



YWCA CANBERRA

## **2020-2021 ACT Government Budget**

**Consultation Submission**  
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## **Acknowledgement of Country**

YWCA Canberra proudly recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to own and control their cultures and pays our respect to these rights. YWCA Canberra acknowledges the need to respect and encourage the diversity of Indigenous cultures and to respect Indigenous worldviews, lifestyles and customary laws.

We extend our respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who for thousands of years have preserved the culture and practices of their communities on country.

This land was never surrendered, and we acknowledge that it always was and will continue to always be Aboriginal land.

## **About YWCA Canberra**

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

Our mission is 'We strengthen communities by supporting girls and women through our services and advocacy' and our vision is 'Girls and women thriving'.

We provide essential, quality services for women, girls and families in the ACT and surrounding regions. We work in the areas of children's services, community development, homelessness and affordable housing, youth services, personal and professional training, women's leadership and advocacy.

We are externally accredited against the [Quality Improvement Council \(QIC\) Health and Community Service Standards \(7th Edition\)](#). Accreditation against the QIC standards support us to improve client and community engagement, diversity and cultural appropriateness, management systems, governance and service delivery, while committing to a cycle of continuous quality improvement.

In addition to the QIC standards, we are accredited against the following external client related service standards for our key areas of work:

- [Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission](#)
- [National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Aged Care](#)
- [National Regulatory System for Community Housing](#)
- [Registered Training Organisations Standards](#)

We also benchmark our work in homelessness and affordable housing against the Community Housing Standards.

Through our national Affiliate Association with YWCA Australia, we are part of the World YWCA network, which connects 120 countries across the globe.

## Introduction

YWCA Canberra welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission for the 2020-2021 ACT Government Budget consultation process. Our submission outlines areas where immediate action can be taken to achieve a greater social impact within current Budget allocations, as well as areas where a modest additional investment can result in significant benefits to the community.

We are dauntless, bold and sustainable and have been providing valuable community services to Canberra women, girls and families for 90 years. As a longstanding feature of the Canberra community our goal is to contribute to building a city where women are safe in their homes, thriving in their workplaces and where their safe access to public spaces is enabled through both design and policy levers.

We welcome the ACT Government's work to develop a wellbeing index for the 2020-2021 ACT Budget. As a contributor to the public discussion and community consultation in the development of the index, we have an interest in seeing gender equality underpin the wellbeing narrative and budget delivery into the future.

Recommendations made in this submission align with recommendations made in our [2019-2020 Budget Submission](#) and also in our flagship policy document; [Leading the Change: The Pathway to Gender Equality Report](#). This submission therefore covers the following priority areas:

1. Gender responsive budgeting and governance
2. Building safe and affordable housing for women
3. A life free from violence
4. Equality in the workplace

## **Priority area 1: Gender responsive budgeting and governance**

The Budget is a core policy mechanism of government and gender responsive budgeting (GRB) provides government with the opportunity to consider priorities and investment alongside the unique the social and economic roles and contributions played by men and women.

GRB acknowledges that consideration of the gendered effects of policies can be used as a powerful means to promote equality and identify otherwise unforeseen and detrimental gender-based outcomes.

### **Recommendation 1.1: Develop a robust 2019-2020 Women's Budget Statement in line with best practice examples**

In 2015 the Canadian Government mandated the Minister of the Status of Women ensure that government policy, legislation, and regulations were sensitive to the different impacts that decisions can have on men and women. In this regard, the annexure of the 2019 Canadian Budget included a gender report which analysed all measures against possible gender impact. We provided a snapshot of this annexure to the ACT Budget Estimates Committee as part of our statement to the committee on the 2019-2020 Budget.

For the first time in 10 years, a Women's Budget Statement was released by the ACT Government in 2019-2020. While YWCA Canberra applauded this action, we were disappointed with the contents of the document. Of primary concern was its failure to make coherent links between stated initiatives and deliberate gender outcomes. Rather, the document simply repackaged broader budget initiatives, some of which appeared to be mainstream measures with no significant implications for women.

Women's Budget Statements are an important means to measure resource allocation against the government's own gender equity goals, as outlined in the ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026. Critically, they provide a comprehensive gender analysis on budget measures. We call on the ACT Government to invest in sufficient resources and analysis to develop a robust Women's Budget Statement as part of the 2020-2021 ACT Budget.

### **Recommendation 1.2: Position the Office for Women in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate**

Women and girls make up more than half the population in the ACT. Due to their unique position in the labour market and broader society, policy and legislative reform has the potential to have unforeseen impacts on the wellbeing of women.

The ACT Office for Women was moved from the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) to the Community Services Directorate (CSD) in 2006, where it has since remained.

We continue to call for the relocation of the Office for Women from CSD to CMTEDD. This repositioning would facilitate a whole of government approach and commitment to the successful implementation of the Women's Plan and streamline information and oversight for the releases of the Women's Budget into the future.

The move would also facilitate greater collaboration with the important work of the Office for LGBTIQ Affairs, as both areas have a key focus on gendered issues, fostering inclusion and celebrating diversity in the ACT.

### **Recommendation 1.3: Better reporting on the progress of the Women’s Plan including allocation of resources in the Second Action Plan.**

YWCA Canberra acknowledges the importance of the *ACT Women’s Plan 2016-2026*. However, we are concerned about the reporting of the year one reporting milestones<sup>1</sup>, particularly the absence of quantifiable outcomes on elements of the plan that are noted as ‘completed’. As the ACT Government progresses towards the Second Action Plan, it is imperative we take stock of what still needs to be achieved and measured from the First Action Plan.

We also welcome initiatives from the First Action Plan such as those which outline targets for women’s representation on government boards and governance bodies. However, we query whether the progress towards this target is being filled by effectively the same women across multiple placements or whether emerging women leaders are being appointed.

This year YWCA Canberra launched [Bringing on Board](#), a guide to establishing board diversity through a traineeship program. Based on our own experience, this guide will help other organisations implement such initiatives to build representation across Australia’s boardrooms. Our Board traineeship program has contributed to building the pool of qualified women available to take on board positions elsewhere and we encourage readership of the guide and uptake of similar initiatives as a way to meet gender quotas and ensure a depth of board talent is represented.

Along with the Women’s Centre for Health Matters (WHCM) and ACTCOSS we provided input to the design process for the Second Action Plan. This contextual analysis allowed us to play a role in analysing existing data, engage across government and the community sector and identify gaps across policies and programs. We welcomed the opportunity to inform the Second Action Plan, but we were disappointed that recommendations outlined in the initial discussion paper, were not underpinned by clear resource commitments and robust analysis of existing gaps. Without funding prioritisation, to reinforce broad statements of policy prioritisation, it is possible the full impact of gaps in services will not be appreciated in gender responsive budgeting terms. We hope that the Second Action Plan recognises this need for funding prioritisation and includes more thorough commitments to reinforce those priorities outlined in the discussion paper.

We call for a more rigorous approach to reporting on the progress of the Women’s Plan, including the collection and publicising of data outlining how milestones were met and the outcomes and impacts achieved.

### **Priority area 2: Building safe and affordable housing for women**

YWCA Canberra has provided feedback for the ACT Budget 2020-2021 through the Community Housing Industry Association (CHIA). As a member of CHIA we endorse its 2020-2021 Budget submission.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/1212471/First-Action-Plan-Detailed-Year-One-Reporting.pdf](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1212471/First-Action-Plan-Detailed-Year-One-Reporting.pdf)

## **Recommendation 2.1: Legislate for a permanent Land Tax Exemption for properties leased through registered Community Housing Providers**

We welcomed the ACT Government's move to pilot a land tax exemption pilot for people who lease their investment properties through registered Community Housing Providers. This reform, along with our exemption from the Agents Act (2003) allowed us to establish [Rentwell](#).

Since Rentwell launched in May 2019 we have tenanted 11 properties, with more in the pipeline. We have had over 50 property owners contact us enquiring about the service and continue to engage with many of these about next steps.

There is a huge demand from prospective Rentwell tenants, with our two most recent open homes attracting 15 interested parties each, with 8 applications completed for each property. Without initiatives like *Rentwell* it is possible that our clients would continue to struggle to find private rental properties that were affordable and offered sustainable tenure.

We call on the ACT Government to legislate for a permanent land tax exemption for properties leased through registered Community Housing Providers, and remove the current cap of exempting up to 100 properties by 2021.

While we acknowledge land tax is a revenue stream for the ACT Government, the cost benefit of providing affordable, appropriate and secure housing for people on low to modest incomes outweighs the lost revenue stream.

By preventing people from reaching crisis point, organisations like YWCA Canberra are alleviating indirect government costs such as the management of housing waiting lists and investment in tertiary services. The social, economic and wellbeing benefits delivered by sustainable and affordable housing connect people to local communities, schools and workplaces - a significant benefit to all Canberrans that cannot be quantified in financial terms alone.

## **Priority area 3: A life free from violence**

Regardless of whether a woman experiences violence in her life, the spectre of violence affects all women because it impacts on our decision making and how we move about the city. Our report, *Our Lives: women in the ACT*, revealed that women are acutely aware of their surroundings and safety when accessing public spaces after dark and that harassment and violence is a feature in the lives of too many women.

Young women reported the highest rates of experiencing domestic and interpersonal violence with 24 per cent of young women age 18-24 indicating that they had experienced emotional, physical, verbal or financial violence in a domestic or interpersonal relationship in the preceding twelve months.

Confusion about consent and the realities of controlling behaviours is disturbingly common among young people.<sup>2</sup> Our survey report highlighted that young women are particularly targeted by interpersonal violence which may occur in relationships not characterised by co-habiting.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://ncas.anrows.org.au/findings/youth-report-findings/>

YWCA Canberra continues to call for age-appropriate respectful relationships education from K-12 and the university setting as an effective and systemic measure to prevent violence against women from getting a foothold in young people's early relationships.

### **Recommendation 3.1: Implement Respectful Relationships education for all staff and students from K-12 and the university setting**

We acknowledge the ACT Government's work to date in introducing some elements of Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) in schools. However, the current ad-hoc approach falls short of implementing the core features and evaluation requirements that Our Watch flags as being fundamental to delivering successful outcomes for individuals and communities. We also note with interest the recent introduction of Positive Behaviours for Learning – a 'whole of school' approach to stamping out unsafe behaviour in schools.<sup>3</sup> A look at the [PBL behavioural matrix](#) reveals this program to be one focused on positive behaviours around use of school equipment and communal resources, respect for other people's belongings and privacy and being safe around cars and other school equipment. Again, while these programs may serve as a good means to measure student adherence to rules and willingness to learn, the program is not designed to introduce concepts such as positive relationships between student peers or between students and teachers.

Our survey highlights that experiences of young people and interpersonal violence are not uncommon, they are being exposed to bullying or harassment at young ages and for young women, this behaviour can carry implicit gendered motivations. In the absence of a school environment that promotes dialogue and reflections on how gender inequality can manifest in everyday life, there is a concern that programs to build outwardly 'respectful' students ultimately do little to eliminate deeply engrained sexist behaviour that can take hold at a young age. We are also concerned that where discussions on intimate partner violence, coercion or abuse do take place, they focus on hypothetical relationships without engaging students on what might be taking place in their relationships.

We also draw your attention to the 2017 Legislative Assembly inquiry in domestic and family violence which provided recommendations to the Assembly in its final report, released in 2019. In particular we note [Recommendations 6 and 7](#)<sup>4</sup> which call for *school based programs aimed at educating young people on recognising and combatting DFV to ensure there is a focus on violence prevention* and that the *annual report for the Education Directorate provide detail on educational programs directed at DFV prevention and an evaluation and assessment of the performance*, respectfully. Given these recommendations, their explicit references to DFV prevention and the substantial number of submissions to the inquiry calling for Respectful Relationships Education programs, we again urge the ACT Government to implement RRE in a meaningful and systematic way to Canberra's schools and colleges.

We also note the Education Directorate's testimony at ACT Budget Estimates Committee 2019-2020 where the Directorate's work with external organisations, including YWCA Canberra was referenced.<sup>5</sup> While YWCA Canberra is a licenced RRE practitioner working with Our Watch and local crisis services to improve resources and education around respectful relationships, we have not been engaged by the Education Directorate in recent times in regard to our RRE work.

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<sup>3</sup> [http://www.kaleenhs.act.edu.au/why\\_uchsk/positive\\_behaviours\\_for\\_learning](http://www.kaleenhs.act.edu.au/why_uchsk/positive_behaviours_for_learning)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/1405372/9th-JCS-06-Report-on-Inquiry-into-Domestic-and-Family-ViolencePolicy-Approaches-and-Responses.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1405372/9th-JCS-06-Report-on-Inquiry-into-Domestic-and-Family-ViolencePolicy-Approaches-and-Responses.pdf), pp. 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.hansard.act.gov.au/hansard/2017/comms/estimates30a.pdf>, pg. 673.

Further, with the recent liquidation of White Ribbon Australia, we also query how the gap in services available to teachers and principals such as *Breaking the Silence* will be filled.

We are also aware that the Australian Human Rights Commission report [Changing the Course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities](#) found that sexual harassment and violence is prevalent in Canberra's universities and colleges. We call on the ACT Government to work with universities and student representatives to create a city and campus life that is vibrant and safe for all students.

### **Recommendation 3.2: Develop a new, funded ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy, in line with national commitments**

In the past, the ACT Government took steps to embed the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children* (2010-2022) into territory level frameworks, including the [ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011-17](#) and the [Safer Families Package](#).

We welcome the initiatives funded under the *Safer Families Package*, such as a residential behaviour change program for men at risk of using violence and the community consultation to develop the Family Safety Hub in 2017.

However, we have concerns about the ACT Government's decision in 2017 to not invest in continuing the work of the now expired *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy* and instead support 'local initiatives' in line with the National Plan. Under the National Plan, states and territories are required to support systemic domestic violence prevention programs.

Importantly, Our Watch has found that 'isolated initiatives are not enough',<sup>6</sup> and it is clear that the Family Safety Hub does not negate the need for an up-to-date strategy and a new local plan.

We call on the ACT Government to develop a local plan to prevent violence against women and children as an urgent priority, in line with the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children* (2010-2022).

While the Safer Families Package has been developed as a local response strategy, it is funded through a 30-dollar flat rate 'domestic violence levy'. The levy system as a revenue mechanism brings the issue of family violence to the fore of the public's mind and we urge the ACT Government to pursue strong, ongoing public messaging and targeted reporting to continually ensure the levy is being used transparently, responsibly and creating positive changes to the lives of those experiencing family violence in Canberra.

The 2019-2020 Budget measure to provide training to front-line workers responding to family violence is welcomed, as are similar initiatives targeted to Directorate staff and managers. We look forward to learning more about the outcomes and impact of this training, and its contribution to a broader understanding of the dynamics of family violence and its capacity to detrimentally affect the working lives of those who experience it.

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<sup>6</sup> Our Watch, (2017) Submission No 23: Inquiry into domestic and family violence in the ACT – Policy Approaches and Responses, accessed at [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0003/1128657/Sub-No.-23-Our-Watch.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1128657/Sub-No.-23-Our-Watch.pdf) on 20 April 2018, p. 11.



### **Recommendation 3.3: Commit to greater transparency and gender disaggregated data collection on women's safety**

Our survey of 1090 women in Canberra found that many feel safe when moving about in public in general; however, responses reversed when asked about perceptions of safety at night. While more than 60 per cent of Canberra women feel 'very safe' or 'somewhat safe' in public spaces in general that dropped to 28 per cent when asked to consider their perceptions of safety after dark. In fact, 55 per cent reported feeling 'somewhat unsafe' or 'very unsafe' when accessing public spaces after dark.

In line with our recommendation for the ACT Government to prioritise gender responsive budgeting, we call on the ACT Government to apply a gendered lens to women's safety. While the ACT Policing Annual Report 2017-2018 lists perceptions of safety among Canberrans when considering a variety of personal or property crimes, the absence of gender disaggregated data in relation to perceptions of these crimes, including sex crimes and domestic violence, remains a serious flaw that limits our understanding of women's perceptions of safety.

### **Recommendation 3.4: Commit to introducing positive consent legislation into the Crimes ACT.**

In response to a Private Members' Bill introduced by Caroline Le Couteur MLA in April 2018, which sought to amend the *Crimes Act 1900 (ACT)*, specifically the definition of consent to one based on a 'free and voluntary agreement', the ACT Legislative Assembly instructed the JACS Standing Committee to commence an inquiry into the proposed amendments. YWCA Canberra participated in this inquiry through making a written submission and giving evidence to the committee. We also encouraged our members to make written submissions.

The Committee tabled its report on this inquiry in October 2018. This report included the recommendation that; *the ACT not consider or enact legislative change to introduce a definition of affirmative consent until the report from the current NSW Law Reform Commission inquiry in relation to sexual offences is presented.*

We note that the NSW Law Reform Commission recently published a series of [draft proposals](#), which it says will strengthen laws around sexual consent. The draft proposals would recognise that *a person who does not do or say anything to communicate consent does not, in law, consent to a sexual activity. That is, without communication of consent, there is no consent.*<sup>7</sup> The draft also recognises that someone who 'freezes' out of fear does not consent.

Given this development, we urge the Assembly to progress with the Committee's recommendations including the establishment of a working group to advise the government on how to improve prosecution outcomes for victims of sexual assault. As per the Committee's recommendations, we also urge the Assembly to amend the definition of consent based on the concept of a free and voluntary agreement and that a complimentary education program, focusing on young people, be established.

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<sup>7</sup> NSW Law Reform Commission, October 2019, <https://www.lawreform.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/Publications/Other-Publications/Draft-proposals/Draft%20proposals.pdf>, pg. 13.

## Priority area 4: Equality in the workplace

According to the 2018 [Australia Human Rights Commission's Survey into Sexual Harassment in Australia's Workplaces](https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/everyone-s-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual)<sup>8</sup>, the workplace remains a site of discrimination and harassment for many women across Australia. Our survey asked women whether they had experienced sexist behaviour in the previous twelve months. Where the respondent answered 'yes', they were then prompted to provide information about the location and whether they knew the perpetrator. Responses indicate that experiences of sexism among young Canberra women are so ubiquitous they are almost routine. Eighty per cent of women aged 18-24 reported experiencing sexism in the previous twelve months, for whom 33 per cent said the workplace was the site of the most recent experience.

**Recommendation 4.1: Ensure ACT Government procurement processes reflect a genuine commitment to workplace equality and that opportunities to better understand the gender pay gap in small organisations are explored.**

We acknowledge that the ACT Government is a national leader in the numbers of women in leadership roles in directorates and independent authorities. However, we remain concerned that for many women, the workplace is an environment where they experience sexism and harassment. The majority of respondents to the survey informing our report, *Our Lives: Women in the ACT* had experienced sexist behaviour in the preceding twelve months. Of those who had experienced sexism in the last twelve months, 41 per cent said it occurred in the workplace.

For more than 50 per cent of respondents age 25-44 the workplace was the location of their most recent experience of sexism and the perpetrator was nearly always known to them. When considered alongside the findings by the Australian Human Rights Commission which indicated that 43 per cent of those who make formal complaints of harassment experience negative consequences in the form of ostracization or being labelled a troublemaker, it is clear there is a real need for systemic reform<sup>9</sup>.

We welcome the steps the ACT Government has taken to date to improve employment outcomes for women undertaking non-traditional trades qualifications. While the [Women in Trades](#) program is a valuable incentive to support women in trades based jobs, however without systemic reforms to address the consequences of gender inequality, including workplace sexism and inequitable paid parenting leave even with trade qualifications it is possible that women entering male-dominated industries will still experience workplace behaviours that limit their full and equal participation.

As a large employer, the ACT Government should continue to implement reforms already outlined in the Women's Plan to promote equity and to continue to identify opportunities that build gender equality within the ACT public service and tendering processes. We believe there is value in the government collecting pay-roll tax data from employers in order to gain a better understanding of the gender wage-gap particularly among those in small enterprises and organisations (<100 employees) which are excluded from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency reporting requirements. YWCA Canberra supports the Secure Local Jobs Code and its objectives to prioritise procurement that demonstrates good practice in meeting workers entitlements. However, it is difficult to gauge the extent to which complying with the

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/everyone-s-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/everyone-s-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual>, pg. 73.

Secure Local Jobs Code guidelines is about more than meeting minimum existing requirements.

We call on the ACT Government to ensure the Secure Local Jobs Code ensures employers meet additional criteria to improve enterprise representation and create conditions that facilitate workplace equality.

**Recommendation 4.2: Introduce progressive paid parental leave entitlements that encourage shared parenting and build a culture that normalises male employees' access to parental leave.**

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. In Australia, corporations are leading the way in terms of introducing generous paid parental leave schemes that recognise parents as equal partners.

From 2017, PWC has offered flexible parental leave with superannuation contributions, with no minimum service requirement, for both men and women for up to 18 weeks. Medibank Private also followed suit in 2018 and now offers all prospective parents 14 weeks paid parenting leave within the first 24 months of a child's birth and includes the opportunity for both parents to take leave concurrently.

As a national leader in equity and inclusion the ACT Government is in a unique position to introduce balanced parental leave schemes to improve the historic division of labour between parents.

We note that the ACT Public Sector Administrative and Related Classifications Enterprise Agreement (2018-2021) precludes the opportunity for both parents to take concurrent paid parental leave, where both parents are employees of the ACT Public Service. More equitable parental leave delivers competitive recruitment incentives and is an opportunity to shift gender imbalances in child rearing. While 'Bonding Leave' provides a baseline for carers to take leave around the birth of a child, the limited duration available re-emphasises the division of caring responsibilities that can emerge in parenting.

**Priority area 5: Early Childhood Education and Childcare**

YWCA Canberra has provided Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in the ACT for more than 30 years. We care for more than 2000 children each week through our early learning centres, school age care programs and family day care scheme.

As a Children's First Alliance member we endorse its 2020-2021 ACT Budget submission.

