Report on Consultations undertaken to inform the *ACT Women's Plan 2010-2015*

November 2009

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LOOKING FORWARD – informing a new plan for act women and girls

In July 2009, the ACT Government released the discussion paper - *Looking Forward – informing a new plan for ACT women and girls* as a way for individuals, organisations and the community to provide feedback on the *ACT Women's Plan 2004-2009* and to inform the next five year plan for women and girls.

The discussion paper provided background information and a demographic analysis on women and girls in the ACT. It examined the structure and policy context of the current *ACT Women's Plan* and sought comment on its focus, impact and accessibility. The paper also outlined the ACT Government's achievements against the plan's objectives, highlighted new initiatives and commitments, and sought comment on future actions and priorities over the next five years. Written responses to the discussion paper closed on 30 September 2009.

A companion paper, *Taking Stock: reporting on the ACT Women's Plan (2004-09) Indicators of Success* measured progress against the Plan's indicators of success.

Other consultation strategies were used to enable a diverse range of women and girls to give their views on the direction of the next women's plan including:

- 2009 ACT Women's Summit;
- outreach consultation forums;
- an online survey; and
- an ACT Government forum on gender analysis.

The Ministerial Advisory Council on Women consulted directly with groups of ACT women and girls, including marginalised women and girls. The Council provided feedback on the findings of their consultations in their written submission to inform the next women's plan.

This Report provides a summary of feedback received from the Canberra community through consultations undertaken by the ACT Government between July and October 2009 and from submissions received in response to the discussion paper *Looking Forward - informing a new plan for ACT women and girls*. Some suggestions do not fall within the ACT Government jurisdiction as they are Australian Government responsibilities. These suggestions will continue to inform the development of the next Plan.

Appendix A provides an overview of the consultation strategies. Appendix B provides a list of Discussion Paper respondents and Appendix C lists the 2009 ACT Women's Summit participants.

SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

Individuals and community organisations provided comments on the current plan; highlighted issues of concern, particularly in regard to groups of marginalised women and girls; and recommended solutions. Access, equity and participation were common themes raised by all age groups and minority groups.

This report sets out the feedback received under the following headings: *Vision, Policy Context, Supporting Principles, Objectives, Actions, and Indicators of Success, Accessibility and Looking forward - future plans*.

The ACT Government would like to acknowledge the 2009 Women's Summit participants, the discussion paper and online survey respondents and each of the women and girls who participated in the outreach consultation forums. Their views will be used to shape and inform the *ACT Women's Plan 2010-2015.*

Vision

The ACT Government's vision outlined in the *ACT Women's Plan 2004-2009* '*that women in the ACT reach their potential, be recognised for their contribution and share the benefits of our community*' was supported.

It was suggested that the next women's plan include:

- young women and girls as a particular focus;
- a Statement of Purpose to shape and strengthen the vision; and
- a statement on the roles and responsibilities of the general community and other institutions, as well as government, in addressing access, participation, equity and safety issues for women and girls.

Policy Context

There was support for evidence-based policy, within an explicit rights-based framework. Suggestions for strengthening the *Policy Context* include:

- development of synergies with ACT, national and international key strategies and initiatives; and
- inclusion of a matrix of ACT and national policies, strategies and frameworks relevant to the next women's plan.

Supporting Principles

Importance was placed on underpinning the *Supporting Principles: participation, equity, diversity and collaborative approaches* with a commitment to human rights, evidence-based policy, responsiveness and accountability.

Objectives, Actions and Indicators of Success

Comments highlighted the importance of ensuring that there are strong links between the *Objectives, Actions* and *Indicators of Success* of the next women's plan. Inclusion of an overview of the issues and contextual information for women and girls in specific demographic and age groups was recommended.

Objective 1: *Representation and Recognition* was supported.

It was suggested that Objective 1 be expanded to include *Participation.* The majority of the feedback related to access to leadership positions and access to female specific information in the ACT.

Recommendations provided to progress Objective 1 include:

- value the unique and diverse roles that women play in both public and private life to impart confidence in women to achieve their goals;
- target gender stereotyping through public education programs at schools, and with broader community education programs;
- diversity of women to be reflected across decision making bodies;
- introduce specific strategies and indicators of success regarding young women's participation, representation and recognition in government and community processes;
- support young women and newly arrived refugee women to develop skills in leadership and decision making through mentoring and training programs;
- continue to provide scholarships and programs that support women to undertake leadership and decision making roles;
- provide scholarships to support women with disabilities, Aboriginal women and Torres Strait Islander women to participate in decision making and leadership roles; and
- collect and report on disaggregated data regarding the number of women on boards and committees.

Objective 2: *Good Health and Wellbeing* was supported.

There was support for a set of indicators covering primary health, mental health, sexual health, alcohol and other drug use and increasing accessibility and affordability of health services.

Health indicators for specific groups of women and girls including Aboriginal women, Torres Strait Islander women, young women, women with disabilities, carers, migrant women and refugee women were recommended. It was proposed that these indicators be used to ensure that:

- the health system is responsive to women and girls throughout their life course;
- the health and wellbeing of all ACT women and girls is improved; and
- access to gender specific and culturally appropriate health services, and health and wellbeing information is improved.

Community feedback highlighted the financial, emotional and lifestyle implications for women and girls who are carers. Particular concerns regarding the ageing profile of carers were raised in the light of a prediction that, by 2013, 56% of all carers in Australia will be over 65, with the majority being female.

Suggestions for improving the health and wellbeing of specific groups of women and girls include:

- incorporate a ‘whole of life’ and social approach to women's health;
- improve access to appropriate, affordable and available health and wellbeing services;
- create pathways of care that are easy to navigate including access to information in preferred formats; access to assistance in navigating the pathways; and a workforce that empathises with women who do not understand the health system and the services provided;
- extend service support to women who have been hospitalised or have had other medical interventions;
- provide gender and culturally sensitive information on health and wellbeing;
- strategies to address mental health issues of young women including self esteem, body image, risk taking behaviour, self-harm, eating disorders, depression, self harm and suicide;
- promote positive attitudes towards ageing;
- improve older women’s access to affordable medical and dental care;
- a campaign to raise awareness of caring and respite needs;
- extend existing support to women and girls who are carers including additional funding for respite care;
- establish innovative models for reaching the most marginalised women, such as outreach and through-care models of service;
- consult with women with disabilities when developing standards and service specifications for all health services, including data collection;
- improve reproductive health services for women and girls with disabilities;
- provide sex education and access to reproductive information, resources, medical care to women and girls with disabilities;
- address issues related to the delays in accessing health care services experienced by culturally and linguistically diverse women who lack knowledge on bulk billing services; and
- introduce culturally appropriate drug and alcohol rehabilitation programs for women and girls.

Objective 3: *Responsive Housing* was supported.

It was suggested that Objective 3: *Responsive Housing* be expanded to include *Responsive Transport.*

Feedback highlighted the need for women and their families to be able to access a range of safe, sustainable and affordable accommodation options. There was support for the introduction of a range of flexible housing options and acknowledgement that housing and homelessness affect women and girls socially, culturally, environmentally and economically.

Particular issues for young women were raised including discrimination in the private rental market and homelessness.

Suggestions for improving housing options for women and girls include:

- support women and their families into safe, sustainable housing;
- ensure women of all ages and abilities have access to appropriate and realistically priced housing;
- increase support for older women who are experiencing broken relationships or homelessness;
- provide private rental bond assistance, particularly for women on low incomes and women exiting criminal justice system;
- increase respite for people with high needs and resources for carers;
- assist women on low incomes to make their homes safe;
- address issues of safety for women of all ages in public housing; and
- increase the universal amount of housing built by ACT Government by 30% to meet the accommodation needs of female carers and marginalised women and girls.

Responsive Transport

Improved access to safe, accessible and responsive transport was a consistent issue raised throughout the consultations process. It was recommended that this issue be included as a focus or new objective in the next women's plan.

Objective 4: *Safe inclusive communities* was supported

It was recommended that *Safe communities* and *Inclusive communities* be separate objectives in the next women's plan.

Safe Communities

There was support for the next women's plan to link to the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children* and to include indicators on:

- attitudes of ACT men towards violence against women and girls; and
- the number of ACT schools and school students receiving education targeted at violence prevention.

Suggestions to address abuse and violence against women and girls include:

- provide public education on the Family Violence Intervention Program;
- engage men and boys in violence prevention strategies;
- resource education programs to reduce the incidence of elder abuse;
- provide ongoing funding for Indigenous Women's Legal Services;
- resource culturally appropriate programs and information strategies targeting women and girls at a higher risk of violence;
- resource safety education programs for women and girls;
- address the rate and range of violence against women with disabilities and include measures to reduce it;
- address the issue of abuse and violence against women and girls living in institutions and groups homes;
- provide accessible services and programs to women and girls with disabilities who experience violence that support their recovery; and
- provide culturally sensitive programs and services for migrant women and refugee women who experience violence that support their recovery.

Inclusive communities

Feedback on *Inclusive communities* highlighted a need to build social connectedness, particular for marginalised women and girls.

Suggestions to build inclusiveness and connectedness include:

- actively promote the rights of women and girls;
- include 'improved awareness of women's rights' as an indicator of success in the next women's plan;
- promote an anti-discrimination legal framework to instil cultural change around women's leadership;
- increase support services available for women with a disability who are escaping violence or rebuilding their lives after surviving violence;
- support the development of a national comprehensive framework to address the over-representation of women with disabilities in the criminal justice system and to ensure their needs are met;
- introduce strategies and indictors of success that recognise women and their varied contributions to the community;
- provide targeted programs which support community inclusiveness and build on social connectedness for marginalised women and girls, particularly migrant women and refugee women;
- increase access to mainstream services that are culturally appropriate for Aboriginal women and Torres Strait islander women;
- establish a program that supports women in the criminal justice system and also assists them to re-establish their life when they leave the system;

- build a ‘child and youth friendly city’ which values girls as equal citizens with equitable access to services; and
- support parents with disabilities, particularly mothers with intellectual disabilities and mothers with psychosocial disabilities who are significantly over represented in the child protection system.

Objective 5: *Economic security and opportunities* was supported.

Women’s participation in the workforce was the main theme raised under this objective. Feedback highlighted pay inequality as an ongoing issue of concern, demonstrated by the national 17% pay gap between men’s and women’s average income.

There was recognition that income levels impact the socio-economic status of women and that low income levels put women and girls at risk of experiencing social isolation and poverty.

Feedback highlighted economic security issues for women and girls. Limited access to fair, flexible and family-friendly work practices and working conditions and to suitable and quality child care were seen as particular barriers across the entire Australian workforce.

Suggestions to improve women’s participation in the workforce include:

- review current thresholds on superannuation entitlements and support the provision of information and education about superannuation;
- review current impediments to family-friendly practices in the local workforce and work towards more family-friendly practices that could assist in reducing the superannuation gap between men and women;
- replace casual positions with permanent part-time positions to reduce irregular and unsuitable working times. This would provide greater job security and allow women to plan for financial stability as well as plan for regular child care;
- ensure information and support is available to employers and employees regarding the *Award Modernisation Process* (an Australian Government initiative to review Work Choices);
- ensure adequate resources are available to implement recommendations of the community sector Industrial Relations Review;
- increase opportunities for flexible training opportunities for women;
- review workforce participation programs such as the Return to Work Grants Program, to ensure bullying and discrimination during pregnancy and after returning to work from maternity leave is reduced;
- address bullying and discrimination against women in the workplace;
- facilitate safeguards for older women in regards to dependency on the Age Pension and social isolation that this can lead to;
- support women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to move towards employment through training scholarships programs;
- evaluate the nature of disability support workers and what measures can be taken to improve the quality of workers;

- improve award pay rates and minimise the highly casualised nature of the work in the community sector. Also, follow the Queensland Government's model of improving the profile of the disability sector workforce;
- provide alternative care options to support women carers to access training and to participate in the workforce; and
- promote and support women's participation in the workforce by including focused strategies and actions linked to indicators of success, which include women and girls in specific demographic and age groups.

Objective 6: *Flexible education and training* was supported.

Feedback on Objective 6 included concern that young women who are disengaged from employment and education would become more vulnerable and require more support with the introduction of the national policy agenda 'Earn to Learn'.

Suggestions to improve training and education outcomes for women and girls include:

- introduce targeted and flexible training and education options which support women's specific needs and recognise their learning styles;
- include life skills and responsibilities and resilience in school curricula;
- support marginalised young women to develop skills and access education and training;
- support older women to develop computer skills; and
- support migrant women and refugee women to participate in the workforce through flexible and accessible training, including ongoing support to develop proficient English language skills.

Accessibility of the ACT Women's Plan

There was support for the next women's plan to be viewed as a vital, living document which is actively used to progress the status of women and girls.

It was suggested that regular community education and awareness events, particularly for women with disabilities and young women would improve the plan's accessibility. It was also suggested that next women's plan be available in accessible formats including a summary version in age appropriate language.

Looking forward – future plans

Feedback proposed targeted actions in the next women's plan to ensure positive outcomes for socially marginalised and isolated women, in recognition that women are not homogenous. There was also strong support for women's positive contributions to be signified.

The incorporation of gender measures to assess gender disaggregated data was strongly supported as a means of identifying outcomes for diverse groups of women and girls.

Feedback included comments on the critical need to increase the availability and analysis of data on specific groups of women and girls to monitor progress against the objectives of the next women's plan over time.

Furthermore, it was recommended that specific actions and indicators of success be linked to particular demographic and age groups including young women, older women, Aboriginal women, Torres Strait Islander women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women with disabilities, women with a mental illness and women leaving institutions including prison.

Improved gender analysis measures were suggested to improved access, participation and equity for women and girls with disabilities. These measures include:

- collect data disaggregated by gender and disability status to highlight and respond to the disparity in the funding structure for disability support services allocated to women and men; and
- use disaggregated data to assess the impact on of policy and programs on women with disabilities.

The continuation of the Women's Plan Advisory Group to oversee the further development, implementation and evaluation of the next women's plan was strongly supported. There was also support for other agencies to ensure best possible outcomes for women.

APPENDIX A

Overview of Consultations

Discussion Paper

In July 2009, the ACT Government released a discussion paper *Looking Forward – informing a new plan for ACT women and girls* as an avenue for individuals, organisations and the community to provide feedback on the current *ACT Women's Plan 2004-2009* to inform the next five year plan for women and girls.

The discussion paper provided background information and a demographic analysis on women and girls in the ACT. It examined the structure and policy context of the current ACT Women's Plan and sought comment on its focus, impact and accessibility.

The discussion paper also outlined the ACT Government's achievements against the plan's objectives, highlighted new initiatives and commitments, and sought comment on future actions and priorities over the next five years. Written responses to the discussion paper closed on 30 September 2009. A companion paper, *Taking Stock: reporting on the ACT Women's Plan (2004-09) Indicators of Success* measured progress against the Plan's *Indicators of Success.*

The Office for Women received 17 individual and community responses to the discussion paper. A list of respondents is provided at **Appendix B.**

Other Consultation Strategies

- 2009 ACT Women's Summit;
- Outreach consultation forums;
- an online survey; and
- ACT Government forum on gender analysis.

2009 ACT Women's Summit

The Summit was held in the Function Room, Theo Notaris Multicultural Centre, Civic on 22 July 2009 and was facilitated by Ms Claire Grealy from URBIS Consultancy. The purpose of the Summit was to inform the development next women's plan and to look at issues of women's safety as a whole of community responsibility.

The Summit was attended by over 80 participants from government agencies and community sectors, representing a broad range of community organisations, peak bodies, cultural groups and interested individuals.

A guest speaker, Ms Adut Atem, spoke about the challenges and issues for refugee women and girls and provided practical solutions to address their particular needs.

The views of participants of ACT Women's Summit were presented in a written report by URBIS, which is available at www.women.act.gov.au.

A list of summit participants is provided at **Appendix C.**

Outreach consultation forums

The Office for Women consulted over 30 women and girls from the following groups:

- Mon women;
- Aboriginal women;
- Torres Strait Islander women; and
- Young women completing their Year 10 and Year 12 certificates through the Canberra Institute of Technology.

The Office for Women acknowledges the generosity of the women and girls for making time to provide valuable contributions to the consultation process.

On 6 November 2009, a whole-of-government gender analysis forum was held to progress the ACT Government's commitment to phase-in gender measures across government departments, and to look at how this work can be used to guide and focus actions that support the objectives of the next women's plan.

The forum was attended by over 40 representatives from across ACT government departments.

Online survey

On 25 September 2009, an online survey was posted on the *Women ACT* website to gather information about a range of issues of relevance to individual women and girls. The online survey closed on 30 October 2009. Over 400 responses were received. Their views are presented in a written report, which is available at www.women.act.gov.au.

The survey will be conducted again in 2012 to assess the progress of the *ACT Women's Plan 2010-2015.*

APPENDIX B

Discussion Paper respondents

Organisation
ACT Council of Social Services Inc.
ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council
ACT Health Council
ACT Human Rights Commission
ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing
ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Advocacy for Inclusion Inc.
Carer's ACT
Children and Young People Commissioner
Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services of the ACT
ACT Three individual responses from members of Ministry Advisory Council for Ageing
Tongan Association of Canberra, Queanbeyan and Yass; Tongan Women's Action Group
Women's Centre for Health Matters Inc.
Youth Coalition of the ACT
YWCA of Canberra

APPENDIX C

2009 ACT Women's Summit participants

First Name	Surname	Organisation
Mr Greg	Aldridge	Canberra Men's Centre
Ms Estelle	Anderson	Sexual Health & Family Planning ACT
Ms Carol	Archard	The Smith Family
Ms Louise	Bannister	Women with Disabilities ACT
Ms Jane	Beach	
Ms Carol	Benda	Women's Legal Centre
Dr Kaaren	Blom	Consultation Planning & Reporting, Department of Education & Training
Ms Dewani	Bakkum	Migrant & Refuge Settlement Service
Ms Jane	Caruana	Justice Advocacy Unity, Victim Support ACT
Ms Adele	Chadwick	Northside Community Services
Assistant Commissioner Leanne	Close	Australian Federal Police
Ms Julia	Collin	Unions ACT
Ms Dianne	Collins	Elected Body/Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Deborah	Colliver	Women's Health Service ACT
Ms Betty	Connelly	Canberra Rape Crisis Centre
Mr Sean	Costello	ACT Human Rights Commission
Ms Sally	D'Souza	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Helen	Denning	Carers ACT
Ms Misty	Devres	Women's Forum Australia
Ms Roslyn	Dixon	National Council of Women ACT
Ms Prillisia	Duignan	Support Asian Women's Friendship Association Inc.
Ms Roslyn	Dundas	ACT Council of Social Services
Ms Penny	Ellis	
Ms Kathryn	Evans	Australian Federation University Women ACT
Ms Gail	Everard	MS Australia
Ms Anna	Fieldhouse	Office for Women
Ms Coral	Fleming	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Joan	Garvan	
Ms Tanya	George	Canberra One Parent Family Support
Ms Sally	Gibson	Social Housing & Homelessness Services
Ms Margaret	Gillespie	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Rebecca	Glasgow	Office for Multicultural Affairs
Ms Kellie	Gourlay	ACT Division of General Practice
Ms Pam	Graudenz	Older Women's Network

First Name	Surname	Organisation
Ms Gwen	Gray	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Arwa	Haddid	
Ms Sarah	Haltiner	ACT Division of General Practioners
Ms Catriona	Heath	Multicultural Youth Services
Ms Renee	Heins	Australian Institute Company Directors
Ms Ruth	Henderson	Office for Multicultural Affairs
Ms Narelle	Hill	Community Sector & Support Disability ACT
Ms Katherine	Hilyard	People and Strategy Ltd
Ms Deb	Hood	Marie Stokes International
Ms Jen	Huctson	Citizen Advice Bureau
Ms Caroline	Hughes	Yurauna Centre CIT
Ms Gabrielle	Hummel	Office of Minister for Women
Ms Di	Jay	Australian Red Cross
Ms Robyn	Jensen	Health Services Planning Unit, ACT Health
Ms Kellie	Jones	Gungahlin Child & Family Centres
Ms Jennifer	Jones	
Ms Leonie	Kennedy	Women Lawyers Association of the ACT Inc
Ms Elizabeth	Kentwell	Toora Inc.
Ms Jenny	Kitchin	Organisational Services & Community Recovery (DHCS)
Ms Kiki	Korpinen	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Pauline	Le Riche	The Junction Youth Health Service
Ms Pierina	Lucchesi	The Smith Family
Ms Olivia	MacDonald	Health Care Consumers Association
Ms Richel	Malouf	YWCA of Canberra
Ms Sarah	Maltiner	ACT Division of General Practice
Ms Margaret	McCulloch	Migrant & Refuge Settlement Service
Ms Brianna	McGill	Office for Children & Young People Commissioner
Ms Anne	McGrath	Housing ACT
Ms Fiona	McIlroy	Conflict Resolution Service
Ms Fiona	McIntosh	Disability ACT
Ms Gabrielle	McKinnon	ACT Human Rights Commission
Ms Alexa	McLaughlin	Allergies and Intolerant Reactions Association Inc.
Ms Lucy	Mitchell	YWCA of Canberra
Ms Vena	Murray	ACT Sport
Ms Louise	O'Donnell	The Office of Ms Meredith Hunter MLA
Ms Rese	Pangalcee	
Ms Armme	Parlmer	
Ms Man	Parson	

First Name	Surname	Organisation
Hang	Penca	Supported Asian Women Friendship Association Inc.
Ms Pathlia	Perry	Women's Forum Australia
Ms Marluce	Silva Peters	Doris Women's Refuge Inc.
Ms Bilijana	Petrova	Women's Information & Referral Centre
Mr Brett	Phillips	Department of Disability, Housing & Community Services
Ms Shannon	Pickles	St Vincent De Paul Society
Ms Janet	Purcell	Department of Defence
Ms Helen	Raymond	Australian Church Women's ACT Unit
Ms Emma	Robertson	Youth Coalition
Mr Anthony	Rochester	Canberra Fathers and Children Services Inc.
Mr John	Roe	Aboriginal Justice Centre
Ms Carolyn	Sakkara	The Junction Youth Health Services
Ms Sue	Salthouse	Women with Disabilities ACT
Ms Kim	Sattler	Unions ACT
Ms Anne	Saxon-Taylor	
Ms Flor	Sermeno	Women's Information & Referral Centre
Ms Maureen	Sheehan	Housing & Community Services Act
Ms Anita	Shroot	ACT Jewish Community
Ms Dennise	Simpson	Domestic Violence Crisis Service
Ms Margaret	Smith	Soroptimist Australia Inc.
Ms Kerry	Snell	Women with Disabilities ACT
Ms Melanie	Stutsel	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Janet	Toni	National Federation Australian Women
Ms Teresa	Tuite	Intensive Treatment & Support Services, Disability ACT
Ms Manja	Visschedijk	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Lisa	Wallace	Care Financial Counselling Service
Ms Alison	Watts	Inanna Inc
Ms Veronica	Wensing	Ministerial Advisory Council on Women
Ms Anne	Wentworth	Council on the Ageing
Ms Kellie	White	Inanna Inc.
Ms Meredith	Whitten	Policy & Organisational Services (DHCS)
Ms Marcia	Williams	Women's Centre for Health Matters
Ms Sue	Williams	Human Rights Commission
Ms Chin	Wong	Canberra Multicultural Community Forum
Ms Alice	Yuen	Supported Asian Women Friendship Association Inc.
Ms Kristy	Zwickert	People & Strategy Ltd
Ms Fiona	Baker	Office for Women
Ms Michelle	Bamford	Office for Women