

Message from the Minister for Women



By responding to this discussion paper – *Looking Forward, Informing a New Plan for ACT Women and Girls* – you are participating in the development of an important document which will focus and shape programs, policies and actions that affect women and girls in the ACT.

Through the discussion paper, the ACT Government plans to further enhance dialogue that helps to build a community in which women and girls continue to be valued contributors and equal partners.

As Minister for Women, and a member of the Stanhope Government, I see it as our role to help create an environment in which all ACT women and girls reach their potential, are recognised for their contribution and share in the benefits of our community.

But to do so, we need your help through comments and suggestions. I am confident that this discussion paper will help to focus public discussion on issues that impact on the status and wellbeing of women and girls across social and economic spheres.

Over the life of the *ACT Women's Plan (2004-09)*, significant progress has been made to improve the lives of women and girls in our community. These are outlined in the discussion paper's section on the Government's key achievements and measures against the *Indicators of Success*. However, there are still many challenges ahead, particularly to address the complex issues experienced by women and girls who are isolated and marginalised.

Violence against women and girls remains a serious and concerning challenge for the whole ACT community and indeed for communities both nationally and internationally. I believe that we need focused and coordinated whole of government and whole of community actions if we are to ensure the safety of all women and girls in our community.

The next *ACT Women's Plan* will provide an overarching strategic framework to focus both Government and the community actions over the next five years. The Plan will articulate the Government's priorities and future plans for ACT women and girls, and will include a statistical snapshot of how they are currently faring.

I encourage individuals and organisations to participate in the development of the next *ACT Women's Plan* by answering the questions in the consultation response form at the end of the discussion paper.

I look forward to your input.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katy Gallagher". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Katy Gallagher, MLA
ACT Minister for Women

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INTRODUCTION

The *ACT Women's Plan* (2004-2009) sets out the ACT Government's vision and a strategic policy framework for working with the community to improve the status of all women and girls. It was developed in response to a recommendation from the *Legislative Assembly's Select Committee on the Status of Women in the ACT* 2002 report, and identified as a strategic action under *Building Our Community - The Canberra Social Plan*.

Development of the *ACT Women's Plan* was guided by an inter-departmental committee in collaboration with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women and through consultation with a diverse range of women in the community.

Since its release in September 2004, the *ACT Women's Plan* has provided a strategic focus for initiatives that have positively impacted on the lives of women and girls in our community.

It is now time to review the Plan and to refresh the priorities and actions for ACT women and girls for the next five years.

PURPOSE

Looking Forward – a discussion paper to inform a new ACT Women's Plan has been developed to inform and facilitate public discussion and to assist individuals and organisations to provide feedback to the ACT Government on the next iteration of the *ACT Women's Plan*.

The paper provides background information on women and girls in the ACT, examines the structure and policy context of the current *ACT Women's Plan* and highlights the Government's key achievements and future plans supporting ACT women and girls.

Section 1 provides a demographic analysis of ACT women and girls.

Section 2 examines the structure and policy context of the current *ACT Women's Plan*,

Section 3 outlines the Government's achievements against the current Plan's objectives.

Section 4 highlights new Government initiatives and future plans for ACT women and girls.

Focus Questions in the Consultation Response Form at the end of the discussion paper seek comment on:

- the focus, impact and accessibility of the current *ACT Women's Plan*; and
- future actions and priorities for ACT women and girls over the next five years.

Other community consultation approaches are planned to ensure that a diverse range of ACT women can participate in the review of the *ACT Women's Plan* including:

- 2009 ACT Women's Summit;
- targeted forums in locations across Canberra; and
- an online survey.

Further information on the review of the *ACT Women's Plan* can be found on the *Women ACT* website www.women.act.gov.au

HOW TO PROVIDE A RESPONSE

The *Looking Forward Discussion Paper* including the Consultation Response Form can be downloaded from the *Women ACT* website: www.women.act.gov.au.

A companion paper, *Taking Stock: reporting on the ACT Women's Plan (2004-09) Indicators of Success* is available on www.women.act.gov.au.

If you require hardcopies, please contact the Office for Women on 6207 2552.

Individuals and organisations are encouraged to respond to the questions posed in this paper, but may choose to comment only on questions of relevance to them, or to provide additional comment.

Responses close on **30 September 2009** and may be sent to the ACT Office for Women by:

Email women@act.gov.au

Post ACT Office for Women
Department of Disability Housing and Community Services
GPO Box 158
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601

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1. ACT WOMEN AND GIRLS

The ACT has high levels of women in education, high levels of women graduates and high levels of women in employment, compared to other areas of Australia. Women in the ACT have higher average incomes than women nationally, and the health status of women is generally better than the national average.

While many women and girls in our community are doing well and now enjoy the benefits of the enormous effort over the generations, this is not the case for all ACT women and girls. Across both the social and economic spheres, many inequalities still exist between men and women in the ACT, and between different groups of women.

In decision making roles in the ACT community, men still outnumber women in leadership positions across all sectors—public, private and academic, in politics and in the judiciary. For instance, out of the seventeen members of the 7th Legislative Assembly seven are women (41 percent) and, as at June 2008 women comprised 39 percent of executive positions in the ACT Public Service.

Whilst women make up just over half of the ACT population (50.7 percent in 2006¹), they are not represented on an equitable basis in areas of employment and earn less on average than men. Although participation in the workforce has enabled many women to obtain an independent source of income, high levels of participation by women in casual and part-time work, and lower incomes mean lower returns than men from superannuation benefits on retirement. As at March 2009, the trend participation employment rate for females in the ACT was 68.1 percent, in comparison to males at 76.9 percent², and the earnings gap, 16 percent as at November 2008, has not moved much since 2003.³

Violence against women is perhaps one of the most serious issues confronting the whole community, not only in the ACT, but across all jurisdictions in Australia and internationally. Women and girls comprise the majority of victims of domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT, and are more likely than males to experience continuous abuse or repeated cycles of violence. In 2007, there were 795 offences per 100,000 of the ACT population of crime against the person reported or becoming known, a decrease of approximately **7.55** percent in 2006.⁴ Noting that family/domestic violence is often under reported, **74** percent of victims of family violence incidents were female (2001-02).⁵ **42.5** percent of recorded victims of assault were female, **6.8** percent reported they had been a victim of physical or threatened violence in the past year, and **89** percent of reported victims of sexual assaults were female (2003).⁶

Whilst the health of ACT women and girls is generally good, major health risk factors exist. For example, the incidence of, and rate of death from, breast cancer is above the national average, women and girls make up more than two thirds of hospital attendances for self inflicted harm, and the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is significantly lower than that of women in general in the ACT.

In the education area, women and girls in the ACT are doing well. In 2008, 66.1 percent of Year 12 Certificate recipients with a University Admissions Index (UAI) were female, as were 57 percent of students with a UAI of 90 or above (ACT Government and non-Government schools). Females comprised 50.7 percent of all CIT students (50 percent plus of enrolments in small business courses and 62 percent in general business courses) and 22.8 percent of all apprentices and trainees in the ACT in 2008.⁷

The ACT Government has been working to address the areas of inequality and to improve the lives of all ACT women and girls and, in particular, those who are isolated and marginalised. The Government will use the next iteration of the *ACT Women's Plan* to further articulate its commitment to women and girls in the ACT.

2 POLICY CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

The Government's vision for women in the ACT:

*that women in the ACT reach their potential, be recognised for their contribution and share the benefits of our community*⁸

The ACT Government is committed to valuing and investing in women and promoting and safeguarding the freedoms necessary for all women and girls to live lives of dignity.

The *ACT Women's Plan* sets out the Government's vision for working with the community to improve the status of all women and girls, and provides a shared approach for working towards this vision.

The Plan provides a framework that supports Government agencies and the community to better meet the needs of all women and girls.

- It is informed by and linked to a broader policy context and underpinned by four supporting principles.
- Six objectives provide key themes to focus priorities and actions.
- Specific areas of action and indicators of success are provided under each objective.

Questions seeking comment on the focus, impact and accessibility of the current *ACT Women's Plan* are provided in the Consultation Response Form at the end of this discussion paper.

POLICY CONTEXT

The *ACT Women's Plan* recognises factors pivotal to the development of effective and responsive policies, programs and services to meet the needs of women and girls.

The Plan is an action identified in the *Canberra Social Plan*, supporting the priority of respect, diversity and human rights.

It recognises:

- the coverage of the *ACT Human Rights Act 2004* specifically in relation to women and girls;
- the policy framework *Justice, Options and Prevention - working to make the lives of ACT women safe*. This framework guides actions across Government agencies to achieve the three 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.
- Australia's commitment to the *International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)*. This Convention is often described as an international bill of rights for women. By recognising the Convention, Australia is committed to undertake measures to end discrimination against women in all its forms. More information on CEDAW is available at <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/>

- Australia's commitment to the International Labour (ILO) Convention 156, concerning equal opportunities and equal treatment for men and women workers, particularly those with family responsibilities. The Convention requires signatories to enable people with family responsibilities to engage in employment to the fullest extent possible without conflict between their work and family responsibilities. More information on the ILO Convention 156 is available at <http://www.ilo.org>.

In addition, the *ACT Women's Plan* aligns with the national women's priorities of women's economic status, leadership, and safety for women, which are progressed through the Commonwealth, States, Territories and New Zealand Ministerial Conference on the Status of Women.

SUPPORTING PRINCIPLES

The *ACT Women's Plan* recognises a set of overarching principles that underpin the effective planning and development of policies and programs for an integrated response across Government. The principles include:

1. Participation

Women of all ages should have the opportunity to fully participate and to contribute in all aspects of their lives without discrimination. This includes access to relevant and accurate information and services. Potential barriers that may limit a woman's control and choices need to be identified and addressed.

2. Equity

Women and girls should be supported to reach their full potential through supported and equitable expectations, experiences and opportunities.

3. Diversity

Women and girls are not a homogeneous group and the diversity of women must be recognised, celebrated and encouraged. The needs, rights and choices of all women must be promoted throughout all stages of their lives.

4. Collaborative approaches

Collaborative approaches strengthen the planning and delivery of effective, accessible and appropriate services and information for everyone. Partnerships and collaboration have the potential to achieve better outcomes for women through recognising, respecting and effectively identifying needs.

OBJECTIVES

The Plan is structured around six objectives. These objectives are interrelated and are of equal importance. Together they provide a framework for the development and coordination of effective and responsive policies, programs and services for women in the ACT. Areas of action and indicators of success were identified for each objective. The action areas give focus to the objectives while the indicators provide measures by which to assess the effectiveness of each objective over time.

Information on the Government's key achievements for ACT women and girls and a brief overview of measures against the *Indicators of Success* are outlined in the next section. More detailed information is available in the companion paper, *Taking Stock: reporting on the ACT Women's Plan (2004-09) Indicators of Success* at: www.women.act.gov.au.

1. Representation and recognition

Women make up just over half of the ACT population. It is vital they are part of decision making bodies and processes at all levels and that their wide-ranging contributions to the community are recognised. Commitment and supportive mechanisms are required if gender equity is to be achieved.

Areas for Action

- Acknowledging women
- Supportive structures and processes

Indicators of Success

- Proportion of women in senior management and leadership positions increased.
- Number and diversity of women on boards and committees increased.
- Number of women as Chairs or Deputy Chairs on boards increased.
- Number of women on remunerated boards increased.
- Availability and range of gender-disaggregated data increased.

2. Good health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of women and girls is central to all aspects of their lives. Health and wellbeing is affected by social, cultural, environmental and economic factors.

Areas for Action

- Accessible services
- Supporting healthy lifestyles

Indicators of Success

- The gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and ACT women in general reduced.
- Women and girls' participation in sport and physical activity across the lifespan increased.
- Women's satisfaction with health and hospital services increased.
- Health services for women in the criminal justice system improved.
- The number of incidences of self inflicted harm for women and girls reduced.
- The prevalence of smoking by women and girls reduced.
- The proportion of women and girls consuming alcohol at levels considered risky or high risk reduced.

3. Responsive housing

Housing provides a sense of belonging and an opportunity for connection with the community. Every woman and girl needs housing as a foundation for security and dignity.

Areas for Action

- Supported, crisis and longer term accommodation
- Public and community housing options
- Affordable housing

Indicators of Success

- The proportion of ACT women on low incomes experiencing housing stress reduced.
- The number of homeless women reduced.
- Numbers of women evicted from public housing reduced.
- Women's satisfaction with public housing increased.
- Land available for purchase at reduced costs to women on low incomes.

4. Safe inclusive communities

The capacity for full participation and inclusion in a society is based on a culture that recognises and respects the rights and needs of all community members. Violence

against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms that results in women and girls being denied the opportunity to live fulfilling lives.

Areas for Action

- Women's rights
- Freedom from violence
- Community participation
- Valuing diversity and progressing reconciliation

Indicators of Success

- Crimes against women (crimes against the person) reduced.
- Women's perception of safety at home and in the community increased.
- Women's awareness and exercise of their rights to equal opportunities with men and to equality before the law, increased.

5. Economic security and opportunities

Economic security is a major factor influencing choices and outcomes in the lives of women and girls. Economic security can mean different things to a woman across her lifespan.

Areas for Action

- Financial, employment and business support
- Flexible workplaces

Indicators of Success

- Long term unemployment for women reduced.
- Poverty for women in the ACT reduced.
- The gap between men and women's full time average weekly earnings reduced.
- The number of male and female employees accessing flexible work practices increased.
- The number of private sector workplaces offering paid maternity leave increased.

6. Flexible education and training

Education, both formal and informal, is key to empowering women and girls as decision makers in their economic security and general wellbeing. Flexible, accessible, appropriate and affordable education and training opportunities are essential if women are to participate fully in the economy and community.

Areas for Action

- School and post school
- Lifelong education, training and skill development

Indicators of Success

- The range of subject areas undertaken as study by women and girls broadened.
- The proportion of women completing accredited Vocational Education and Training (VET) programs increased.
- The proportion of women across all age groups undertaking flexible education and training increased.
- The proportion of women completing graduate and postgraduate courses increased.

3. TAKING STOCK - key achievements

Over the life of the *ACT Women's Plan (2004-2009)* the ACT Government has initiated positive change for ACT women by developing innovative policies, programs and services.

This section of the *Looking Forward Discussion Paper* looks at the ACT Government's key achievements for ACT women and girls in relation to each of the six objectives of the current *ACT Women's Plan*.

While significant progress has been made, the ACT Government acknowledges there is still more to be done to ensure *'that women in the ACT reach their potential, be recognised for their contribution and share the benefits of our community'*.

1. Representation and recognition

Representation and recognition includes raising the profile of women and women's issues in the community, ensuring women have access to participate in power structures and removing barriers to achieving genuine equality.

The Government continues to support mechanisms to increase women's representation and recognition in the community and to ensure their contribution to community life in the ACT is recognised. These include:

- The Office for Women's key roles in both advising the Government on issues affecting ACT women and girls and in promoting policies and programs that support this objective.
- ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, which consults with the community and provides direct advice to the Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher MLA and the Government on issues affecting women in our community.
- Annual International Women's Day Awards that acknowledge women who have made significant contributions in the community, as well as individuals and organisations who have had a role in progressing the status of women in the ACT.
- The ACT Women's Register, which matches women who have relevant skills and expertise with board and committee vacancies and thereby supports the Government's commitment to achieving and maintaining 50% representation of women on Government boards and committees.
- Women's specific consultative mechanisms including the ACT Women's Summits and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gatherings.

Key Achievements

The Government has delivered a number of initiatives to increase women's representation within the community and to ensure their contribution to community life in the ACT is recognised.

Audrey Fagan Scholarship Program

\$60,000 per annum for the Audrey Fagan Scholarship Program providing Canberra women and girls with opportunities to further their study and professional development in leadership positions in law enforcement, care and protection or professional support services for women who are victims of violence. The Program has three separate components:

- Churchill Fellowship Grant up to \$30,000
- Post Graduate Scholarship of \$20,000
- Five enrichment grants for young women of \$2,000 each.

ACT Women's Grants Program

The ACT Women's Grants Program provides \$100,000 per annum to assist community organisations and groups to improve the status of women and strengthen their capacity to provide services to women.

ACT Women's Summit

In 2006, the first ACT Women's Summit was held in partnership with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women. The Summit was followed by a series of roundtable meetings focusing on prevention of violence against women, health and housing.

ACT Women's Register

The Women's Register was expanded, enabling boards and committees, including community organisation boards, to identify and appoint suitably qualified women.

Increased representation of women on ACT Government boards and committees

A whole of government appointments consultation process was established to support the Government's commitment to achieving and maintaining fifty per cent representation of women on its boards and committees. The ACT has a strong record of appointing women to boards and committees, compared to other States and Territories.

Women in the Making of Canberra

This project promoted women's place in the history of Canberra and honoured women and women's organisations that have made a significant contribution to the development of Canberra. The project was launched as part of Celebrate Heritage 2006. The project can be viewed online at: <http://www.womenaustralia.info/exhib/wmc/wmc.html>.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gatherings

Annual funding is provided to support four ACT women to attend the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gatherings. The National Gatherings provide a forum for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women across Australia. Since 2007, the Office for Women has held ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gatherings in support of the ACT's National Delegates, and along with other States and Territories, funded a National Secretariat position since 2007-08.

Women ACT Website

In December 2008, a new website for ACT women and girls was launched. The website brought together and enhanced information from the previous Office for Women and Women's Information and Referral Centre websites, creating a 'one-stop-shop' for ACT women to access online information and resources.

The website can be accessed at www.women.act.gov.au

Indicators of Success

The number of females in executive positions in the ACT Public Service has increased by 5.1 percent since 2003 to 39 percent as at 30 June 2008.

The level of women's representation on ACT Government boards and committees increased from 46 percent in 2005 to 48 percent in 2008.

Women represented 34.7 percent of chairs of ACT Government boards as at 31 March 2008, an increase of 8.7 percent since December 2005.

The percentage of women on remunerated ACT Government boards and committees increased from 42 percent in 2002-3 to 45 percent in 2005.

The ACT Government is currently exploring options to increase the availability and range of gender disaggregated data in line with the Parliamentary Agreement for the 7th Legislative Assembly.

2. Good health and wellbeing

Women and girls have particular health needs at different times in their lives as well as the socio-economic, environmental, and cultural factors that impact on their health and wellbeing.

Provision of accessible services and supporting healthy lifestyles for ACT women is a high priority for the Government. A wide range of affordable, accessible and appropriate programs and services continue to be provided.

Key Achievements

The Government has delivered a number of initiatives to ensure that the health and wellbeing needs of women and girls in the ACT are met.

Women's and Children's Hospital

Funding of \$90.733 million was provided for the new Women's and Children's Hospital. The hospital will enable the development of a centre of excellence in women's and children's health care in the delivery of new models of clinical care, and will facilitate innovation and the translation of research to clinical care.

Midwifery Access Program

Funding was provided to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Midwifery Access Program at the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service. The program provides a culturally appropriate and holistic midwifery service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Sport

The ACT Government has invested funding in a number of initiatives in the ACT including: \$16 million in annual grants to support the sustainability of local sport, recreation and community organisations and promote participation; \$4.5 million to redevelop the Lyneham Hockey Centre; and \$19 million in funding for drought-proofing initiatives for the sporting and recreation industry. While these initiatives are not gender specific, they recognise that more women than men participate in regular outdoor sports activities.

Smoking

A component of the *ACT Primary Health Care Strategy 2006-2009* is to reduce smoking during pregnancy, especially amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. The ACT Government also introduced smoking prohibitions in enclosed places and restricted the sale and display of tobacco.

Human Papillomavirus (HPV) Vaccination

This vaccination was offered to girls in all ACT high schools and colleges, both public and private. From 2010, the vaccine will be available on an ongoing basis to all Year 7 girls through the school immunisation program.

Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups

Recurrent funding was provided to the Majura and Brindabella Women's Groups to support improved health and wellbeing outcomes for ACT women.

Indicators of Success

53.4 percent of participants in regular outdoor sport in the ACT are female (2008).

In 2005, 13.1 percent of females in the ACT identified as a smoker, in comparison to 20.1 percent in 2001.

In 2004, the estimated life expectancy for Aboriginal females in the ACT was 65 years (all ACT females 83.9 years) (ABS, 2005b). The average age of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the ACT in 1995 and 1996 was 40.6 years.⁹

3. Responsive housing

Responsive housing for women includes: safe places 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 including access to safe places during periods of homelessness.

Key Achievements

The Government has implemented a number of initiatives which focus on delivering responsive housing for women including access to services and other mechanisms to overcome adversity such as managing poverty.

Domestic Violence and Crisis Accommodation Initiatives

- The Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative was established to provide crisis accommodation for women and children over the Christmas/New Year period, providing innovative responses to the increase in demand over the Christmas period.
- Housing ACT introduced new priority public housing needs and eligibility categories for applicants with complex needs, including women and children escaping domestic violence.
- The Transitional Housing Program was established with capital funding of \$6 million for homelessness service provision.

Women's Pathways Group

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services in partnership with the ACT women's sector, established the Women's Pathways Group to review women's pathways in and out of homelessness services and related entry and referral processes. In 2005, the Group successfully delivered the Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative and developed the "any door is the right door" principle and accompanying common referral form. Clear referral processes that can be implemented by homelessness services are in development.

Aleta Outreach Service

Recurrent funding was provided for Toora Women Inc Aleta Outreach Service for single women with complex needs and at risk of homelessness.

Options for Older Women

Accommodation options have been established to meet the needs of older women experiencing homelessness. These include Betty Searle House which provides medium to long term accommodation for single women over 55 years and funding to Toora Women Inc to provide crisis accommodation and outreach support for older women.

Indicators of Success

In 2007-08, **33.8** percent of females with children who accessed SAAP services in the ACT were seeking assistance due to domestic/family violence, a reduction of 12.2 percent since 2002-03.¹⁰ The Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative has provided around 1,000 additional bed nights each year since 2005 over the Christmas period.

Eight women were evicted from public housing in 2008, a reduction of 43 percent since 2005.

Since 2007, initiatives to make home ownership easier in the ACT include making more land available, requiring all new developments to include a minimum of 15 percent of blocks set aside for affordable house and land packages, introducing a land rent scheme for eligible buyers and looking at deferred duty payment schemes.¹¹

4. 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.

Key Achievements

The Government has implemented a number of initiatives aimed at building safe, inclusive communities and overcoming exclusion and diversity to enable women and girls to fully participate in society. Some initiatives have also been influenced by the Government Policy Framework: *Justice, Options and Prevention – working to make the lives of ACT women safe*.

Review of the Victim Services Scheme

The review was followed by additional funding of \$580,000 in the 2007-08 Budget to provide a seamless service with reduced waiting times for victims seeking counselling.

Sexual Assault Reform Program

This interagency program was initiated in response to the joint review by ACT Policing and the Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP). It includes involvement of victims' agencies, Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, child advocates, police, prosecution, courts, and members of the legal profession in partnership with the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Additionally, collaborative relationships between ACT Health, the ACT Policing Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team (SACAT), the DPP and Care and Protection Services were enhanced through continuation of joint education and training opportunities for agencies.

Responding to Sexual Assault: *The Challenge of Change Report*

This Report made recommendations to improve the criminal justice response to sexual assault matters, and to better meet the needs of sexual assault victims. The Government responded by:

- Increasing funding to justice and non-government agencies to support victims of sexual assault and to fund reforms in the criminal justice system for victims of sexual assault (nearly \$4m was allocated in the 2008-09 Budget over four years).
- Introducing changes to the way victims of sexual assault are required to give evidence in the justice system, including extra infrastructure and video links to give evidence in court, and more experienced personnel for physical and mental support. These changes were developed to ensure victims of sexual assault were treated fairly and empathetically.

Legislative Reform

Insertion of a new part in the Criminal Code 2002 has enabled improved procedures for the management of family violence offences and reform relating to sexual offences in the ACT.

Support for women experiencing violence

- Provided ongoing funding of the Domestic Violence Crisis Service and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to 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 maintained a Domestic Violence Support Group for women who have experienced abuse from their partner, and

continued to work in partnership with the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to provide a weekly support group for survivors of sexual abuse.

Family Violence Intervention Program

Increased funding was provided for the Family Violence Intervention Program. This program provides an integrated and coordinated criminal justice and community response to family/domestic violence. It supports work with individuals and families affected by family/domestic violence.

Inclusion

Since 2007, regular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gatherings provide a forum for women to meet and discuss current issues at a local ACT community level and feed into the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Gatherings.

New International Women's Day (IWD) Award categories were introduced to acknowledge and recognise the contributions made by diverse groups of women and girls in the ACT. In 2008, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CaLD) backgrounds were acknowledged with a special award category and in 2009, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were acknowledged for their unique contributions to the ACT community.

Women's Information and Referral Centre continues to support women to access information about groups, courses and workshops held in the community through the bi-annual Community Calendar. The Centre also has a specialist library to complement the learning gained in groups and courses.

Indicators of Success

The Crimes (Offences Against Pregnant Women) Amendment Act 2006 was introduced to the Assembly in November 2005 and passed in March 2006. The Act amended the Crimes Act 1900 to make a number of offences aggravated offences when they are against 'a pregnant woman'.¹²

4.6 percent of females felt unsafe in their home, a reduction of approximately 6.5 percent since 2002. (Source: 2005 ACT General Health Survey)

Established in 2005, the ACT Human Rights Commission provides community education and information about the HRC Act and related Acts, and promotes the recognition and acceptance within the community of the equality of men and women and of the principle of equality of opportunity for all people.

A component of the Legal Aid ACT Community Legal Education program focuses on providing legal information to women on a range of topics.

5. Economic security and opportunities

Economic security and access to opportunities are critical in supporting lifestyle choices and decision making for women. Women are at greater risk of experiencing poverty than men and strategies need to be in place to minimise this workforce participation risk.

Key Achievements

A number of initiatives have been implemented to increase women's economic independence and to promote work life balance.

Return to Work Grants Program

The Program commenced in 2008 and provides grants of up to \$1,000 for women to return to the workforce. The Program supports women by enabling them to attend short courses and pay for childcare to attend interviews and more formal training and education.

Payroll Tax Exemption

In 2004-05, the Government provided a payroll tax exemption to private employers who give 14 weeks' primary care giver leave to their employees following the birth or adoption of a child.

Work and Life Balance Policy

The Government's *Work and Life Balance Policy* for ACT public servants recognises and supports family friendly initiatives for female employees such as positive management of maternity/ parental leave and provision of space and accommodation to support nursing mothers.

Indicators of Success

As at March 2009, the trend participation employment rate for females in the ACT was 68.1 percent, in comparison to 66.8 percent in September 2007.¹³

In 2009-10, the ACT Government will provide an additional four weeks paid maternity leave for permanent ACT public service employees on top of the current 14 weeks, an additional week in bonding leave on top of the current five days, and five days personal leave for bonding purposes.¹⁴

The ACT Government introduced the *Work and Life Balance* policy for public servants in 2005. **66** percent of employees are female.

6. Flexible education and training

Education, both formal and informal, is key to empowering women and girls as decision makers in their economic security and general wellbeing. Flexible, accessible, appropriate and affordable education and training opportunities are essential if women are to participate fully in the economy and community.

Key Achievements

The Government has implemented initiatives which recognise the need for women and girls to access quality and flexible education and training.

Refresher and Re-entry Scheme for Nurses and Midwives

A new nurse refresher and re-entry scheme was introduced to support nurses and midwives who want to update their skills and knowledge and to return to the workforce.

Women in VET Action Plan

The Women in VET Action Plan identifies specific actions that will be undertaken to increase the participation and satisfaction of ACT women and girls in Vocational Education and Training.

VET Training Initiatives for Women

Funding was provided for VET training initiatives for women in equity and target groups. These groups were identified both nationally and locally to address industry skills shortages and inclusiveness, and to attract or retain workers in the workforce. Additionally, programs offered women the opportunity to have their existing skills and knowledge formally recognised.

Indicators of Success

Since 2003, more females have been undertaking vocational education and training in the ACT than males. In 2006, there were 12,200 female VET students compared with 11,300 male students.¹⁵

In the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy 2008, more female than male students achieved above the national minimum standard in all tests (reading, writing, spelling, grammar, punctuation and numeracy) in all year levels (3, 5, 7, 9) with the exception of year 9 numeracy where males and females performed the same (96.6 percent).

In 2008, 66.1 percent of Year 12 Certificate recipients with a University Admissions Index (UAI) were female, as were 57 percent of students with a UAI of 90 or above (ACT Government and non-Government schools).

4. LOOKING FORWARD – future plans

The *Looking Forward Discussion Paper* and other consultation strategies including the 2009 Women's Summit will provide avenues for public comment on "where are we now and where do we need to be for the second century".

The second ACT Women's Plan will be developed and implemented across the ACT over the next five years. The Plan will articulate the Government's commitment to ACT women and girls, and will include a statistical snapshot of how they are currently faring.

Prior to the 2008 ACT Election, the Government made a number of commitments to support ACT women and girls. This section highlights these commitments and several new initiatives, which were announced in 2009-10 ACT Budget.

Questions seeking input on new priorities and future plans for ACT women and girls over the next five years are provided in the Consultation Response Form at the end of this discussion paper.

Gender Analysis

In 2008, the Parliamentary Agreement of the 7th Legislative Assembly committed to "Phase in the publication of gender impact statements and gender disaggregated data associated with Government legislation, policies, budget and annual reports by 2010.

The introduction of gender analysis across government will require a phased approach, focusing on the development of a gendered understanding of the impact of government policy and program delivery. This will need to be supported by gender disaggregated data and analysis, as well as tailored training across government. While gender analysis is a positive and well-utilised tool in developing nations, as well as in the international setting, there is limited implementation of this policy development tool across Australia.

In the first instance, the ACT will undertake a pilot project, developing gender analysis capacity in ACT Health, as part of the upcoming ACT Women's Health Services Plan. The project will enable the evaluation of tools for gender analysis across government, and provide the foundation for wider use of gender analysis.

The Parliamentary Agreement has obvious implications for a renewed *ACT Women's Plan*. This will be primarily "visible" in the regular reporting of gender impact in Government publications, and will also require the embedding of gender analysis into policy and practice at the early development stages.

Leadership

The Government is committed to achieving and maintaining 50 percent representation of women on its boards and committees and to supporting women to increase their leadership capacity. New women's leadership initiatives include:

- Upgrading and automating the ACT Women's Register. This will strengthen the capacity of the Register to identify suitably qualified women for appointment to boards and committees.
- A full audit, and automation of government boards and committees so that statistics of female representation can be monitored and remedied as required; and
- Providing accessible, online information on women's leadership programs.

Health

ACT Women's Health Plan

The ACT Government is in the process of developing a comprehensive plan that reflects a whole of health plan for women. The plan will be embedded in a policy and service plan context that is underpinned by universal access for all ACT women and strong, positive partnerships across a whole of women's health continuum.

The development of the Plan will be informed by *the Health Status of women in the ACT* which was released in 2008. It is anticipated that a draft plan will be released for consultation in mid-2009.

A Public Diagnostic Mammography Service

The service will be established at the Canberra Hospital and provide access to public mammography services for an estimated 2,000 women per year who do not meet the current criteria and require follow-up services following breast cancer surgery (\$2.966 million over four years).

Support for Carers

The Government will establish a Flexible Support Fund to improve the quality of life of people with a disability and their carers through the provision of individualised grants. Funding of \$0.83 million over four years will be provided for this initiative. 55.7 percent of people with a profound or severe disability in the ACT are women and, nationally, 71 percent of primary carers are women.

Housing

The ACT Government has implemented broad housing reform to increase and improve housing availability and affordability, and to establish a fairer and more responsive public housing system, targeted to those most in need.

Initiatives under the *ACT Affordable Housing Plan* will continue to assist people into home ownership. These initiatives include making more land available, requiring all new developments to include a minimum of 15 percent of blocks set aside for affordable house and land packages, introducing a land rent scheme for eligible buyers and looking at deferred duty payment schemes.

Housing ACT will introduce a Domestic Violence Policy which will consolidate all existing Housing ACT legislation, policies and procedures that relate to domestic violence.

A substantial proportion of the ACT's share of the Australian Government's \$42 billion Nation Building and Jobs Plan funding of \$350 million will be channelled into social housing. This will include \$96.3 million for the construction of around 320 homes over the next three and a half years; and \$6.4 million for the maintenance of around 243 properties.

Crisis Accommodation

Funding was announced in the 2009-10 Budget to address the needs of people exiting crisis accommodation including:

- \$0.32 million for the expansion of the Transitional Housing Program. This Program utilises vacant Housing ACT stock to provide short term accommodation for people exiting crisis accommodation. The program builds on the Domestic Violence Christmas Initiative, which provided a total of 1,197 additional bed nights for women and children escaping domestic violence during the 06/07 Christmas period.
- \$290,000 over 4 years to provide: assistance to people exiting crisis accommodation and \$100,000 in funding for the Housing Assistance for Victims of Domestic Violence initiative which will support domestic violence victims to remain in their home.

A Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy

This Strategy will bring together:

- Government election commitments on the development of a promotional campaign '*Respect and Responsibility*' to support women's safety at major events.
- The development of a Whole of Government statement against domestic and family violence.
- The ACT's response to *A Time for Action: The National Council's Plan for Australia to reduce Violence against Women and their Children, 2009-2021*.
- Funding to Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to implement and evaluate a pilot sexual assault prevention education program at a local high school using a whole school community approach.

Microcredit Program

A microcredit program will be established to support women in small business. The microcredit program will be targeted at women who want to set up a business or need help to grow their business. The program will assist women on low incomes by providing a \$3,000 interest-free loan.

Increased Maternity Leaves for ACT Public Service Employees

The Government will increase maternity / paternity provisions for permanent ACT public service (ACTPS) employees in 2009-10. This funding will provide an additional four weeks in paid maternity leave for ACTPS employees on top of the current 14 weeks, an additional week in bonding leave on top of the current five days, and five days personal leave for bonding purposes. (\$7.06 million over four years)

Community Sector Portable Long Service Leave

The Government will provide \$1.950 million in funding for Community Sector Portable Long Service Leave. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare indicates that the profile of workers in community services occupations across Australia is predominantly female.

CONCLUSION

The current *ACT Women's Plan* has provided a strategic focus for initiatives that have positively impacted on the lives of women and girls in our community.

The ACT Government is committed to involving the community in the development of the next iteration of the *ACT Women's Plan*. This discussion paper and other consultation approaches will help to inform the Government's future strategic direction and priorities for ACT women and girls.

In a rapidly changing local and global environment, it is important that there are regular opportunities to 'take stock', reflect and plan for future priorities and actions which continue to improve the status of women and girls and progress the ACT Government's vision '*that women in the ACT reach their potential, be recognised for their contribution and share the benefits of our community*'.

¹ ABS 2007, *2006 Census Tables*

² ABS - Industrial Relations, Chief Minister's Department

³ ABS Average Weekly Earnings

⁴ ACT Justice and Community Safety Annual Report

⁵ Source AFP

⁶ ABS Recorded Crime Victims 2003

⁷ Source CIT

⁸ ACT Women's Plan 2004-09

⁹ Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander People in the ACT – ACT Health 1998 update

¹⁰ SAAP National Data Collection annual report 2007-08 – ACT supplementary tables

¹¹ 2007 ACT Housing Affordability Action Plan

¹² Justice and Community Safety Annual Report 2007-08

¹³ ABS Labour Force *Australia, Spreadsheets, Sep 2007* (cat. no. 6202.0.55.001)

¹⁴ ACT Budget 2009-10 – In addition, the Commonwealth Government has announced a new parental leave scheme equivalent to 18 weeks of the Federal minimum wage for all Australians commencing in 2011 (May 2009).

¹⁵ ABS Australian Capital Territory in Focus 2007

Looking Forward Discussion Paper

Informing a new plan for ACT women and girls

CONSULTATION RESPONSE FORM

The *Looking Forward Discussion Paper* including the Consultation Response Form can be downloaded from the *Women ACT* website: www.women.act.gov.au.

A companion paper, *Taking Stock: reporting on the ACT Women's Plan (2004-09) Indicators of Success* is also available on www.women.act.gov.au. If you require hardcopies, please contact the Office for Women on 6207 2552.

Individuals and organisations are encouraged to respond to the questions posed below, but may choose to comment only on questions of relevance to them, or to provide additional comment.

QUESTIONS

SECTION TWO - POLICY CONTEXT AND STRUCTURE

1. Vision

Does the ACT Government's vision statement for women reflect your/ the community's aspirations for women and girls in the ACT?

2. Policy Context

Should other policy, legislation and/or supporting structures be included in the policy context of the Women's Plan?

3. Supporting Principles

Do the supporting principles adequately inform the diversity of women policy and program approaches in the ACT?

4. The six objectives of the ACT Women's Plan

Do the objectives broadly reflect the key priorities for women in the ACT?
Are they still relevant? Should other key themes/ priorities be included?

5. Areas of action for each of the objectives

What other actions are needed to focus a new ACT Women's Plan?

6. Indicators of success for each of the objectives

Are the Indicators of Success useful and relevant? What, if any other indicators are needed?

7. Accessibility of the ACT Women's Plan

What strategies can you suggest to improve accessibility and increase knowledge of a new *ACT Women's Plan*?

SECTION 4 - LOOKING FORWARD – future plans

- 1** What other **priorities and future actions** are required to advance the status of ACT women and girls?