

**REPORT ON THE
ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on
Women Round Table:**

Preventing Violence against Women

7 FEBRUARY 2007

PREPARED BY:
THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COUNCIL ON WOMEN

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Welcome and opening

Hilary Russell, Chair of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, opened the meeting by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land - the Ngunnawal people.

Hilary outlined that the Round Table had arisen through the ACT Women's Summit. The Summit held in August 2006, had identified the prevention of violence against women and the pattern of violence against women as an issue of continuing concern. In addition, the release in late 2006 of the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth) Report "*Two Steps Forward One Step Back*" provides further evidence of the continued entrenchment of attitudes that support violence against women.

Is violence against women increasing?

Hilary invited discussion on whether the ACT community should be concerned about the pattern of violence against women; whether the incidence is increasing and whether there are any obstacles to seeking positive change.

Ms Fagan noted the success of the Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP) and commented that whilst data suggests the incidence of violence against women has decreased, it remains an issue of concern amongst service providers. She commented that there is potential for greater collaboration between agencies in reducing the incidence of violence against women in the ACT.

The meeting agreed that violence against women continues to be a significant issue in the ACT and the incidence is at unacceptable levels.

What is the experience of service providers in the ACT?

Denise Simpson (DVCS) reported that service demand has increased from approximately 6,200 in 2001/2002 to 7,997 in 2005/2006. Anecdotally she considers there is greater awareness generally of the issue and of women's rights in seeking legal redress. Ms Simpson also supported the FVIP although it is acknowledged that information in relation to funding levels and levels of support are unclear.

The services provided by Marymead's Children Handover Program and Majura Women's Group were commended. The Federal Government's Family Relationship Centre in Woden and Handover services in Belconnen were also noted as positive initiatives.

Adequacy of funding to Canberra Rape Crisis Centre

Veronica Wensing (CRCC) noted that there had been a steady increase in calls to the Rape Crisis Centre over the last two years. In the last six months calls to the service had risen by 75% and service demand over the last 4 years was up by 200%. She noted there is a six week waiting period for women accessing counselling services.

Analysis of data by both DHCS and CRCC since the Round Table has shown that the above figures are incorrect. CRCC now advise that over the past 5 years the volume of crisis calls has increased by 138% and face-to-face counselling has increased by 46%. DHCS advise that in the last six months calls to the service have increased by 29%. DHCS note that over the past five years, CRCC received 40% funding increase to their 2002-03 base funding due to indexation and the inclusion of the Service Assisting Male Survivors of Sexual Assault (SAMSSA) program.

Veronica also commented on the limited resources available to support the education programs of the Centre – currently only 1 EFT is allocated to providing community education. Despite this the CRCC had achieved good results through school based education initiatives.

Hilary Russell inquired as to the adequacy of the funding to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and asked Sandra Lambert to comment on funding plans.

Sandra Lambert commented that in a tight fiscal environment no expansion of the Centre's funding was planned. She did however note that the Government often provides resources outside the Centre's funding which nevertheless benefit many of the Centre's clients.

The Council agreed to include increased funding of the Centre in its budget bids for the 2007/2008 budget and would raise the matter of its funding with the Minister.

What obstacles are faced by women?

Participants noted that some groups of women, particularly women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD), do not access services at the same rate as women whose first language is English. Cultural norms appear to prevent women of CALD backgrounds acknowledging the incidence of violence against women and militate against reporting cases of violence against women.

The meeting agreed there is a need for targeted education and outreach programs promoting women's right to be free from violence and how to access support and legal services. However it was agreed that any awareness program would need to be accompanied by increased funding of direct service to meet increased demand resulting from increased community awareness.

Women's experience of the legal system

Rosemary Buddavari (Women's Legal Service) noted that in relation to family law cases, 20% also involve domestic violence. She noted the Victorian survey findings that a sizeable proportion of the community continues to believe that both men and women experience violence at an equal rate, are consistent with the views of a significant proportion of the legal profession. She also noted there is a persisting view in legal circles that women 'make up' stories of domestic violence in order to better position themselves in cases of family law. The WLC however refutes this.

Rosemary also noted there is a need for greater attention in continuing professional education for lawyers and judges in relation to violence against women. Recent changes to the *Family Law Act* have placed a greater burden of proof on any claim of domestic violence. Anecdotally this appears to be resulting in women being less likely to report any experience of violence while they are pursuing a legal path through the Family Court.

The Council agreed to advocate to the Law Society on the need for CPE for practicing lawyers and judges on violence against women in the context of the legislative changes to the Family Law Act.

The view of DHCS

Sandra Lambert did not have specific data on the rate of violence against women however anecdotal evidence from staff, particularly in Care and Protection, indicates that there are still significant problems. The Department is looking to an expansion of orders through the proposed Children and Young Persons ACT. This expansion will enable orders for children who are exposed to violence between others and may assist with 'proof' in family law cases.

DHCS is also continuing to work with ACT Police and focussing on place management and on training for frontline staff including housing managers.

Sandra Lambert supported early intervention and prevention strategies however was cautious about such initiatives without there being in place adequate direct care services to support increased rates of reporting.

A targeted social marketing campaign aimed at preventing violence against women

There was discussion on the recommendations of the VicHealth Report – “*Two steps forward, one step back*” - in relation to the potential for the ACT to undertake a targeted social marketing campaign aimed at changing attitudes on violence against women.

The meeting noted the links between attitudes about violence against women and society's increased acceptance of violence in general. The AFL model of achieving attitude and behaviour change amongst players and club supporters was noted. The meeting agreed there are a number of ACT sporting events and nightclubs where the behaviour of male patrons and the organisation of the events are unacceptable. Summernats for example was specifically cited as an event which receives government funding and yet is perceived to support a view of women which is degrading and unsafe. It was agreed there is potential for working with Summernats on changing the profile of the event and the underpinning values and representation of women. There was discussion on the 'Australia Says No Campaign - the lesson of which the Round Table agreed is that community consultation is critical to the design and planning of any marketing campaign.

The Round Table agreed there was benefit in a social marketing campaign in the ACT aimed at preventing the incidence of violence against women. Such a campaign should focus on the benefits of positive and respectful relationships and the advocates of change should be men who are readily associated with the sporting or social event.

Nadia Docrat noted that when considering a campaign to combat violence/ disrespectful behaviour, it is important to find 'replacement behaviour'. She also noted that it would be best to start with a small campaign and build up to something bigger.

Other initiatives

Ms Lambert reported on an initiative of the Department which will involve Sharon Nelson Keely working within DHCS in March 2007 as a 'thinker in residence'. Dr Keely has had experience working with the Maori community on men being violence free.

Ms Fagan reported that the National Community Crime Prevention Program provides grants of up to \$150,000 in areas of Security Related Infrastructure, Indigenous Community Safety, Community Partnership, and Community Safety. It was agreed that although grants cannot provide secure recurrent funds they are a useful means to test new partnerships and new practices.

Sandra Lambert noted that as Australian government funding generally focuses on rural and remote areas, the ACT is often not eligible.

Summary and next steps

The meeting agreed:

- direct care services of the DVCS and CRCC are stretched and Council will support additional funding in its 2008/09 budget submission;
- Council will also raise the level of funding for DVCS and CRCC with the Minister;

- Council will write to the Law Society regarding the need for CPE for lawyers and judges on the issue of violence against women in the context of changes to the *Family Law Act*;
- there is “in principle” support for a targeted social marketing campaign to be undertaken in collaboration with organisers of sporting events and owners of nightclubs which would be aimed at condemning violence against women. To this end, Audrey Fagan will explore the potential for nightclub owners to be involved in a collaborative social marketing campaign;
- information on federal funding streams will be circulated to participants;
- Sandra Lambert will explore the potential of an interdepartmental approach to the issue of violence against women – eg across Police, Tourism, Sport, Education and Human Services;
- Council will explore how expertise in ACT and other states can be drawn upon;
- Hilary Russell will circulate a write up of this discussion and set in place further forums and discussions;
- Fiona Jolly will draft a submission to the ACT review of the Children’s and Young Persons Act.

On behalf of Council, Hilary Russell encouraged Round Table participants to continue the dialogue and welcomed any further comments, expertise and insights.

ROUND TABLE PARTICIPANTS

Audrey	Fagan	Chief Police Officer
Veronica	Wensing	Canberra Rape Crisis Centre
Dennise	Simpson	Domestic Violence Crisis Service
Rosemary	Budavari	Women’s Legal Service
Mary-Anne for Joan Scott	Robertson	ACT Health
Katie	Firster	Domestic Violence Prevention Council
Sandra	Lambert	CEO, DHCS

MACW members

Hilary	Russell	Chair
Margaret	Ryan	
Grace	Concannon	
Nadia	Docrat	
Sue	Tucker	
Louise	Bannister	
Sabrina	Caldwell	
Gwen	Gray	
Lyndal	Ryan	
Fiona	Jolly	