Ministerial Advisory Council on Women

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Women (MACW) is a body established by the Minister for Women in the ACT. The Council provides strategic advice to the ACT Government, through the Minister for Women, on issues affecting women in the ACT and provides a link between the Minister and women in the ACT community.

The Council is comprised of 12 to 14 women, who have a broad range of experiences. The 2012-2014 Council membership includes mothers, young women, older women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, business and professional women, women with disability, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. These women come from a variety of backgrounds including the community sector, health, government policy and the justice system. Many of the women who serve on the Council identify themselves as feminist.

The Council considers an important part of its role is to try to identify marginalised women in the community and to give those groups of women a ‘voice’. More generally, the Council also considers the important ways in which law, government policy and the culture of Australian society affects women in particular ways. It is part of the Council’s role to ensure that Australian governments appreciate women’s lived realities and the effect of law and policy on women.

The ACT Women’s Plan

The ACT Women’s Plan 2010-2015 (the Plan) is designed to provide a strategic policy framework for working with the community to improve the status of all women and girls in the ACT. The Plan was developed in 2009 following extensive consultation with the ACT community including through a discussion paper, a Women’s Summit, outreach consultation forums, an online survey and an ACT Government forum on gender analysis.

To complement the work of the ACT Office for Women in developing the Plan, the 2008-2010 Ministerial Advisory Council on Women consulted directly with groups of ACT women and girls, including marginalised women and girls, and provided a written submission on their findings.

Through consultation with women, women’s groups and community organisations in the ACT, the current Council continues to monitor progress of achievements towards the objectives of the Women’s Plan.
Purpose of MACW’s Report on the Women’s Plan

In 2013, the ACT Office for Women released its *First Progress Report* against the Plan. This progress report fulfils the ACT Government’s commitment to report against the indicators of progress of the Plan using data provided by the ACT Government directorates and external sources.

To complement this work, the 2012-2014 Ministerial Advisory Council on Women carried out a series of consultations with similar groups of women and girls to those consulted by the previous Council in 2009. Unlike in the first set of consultations, which informed the development of the Plan and its central themes and objectives, the primary purpose of the 2013 consultations was to track progress, and identify ongoing or emerging issues affecting women in the ACT. MACW then hosted a “Hand On” forum in May 2013 to consider emerging themes from these consultations and asked ACT women to propose solutions to address the concerns raised. These consultations, combined with the strategies proposed in the “Hands On” forum, form the basis of this Report against the *Women’s Plan*.

The Report will be provided to the Minister for Women and her ministerial colleagues and will inform the development of policy and planning in the ACT across all ACT Government Directorates through ACT Ministers and the Women’s Plan Implementation Group.

Consultations

The consultations carried out by MACW in 2013 mirrored those undertaken by the previous Council, which included women prisoners, women with disabilities, women lawyers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, community sector workers, old and young women.

The 2012-2014 Council additionally consulted women from an asylum seeker or refugee background, sole parents, women and mental health consumers and carers, and undertook a number of direct consultations with representatives from government and the community sector.

In compiling the report, MACW also had the benefit of learnings from recent research undertaken by the Women’s Centre for Health Matters on issues faced by women accessing the health system, older women, and women with disability (including a research project jointly undertaken with Women With A Disability ACT; *Strong Women, Great City*), and the YWCA’s *SheSpeaks* survey, which included valuable jurisdiction-specific data.

The “Hands On” forum provided a further opportunity to listen to the issues and ideas of over 70 women with direct links with a range of community groups, organisations and government. Their response to the issues raised in consultations across the economic, social and environmental objectives of the Plan has influenced this Report.
Structure of the Report

The first part of the Report summarises the key issues identified through MACW’s consultations and forum against the economic, social and environmental aspects of the ACT Women’s Plan and lists six overarching recommendations for Government action.

In the second part, MACW compares the findings of the ACT Office for Women’s First Progress Report with the issues raised through the consultation process, identifying in particular where there is room for improvement or opportunities for change in Government policy and planning. The issues raised in this section provide the basis for MACW’s recommendations to the ACT Government.

The third part of the Report comprises appendices that list groups consulted by MACW, references used to inform the Report and a consolidated summary of consultation and forum outcomes.
PART I

VISION
In the ACT, women and girls realise their potential, are recognised for their contribution and share in the benefits of our community.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STRATEGIC OUTCOMES</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ECONOMIC</strong></td>
<td>Women and girls equally and fully participate in and benefit from the ACT economy.</td>
<td>Women and girls equally and fully participate in sustaining their families and communities and enjoy community inclusion and wellbeing.</td>
<td>Women and girls equally and fully participate in planning and sharing a safe, accessible and sustainable city.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL</strong></td>
<td>Domestic violence and sexual assault</td>
<td>Culturally appropriate and gender sensitive services</td>
<td>Safe and accessible transport</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ENVIRONMENTAL</strong></td>
<td>Urban safety</td>
<td>The shift to mainstream delivery of services was identified as a grave concern in terms of negative impacts on the lives of women and girls in the ACT.</td>
<td>ACT women continue to raise concerns about the safety and accessibility of public transport to meet their needs and facilitate access to essential services.</td>
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**SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES RAISED IN MACW CONSULTATIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Issue</th>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term impact of gender pay gap</td>
<td>Women remain at an acute disadvantage in terms of accumulated wealth (superannuation) due to their disproportionate representation in low-income households, low-pay sectors and casual employment.</td>
<td>Domestically oriented and violent assault</td>
<td>Women supported the Government’s Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy but consistently pointed to its lack of resourcing and the need to align all service delivery with its key actions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Affordable and available childcare</td>
<td>The cost and unavailability of childcare remains a critical issue and a significant barrier to women entering education, training and the workforce.</td>
<td>Culturally appropriate and gender sensitive services</td>
<td>Urban safety</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and decision-making opportunities</td>
<td>There is an underrepresentation of women from vulnerable groups in leadership or decision-making positions, particularly women with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD women.</td>
<td>Affordable and available housing</td>
<td>Many ACT women identified the need for better lighting and/or police presence in parts of the ACT, which could be informed by broader use of women’s safety assessments in planning and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible working arrangements</td>
<td>Women emphasised the need to provide more education for employers to encourage flexible working and return-to-work arrangements.</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education and training opportunities</td>
<td>Vulnerable women find it harder to access education and training opportunities due in part to economic disadvantage and the lack of affordable childcare.</td>
<td>Women’s Safety Assessments – planning and events</td>
<td>Women supported the broader implementation of women’s safety assessments as a routine tool for planning and urban development across the ACT.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition and respect for women</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women identified endemic prejudice and marginalisation in the areas of health, justice and transport.</td>
<td>Environmental sustainability</td>
<td>Social inclusion and mental health benefits should be equal to safety and accessibility in the development of environmentally sustainable urban planning solutions.</td>
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MACW RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That there is a formal whole of government framework to embed an understanding of the different needs of women and girls into policy and practice across the work of all directorates, including:
   a. an annual roundtable of all ACT Ministers (and the Director General of each directorate), to be held in February each year, in which priorities and actions for the next year (as recommended by the Women’s Plan Implementation Group (WPIG)) are discussed and agreed;
   b. quarterly meetings of the WPIG, whose role is broadened from tracking progress against the ACT Women’s Plan to providing advice on priorities and actions to achieve the objectives of the Plan, and recommending and following up those priorities and actions through its directorates; and
   c. active engagement (at adviser level) across ministerial offices on identified priorities and actions.

2. In recognition of the social determinants of health, that a staged, comprehensive data collection exercise be undertaken by the Chief Minister’s Directorate to determine what is known about access to core infrastructure (including affordable housing, affordable and accessible childcare, health services and trauma/crisis support) by vulnerable groups of women in the ACT, consistent with the commitment to building statistical capability across Government.
   a. The data collection will include, but may not be limited to, the following groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (particularly young women), asylum seekers and refugees, women with disability, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, sole parents, older women, women with mental health issues, women with substance use issues and women exiting prison.
   b. The exercise will map the social policies that impact upon these groups’ access to core social infrastructure, including their pathways to economic security, good health and wellbeing.
   c. The data collected through the exercise will identify where there is a need for improved coordination and service delivery across government and for programs that are culturally competent, trauma-informed and/or gender-sensitive.

3. That in relation to the shift to mainstream models of funding in the ACT, and in particular the new funding model for homelessness:
   a. an evaluation framework is immediately put in place that will assess access to services going forward, and the capacity of the suite of services that currently operate to respond in a gender- and culture-sensitive way to demand; and
   b. service agreements to all homelessness providers include language that explicitly indicates an understanding of the gendered nature of violence against women and their children and commits to align homelessness services with the ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy.
4. That in relation to the introduction of DisabilityCare in the ACT:
   a. gender is embedded in the criteria which will assess allocation of the Enhanced Service Offers, and subsequently into all aspects of DisabilityCare preparedness in ACT;
   b. that staff working in any DisabilityCare-related capacity, especially newly recruited staff have gender awareness training, including an awareness of the impact on functionality of the experience of violence, neglect and abuse; and
   c. that an evaluation framework is immediately put in place that assesses the capacity of women with disability to access the services and supports they need under the new arrangements.

5. That in relation to the ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy:
   a. an annual reporting mechanism is put in place across all Directorates in the ACT to:
      i. list positive work undertaken that aligns with the Strategy; and
      ii. track monies spent on service delivery that responds to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or family violence, including crisis, health and justice responses;
   b. this data is used to better understand the cost, health and justice burden of violence against women and children in the ACT and guide policy and program delivery that supports the objectives of the Strategy, and provide an evidence base for the allocation of appropriate resources to the Strategy.

6. That in relation to the introduction of Women’s Safety Assessments in the ACT:
   a. they be embedded in the planning and risk management strategies of all events undertaken or overseen by the Territory and Municipal Services and Economic Development Directorates;
   b. they be embedded in the regular consultation, planning and risk management processes of the ACT Planning and Land Authority and the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate in relation to all new or retrofitting of old housing developments, health infrastructure planning and urban design;
   c. they be used in the development of accessible transport service solutions by ACTION Buses; and
   d. they be supported by ongoing funding for the Women’s Safety Assessment Register and associated training, currently implemented through a small funding allocation to the Women’s Centre for Health Matters from the Office for Women.
The *ACT Women’s Plan 2010-2015* (the Plan) sets out the ACT Government’s vision for working with the whole community to improve the status and lives of women and girls who live, work and study in the ACT. A critical focus of the Plan is to embed an understanding of the different needs of women and girls and men and boys into policy and practice, as a mechanism for improving gender equity.

The Office for Women’s *First Progress Report* highlights a number of the ACT Government’s key achievements over the life of the Plan which reflect this focus. These include:

- the introduction of annual reporting by all ACT Government directorates against a set of gender indicators, which will provide an evidence base from which to track and report on progress over time;
- the development of the *ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy 2011-2017*, which identifies key actions to end all violence against women and children in the ACT and which aligns with the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*; and
- the introduction of an across-government Triple Bottom Line Assessment Framework, which integrates gender impact, along with poverty and climate change, into policy development cycles.

MACW notes that the ACT Government, through the Minister for Women, has also actively participated in national policy development in relation to women, in particular through the COAG Select Council on Women’s Issues. The Select Council has undertaken some highly commendable initiatives, particularly in the violence prevention space. These initiatives include the establishment of a National Centre of Excellence to Reduce Violence against Women and Children; the engagement of media nationwide to assist in improved reporting of violence against women and children, and the development of a National Approach to Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Leadership and Participation in Governance and Decision-making. MACW notes that the ACT Government has committed to working through its own response to elements of these initiatives, and to ensuring national standards are maintained in the implementation of local policy and service delivery.

At a local level, MACW also notes the commitment of the ACT Government to recognising the contribution of individuals, business and community groups in taking actions to reduce violence against women and children, which is reflected in the introduction in 2013 of grants for special projects that support the objectives of the ACT Strategy (the Audrey Fagan Violence Prevention Grants) and Violence Prevention Awards. The ACT Government has also committed to refreshing the focus of its annual awards to women (which are announced on International Women’s Day each year) and will introduce a new suite of awards in 2014 –
the ACT Women of the Year Awards. These awards will recognise outstanding courage and/or contribution by individual women to the ACT community.

MACW applauds each of these initiatives, but notes that more work needs to be done to improve communication and coordination across ACT Government Directorates to harness opportunities to embed an appreciation of gender impact across the range of policy and program initiatives that impact on women and girls in the ACT.

MACW recognises that overarching improvements in engagement, coordination and process across Government are just one part of the solution, but that our Government can and should create the best possible conditions in which all its citizens thrive. The ACT Government as a whole ‘owns’ the Women’s Plan and should be responsible for its implementation. Improved use of WPIG will lead to less duplication across government, and less siloed decision-making in relation to issues that impact on women and girls.

MACW recommends that the Women’s Plan Implementation Group (WPIG) should be used as the primary mechanism for information sharing across directorates and to lead whole-of-government action to achieve the objectives of the Women’s Plan. WPIG should meet at least quarterly. Representatives from each Directorate on the WPIG should brief their senior executive on the outcomes of each WPIG meeting and list actions or initiatives for which their Directorate has responsibility. These briefings should then feed into annual Ministerial consideration of priorities and actions, which will provide high-level engagement in the Women’s Plan and a clear mandate for the actions undertaken by the WPIG.

**Recommendation 1**

That there is a formal whole-of-government framework to embed an understanding of the different needs of women and girls into policy and practice across the work of all directorates, including:

a. an annual roundtable of all ACT Ministers (accompanied by the Director General of each directorate) held in February each year in which priorities and actions for the next year (as recommended by the Women’s Plan Implementation Group (WPIG)) are discussed and agreed;

b. quarterly meetings of the WPIG, whose role is broadened from tracking progress against the Women’s Plan to providing advice on priorities and actions to achieve the objectives of the Plan, and recommending and following up those priorities and actions through its directorates; and

c. active engagement (at adviser level) across ministerial offices on identified priorities and actions.
ECONOMIC PROGRESS

**Strategic outcome**

Women and girls equally and fully participate in and benefit from the ACT economy

The *First Progress Report* highlights ongoing progress in closing the gender pay gap in the ACT, increasing pay for community workers and increasing access to childcare. However, it also notes that ACT women continue to be over-represented in low-income households, low-pay sectors and workforces where there is a high level of casual employment. Issues identified through MACW consultations demonstrate that efforts to equalise women’s participation in the ACT economy need to focus on improving conditions for our most vulnerable groups.

At MACW’s *Hands On* Forum in May 2013, Principal Research Fellow and Leader of the Women, Children and Families team at the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), Rebecca Cassells, presented a positive picture overall of women’s participation in the ACT economy, but noted that high-level statistics around the gender wage and pay equity gap mask underlying economic inequity amongst our most vulnerable groups. These include older women, sole parents, women from a culturally or linguistically diverse background, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with mental health issues and women with disability. Cassells research further indicates that:

- more bottom-income quintile households are headed by a woman than a man in the ACT;
- high labour force participation, together with caring responsibilities that are often bestowed upon women also means higher rates of stress and feeling ‘rushed and pressed’ for time;
- the increase in labour force participation and hours of work is not always met with an equal decrease in hours spent on unpaid work; and
- our labour force is highly segregated (women tend to work with women and men with men), and women are more likely to work part-time, which can restrict labour supply, wages growth, life time earnings and wealth accumulation.¹

Cassells made particular reference to the negative implications of ongoing employment, wage and wealth gaps for women in the ACT. These include: economic insecurity; low standards of living; lower life-time earnings; lower accumulation of wealth and retirement savings (superannuation); lack of economic and social autonomy; increased welfare reliance; and impeded economic growth.

MACW’s consultations with the vulnerable groups identified by Cassells confirm her view that women in these groups continue to be acutely disadvantaged by their economic circumstances, which limits their capacity to equally and fully participate in and benefit from the ACT economy.

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¹ Rebecca Cassells, *Economic environment for women in the ACT: An overview*; presentation to the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, 1 May 2013.
Participants in MACW’s broader consultations identified a number of barriers to exiting cycles of economic dependence. These included a lack of affordable housing, a lack of affordable and available childcare, and inflexible working hours or arrangements, particularly outside of the public sector. The latter two barriers also severely limit the capacity of women to access education and training opportunities and to establish pathways out of poverty and/or welfare dependence. Long term, this means those in our most vulnerable groups feel trapped in a cycle of economic dependence from which they are unable to escape.

MACW takes the view that living conditions, including economic security and stable housing, drive women’s overall health and wellbeing. Therefore, inequitable economic arrangements, unaffordable housing, and social policies which fail to fully recognise and address the barriers to accessing pathways to economic and housing security will impact negatively on women’s lives. That impact will extend to their children.

The issues raised in MACW’s consultations demonstrate that we need to understand better the barriers that our most vulnerable groups face in achieving economic independence, and the assistance they require to exit a cycle of dependence. This understanding must inform future policy and planning and shape the delivery of services to these groups.

**Recommendation 2**

In recognition of the social determinants of health, that a staged, comprehensive data collection exercise be undertaken by the Chief Minister’s Directorate to determine what is known about access to core infrastructure (including affordable housing, affordable and accessible childcare, health services and trauma/crisis support) by vulnerable groups of women in the ACT, consistent with the commitment to building statistical capability across Government.

a. The data collection will include, but may not be limited to, the following groups: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (particularly young women), asylum seekers and refugees, women with disability, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, sole parents, older women, women with mental health issues, women with substance use issues and women exiting prison.

b. The exercise will map the social policies that impact upon these groups’ access to core social infrastructure, including their pathways to economic security, good health and wellbeing.

c. The data collected through the exercise will help identify where there is a need for improved coordination and service delivery across government and for programs that are culturally competent, trauma-informed and/or gender-sensitive.
SOCIAL PROGRESS

Strategic outcome
Women and girls equally and fully participate in sustaining their families and communities and enjoy community inclusion and wellbeing

The *First Progress Report* highlights a number of initiatives undertaken by the ACT Government that have contributed to improving equity and participation for women and girls in our society, but is silent on some broader social policy issues that are impacting on the delivery of appropriate services to women and will hinder progress towards the social objectives of the *Women’s Plan*.

MACW notes in particular the following positive initiatives:

- the *ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children Strategy*, which provides a whole-of-government and community approach to preventing and responding to violence against women and children;
- the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, which co-locates a broad suite of services for women in one state-of-the-art facility, positioning itself as a national leader in the provision of patient care and safety; and
- the Belconnen Child and Family Centre, which has a focus on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and aims to improve the quality of life for children and their families in the West Belconnen area.

MACW also notes that the ACT is one of the first launch sites for DisabilityCare Australia, the national disability insurance scheme, which will commence operations in the ACT in 2014. This presents a real opportunity to reform comprehensively the way in which services are delivered to people with disability in the ACT and nationally – aiming to improve the capacity of people with disability and their families to exercise choice and control, and the capability of the community sector to deliver services under the scheme.

MACW commends the ACT Government on each of these initiatives, but wishes to bring to its attention a number of broader, systemic issues across government that are significantly hindering progress towards the social objectives of the *Women’s Plan* and which are largely driven by inadequate allocation of resources through the ACT Budget. These include:

**Mainstream service delivery**

In an effort to save money and rationalise the delivery of core social services, ACT Government Directorates are increasingly moving towards a mainstream service delivery model. MACW believes this approach fails to recognise the need for culturally specific, gender and trauma-informed services that respond to and meet the needs of those individuals and groups that access the services.
MACW notes that gender-based and/or women-led services play a critical role in delivering sensitive and appropriate support for women in the ACT, for example for women experiencing domestic violence, sexual assault, homelessness, poor health, or legal issues following separation or as a consequence of domestic violence or assault. These services are crucial – women from disadvantaged groups expect that women from their own backgrounds will have a better understanding of their experiences and issues and greater empathy than men or women who do not share their backgrounds. Evidence and experience nationally and internationally also shows that female survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault prefer to access services that are provided by women in a women-only environment.

MACW is concerned that there may be a loss of gendered and specialist services in the ACT because of service reviews and tendering and contracting approaches. While there is an understanding in the current fiscal environment of the need to lower costs, this must be balanced against the need to maintain specialist expertise, skills and knowledge that has been developed over many years.

MACW further notes that mainstream delivery of services (based on unit cost models of funding) is at odds with the ACT Government’s overarching commitment to social policy reform in the transition to DisabilityCare Australia, which is needs-based and demand-driven.

**Funding for homelessness services**

The ACT Government recently announced a reduction in funding for homelessness services in the ACT, which was the knock-on effect of a cessation of Commonwealth Government support through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness. The housing/homelessness sector as a whole needs to absorb $3.7 million over 3 years, which will be achieved by moving from historical funding arrangements to a single costing model for all organisations.

MACW understands that Housing ACT hope to gain efficiencies and greater transparency from this shift but expect that reduced outputs will result. MACW has further been advised that services should not deliver above core outputs and non-accommodation support, and that the intensity of case management needs to change to focus on housing need, referral to other services and employment/income. In other words, the wraparound care that most specialist women’s crisis services offer needs to stop, or alternative sources of funding for that aspect of women’s care will need to be found.

Although this reduction of funding has been anticipated for some time, services were given short notice of the actual impact of the funding reduction on their base funding levels following the development of the agreed service model and costings.
While recognising that there may be a need to adopt new business models for crisis services offered in the ACT, MACW is concerned about the immediate impact of this reduction of funding on women in the ACT, and in particular our most vulnerable groups. It also believes that there is an urgent need to think much more strategically, and across government, about the way these services are delivered into the future.

MACW believes action needs to be taken immediately to assess the impact of this reduction in funding in the delivery of services to women and their children. Likewise, MACW urges the ACT Government to ensure that new service agreements with all organisations that deliver homelessness services to women include language that explicitly indicates an understanding of the gendered nature of violence against women and their children and commits to align services with the *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy*.

### Affordable housing

The shortage of affordable housing in the ACT severely limits the capacity of our most vulnerable groups to exit a cycle of homelessness and crisis accommodation. This means we have a significant portion of our relatively affluent population who experience perpetual housing insecurity, leading to severe stress and anxiety, transience and dislocation, and exacerbating the multiple impacts of financial hardship.

MACW agrees with ANGLICARE that housing insecurity is not just about shelter, but has a knock-on effect that impacts on individual and family wellbeing.² Properly understanding housing needs and securing a stock of appropriate and affordable housing should be an urgent priority for the ACT Government.

We know, for example, that there are growing numbers of single parent families and older women who require rental subsidies to afford adequate housing. We also know that some vulnerable groups will have specific needs that require particular types of accommodation, including women who have escaped domestic violence or sexual assault, and their children – and that there is not always an appropriate stock of housing available. This can happen in crisis situations, but is a broader problem in the development of new affordable housing.

In MACW’s consultations, participants additionally asked that consideration be given to assisting low-income women to access housing loans and ensuring the eligibility requirements for public housing are updated to reflect the demographic profile of low-income people in the ACT.

MACW believes that this identification of the real housing needs of vulnerable groups should be undertaken as part of Recommendation 2 of this Report.

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² ANGLICARE SYDNEY, 2011; *State of Sydney Report. Home Truths: Impacts of housing insecurity on women across the life course*.  

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The introduction of the national disability insurance scheme, DisabilityCare, represents one of the most important social policy reforms of our time. The ACT has opportunity to lead other jurisdictions in a range of effective DisabilityCare planning, implementation and service policies and procedures. MACW believes that gender equity is critical in the design of the scheme, including the collection of sex disaggregated data, and that staff employed through the scheme need to be appropriately trained to appreciate the impact on functionality of the experience of violence, neglect and abuse.

The population of women with disabilities in the ACT is greater than for men with disabilities. Nationally, there are almost equal proportions of men and women with severe and profound disabilities, yet the most recent National Disability Agreement data indicates that men with disabilities comprise 60% of the users of disability support services.

MACW recommends that gender needs to be embedded in the criteria which will assess allocation of the Enhanced Service Offers, and subsequently into all aspects of DisabilityCare preparedness in the ACT. This will assist DisabilityCare to achieve its objectives to improve the wellbeing and social and economic participation of people with disabilities and their carers. This objective is consistent with Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which states that appropriate measures are needed to ensure the full development, advancement and empowerment of women. This means that the “My Access Checker” self-assessment tool under development could include some weighting to recognise the different situations for women with disabilities and for female family carers.

In relation to DisabilityCare systems, MACW recommends that gender is embedded in agreements and contract requirements, including the collection and reporting of gender disaggregated data.

MACW further recommends that women with knowledge of disability care and governance experience are represented on the governance of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and relevant Advisory Councils and structures overseeing the planning and implementation of the scheme.
MACW notes that the *ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and their Children Strategy* (the Strategy) was released in 2011 without resources. This limits effective preventative actions and positive impacts on women and girls, which in turn exacerbates the cost burden on the health and justice systems.

The lack of resourcing for the Strategy was consistently raised in MACW’s consultations. A selection of comments includes:

- “We cannot have a strategy without funding. We do not approach any other societal issue in the same way. Eg. we do not try to eradicate cancer without funding the eradication. A strategy without funding is a token exercise.”
- “Value on women must be questioned if there is no funding for the Strategy.”
- “There needs to be a structure for reporting against the Strategy, with identified milestones.”
- “[We need to] prioritise funding towards prevention of violence.”
- “Fund a whole of government approach in the ACT to violence against women; a joined up response that includes health, education, housing, trauma-informed responses (not just focused on the perpetrators.”

Although the ACT Government has made commitments to action consistent with the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022* and will benefit from some of the resources attached to this National Plan, there is nevertheless a need to identify further actions that can be taken at a local level to prevent violence and sexual assault.

MACW notes that our response to violence and sexual assault against women and children is a whole-of-government exercise, involving actions across a number of directorates. We need to understand better what resources are already allocated to violence prevention and the outcomes of sexual assault, as well as the cost burden of violence itself on the health and justice systems. Only then will we have an evidence base to guide policy and program delivery that supports the objectives of the Strategy, and grounds for allocation of appropriate resources to the Strategy.

In response to these issues, MACW makes the following recommendations:
Recommendation 3

That in relation to the shift to mainstream models of funding in the ACT, and in particular the new funding model for homelessness:

a. an evaluation framework is immediately put in place that will assess access to services going forward, and the capacity of the suite of services that currently operate to respond in a gender- and culture-sensitive way to demand; and
b. service agreements to all homelessness providers include language that explicitly indicates an understanding of the gendered nature of violence against women and their children and commits to align homelessness services with the *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy*.

Recommendation 4

That in relation to the introduction of DisabilityCare in the ACT:

a. gender is embedded in the criteria which will assess allocation of the Enhanced Service Offers, and subsequently into all aspects of DisabilityCare preparedness in ACT;

b. that staff working in any DisabilityCare-related capacity, especially newly recruited staff have gender awareness training, including an awareness of the impact on functionality of the experience of violence, neglect and abuse; and

b. that an evaluation framework is immediately put in place that assesses the capacity of women with disability to access the services and supports they need under the new arrangements.

Recommendation 5

That in relation to the *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy*:

a. an annual reporting mechanism is put in place across all Directorates in the ACT to:

   i. list positive work undertaken that aligns with the Strategy; and

   ii. track monies spent on service delivery that responds to victims of domestic violence, sexual assault or family violence, including crisis, health and justice responses;

b. this data is used to better understand the cost, health and justice burden of violence against women and children in the ACT and guide policy and program delivery that supports the objectives of the Strategy, and provide an evidence base for the allocation of appropriate resources to the Strategy.
ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS

Strategic outcome
Women and girls equally and fully participate in planning and sharing a safe, accessible and sustainable city

The Office for Women’s First Progress Report highlights positive work towards the environmental objectives of the Women’s Plan. It notes that ACT Government organisations are increasingly consulting with women about the design and uses of the built environment. They are also working to increase women’s role in the design process, their participation at events, in public spaces and in transport systems. This is underpinned by a recognition that utilising women's perceptions and their diverse experiences in urban and transport design and planning processes can greatly enhance women’s ability to participate in our community and improve their overall health, wellbeing and participation in community life.

Despite this progress, MACW’s consultations highlight the need for further targeted action to reach fully the strategic outcome that is identified in the Women’s Plan. At MACW’s Hands On Forum, Gay Williamson (Senior Manager, Design Policy, ACT Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate) outlined three key strategies we need to use to improve urban planning and design in the ACT. Firstly, we need to emphasise human experiences – focusing on the people who live in our environment, rather than solely the objects we use; secondly, we need to invite dialogue and “engage the spirit” – consulting widely and constructively; and thirdly, we need to “remove the adversarial” from the process – that is, we need to look at what positive outcomes we would like from any given project, rather than focus on those outcomes we do not want to see. In Williamson’s address she pointed to the elements of a place or a city that encourage a feeling of safety and belonging and noted that public ownership of and participation in public places is key to building a healthy city.

Throughout MACW’s consultation on this issue, poor street lighting in Canberra and a perceived lack of police presence in some areas of the city were identified as ongoing issues for women. Likewise, many women cited the need for safe and accessible public transport, particularly outside of traditional working hours. The inaccessibility of public transport can act as a significant barrier to women’s access to and full participation in public places and available services. This is particularly acute for women with disability and other vulnerable groups, particularly where accommodation is far away from relevant health and financial assistance services. The one-stop shop approach to service delivery can put disadvantaged groups at even more of a disadvantage if that ‘shop’ is located at a considerable distance from their homes.
MACW notes a very real need for more comprehensive, targeted consultation around the location of financial and health infrastructure in the ACT, focusing on the impact of the location of services on our most vulnerable groups.

MACW’s consultation further emphasised the importance of consultation in the development of a safe and healthy city more broadly, and highlighted the need to ensure that this consultation is not tokenistic – if we agree with Williamson that ownership and participation of public places will enhance community wellbeing, then the processes and strategies we use in the consultation process need to appropriately engage our citizens: women, men and children from all ages and backgrounds.

One strategy that engages this approach is the Women’s Safety Assessments Toolkit. MACW recommended use of this toolkit in 2010, and it has since been used successfully in a number of ACT Government events and is explicitly linked to the Implementation Plan of the ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy 2011-2017.

MACW recommends that use of this toolkit is embedded across all aspects of planning and development in the ACT as a means to achieve the environmental objectives of the Women’s Plan. However, it notes that the outcomes of using this toolkit will have positive impacts across all ACT citizens, and is also consistent with The Canberra Social Plan 2011. This action requires the active participation of a number of directorates across the ACT Government and ongoing, shared support for the Women’s Safety Assessment Register – this is a very small cost to the Government, with a significant impact on the lives of men, women and children in the ACT, in particular our most vulnerable citizens. This initiative should be agreed by all Ministers and activated through the WPIG.

**Recommendation 6**

That in relation to the introduction of Women’s Safety Assessments in the ACT:

a. they be embedded in the planning and risk management strategies of all events undertaken or overseen by the Territory and Municipal Services and Economic Development Directorates;

b. they be embedded in the regular consultation, planning and risk management processes of the ACT Planning and Land Authority and the Environment and Sustainable Development Directorate in relation to all new or retrofitting of old housing developments, health infrastructure planning and urban design;

c. they be used in the development of accessible transport service solutions by ACTION Buses; and

d. they be supported by ongoing funding for the Women’s Safety Assessment Register and associated training, currently implemented through a small funding allocation to the Women’s Centre for Health Matters from the Office for Women.
PART III

APPENDIX A

LIST OF GROUPS CONSULTED BY MACW

- *Hands On* Forum (1 May 2013) – over 70 women from community, public and private sectors
- ACT women lawyers (via email survey)
- Women from asylum seeker or refugee background (individual sessions in person and by phone, through the Australian Red Cross)
- ACT community sector workers (through Women’s Centre for Health Matters staff)
- Women with mental health issues and carers (through the ACT Women and Mental Health Working Group)
- Women with disability (through a survey by Women with Disability ACT)
- Women in prison (through the Women And Prisons group)
- Older women (through research undertaken by the Women’s Centre for Health Matters)
- Sole parents (single parents with children, who had experienced and escaped domestic violence, lived in public housing and received Centrelink’s Sole Parent Pension)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (through MACW representatives)
- Women from a culturally and linguistically diverse background (through MACW representatives)
- Young women (through MACW representatives)

RECENT REPORTS/RESEARCH

- COAG Select Council on Women’s Issues; 2013, *Communique 3 May 2013*.
- Women with Disability ACT and the Women’s Centre for Health Matters; 2013, *Strong Women, Great City: A snapshot of findings from a survey of ACT women with disabilities*.
- YWCA; 2013, *SheSpeaks survey*. 
AFFORDABLE CHILDCARE

- The availability of affordable childcare was consistently raised as a barrier to women considering or engaging in education and training opportunities in the ACT, amongst both educated and vulnerable groups.
  - “the cost and unavailability of childcare remains a key, difficult issue for myself and many of my female friends and colleagues.”
  - For vulnerable groups, this unavailability and lack of affordability of childcare presents a particular challenge because it prevents their participation in education, training and the workforce and further entrenches a cycle of unemployment.
  - Sole parents report the cost and accessibility of childcare as a major contributor to their ongoing financial struggles, limiting their capacity to take up work, education and training opportunities.
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women report the cost and accessibility of childcare as a major contributor to their limited opportunity to engage in the workforce and seek education and training opportunities.

FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

- Likewise, inflexible working arrangements, including a ‘strong emphasis on the 9-5 work day pattern’, was also cited as a barrier to women trying to enter or re-enter the workforce.
  - Although the ACT Government and some large private agencies were identified as having excellent written policies, they nevertheless had “poor workplace culture and practice when it comes to implementation”.
  - “From this perspective, I think it is essential that the ACT Government continues to prioritise education and training of executive staff regarding the significance of flexible return-to-work arrangements for their staff, and the importance of being responsive to employee needs in implementation of such policies.”
  - Some respondents suggested a public education campaign to encourage non-government workplaces to prioritise the implementation of flexible employment opportunities.
  - One respondent cited the Caltex Return to Work ‘Babycare’ package as a great example of the provision of financial and practical support to women returning to work, and encouraged the ACT Government to continue looking at innovative ways to develop and implement measures such as this.

PAY EQUITY AND EMPLOYMENT

- Most respondents in the professional workforce (for example, lawyers) felt they received equitable pay for their work; but identified a real disparity between community workers and ACT Government employees.
They urged the ACT Government to continue its support of organisations to implement the Equal Pay case findings . . . “the lack of equitable pay across the government and community sector continues to be THE major challenge facing so many (large and small) community agencies, which further hampers the productivity of those agencies. From this perspective, it is in the ACT Government’s interests to continue working towards a more equitable approach to pay for community workers, to ensure a viable ACT community sector in the long term.

- Some women felt very negative about whether there will ever be pay equity, and there will always be a disparity between community and government workers.
- Women with disability were identified as having particular issues being supported to find fulfilling employment, with adequate pay.

- **Carers** were identified as some of the most poorly paid or unpaid people in the ACT and tend to be mostly women – “there is no pay equity [for carers]”.

- **Women with disability** felt there were limited opportunities for employment, despite this being a pathway to economic independence.
  - They additionally felt that disability awareness training should be undertaken as a matter of course by employers.

- Unlike their male counterparts, **women in prisons** reported having no access to work experience and transition programs before they leave prison – this is a significant problem as many have not worked previously and need a way to transition to life in the community.
  - The low pay they tend to receive in employment is a disincentive to working, when other costs (such as childcare) are taken into account, and the relative benefit of remaining on welfare.
  - Women who have left the ACT prison system also suffer from the stigma that is associated with their experiences, and require targeted assistance from the Job Network.

**Leadership and decision making opportunities**

- In terms of **leadership and decision making opportunities**, most women said they did feel they had equitable access to opportunities in this field, although there was a disparity between the government and non-government sector.
  - **Vulnerable groups** were more likely to feel there is inequitable access to these opportunities, based on the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, women with disability and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
  - “We are woeful at leadership opportunities for **women with disabilities**. The ACT has made little progress towards women with disabilities being seen as leaders and decision makers and is yet to fund any program to encourage this to happen. The same women who have been relied on for decades are still the ones being relied on to participate at the senior level . . .” – women with disability need to be supported to take up opportunities. Women with disability reported feeling excluded from mainstream leadership opportunities.
  - **Women with a lived experience of prison** have few leadership or decision making opportunities, which would assist them in transition to the general community and would encourage an understanding of their needs. These women could also make a valuable contribution to the justice system as they understand the background, experience and needs of women who are in the system.
**Education and training opportunities**

- Education and training opportunities were particularly difficult to pursue for women from an asylum seeker or refugee background, based on visa issues, lack of work experience, or lack of appropriately recognised work experience.
  - One participant suggested a specific refugee graduate program should be considered.
- Some respondents felt it is difficult to take up education and training opportunities because there are **not enough courses that can be taken part-time**.
- Education and training is **expensive**, and therefore out of reach for many people.
- Members of the ACT Women and Mental Health Working Group supported the programs run by Mental Illness Education ACT and advocated for its extension to colleges in the ACT, **increased support for counselling services in schools**, and training opportunities for carers.
- **Women with a Disability ACT** reported mild difficulty in women with disability accessing education and employment.
- **Women in prisons** reported less access than their male counterparts to education and training.

**Lack of sex-disaggregated data**

- Respondents called for ACT Government agencies to be required to collect, analyse and make available data on participation rates by gender (including within key groups such as ATSI women) – noting that without this data it is not possible to assess or assure the effectiveness of policies or service delivery strategies.

**SOCIAL PROGRESS**

**Domestic violence and sexual assault**

- Some women raised concerns about isolation and **lack of appropriate housing** available to women escaping domestic violence.
- Although women applauded the ACT Government’s Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy, they felt more could be done to introduce practical measures to implement the plan, and to ensure the plans’ goals are achieved.
  - “Providing **additional funding** to organisations who are working intensively and effectively with a broad client base of vulnerable women, and who are successfully integrated into the criminal justice system, seems . . . to be one of the most cost-efficient and effective ways to address the needs of those most vulnerable to sexual, intimate partner and family violence.”
- There was general support for more **preventative measures** and campaigns.
- **Women with disabilities** need specific support to recognise and respond to violence and abuse – “This is the single most pressing issue for women with disabilities, yet they are the one group that did not get funding under the National Plan to make change”.
  - This group felt progress in developing an anti-violence culture was slow.
- **Carers** and people with mental health need special support under the Prevention strategy.
- **Women exiting prison** frequently have a history of violent relationships and/or sexual assault – there needs to be specific funding allocated to community services such as DVCS or CRCC to
allow work and counselling with these women prior to release to assist them to escape the cycle of abuse. These women may not access these services without early intervention.

- **Sole parents** expressed concern about their experiences accessing crisis support, and the delays in accessing crisis accommodation.
  - They were concerned about the focus of ACT Housing on process and tenancy issues rather than the safety of women leaving domestic violence situation.
  - These women also felt that waiting lists impacted adversely on women escaping violence.
  - Safety issues at Bega Flats were specifically identified – the placement of women and their children in these flats put them at risk of being exposed to drug dealers and other unsafe people – they emphasised that women escaping violence with their children should not be put into high-density public housing.

- All workers responding to **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples** seeking assistance and issues relating from domestic/family violence need to be responded to in an appropriate manner. Training to ensure services are delivered in a professional and culturally sensitive way needs to be available upon induction and in an ongoing capacity.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women’s organisations** report a three-fold increase in domestic violence cases over the last 12 months.
  - These organisations are noting a particular increase in presentations by young (18-20 year old) women – these women tend not to stay a long time with crisis services, due to the restrictive rules, and therefore return quickly to violent relationships.
  - Due to the shame associated with reporting domestic violence or sexual assault, these women are reluctant to present to services and require careful, culturally sensitive, handling.

*Gender and culturally sensitive services*

- Respondents felt there were limited services of this kind and they needed to be more accessible.
- Refugee and asylum seeker women reported very positive experiences with specialist service providers, and in particular with their access to the ACT Government Access Card, which gives them access to free medical services and discounts on public transport.
- “Readily available and timely service provision by skilled professionals is crucial to maintaining the safety of women and their children in our community.”
- “The ACT Government needs to act to ensure that crisis services that are currently funded as homelessness initiatives are not reduced by the anticipated reduction in the amount of funding available for housing and homelessness services.”
- “There are no gender specific services available for women dealing with mental health issues. This is a gap in the ACT. . . . Gender specific services are vital for women who are often the most marginalised. Add to this marginalisation women with mental health problems and the issues are compounded.”
- **Women with eating disorders** require gender specific services – these disorders disproportionately affect women.
- **Women exiting prison** need immediate access to a range of essential services – at the moment they need to navigate these services themselves, which is daunting, intimidating – they would
benefit from the support of a service that assisted them to identify their needs and the services appropriate to the issues they face across the spectrum of work, health and family.

- “The mental health profile of female prisoners is often characterised by high rates of depression, anxiety disorders, and substance abuse, and there is a high rate of self-harming behaviour. But there is often a lack of expertise in mental health services and psychologists in recognising and supporting mental health issues specific to these women, particularly trauma and emotional damage for those who were abused as children and have histories of sexual violence.”

- Peer support is critical, but there is currently no funding to support the group.

- In addition to physical and mental health issues, women exiting prison require support to take control of their financial situation – the Throughcare program offers a critical opportunity to link up service responses for these women. [There is a concern in the community that the Throughcare program is at risk.]

- **Sole parents** report having difficulty accessing specialist services.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women** raised concerns about the First Point service, which does not meet the needs of these communities.

  - “First Point needs to strengthen engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and be seen actively liaising with communities. This requires a number of strategies including taking First Point and Central Intake Service to the community and engaging in a broader sense by talking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, particularly around access to the homelessness sector, what barriers are experienced and how trust and relationships can be enhanced.”

**Affordable housing**

- **Vulnerable groups** reported significant challenges in accessing and securing affordable housing in the ACT.

  - A number of participants reported having to move in with family or friends, or access emergency or refuge accommodation.

  - Women from asylum seeker or refugee background reported being turned away from a number of homelessness services due to her lack of permanent visa, resulting in her spending a night in a park with her child.

- **Women with disabilities** reported the need to address a shortage of accessible housing and emergency accommodation.

- **Women exiting prison** appreciate the specific service provided to them by the Coming Home program, which additionally provides them with wraparound support.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women** reported significant issues around the availability and affordability of accommodation in the ACT.

  - Waiting times for public housing are unacceptable and access to homelessness services is limited, particularly for young women.

  - Young women from these communities need more than just ‘a house’, but access to their communities, which provide a culturally sensitive support for them and their families. The shift to a mainstream approach is damaging this connection to community.
Health and wellbeing

- **Vulnerable women**, in particular women of low income, women with disability and women with mental health issues, face barriers in access to organised sport or gym membership due to the lack of affordability of those services and difficulties these groups face in relation to access.
  - Physical inactivity [is] a considerable risk factor for people with disabilities developing chronic health conditions.
- The example of the issues raised around access to the ACT Government’s Village Creek facility was cited as emblematic of all of the challenges such groups face.
- **Women with disabilities** face particular barriers to accessing health screening and services in the ACT.
  - “Research show that people with disabilities experience an array of barriers when accessing primary healthcare, which include: not being taken seriously, or not having their support workers taken seriously; having health issues confused with disability issues; not being offered the same screening programs as the general population; not being able to access examination equipment; and not being able to access relevant and appropriate health promotion materials.”
  - Women with disabilities reported lacking awareness of programs and information about maximising good health and wellbeing, and sexual health – they seek greater support and programs from mainstream services.
  - Lack of public transport contributed to these women’s ability to access low cost sport and fitness opportunities, which would contribute to their better health and wellbeing.
- **Older women** are likely to face a range of interrelated health and mental health issues.
  - Respondents noted that “there is a need to look for ways to adjust current thinking and approaches within the ACT to help older women maintain and improve their health and wellbeing and assist them to connect, maintain connection or reconnect with their community, thereby raising the quality of their lives.”
  - Studies undertaken in the ACT over 2011-2012 highlight issues around depression and poor social connectedness.
  - **Older women from CALD backgrounds and older women in residential care** are more at risk of depression due to their specific circumstances.
  - Where older women suffer poor health, this can impact on their capacity to connect to services, facilities and communities, which becomes increasingly concerning where this is combined with limited transport options and poor layout of health services and infrastructure.
- **Women facing mental health issues** raised concerns around the lack of a holistic approach to health services, such that mental and physical health services are separated; the persistent stigma from service providers, employers and others towards people with mental illness; the impact of gender on mental health experiences; and the impacts of the social determinants of health on women’s experiences.
  - Women consulted through the ACT Women and Mental Health Working Group noted in particular that they have difficulty accessing information about mental health services; that there is a shortage of appropriate services available to meet diverse needs; and that there is a lack of trust in service providers, who seemed to be in a position of power in relation to their clients.
Women from this group advocated a person-centred approach to funding and early intervention – noting “there should be more funding for services and the individual”.

Women also suggested more holistic service delivery and increased case coordination services.

Safety was identified as an issue at the Adult Mental Health Unit at the Canberra Hospital, alongside the lack of appropriate pathways for women exiting this facility.

- **Women with a lived experience of prisons** have no access to the rehabilitative and therapeutic programs that are available to male prisoners, despite this point in time being an ideal opportunity to engage in therapy, treatment or counselling.

- **Sole parents** reported needing greater access to bulk billing and effective services that understand their issues.

**Recognition and respect for women**

- **Women with disability** reported feeling their contribution to the ACT community is not valued and recognised, and is reflected in their lower pay and inability to obtain work.
  - Media representation of these women perpetuated negative attitudes towards their contributions.

- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women** report endemic racism in the general community, from taxi drivers and the police force.

**ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS**

**Urban safety and planning**

- The lack of adequate street lighting was consistently raised as a particular concern in Canberra, leading to feelings of insecurity at night and in the early mornings.

- There is a perceived lack of police presence, particularly outside of the civic centre.

- Most women consulted felt there was adequate consultation undertaken in relation to public safety initiatives, but more could be done to seek specific, targeted, input from women, girls and more vulnerable groups.

- **Women with disabilities** felt that accessibility needs to be more routinely considered in public facilities, and complained that consultation can be insufficient or tokenistic.

**Public transport**

- **Limited public transport** was consistently cited as a critical problem in Canberra, particularly outside of traditional working hours.

- **Vulnerable groups** (including people with mental health issues and women) are particularly at risk in navigating the public transport at night time.

- Some respondents felt that the ACT’s public transport planning system does not appear to pay sufficient attention to the need for safety for women and girls.

- Some respondents noted the need for recognition of the intersection of poverty and transport – poor women need services close to where they live, and do not benefit from the one-stop-shop approach if that ‘shop’ is far from home.

- **Women with disability** cited the expense and accessibility of transport as a significant barrier to independence, particularly where they were unable to drive due to their disability. [The
Mobility Allowance is restricted to travel for work and study, and does not include (for example) taking children to and from school, or attending appointments or activities.

- **Women exiting prison** report the cost and accessibility of public transport as a barrier to accessing essential services.
- **Sole parents** report the cost of public transport as limiting their ability to access essential services, including Job Network providers and health services.

**Access all areas**

- **Women with disability** reported improved physical access to services in the ACT, with some notable exceptions, including access to health services premises.

**Environmental sustainability**

- **Women with disability** emphasised the social inclusion and mental health benefits for all when environmentally sustainable solutions, alongside safety and accessibility are taken into account in planning.
ECONOMIC PROGRESS

Affordable and accessible childcare

- We need **better and more subsidies** for vulnerable women to afford childcare.
- The ACT needs **more childcare places**, including on site and family day care options.
  - Workplaces should be breast-feeding friendly – including provided comfortable spaces in which to breast-feed, and allowing paid breaks/leave to breast feed;
  - Some called for the introduction of nannies in the workplace to care for children on site;
  - There was a call for childcare costs to be (more routinely) included in **salary sacrifice** arrangements.
  - Some participants called for **more flexibility** in childcare arrangements – ie. part-time hours, or permanent booking for fortnightly places (note the current pre-school times, which mean every second Wednesday is a half-day. . .alternatively, increase pre-school hours).
- There needs to be a stronger expectation that men will contribute to child rearing responsibilities – so the caring role is properly shared/balanced.
- The ACT requires more emergency or occasional childcare availability, and after hours care, to cater for women who need to work at night, or do shift work, to improve their economic situation.
- The implementation of paid parental leave – need to improve viability for small business owners or farmers.
- Fair Work Agreement – this has an impact on affordable childcare – although this is primarily a federal government issue, we need to understand how it impacts on the affordability of care in the ACT.

Pay equity

- Maintain and increase No Interest Loan Scheme (NILS); expand the micro-credit program.
- There needs to be additional subsidies for transport/health costs for low-income earners.
- Superannuation is a particularly inequitable scheme for Indigenous workers because the age at which it can be accessed by many is high, yet life expectancy is low – participants suggest lowering the access age for Indigenous Australians.
- There is a direct correlation between low rates of unionisation in female employment and low pay – where women’s roles are unionised (nurses, teachers), rates of pay have generally been higher.
- More research needs to be undertaken into the reasons behind pay inequity.
- We need to increase the employer contribution to superannuation.
- Note pay gap at the ANU.
- We need a public campaign in the ACT to raise awareness about how ACT’s prosperity across a large proportion of the population impacts on the cost of housing and basic supplies – increasing the impact of the cost of living on low-income earners.
Pay equity could be improved by strengthening discrimination legislation – placing the burden of proof on the employer.
  - A participant notes that women in the ACT are still being routinely sacked when they get pregnant.

Women in the private sector are often not aware of their entitlements – suggest that we establish a working women’s information centre – encourage early exposure to career and financial planning, especially superannuation and wealth accumulation strategies; nuance of end dollar goal; exposure to choices available; lack of informed view of what it is like to work in male dominated areas; exposure to female entrepreneur career paths (career choices underpinned by a financial plan); strengthen career pathways and role models; mentoring and advice, peer support, referrals and financial support for women in small business.

Steps need to be taken to ensure women can be promoted equally even when working part time.

Explore potential for transferrable long-service leave entitlements between different sectors.

Set targets for pay equity.

Flexible working arrangements

- Change workplace culture by educating managers to enhance flexibility – which in turn will attract and retain workers – including a better understanding of the need to be at home when children are sick.
- Amend Discrimination Act – obligation on employers to accommodate part-time hours following carers’ leave; prevent discrimination against women who disclose need to part-time hours at interview or once offered a position; legislated right to part-time work if children are under 4 years old.
- Increased leave availability for family obligations (including school holidays; when primary carer is sick) – including also more flexibility around start and end times to enable drop off and pick up times to vary depending on stage of children’s schooling.
- Increased job sharing opportunities.

SOCIAL PROGRESS

Affordable housing

- Canberra is geographically confined with fewer outer suburbs that provide the option of lower rent, as in other states and territories. We have a high, flat private rental market with little access to crisis accommodation and public housing.
- We need a gendered approach to housing in the ACT.
  - For example, women leaving relationships (particularly violent ones) with children are not able to leave the ACT without the consent of the other parent – this results in a single (likely low) income parent forced to find accommodation in an inaccessible private market.
- Women feel unsafe in public housing, the standards of properties are low, and some properties are overcrowded (particularly in Indigenous communities).
- There is not enough affordable housing.
- Public housing is stigmatised and focused on ‘low’ income tenants – tendency to create ghetto-like conditions and a cycle of poverty.
More thought needs to be given to the demographic profile of those in need and matching it to stock of affordable housing – there are growing numbers of single parent families and older women who require rental subsidies to afford adequate housing. Consideration could be given to:

- assisting low-income women to access housing loans; and
- ensuring the eligibility requirements for public housing are updated to reflect the demographic profile of low-income people in the ACT.

There is not a large enough stock of accessible housing for women (and men) with disability.

The ACT needs to coordinate rental markets better, including:

- considering financial incentives for developers to build or convert commercial properties to residential;
- legislating a requirement for a percentage of new developments to include affordable housing;
- seeking extra land to be given free to community groups to develop affordable housing;
- assisting people make the transition from public housing to affordable home ownership;
- building energy efficient public housing to ease the burden of utility costs; and
- putting more ‘sale to tenant’ properties on the market to turn over housing stock.

**Domestic violence and sexual assault**

Both domestic violence and sexual assault need to be a focus of our violence prevention strategy. “Sexual assault is invisible within the ‘domestic violence’ and ‘violence agenda’ – “why has MACW endorsed the funding for ACT’s domestic violence strategy without mention of sexual assault?”

- “[We need] proper funding for violence against women strategy”.
- “We cannot have a strategy without funding. We do not approach any other societal issue in the same way. Eg. we do not try to eradicate cancer without funding the eradication. A strategy without funding is a token exercise.”
- “Value on women must be questioned if there is no funding for the Strategy.
- There needs to be a structure for reporting against the Strategy, with identified milestones.
- “[We need to] prioritise funding towards prevention of violence.”
- “Fund a whole of government approach in the ACT to violence against women; a joined up response that includes health, education, housing, trauma-informed responses (not just focused on the perpetrators.”
- “Invest in better police knowledge of how to handle DV situations through gendered training”. “We need police to be better trained and respond better to rape and DV. DVOs are very poorly enforced. DV and stalking victims are told the onus is on them to collect evidence before the police will respond. Sometimes the police fail to even speak to the alleged perpetrator about death threats and assault – let alone persecuting them.”
- “Fund initiatives to work with workplaces on DV.”
- “Funding for DV services needs to have a broader base – ie. not just CSD, but health and justice [directorates].”
- “A strategy without funding is political rhetoric; yes it is important for awareness but without funding for the actions to be implemented, it is insulting to women and children . . .It is about the Government’s priorities in how the budget is allocated. And [it] goes to the question of, do we want to live in an economy or a society?”
• “Could we target local businesses to donate funds each year to support the strategy? Can we approach philanthropic organisations?”

• Need to refocus on the importance of early intervention – including education programs in schools that provide support for children around respectful relationships, DV, alcohol and drugs.
  o “We desperately need to teach good consent practices in sex education. The focus on rape prevention is at the moment, very skewed towards the victim’s choices. We need to be teaching young people how to communicate about consent and respect boundaries.”
  o “Teach both boys and girls about social boundaries.”
  o “Increase information flow about women's social and self-help groups to a wider audience.”

• There needs to be a prioritisation of funding towards the prevention of violence.

• We need greater analysis of the economic impact of family, domestic and sexual violence to create better awareness of the need for funding.
  o This is a long-term problem that needs a long-term approach and funding.

• Suggestion of sponsorship for sporting clubs and market places raising awareness for the prevention of violence against women and children strategy.

• The ACT public service should include DV leave in its conditions; ACTCOSS could consider community sector DV leave.

• Women/mothers need support to raise boys that are sensitive to the unacceptability of violence. They also need to value their own contribution to caring and recognise the power they have in rearing ante-violence boys.
  o Behaviour modelling from fathers is equally important – fathers need to explicitly value the role of the mother, but must also more actively take up a primary caring role

Gender and culturally sensitive services

• Gender specialist services foster social inclusion and wellbeing, reduce social isolation and reduce the risk of mental health issues; they are essential for people whose safety, cultural, or vulnerability prevents them from accessing or being comfortable with mainstream services.

• There is less support for women in prison than men.

• Current tendering practice is working counter-intuitively to gender specialist services.
  o “Tendering activity in the community sector focuses attention on bean counting, not real outcomes.”
  o “Abolish the tender process. Small women’s services staffed by unpaid workers can’t be expected to put together bids to beat national and international charities like the Salvation Army . . . Canberra lost the only refuge with decent engagement with ATSI teenager because of this. It needs to stop”.
  o “CRCC and DVCS need more resources – need to be able to operate 24/7 rape counselling and hire more staff”. “Increase resources of DVCS”.
  o “[We need] a review of current funding models and service delivery models.”

• Gender specialist services support groups that are unable to participate in the community.

• “At present many of the gendered services in the ACT are struggling to maintain funding under unusual historical funding arrangements”.

• Can small organisations collaborate to share information and administration?

• We need to support/train mainstream services to apply a gendered approach.
• Education/training for staff, development of gender lens self-assessment tools
• We need more women-specific services in the violence sector.
• “DV Homelessness programs should not be included in FirstPoint central intake due to 24 hour crisis aspect”.
• Children as well as women should be included in statistics if homelessness due to DV.
• “Canberra needs a community legal centre hub – “free legal services are extremely patchy.”
• CALD women require specialist, bilingual/interpreter support services - need to work with the communities to establish the appropriate support networks to encourage them to participate actively and safely in community life.
• Specialist services need to be publicised more broadly.
• “Pursue a “gender matters” weekly radio slot on ABC666 – equally split between topical issues for women and men.
• We need more services that are specific and sensitive to our Aboriginal community.
• There needs to be more representation of Aboriginal women in ACT Plans, including the Women’s Plan.

Health and wellbeing
• “The Legislative Assembly should legislate for a protest exclusion zone around abortion providers – similar to what is being established in Tasmania. Young women would benefit greatly from mandatory referral on abortion and contraception – if doctors or healthcare providers refuse to discuss these issues they must refer elsewhere. Calvary’s policy – is hugely harmful. Their policy, even in dealing with rape victims, is to refuse to even talk about the morning after pill and to refuse to refer to anyone who will – especially the Rape Crisis Centre. If Calvary won’t budge, ACT should establish a sexual assault clinic as close as possible to the hospital. Calvary’s policy is particularly harmful for students, who may not know of its Catholic policies – it is the closest hospital to the ANU and UC and students go there for emergency treatment . . .”
• Older women need more support – including through retirement planning, financial planning and the transition phase from working to retirement.
• More places need to be made available in the Canberra Hospital Birth Centre.
• A counselling service should be established for women who have experienced genital mutilation.
• “Don’t Shoot Our Wounded” report has answers for Aboriginal peoples’ outcomes.

Recognition and respect for women
• Girls need to know they are valued in the community – mentoring and role models are important in setting up examples of leadership and contribution to community.
  o Girls need to see others around them demonstrating positive female behaviour, which they can emulate.
• Girls need to be provided with stronger skills acquisition – for example, tools for negotiation and conflict resolution.
• “Triple Bottom Line reporting is not addressing the Women’s Plan.”
• “Start empowering our young women. Listen to them!”
ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRESS

Urban safety and planning

• Public facilities and urban environments need to be designed for mixed demographic groups.
• Address line of sight issues for children playing near commercial facilities.
• Road rules and consultation with youth – communicate changes better; set up clearer expectations (socially) of driving in Canberra.
• Accessing the amenity of the city, parks and public spaces – CCTV, self-defence training, consultation with teenage girls in particular on safety/security who use buses, walk home from school.
• Targeted consultations with women and children on urban planning.
  o “Women’s safety assessments need to refocus on urban planning, not just events.”
  o “Women’s safety assessments should be compulsory and funded.”
• Build community ownership of public spaces – encourage participation in planning and development (more community gardens) – eg. get high school children to work with designers.
  o Encourage ephemeral or temporary interventions that capture public attention and create connection – these are more successful when not permanent.
• We need more community meeting places, targeting special women’s groups with playgrounds so that women can socialise and feel safe.
• Insufficient lighting is identified as an issue, especially on urban streets but also in car parks – need more police patrolling car parks.
• Better CCTV in clubs and outside clubs to identify perpetrators of violence.
• Focus on “healthy city” initiatives, and take a population health approach to urban planning.
• There should be more education around safety for girls (in schools), which would link back in to cultural and social attitudes to women and violence against women.
• Prioritise communities, relationships, families, cultural practices, rather than cars, objects, car parks, etc.
• Promote partnerships for safe communities – for example through partnering with, rewarding or sponsoring sports clubs and events to introduce active family friendly policies.

Public transport

• Need a female-only taxi service so that women can safely get to services and courses at night – especially for women who face cultural/religious restrictions – “pink cab taxis”, “women’s taxi service”, “women-safe taxi service”.
• Public transport is not accessible for low-income, vulnerable people – are community buses an alternative to large buses – for special groups, including marginalised groups, older women and kids.
• Accelerate wheelchair accessible public bus transport program.
• See COTAS budget submission on accessible transport and alternative models for Canberra (note there is a transport survey in progress).
• Could we have a fleet of smaller buses (eg. 22 seats) – we need greater flexibility for suburbs, especially for evenings, weekends and public holidays.
• Can there be more “party” buses to collect young people and drop them off at designated safe spots.
• Safer (lit), direct bike paths; better cyclist/driver education.
• More paths through parks rather than next to roads.