

**ACT GOVERNMENT  
POLICY FRAMEWORK**

# ***Justice, Options and Prevention***

***- working to make the  
lives of ACT women safe***



AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL  
TERRITORY GOVERNMENT

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## MESSAGE FROM THE MINISTER



Violence against women is an area for priority action for the ACT Government.

It is of concern that, in 2003, violence against women is still the most serious issue facing women, not only in the ACT but across all jurisdictions in Australia and across the world. Achieving our vision, of every woman in the ACT living free from violence and the fear of violence, requires ongoing commitment and action from each and every individual and all sectors of society.

As noted by the World Health Organisation in their World report on violence and health,

“ Violence is not an intractable social problem or an inevitable part of the human condition. We can do much to address and prevent it. The global knowledge base is growing and much useful experience has already been gained which needs to be implemented” (2002).

Recent community consultations in the ACT have indicated that many women experience a high level of fear of violence and that there is a lack of understanding of the impact fear of violence has on women’s lives.

The ACT Government is working with women across our community to ensure that their diverse range of needs are recognised. This policy Framework will form the basis of a more collaborative, coordinated, and holistic approach to addressing violence and safety issues for women in our community.

A 15 member reference group, consisting of Government and non-Government members, developed the Framework. Extensive consultation with Government and key community stakeholders was undertaken throughout the development of the Framework.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the development of the Framework. Your involvement has strengthened our community’s capacity to ensuring that every woman in the ACT is free from violence and the fear of violence.






A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Katy Gallagher".

Katy Gallagher MLA  
Minister for Women  
March 2003



# ACT GOVERNMENT COMMITMENT

The ACT Government's vision for Canberra is of a community that:




-  is inclusive of all Canberrans;
-  is prosperous, progressive, skilled and creative;
-  is cohesive, fair, tolerant and optimistic;
-  is committed to protecting the vulnerable and supporting those in need; and
-  gives its children every chance to realise their potential.

This vision is underpinned by sustainability in a social, economic and environmental context, and by a whole of Government approach to developing policies and delivering services.

The Government recognises the right of every individual to participate, contribute and feel safe in all aspects of life in the ACT. A key component of our vision therefore, is that every woman in the ACT is free from violence and the fear of violence.

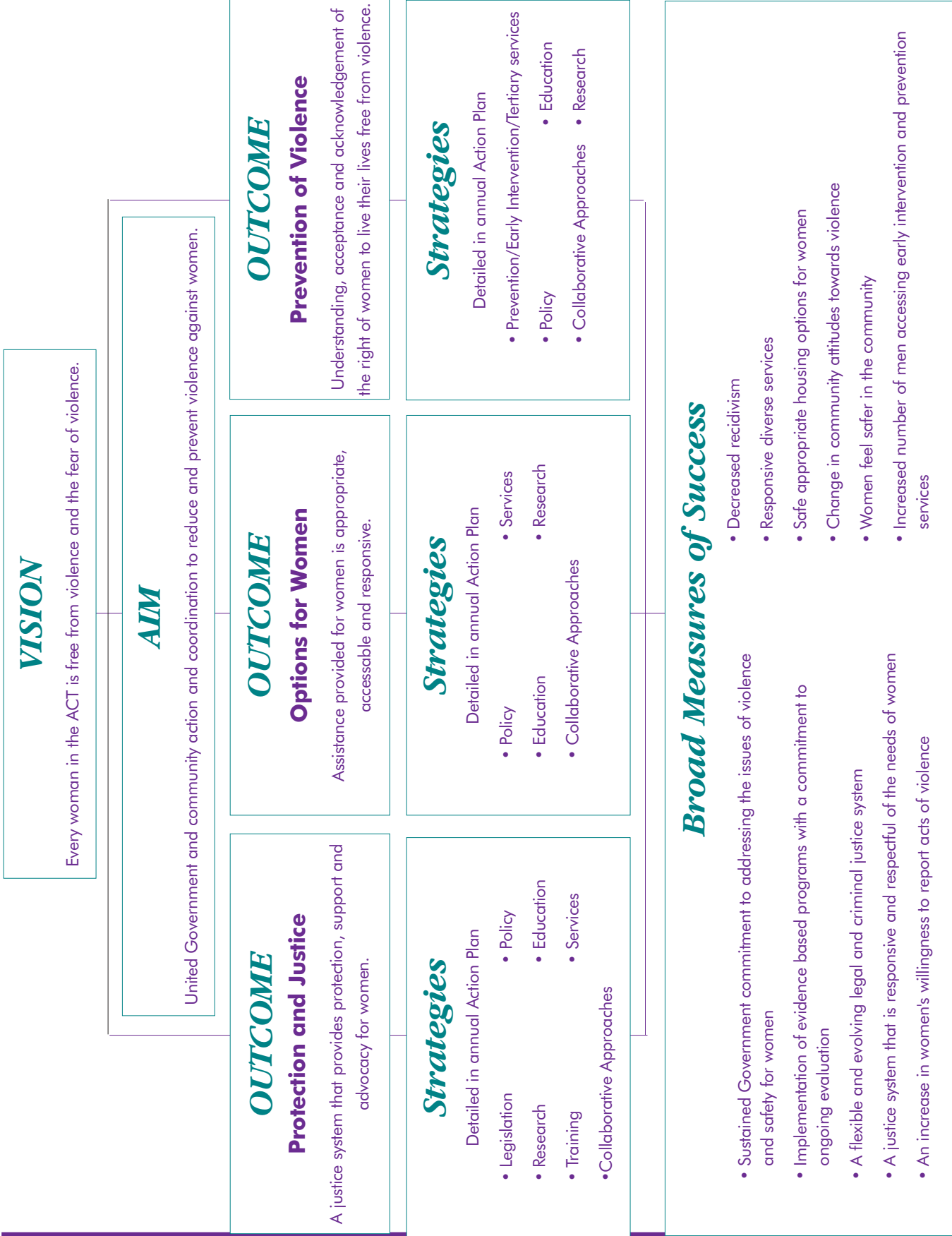
A whole of Government approach to violence and safety issues for women will assist with improved outcomes for individuals and families in the ACT who are affected by violence. The Framework will build on Government services and programs that enhance the safety of women in the ACT and assist us to meet our commitments to supporting the choices women make in their lives, and to working to enhance the opportunities for women to participate fully in community life.

This Framework will achieve this through:

-  developing and encouraging an holistic approach to addressing violence and safety issues for women through promotion, coordination and collaboration in policy development, programs and services;
-  supporting and enhancing current effective programs through a shared, strategic and measurable approach; and
-  encouraging 'best practice' as agencies work in a more collaborative manner to address the needs of women from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.






# Framework Model



## *What is the Framework?*

The Framework is an instrument to guide Government agencies in their work to eliminate violence against women, across their areas of responsibility. It provides key stakeholders with directions to work from to achieve three identified key outcomes:

-  Protection and Justice: Women have a right to access a justice system that provides protection, support and advocacy;
-  Options for Women: Assistance provided to women is appropriate, accessible, and responsive; and
-  Prevention of Violence: Understanding, acceptance and acknowledgment of the right of women to live their lives free from violence.

As part of the Framework, an annual Action Plan will identify the range of strategies in place across agencies to achieve progress towards the three key outcome areas.

## *Monitoring and Reporting*

Agency progress against the Action Plan will be monitored through agency Annual Reports. The Office for Women will collate this information from agencies, along with information gained through consultation with community organisations, into a report. This report, outlining key highlights and emerging issues, will be provided to the Minister for Women, and to an inter-departmental committee, with representation from the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women. This will enable the committee to develop a strategic overview and provide guidance and advice on effective future directions for addressing issues of violence and safety for women in the ACT.

## *What Principles underpin the Framework?*

Nine core, shared principles will guide the Government in implementing the Framework and accompanying annual Action Plan

The Framework is guided by the belief that:

- 1 Violence against women in all its forms is not acceptable in any group, culture or belief system.**
- 2 Violence against women is a crime.**
- 3 There is a need to respect all fundamental human and civil rights, which includes the right of women to be free from violence.**
- 4 Women are not a homogeneous group and come from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences. This needs to be recognised in the development and implementation of initiatives and guided by leadership within the relevant community.**
- 5 The whole community has a responsibility to eliminate violence against women.**
- 6 Government has a responsibility to show leadership in eliminating violence against women.**
- 7 Prevention and early intervention are key strategies to eliminate violence against women.**
- 8 Indigenous leadership in the development and implementation of initiatives to focus on Indigenous family violence is most effective.**
- 9 Programs and practices addressing violence against women need to be informed by research and evaluation.**

## *How is violence defined?*

The United Nations Definition of violence has been adopted as part of a shared understanding for the development of the Framework.







The UN defines the term "violence against women" to mean any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

"Women", within the definition for this Framework, includes their children.

## *Why have a Framework addressing violence and safety issues for women?*

Women's experience of violence is often different to that of men's. It is well recognised that violence against women historically relates to unequal power relations between men and women. This has led to women experiencing disadvantage and discrimination, which can prevent the full advancement of women. Violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms that result in women being denied the opportunity to live a fulfilling life.

Characteristics of violence against women include:

-  both criminal violence and non-criminal violence e.g sexual assault and emotional violence;
-  the majority of the violence is unreported;
-  most perpetrators of violence are known to the victim and are either former or current partners;
-  most of the violence occurs in the home;
-  women are more likely to be killed by their male partners following separation; and
-  women who have male partners and who have children under 15, are more likely to fear violence than women in the same circumstances who do not have a partner.







It is also important to note that, different to the experience of men, many women live in constant fear of their partner and often experience post separation violence.

The ABS conducted a national Women's Safety Survey in 1996. The results showed many women in the ACT to be uneasy about harassment and safety in various situations, particularly after dark using public transport, walking in their local neighbourhoods and in their own homes. The level of concern was higher than the national average. Consultation during the development of this Framework also highlighted that many women fear violence in both public and private places in our community and that this fear limits their ability to fully participate in many aspects of life.

## *How was the Framework developed?*

A joint Community and Government Reference Group was formed to oversight the development of the Framework.

Extensive consultation was undertaken, focussing on obtaining feedback on:

-  key issues that exist around violence generally in the community, as well as violence and safety issues specific to women in the ACT;
-  identification of strategies that were currently in place and working effectively;
-  useful future strategies that could be undertaken;
-  possible broad measures of success in relation to the three identified outcomes;
-  feedback on a proposed model for the Framework, developed by the Reference Group; and
-  comments on the suitability of the guiding principles adopted by the Reference Group, being used for the Framework.

The information from the consultation phase provided direction for the development of the final Framework and accompanying Action Plan.



