

10. WOMEN'S BUDGET STATEMENT

Advancing the status of women and girls in the ACT is a Government priority.

As part of *The Canberra Social Plan*, the Government made a commitment to develop and support a strategic plan to improve the status of, and opportunities for, the ACT's women, particularly those who are disadvantaged.

The *ACT Women's Plan*, released in September 2004, sets out the Government's vision for working with the community to advance the status of women and girls.

The Plan is structured upon the following six objectives, which together form a framework to guide Government agencies in the development and coordination of effective and responsive policies, programs and services for women:

- representation and recognition;
- good health and wellbeing;
- responsive housing;
- safe inclusive communities;
- economic security and opportunities; and
- flexible education and training.

Women in the ACT

Recently released data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) indicates that females comprise just over half (50.6%) of the ACT's population, and 1.1% of the ACT's women identify as Indigenous. The ACT's women have a higher life expectancy of 83.3 years compared with the national average of 82.6 years and higher levels of educational attainment with 51.8% holding post-school qualifications, compared with 41.2% nationally. A relatively high proportion of pre-retired women in the ACT have some form of superannuation (81% compared with 71% nationally). Women also make up 48% of ACT Government board members and 42% of ACT Government remunerated board members.

However, the ACT's women face some significant challenges. For example, in terms of health and wellbeing, 65% of ACT women report experiencing some personal stressors (compared with 59% of women nationally) and 3.5% report high levels of psychological stress (compared with 1.6% of women nationally). In 2002, 35.4% of women had some form of disability, with 10.8% having a core activity restriction, meaning they may have needed help with communication, mobility or self-care. Latest ABS figures on fulltime adult ordinary earnings also show that in the November 2004 quarter, ACT women earned only 84.5% of ACT men's wages.

2005-06 Summary

The 2005-06 Women's Budget Statement demonstrates the Government's strong and ongoing commitment to advancing the status of women and girls in the ACT.

Representation and recognition

The Government continues to support a number of initiatives that aim to increase women's representation and recognition within the community. Representation and recognition includes raising the profile of women and women's issues in the community, ensuring women gain access to, and participate in power structures, decision-making and removing barriers to women achieving genuine equality.

The ACT Women's Grants Program will continue to assist individuals and groups to develop activities that strive to improve the status of women. Two categories exist under this scheme – *Capacity Building* and *Special Projects*. Further support will be provided through the ACT Women's Director Scholarships Program. This program aims to develop the knowledge and skills of women in the ACT who are, or aspire to, undertake senior decision-making roles by funding a number of positions in the *Company Directors* and the *Directors Essentials* courses conducted by the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

The Government also promotes the representation and recognition of women through the annual International Women's Day Awards. The Awards acknowledge women who have made outstanding contributions in public life, as well as individuals and organisations that have contributed to progressing the status of women in the ACT.

The Women's Information and Referral Service will produce an International Women's Day program of events in the ACT, as well as a brochure with contact details about women's organisations in the ACT.

Data and analysis requirements will be incorporated into the new ACT Government Human Resource Management Information System functional and reporting specifications. This process is expected to result in improved gender specific data collection and more consistent reporting procedures.

Public Sector Equity and Diversity planning will incorporate specific strategies and actions supporting outcomes of the *ACT Women's Plan*. Employment strategies aimed at women will be incorporated into the Equity and Diversity toolkit. This will occur across all Government agencies.

A new initiative being introduced in 2005-06 will establish nurse practitioner positions in the ACT. The nurse practitioner role is at the peak of clinical nursing practice, emerging as a new level and type of health service that is innovative, effective, efficient, accessible and able to respond to the health service needs of specific populations.

The Government will also develop and pilot the implementation of policies and programs to target mature carers, and provide centrally located office accommodation for the Multicultural Women's Advocacy Group in the new Multicultural Centre by late 2005.

Good health and wellbeing

The good health and wellbeing of ACT women is a high priority, and the Government will continue to deliver a wide range of high-quality, affordable, accessible and appropriate programs and services to ensure that the health and wellbeing needs of women in the ACT are met.

New initiatives include the provision of on-site registrar cover for obstetric and gynaecology at Calvary Public Hospital and support for the delivery of a range of early intervention programs, including universal and targeted parenting information and support services, specialist clinical services, community development and education programs at the Child and Family Centre in Tuggeranong.

Many existing services will continue to be provided. These include generalist counselling services for women, the implementation of the *beyondblue* Postnatal Depression Program study findings, the delivery of nursing and midwifery services for young pregnant women, young mothers and their families at the Junction Youth Health Service, the development and delivery of the *Any Body's Cool* body image, eating disorder behaviour program in schools and the provision of accommodation, respite and other services for women with mental health issues through Inanna Inc.

A needs assessment of GP prescribing patterns and benzodiazepine use by women will be finalised. A support program for mothers in Tuggeranong will be developed through the partnership between the Majura Women's Group and Mental Health ACT.

Funding has been made available in the 2005-06 Budget for the development and implementation of falls prevention programs in ACT residential care facilities. The benefits for older women could be significant, as injuries resulting from serious falls can often lead to loss of mobility, as well as confidence and independence.

Ongoing funding of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre will enable these agencies to continue to support women and children who experience violence and to address the causes of violence through community education. The Women's Information and Referral Centre will maintain a Domestic Violence Support Group for women who have experienced abuse from their partner, as well as continuing to work in partnership with the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to provide a weekly support group for survivors of sexual abuse.

Responsive housing

Responsive housing for women includes safe shelters for women and girls at risk, safety nets and other mechanisms to enable capacity-and-resilience-building for women living in poverty, the provision of support to female-led households and the accessibility of appropriate, affordable housing. A number of Government initiatives will focus on delivering responsive housing for women.

This will include the development of a women's housing policy and continuing provision of safe, appropriate, accessible and responsive housing assistance options through the social housing sector.

Existing recurrent funding is available for an outreach service for single women with complex needs and at risk of homelessness, as well as, alternative models of supported accommodation for families, including those headed by women. Crisis and medium term accommodation options for older women escaping domestic violence will be established and the Government will undertake an evaluation of Dyramal Migay, a supported accommodation service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls between the ages of 12 and 17 who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Safe inclusive communities

Making communities safe and inclusive encompasses preventing violence, overcoming prejudices and stereotyping of women, involving women in decision-making, acknowledging human rights and embracing diversity.

The Family Violence Intervention Program, an integrated and coordinated criminal justice and community response to family/domestic violence, will receive increased funding through the 2005-06 Budget to support work with individuals and families affected by family/domestic violence.

The Government will continue to fund the 2005-06 Carer Recognition Grants Program to improve the recognition and support of carers. Through the 2004-05 2nd Appropriation Act, funding has been made available for the provision of additional respite services to primary carers aged 65 years and over, the majority of whom are women.

The Government will also ensure that women's services funded through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program will be represented on the ACT Homelessness Committee. The Family Support Services Review implementation process will recognise community participation, women's safety, valuing diversity and progressing reconciliation as a matter of course to ensure they continue to underpin service delivery practices.

Economic security and opportunities

Women's economic security and access to opportunities is of paramount importance. The risk of women falling into poverty is higher than for men, and action is required to ensure this risk is minimised.

One strategy to improve women's financial security is through the provision of relevant services, advice and training to strengthen women's economic capacity. The Women's Information Referral Centre will deliver information sessions on Managing Personal Finances two to three times a year for all women, including those who are in receipt of pensions or benefits, older women and women with a disability.

A new scheme will also provide an increase in preschool hours for eligible four-year-olds from 10.5 to 12 hours a week. For parents, this will mean increased opportunities for flexible engagement in paid and unpaid work and other activities.

Flexible education and training

Education can play a key role in achieving genuine equality for women. The Government recognises the importance of providing women with access to relevant, flexible, high-quality education and training.

ABS data suggests that more men access the Internet than women, and approximately 80% of people employed in the IT industry are male. The Women's Information Referral Centre is aiming to address this imbalance by providing basic computer and Internet information sessions to women with little or no experience in these areas, especially older women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The aim of these sessions is to enable women to feel more confident and to explore further training in these areas.

A new nurse refresher and re-entry scheme will be introduced for nurses and midwives, who want to update their skills and knowledge, to enable them to return to the workforce. The aim of the scheme is to provide well-structured, flexible and accessible education and training to enable nurses and midwives, who have not worked in a clinical setting for some time, to re-enter and progress their careers.

In terms of girls' education, the ACT Safe Schools Framework will be updated and leadership development opportunities will be provided to female Indigenous students through the Indigenous Leadership/Mentoring Program.

The Government will further support research programs aimed at assisting young mothers to continue with, or re-engage in schooling and implement the Canberra College Cares program, which provides an alternative educational service for young carers, pregnant and parenting students. Professional learning for schools around flexible arrangements for young carers will be delivered in partnership with carers groups.

A *Women in VET Action Plan 2005* is being developed, which identifies specific actions that will be undertaken to increase the participation and satisfaction of women in Vocational Education and Training (VET) in the ACT. In addition, posters promoting the participation of ACT women in VET, will be produced and distributed. An Introduction to VET brochure, a guide to women in the ACT that explains VET specific concepts in plain English, will also be developed.

