homelessness statistics at seven times the rate of non-Indigenous people seeking support, compared to their representation in the ACT population.¹⁴¹

Experts in social housing and homelessness service provision emphasise the importance of culturally appropriate social housing service supply, as well as Indigenous-led housing service delivery.¹⁴² An understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kin culture is essential in the design of housing support for Indigenous Australians, however, this is often overlooked.¹⁴³ The needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are distinct to the needs of non-Indigenous older women. As such, it is essential that housing policies address their unique needs.

Research into culturally-appropriate urban social housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people emphasises two key factors. Firstly, that there is a requirement for culturally-appropriate mainstream housing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the broad housing service system.¹⁴⁴ Indigenous-led housing organisations, Indigenous staff and communities play a key role in effectively shaping and delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.¹⁴⁵ While culturally-appropriate service is highly contextual, there is sufficient evidence of leading best practice in such service provision that should be implemented.¹⁴⁶

Sole-parent families headed by women

According to the ABS, one-parent families are projected to rise exponentially (from 47 per cent in 2011 to 70 per cent in 2036) with women heading the majority (83 per cent) of one-parent households in 2011.¹⁴⁷ In the ACT 79.9 per cent of sole parent households are headed by women, according to the 2016 Census.¹⁴⁸ Research commissioned by ACTCOSS, *Hidden disadvantage in the ACT: Report for ACT Anti-Poverty Week*, found that 23 per cent of small areas¹⁴⁹ in the ACT had a higher proportion of people living in a 'sole parent family in a low income household' than the national average.¹⁵⁰ According to the report, this rate was higher than for people living in low-income households (10 per cent) and children (16.1 per cent), suggesting that sole-parent families in the ACT are 'doing it [particularly] tough'.¹⁵¹

These findings align with anecdotal feedback from YWCA Canberra's housing and women's services, with staff and clients telling us that single women with children struggle to make ends meet. According to Homelessness Australia, children experiencing homelessness are 'almost always in a family group, 'most likely with a single mother'.¹⁵²

Housing stress and risk of homelessness for women with children in sole-parent headed and low income households is significant. Housing options need to be tailored to suit the needs of this specific group of women and their children.



Best practice and future opportunities

Innovative housing models such as Victoria's Launch Housing (formerly HomeGround Real Estate) which leverage private investment for the provision of affordable rental housing have been recommended to governments seeking to reduce pressure on public and social housing.¹⁵³

This model has been successful because it allows landlords to claim tax concessions, irrespective of the affordable housing rental rate.¹⁵⁴ To build on this innovative model, YWCA Canberra

recommends that the ACT Government support ACT registered community housing organisations to provide affordable rental properties to those in need. To complement existing Commonwealth taxation incentives (capital gains tax incentive and tax deduction for the gap between full market rent and affordable housing rent) YWCA Canberra recommends that landlords (who lease their properties to fellow Canberrans at 75 per cent or less of market rates through ACT registered community housing providers) pay reduced ACT land tax.

Recommendations

That the ACT Government:

- identifies and addresses the intersectional vulnerabilities of women with disability through targeted consultation and specialist support
- upholds and implements the Livable Housing Design Guidelines for new dwellings
- consult with older women, women with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and sole-parent households to develop innovative housing models that meet their unique needs
- fund specialist and culturally-appropriate housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women escaping domestic violence
- work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address the need for additional Indigenous-led housing support and service provision and fund additional culturally-appropriate training for employees of mainstream housing and homelessness services
- invest in social and affordable rental housing stock to suit the specific needs of large families, including unlocking land to supply affordable rentals
- provides land tax reductions to private landlords who lease their properties to fellow Canberrans at 75 per cent or less of market rates for properties managed by ACT registered community housing providers.

Through the Council of Australian Governments, the ACT Government should support the Federal Government to:

- Develop a National Housing and Homelessness Strategy that includes actions and measurable targets that will create additional social and affordable permanent housing for women, and particularly for older women in each state and territory.
- Implement a comprehensive Federal Government strategy to address the current financial insecurity of older women. To include a review of superannuation policy and legislation, Commonwealth rent assistance and the national income support system.
- Implement a comprehensive Federal Government Strategy to address the underlying causes of gendered economic inequality, including eliminating the wage gap, reviewing the superannuation system, promoting the adoption of measures to redistribute unpaid care, reviewing child care support, desegregating Australia's gendered workforce and increasing women's participation in leadership.
- Establish a Seniors Housing Gateway Program to better address the housing support needs of vulnerable older women. This will include locating a central older persons housing information and support service in each capital city, improve Specialist Homelessness Service responses to older women, expand the Assistance with Care and Housing (ACH) Program and improve service integration with the aged care sector.
- Ensure that national aged care policy and programs also address housing adequacy - especially for those programs that are predicated on delivering care services to women in their own homes.
- Develop better national data collection and better data informed responses based on a gendered data collection and analysis. This will inform better policy and strategy for programs that target older women.

CONCLUSION

Australia is facing a housing crisis which is disproportionately affecting women and driving them into homelessness. Addressing the unique needs of women and considering the additional disadvantage particular groups of at-risk women face in accessing housing and homelessness services is central to the successful delivery of housing options. In addition to this, policy and funding must be dedicated to supporting women escaping family and domestic violence — a key driver of the overrepresentation of women who seek homelessness and housing support services.

CONCLUSION

The ACT has the ability to be the jurisdiction that leads the change in gender equality. This report has outlined the many positive achievements of the ACT and progress made by the ACT Government. The report has also recommended opportunities and initiatives that the ACT Government could adopt to take the next steps towards gender equality.

YWCA Canberra believes gender inequality is preventable and is able to be achieved in the ACT through the implementation of gender responsive governance mechanisms, policies and practices to promote gender equal workplaces, primary prevention programs to eliminate the drivers of violence against women and housing and homelessness services which are sensitive of the needs of all women.

In section one, the history of gender responsive government in Australia and the ACT was explored, assessing both the successes and shortcomings of past approaches. Research and practice has found that coordinated whole-of-government approaches to gender policy analysis are critical for success. The experience of gender-based analysis in Canada demonstrated how gendered policy approaches can be systematically applied to deliver more inclusive policy, also giving attention to intersectional issues such as sex, race, religion, sexuality, ethnicity and disability. However, for gender-based strategies to be effective, it is clear that governments need to provide appropriate resourcing, develop specific and tangible targets and establish visible accountability mechanisms to monitor progress.

In section two, the status of equality in the workplace both in the ACT and Australia more broadly was assessed. The barriers to women's equal participation in the workforce – disproportionate unpaid caring responsibilities, time out of the workforce and the over-representation of women in casual and part-time employment – were shown to be preventable. Examples of progressive workplace policies to increase the male uptake of parental leave and Iceland's Gender Equality Act demonstrated how more can be done to reverse workplace inequity.

Section three described the current state of violence against women in Australia and in the ACT as reaching crisis point. National statistics underscore the endemic nature of this crisis, requiring coordinated national leadership supported by strategic action from within jurisdictions. A focus on the Respectful Relationships curriculum highlighted the importance of educating children and young people on issues such as consent, gender and power in an effort to prevent the perpetuation of a culture which enables gender-based violence.

Finally, section four analysed the housing and homelessness crisis in Australia and how the ACT Government can most effectively address the multiple needs of women. Women are overrepresented in the primary beneficiaries of the housing sector, indicating that more must be done to prevent women slipping into homelessness. Innovative approaches to social and community housing were explored, providing the ACT with a clear direction for future action.

Gender equality is an achievable goal if the needs and interests of women are at the centre of the development of policies and programs. YWCA Canberra hopes this report provides a clear impetus for action.



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