

# Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, ACT

September

# 2009

A set of principles should underpin the 2010 budget to ensure women's interests are met. They are:

- The responsibility for women's issues requires a 'whole of government' response;
- maintain recurrent expenditure (+CPI) to services which affect all women;
- maintain recurrent expenditure (+ CPI) to services which support women in crisis or at risk;
- public sector efficiency dividends should not impose an inequitable burden on female employment in the sector and should not impede progress in relation to pay equity or promotional opportunities;
- Wages for workers in the community sector should be appropriately remunerated with the real value of their wages protected through indexation.

A Review of the current Women's Grant program should be conducted.

A Review of current community grants acquittal procedures with a view to streamlining acquittals through DHCS should create new efficiencies and enhanced data analysis opportunities.

The government should examine opportunities to extend community philanthropy and new funding sources to services which support ending violence to women in the ACT Community.

**Budget  
Submission  
2010-2011**

## Summary of Recommendations

*The ACT Government adopts the following principles when framing the 2010 Budget:*

1. The needs and interests of women require a 'whole of government' response. The funding for programs, policies and services which are designed to ensure that women are able to fully participate in all aspects of life in the ACT must be a government responsibility, rather than fall to one particular area of government such as the Office for Women.
2. It is recognised that there is a large unmet need for a variety of different types of services for women in the ACT. For this reason, it is important available funds for programs which are designed to support women be used efficiently.
3. Women require support from general programs and services as well as specialised and targeted services specifically designed for women. Therefore it is recognised that:  
It is important to maintain recurrent expenditure (plus CPI increase), to services which affect all women, including for example services which deal with health, domestic violence, housing and aged care;  
And  
It is important to maintain recurrent expenditure (plus CPI increase), to services which support women in crisis or at risk, including for example, sexual assault services, homelessness and drug rehabilitation;
4. Public Sector efficiency dividends should not impose an inequitable burden on female employment in the sector and should not impede progress in relation to pay equity and promotional opportunities. Therefore, all agencies are asked to specifically report on all initiatives they take as part of any efficiency dividend and their impact on women.
5. Recognition is given to ensuring that wages for workers in the community sector, which is heavily reliant on a mix of grants, should be appropriately remunerated with the real value of their wages protected through indexation;

### *Review of Women's Grants program*

A review of the current Women's Grants program be undertaken to examine their efficiency and effectiveness in supporting current groups and services. That the review also examines the need for indexation of grants, transition funding for groups moving from seeding grants to ongoing funding and the relationship the grants have to unmet funding needs of existing organisations.

### *Community Grant Acquittal Procedures*

The government reviews current community grant acquittal procedures with a view to streamlining acquittals through the Department of Housing and Community Services.

*Community Chest created to eradicate violence against women*

The government creates a community chest with hypothecated funding for services focussed on eradicating violence against women in our community. The community chest would have access to an agreed percentage of funds from liquor licenses and drink driving fines in the ACT as well as seeking dollar for dollar matched funding from philanthropic donations from businesses, organisations and individual donations.

## ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Women

# 2010 Budget Submission

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### Introduction

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

The Council believes that ACT women should be a central part of all government decision making, and is pleased to be able to offer recommendations on the forthcoming 2010 budget.

In formulating this submission, the Council has considered the current social, economic and policy position of the ACT government. In particular, the Council is aware of the global economic climate, and the ACT government's longer term intention of returning the Budget to surplus in 2015-2016.

Given this broader context, the Council considers that it may be most productive to use this submission to outline a number of key principles which the Council believes should underpin effective expenditure to support women and women's interests in the ACT. Rather than outline a broad range of fresh initiatives or suggestions for programmes which focus on women, this submission will identify some principles which the Council believes should underpin budgetary decision making in the ACT. Further, this submission will contain some suggestions for the practical implementation of such principles, providing examples of how the principles may operate in practice.

Finally, the submission outlines recommendations to review the current Women's Grants program and current community grant acquittal procedures as well as outlining what the Council believes is an exciting innovation in relation to new funding possibilities for the eradication of violence against women in our community.

### Discussion

In 2002, the current Minister for Women, Katy Gallagher MLA, chaired the Legislative Assembly Select Committee inquiring into the status of women in the ACT. In its report, the Committee noted that the ACT Government had made significant inroads – through the Ministerial Advisory Council and the Office for Women – into women's policy in the ACT. However, it noted that changes could be made to strategic policy to meet the needs of women and that government

decision makers needed to take greater account of the needs of 'isolated women'. The Committee noted that women could be 'isolated' by a range of factors including homelessness, violence, poverty, age, children, being indigenous or from a culturally and linguistically diverse background.

At that time, the Committee made a number of recommendations about ensuring that the needs of women in the ACT were considered as part of an ACT policy agenda. These recommendations included formulating an ACT Women's Plan. The recommendations also included matters such as extending outreach services in the community sector to meet the needs of disadvantaged women (especially Indigenous women), to provide additional funds for community care services across the board, and to review service purchasing to take into consideration enterprise bargaining (including above the Social and Community Service award (SACS) wages).

The recommendations also included a range of suggestions designed to support women who have experienced domestic violence, make transport safer for women, improve educational opportunities and ensure that government disaggregated data was as useful as it could be.

Many of these recommendations have been implemented (or progress has been made toward their implementation). However, in the Council's view, the underlying principles behind the Committee's report remain relevant. The issues for government about how to meet the needs of women in the ACT are essentially reflected in the report – the relevant question is: how can the government best implement policy which deals with violence against women, access to justice, appropriate housing and transport, and health services? In particular, how can the government ensure that marginalised and isolated women in our society are provided with crucial government and support services?

In terms of the Budget, therefore, the central challenge to government is how to best expend funds to ensure that women, as critical participants at all levels of the ACT community, can flourish. The Council is of the view that when considering the Budget, the government should both ensure that women are not disproportionately disadvantaged by any cost saving measures taken by the government, and are also supported to the fullest extent possible by the funds available.

### *Key Principles*

In terms of the 2010-2011 Budget, MACW believes that it is critical to make decisions informed by the following key principles:

- The ACT Government considers that the needs and interests of women require a 'whole of government' response, and this principle is reflected in the Women's Plan. The responsibility for 'women's issues' falls to the whole of government. The funding for programs, policies and services which are designed to ensure that women are able to fully participate in all aspects of life in the ACT must be a government responsibility, rather than fall to one particular area of government such as the Office for Women.
- It is important to recognise that a consideration of women and the needs of women, is not a 'add on' to the Budget in any sense. Rather, a consideration of the needs and priorities of women in the ACT should form a central part of Budget considerations.

- There is continued unmet need for a variety of different types of services for women in the ACT. For this reason, it is important that the funds available for programs which are designed to support women be used efficiently.

This unmet need for services is also symptomatic of the fact that women remain vulnerable in the ACT community in a variety of ways. Women require both support from generally applicable policies and services, and specialised and targeted services designed to meet the specific needs of women. For this reason:

- It is important to maintain recurrent expenditure (plus an appropriate CPI increase) to services which affect all women, including for example services which deal with health, domestic violence, housing and aged services.
- It is important to maintain recurrent expenditure (plus an appropriate CPI increase) to services which support women in crisis or at risk, including for example, sexual assault services, homelessness services and drug rehabilitation;
- Although ACT women are, generally speaking, in a better position than other women across Australia in terms of employment, women remain disadvantaged in the workplace in a number of ways. Specifically, in terms of this Budget, it is important that:
  - Public Sector efficiency dividends should not impose an inequitable burden on female employment in the sector and should not impede progress in relation to pay equity and promotional opportunities.
  - It be recognised that wages for workers in the community sector, which is heavily reliant on a mix of grants, should be appropriately remunerated with the real value of their wages protected through indexation.

## Women's Grants

### *Background to the Women's Grants*

In line with the principles that the funding available to support women in the ACT be used as effectively as possible, the Council is of the view that it is timely for a review of the ACT Women's Grants.

The ACT Women's Grants Program was launched in November 2004. The amount of funding available through the ACT Women's Grants Program has remained at **\$100,000 per annum** since its establishment. Since 2004, there have been five funding rounds (04-05, 05-06, 06-07, 07-08 and 08-09). The 2009-10 funding round will open in early October 2009.

Each year applications exceed the amount available. For the 2006-07, 47 applications were received for a total value of \$352,206. Seventeen projects were funded. For the 2007-08, 51 applications were received for a total value of \$472,209. Eighteen projects were funded. For the 2008-09, 43 applications were received for a total value of over \$336,000. Sixteen projects were funded.

The Program consists of two categories: Special Projects and Capacity Building.

In relation to Special Projects, up to \$15,000 per project is available to support activities that contributing to public policy, service development for the benefit of women or add to the research base and progress one or more of the following six objectives of the ACT Women's Plan:

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

In relation to Capacity Building, up to \$3,000 per project is available to support activities that strengthen the capacity of community organisations and their contribution to women in the ACT community.

### *Issues for Review*

First, it is important to note that the amount of money available for the Women's Grants has not been indexed or increased since 2004. Clearly, if the grants are not indexed, they will achieve less and less over time. The Council is of the view that the amount of the grants should be reviewed, and at least increased to reflect CPI increases.

In addition, in line with the Council's stated principles, the Council is of the view that it is important to ensure that the small amount of funding that it available for the Women's Grants is used as effectively as possible.

As it currently stands, there does not appear to be any clear policy direction about whether it is appropriate to use the funds to seed fledgling organisations or to fund what effectively amounts to ongoing projects. If budgetary constraints are to exist for several years, it makes sense to ensure that existing community services receive priority over seeding grants for new services and groups. This will ensure that productive, successful community services can continue to grow, delivering their services in creative ways.

Further, such an approach will minimise difficulties around new community groups being unable to continue to deliver services as it is not possible to identify an ongoing funding source. There is a demonstrable gap in funding to transition a group from seed funding to supporting an established service. The Council believes that the government should examine what realistic means it has at its disposal to develop capacity in emerging groups. In addition, the government should resist creating a situation where groups are funded as 'start ups' only to fail when they can no longer access seed funding. This is particularly important for stability of support to women in our local Aboriginal community.

It is also noted that many existing services and groups are forced to rely on a patchwork of funding to assist in maintaining their existing staff numbers, so a reliable source of funding is imperative to protect the adequacy and quality of services in the sector. Obviously, the Council is keen to ensure that appropriate on-going core funding is available to these groups, and that established high-quality services for women in the ACT are not forced to apply for discretionary Women's Grant funding to conduct their core business.

## **Review of Funding Acquittal Processes**

One of the key principles of this submission is that funding ought to be used as effectively as possible. The Council believes that it would be more efficient and productive for services, their staff and the government, if grants were acquitted through one department (perhaps the Department of Housing and Community Services) using the same form.

Such a system would have clear advantages. First, it would assist government to be in a position to coordinate the community needs, available funds and relevant programs across the ACT. Gaps could be more easily identified. In addition, a single acquittal system would also introduce significant efficiencies for both the service provider (who need only complete one type of assessment of funding use) and the government (which can meaningfully assess and analyse information given in answers to the same set of questions). The Council is of the view that making the reporting about the allocation of funds as efficient as possible will introduce important savings to the ACT government.

## **Creation of a Community Chest to eradicate Violence against Women –**

One of the principles outlined in this submission is that consideration of the interests and needs of women in the ACT is a 'whole of government' responsibility. Violence against women remains one of the most costly and damaging social and legal problems in the ACT and across Australia. It is important for the ACT government to take leadership action in relation to violence against women, demonstrating a commitment to government and community involvement in creating solutions to this difficult problem.

The Council recommends the government explore the creation of a Community Chest. In the first instance funds from the Chest to be pledged or hypothecated to services which support ending violence against women in our community. Funding for the initiative could be a mix of matched dollar for dollar funding from the government to donations from community philanthropic funds (business, community organisations and individuals). This matched funding could be combined with seed funding coming from an allocated percentage of funds derived from alcohol licensing and drink driving fines.

The funding base of the Community Chest would therefore create a new sense of community responsibility and ownership for this most pernicious problem in our community as well as creating a new source of funding for government.

A wide range of groups and organisations would therefore benefit from this government/community partnership including established women's groups together with initiatives such as White Ribbon Day or support programs aimed at assisting perpetrators of violence to stop their violent behaviour.

The Council understands that there are a range of international initiatives which may provide models for engaging the community in such an exercise. We would

be pleased to participate in more detailed discussions about how such a scheme could be created in our community.

## **Women Workers in the ACT**

One of the key principles outlined by the Council is that women ought not to be disadvantaged in the workplace as a result of cost-saving measures introduced in this Budget. Specifically, the Council considers that public sector efficiency dividends should be carefully managed such that female employees are not disproportionately affected. In the Council's view, the ACT government should be mindful not to impede pay equity and promotional opportunities. We would therefore seek that all agencies are asked to specifically report on all initiatives they take as part of any efficiency dividend and their impact on women.

Likewise, in the Council's view, careful consideration needs to be given to the wages of people who work in the community sector. Statistics obtained from ACTCOSS indicate that 78% of community workers in Australia are women (as compared with 45% of the total working population). Community and health workers make up approximately 8% of the total working population.

The 2002 Legislative Assembly Select Committee inquiring into the status of women in the ACT was clearly concerned, about the quantum of award wages of community workers in the ACT. At that time, the Committee was already noting the significant disparity between government wages and community workers. The Committee noted that a review of the award was beyond its jurisdiction, but noted that it was prepared to consider a recommendation that would at least allow community groups to negotiate with the government for funding which would pay their staff above award wages. The Committee recommended that the government review service purchasing to take into consideration enterprise bargaining (including above the SACS award wages).

The Council considers that this matter needs to be addressed as a budget question, allowing for community groups to remunerate their staff appropriately. The community sector provides an effective and cost efficient method of program delivery in our community. However, workers in the sector continue to carry the twin burden of working in a sector which has continuing and rising demand for its services together with a totally unrealistic wage structure. The Council understands that the government is currently examining the remuneration of workers in the sector and urges the government to ensure that the real value of wages in the sector are protected in grants and that a new standard is established to ensure that wages in the sector are indexed.

The Council thanks the Treasurer for the opportunity to contribute to consideration of the 2010-2011 Budget and would be delighted to participate in further detailed discussions if required.

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ACT Ministerial Advisory Council for Women

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