



ANNUAL STATEMENT

on the Status of Women and Girls in the ACT – March 2022

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Madam Speaker, as Minister for Women and Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, I welcome the opportunity to acknowledge International Women's Day, which occurred on 8 March, by providing a Statement to the Assembly on the Status of Women and Girls in the ACT.

This statement is about acknowledging the challenges women and girls continue to face in seeking to achieve equality. It is also an opportunity to celebrate the achievements of 2021 and acknowledge how these achievements are improving outcomes for women and girls in the ACT. Although this statement is specifically about the status of women and girls, I am using these terms inclusively, referring to anyone who describes themselves as a woman or non-binary.

I would like to begin this statement by acknowledging 2021 was a challenging year for many in the ACT. As a community, we continued to navigate a period of uncertainty, change, and insecurity. In 2021, women were disproportionately affected by the impacts of COVID-19.

Women are working on the frontlines of this pandemic, in female-dominated healthcare and social assistance workforces. In the ACT, 75 per cent of health professionals are women, which includes pharmacists, medical practitioners, midwives, nurses, social and welfare professionals, and medical laboratory scientists.

Women are also over-represented in less stable employment, including casual work without access to paid leave. This, in addition to gender segregation in certain sectors and under-representation of women in leadership suggests women are more likely to face economic insecurity during the pandemic.

Changes to the way we live and work as a result of COVID-19 have significantly impacted women. 2021 saw Canberrans adjust to tight restrictions in response to the Delta strain of COVID-19, from August to October. During that period, and throughout the pandemic, many women working from home have borne the heavy load of home-schooling and unpaid care work. For some women this resulted in decreased work hours and negative impacts to their mental health.

To support Canberrans in need during the extended lockdown period, the ACT Government partnered with the Community Info Hub through VolunteeringACT and the ACT Emergency Services Agency to urgently provide access to food and essential items for those Canberrans who were unable to feed themselves or their family.

Results from a 2021 Australian Bureau of Statistics survey, 'Household Impacts of COVID-19', show that women were more likely than men to have experienced high levels of psychological distress— 23 per cent of women compared with 17 per cent of men.

And yet, despite the many challenges the pandemic continues to pose, women in our community have demonstrated tremendous resilience and have been integral to our community's ongoing recovery. Individual women have been keeping our city going on the frontlines, in the workplace, and at home. They deserve recognition.

The ACT Government is determined to take a leading role in supporting women as the pandemic continues. In the 2021-22 Budget, the ACT Government committed \$260,000 to support the delivery of additional mental health services to Canberrans affected by the pandemic and associated lockdowns.

We know flexible working arrangements can significantly ease the burden of caring responsibilities and unpaid domestic work, the majority of which in Australia still falls to women. By supporting

flexible working arrangements within the ACT Government, we continue to support women to take up leadership roles and achieve their full potential in the workplace.

In understanding the significant challenges many women experienced in 2021—including the pressures on their health, time, and economic security—we can gain a deeper appreciation for the commitment, resilience, and ongoing support provided to our community by the women’s sector.

Every year, the non-government and not-for-profit organisations and community groups in our women’s sector provide much-needed support to women and girls in the ACT. In 2020 and 2021, these groups adapted their delivery models to meet public health requirements; have been quick to respond to the complex, changing needs of our community; and have not faltered, despite the lengthy and ongoing nature of the pandemic.

It remains my personal commitment, and the commitment of the ACT Government, to listen to and work with women and the sector to make sure there are appropriate supports available as we continue to respond to the pandemic, and as we plan for longer-term recovery.

This year, International Women’s Day was another welcome opportunity to celebrate the collaboration, ingenuity, and resolve of women in the ACT. In 2022, there were two major themes to mark International Women’s Day. The first was ‘Break the Bias’, which encouraged us to imagine a world free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination, and work together to achieve it.

The second theme was the United Nations theme of ‘Changing Climates: Equality today for a sustainable tomorrow.’ This recognised and celebrated the contribution of women and girls around the world, who are working to change the climate of gender equality and build a sustainable future. Women and girls face greater vulnerability and exposure to disasters and conflicts, yet they remain largely ignored in developing solutions and their capabilities are often under-utilised. As the most impacted, women are a critical part of the solution.

My experience of International Women’s Day in 2022 was incredibly positive. Although the pandemic continues to impact the way we gather to celebrate and recognise significant occasions, spending time with women from diverse backgrounds with diverse skills and experiences was an opportunity to look towards future policies and services to make gender equality a reality in the ACT.

This year, on 3 March, I was proud to attend the 2022 ACT Women’s Awards, which also celebrated the bi-annual update of the virtual ACT Women’s Honour Roll.

I was able to again present the ACT Women’s Awards to some amazing women:

- **ACT Woman of the Year, Kelli-Ann Jackson**

Kelli Jackson is the group leader of Women’s Adventure ACT, and through her role has positively impacted the lives of thousands of women and gender-diverse people in the ACT. With the support of Women’s Adventure ACT’s volunteers, Kelli helps to keep the outdoors accessible, affordable, safe and available to women and gender diverse people of all backgrounds.

- **ACT Senior Woman of the Year, Lee-Anne Daley**

Lee-Anne Daley is a proud Wiradjuri woman from Wellington with many years’ experience working in the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector. Lee-Anne works with vulnerable families, including facilitating the Strong Women’s Group and the Koori Girls Group.

- **ACT Young Woman of the Year, Asha Clementi**

Through her work as co-founder of The Girls Leadership Network and founder of Girls Run The World, Asha Clementi is inspiring young women to pursue their leadership dreams. Girls Run the World has placed over 100 participants in diplomatic missions, creating unique opportunities for young women and empowering them to explore careers in international affairs.

Despite its challenges, 2021 saw significant advancements in the second year of implementation of *Equity Together: The Second Action Plan 2020-22* under the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26*.

Equity Together recommitted the ACT Government to working collaboratively across Government and with the community to support improved gender equality in the ACT.

The actions in *Equity Together* contribute to five objectives to improve outcomes and opportunities for women and girls. These are:

1. Improving the mental health and wellbeing of women and girls in the ACT;
2. Fostering gender equity in Canberra workplaces, including through improved gender equality in leadership and workplace participation;
3. Building a community where women and girls are safe and supported to participate;
4. Improving housing support and sustainability and reducing homelessness for women; and
5. Developing appropriate and accessible services, programs, and policies for women and girls, ensuring consideration of those from diverse backgrounds.

After two years of implementation, six of the 29 actions have already been fully delivered and the rest are now underway. Many of the achievements I would like to highlight from 2021 are commitments in *Equity Together*. These actions were the result of extensive consultation—we have listened and acted on what our community has told us.

Madam Speaker, access to safe, appropriate, and affordable housing is essential to women and girls' wellbeing.

I am happy to report that recent work led by the Justice and Community Safety Directorate has seen the ACT Government complete action 4.1 of the Second Action Plan, to implement a Justice Housing Program. The ACT Government's Justice Housing Program provides accommodation options for women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved with the criminal justice system, with a focus on trauma-informed, gender-informed and culturally safe practices.

In March 2021, the last of the ten Justice Housing Program properties came online, with all ten properties now operational. Two properties, with six beds, are dedicated to women, and in total the Program has accommodated ten women to date, including five who are Indigenous. A further four women, two of whom are Indigenous, have been assessed as suitable for the Program.

The ACT Government is committed to ensuring housing pathways exist for women across the community, including older women, single parents, and families. This is often achieved through work with service providers on transitional accommodation and shelters. COVID-19 has seen an increase in support required, and the ACT Government has responded accordingly to support vulnerable women.

As part of the 2021-22 Budget, the ACT Government provided further funding of \$1.371 million to COVID-19 homelessness programs to extend their operations to 30 June 2023. This will enable MacKillop House and the Client Support Fund to continue providing both accommodation and support services to women.

In 2020, former convent, MacKillop House was repurposed in partnership with CatholicCare to house women experiencing homelessness due to relationship breakdown, economic hardship, or domestic

violence. MacKillop House is now able to accommodate up to 25 single women and six women with children, and as of November 2021, had accommodated a total of 73 women affected by homelessness, some with accompanying children.

The Client Support Fund has also been supporting women impacted by domestic and family violence by providing accommodation to women. The Client Support Fund commenced in May 2020, and as of November 2021, had provided tailored and flexible support to 130 families and individuals.

I am pleased to note, as part of the 2021-22 Budget, the ACT specialist homelessness sector will receive a 12.7 per cent increase in funding over two years to provide increased capacity to respond to homelessness, including those services funded to support women and families.

Unfortunately, as we well know, for many women their most significant concern is safety in their own homes, for themselves, and their children. Increased time at home due to the pandemic has also placed some women at higher risk of violence. While these issues occur in individual households, they occur because the perpetrators believe this is an acceptable way to behave. As feminism has taught us, the personal is political.

Domestic and family violence are national issues which require consistent and coordinated national responses to ensure women and children across Australia are supported to live free from violence. In the ACT we are committed to working with our colleagues in federal, state and territory governments to continue to coordinate our efforts to improve responses to domestic and family violence.

We continue to implement initiatives under the *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children* and actively contribute to the development of the next National Plan. The priorities that emerged through the National Women's Safety Summit, which took place in September 2021, will be crucial as we continue to address and reduce domestic and family violence. The funding delivered through National Partnership Agreements has also been critical in supporting services to continue to deliver innovative and vital programs for victim-survivors throughout the pandemic.

The 2021-22 Budget allocated \$35.9 million over four years to expand the ACT Government's evidence-based approach to addressing domestic and family violence. This continued investment provides resourcing to address the widespread nature of domestic, family, and sexual violence in the ACT and to provide a range of responses to make a difference for people experiencing violence.

I would like to make special mention of the \$1.5 million the ACT Government has committed over four years for our landmark Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Program. The program will deliver a robust approach to sexual assault in Canberra focused on prevention, response, law reform, and workplace safety.

In 2021, ACT Policing continued to work with family violence support services to prevent family violence incidents and make sure victims are supported and protected, and perpetrators are held accountable for their actions.

Family violence is a complex and pervasive issue that requires a response from multiple agencies. However, this multi-agency approach at times means information is held across agencies, with no one agency having a complete picture of the situation. 2021 saw the continuation of the Family Violence Safety Action Pilot, which has significantly improved the flow of information between police and other agencies in respect to high-risk victims and perpetrators.

As Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development, I am proud of the ACT Government's commitment to provide a considered, evidence-based approach to preventing gender-based violence in ACT Government schools.

In the 2021-22 Budget, the ACT Government invested \$2.1 million in a new, whole-of-school approach to preventing gender-based violence by creating a culture of gender equality and inclusion. This includes a team of gender equality coaches to support schools and professional learning for public school staff.

In July 2021, the ACT Government collaborated with the University of Canberra to host a roundtable on the topic of respectful relationships, sexuality, and consent education in ACT schools. The roundtable brought together representatives from community organisations; public, Catholic, and independent school sectors; parent representatives; teacher representatives; policing; child protection; and academic experts.

The outcomes of the roundtable will be used to inform approaches to gender equity, relationships, and sexuality education, and in the university education of pre-service teachers.

Supporting women and girls' mental and physical health and wellbeing is critical to ensuring they can thrive and participate fully in our community.

Equity Together saw the ACT Government commit to develop and launch an online triage navigation portal to support young people in the ACT who are seeking mental health and wellbeing support. I am very pleased to share that the portal - named 'MindMap' - officially launched in October 2021. MindMap is a dedicated portal for children and young people to help navigate Canberra's mental health system and to find the right services and support.

The implementation of the Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response (PACER) initiative in the ACT has created a safer, more dignified platform for providing emergency mental health intervention. PACER offers therapeutic, less restrictive options for managing acute mental health crisis in the community.

Over the past 12 months, PACER has responded to 1,472 incidents involving a person experiencing mental health crisis. Of that number, 60 per cent of patients were female. Significantly, data shows more than 300 women or girls were able to be diverted from hospital and instead receive mental health support in the community.

As the PACER initiative continues, outcomes will continue to inform strategies to best improve the treatment of women in mental health crises.

ACT Health and the Community Services Directorate are jointly developing a 5-year Strategy for the First Thousand Days that aims to improve wellbeing for children, mothers and families from conception to 2 years old in order to lay strong foundations for their development in later years.

The Best Start for Canberra's Children: The First 1000 Days Strategy will build on extensive research and engagement with a range of experts through a dedicated Reference Group. ACT Health and the Community Services Directorate are engaging with people with lived experience to ensure the strategy is relevant, targeted and useful for those who the system often misses and whose voices are rarely heard directly. This crucial Government strategy has the clear objective to enable parents and families in the ACT to provide the best start for their children.

ACT Health is also committed to implementing the recommendations from the LGBTIQ+ Health Scoping Study. Implementation of these recommendations will improve health service delivery and remove barriers to accessing health services for LGBTIQ+ Canberrans.

As we know, accessibility and appropriateness of policies, programs, and services is vital to supporting our diverse community. Services are enhanced when service providers consider and respond to the diverse needs and experiences of women and girls.

I would like to commend Corrective Services for its release of the *Walking with Women on the Pathway to Change Framework*. The Framework will inform a new operating model that will incorporate improved gender responsive, culturally appropriate and trauma aware practices for women in custody or under community supervision.

I am also happy to provide an update on works undertaken within sportsground pavilions across the ACT to provide a better amenity for women and girls, consistent with the *Female Friendly Change Rooms @ Sporting Facilities Guidelines*. With 16 pavilion upgrades in 2020-21 and three more undertaken in 2021-22, it takes the total number of sportsground pavilions upgraded in recent years to 28.

Changes to the pavilions include the installation of privacy screens on all showers and toilets, removal of urinals, and adding baby change tables, bench sinks, and mirrors. By creating safe and supportive environments to participate in sport, we are creating more opportunities for women and girls to connect socially and improve their health.

When it comes to women's workplace participation and leadership, the ACT Government has a leading role to play. Workplaces that foster and promote gender equality are critical to realising and securing women's workplace rights, entitlements, and protection from discrimination and exploitation. There are many positive steps being taken across the ACT Government to improve women's participation and leadership, and I am pleased to share some of those initiatives with you today.

In July 2021, the ACT Rural Fire Service responded to calls from women within the Service to create a support network where they could share experiences in a safe and trusted environment. They did this by launching the ACT Rural Fire Service Women's Network. The aim of the Network is to build a community of confident female leaders who proudly share their skills and diverse experiences, paving the way for future members to follow.

Since its establishment, the ACT Rural Fire Service Women's Network has supported women to share their experiences of working in an emergency services environment and consider barriers to being recognised as leaders in the Service.

Important steps are also being taken to improve the diversity of ACT Fire and Rescue to better reflect the community they serve and improve diversity of thought and leadership in the organisation.

ACT Fire and Rescue has introduced a Physical Preparation Program for all candidates, in the lead up to and during the recruitment process. ACT Fire and Rescue Service has also worked to eliminate bias from the selection process by redesigning aspects of the physical abilities test so height and assumed knowledge do not influence the assessment. The initiative was taken up by 60 candidates, which included 29 female candidates.

I would also like to highlight the significant cultural reform taking place across the Australian Federal Police (AFP), including ACT Policing, to empower women and encourage female leadership. Women continue to apply for work within the AFP at a lower rate than men, and we know women face unique challenges in male-dominated industries. To address this, the AFP is collecting feedback from female recruits, creating opportunities for female applicants to connect with other women interested in policing, and implementing a mentoring program for women entering the AFP College.

This is all a part of the organisation's journey towards a long-term target for women to represent 50 per cent of the total AFP workforce by the end of 2026.

Fostering gender equality within Transport Canberra and City Services (TCCS) remained a focus in 2021. To continue to address gender disparities in its workforce, TCCS has recently offered tailored leadership and development programs, which aim to equip participants with the skills needed to lead high-performing teams and support frontline operational staff to increase management and leadership capability. TCCS has also made a 'Best Practice Recruitment and Selection' eLearning module, which includes a section on addressing unconscious bias, a pre-requisite for attending a one-day face-to-face recruitment training course.

Increasing the participation of women in traditionally male dominated and higher paid roles is an important step towards gender equality. Through *Equity Together*, the ACT Government is also working collaboratively to deliver a number of actions to support increased numbers of women in the construction industry. Importantly, the Second Action Plan has committed to a target for 10 per cent female employment in the construction industry in the ACT.

Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT) Trade Skills has seen a continual increase in female student enrolments over the past three years and CIT Construction has significantly increased female enrolment numbers. Since 2019, CIT's Trade Skills programs have seen a 34 per cent increase in female student enrolments across all Trade Skills training areas; with 20 per cent of this increase between 2020 and 2021 when the 'Her Trade' campaign was being promoted. CIT Construction has also seen a 75 per cent increase in female enrolment numbers since 2019.

This year, I echo my sentiments from 2021, and would like to commend the engagement and passion from industry, unions, the women's sector, and the broader community to support improved uptake and retention of women in the construction industry. With so many people and organisations in our community working towards this shared goal, I am reminded of the appetite in our city to support and promote participation and inclusion.

Addressing inequality around the types of work undertaken by men and women needs to start in school. To increase the representation of girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) classes, an ACT Government Girls in STEM grant scheme totalling \$200,000 was released in 2019, with projects being completed throughout 2020 and 2021.

A total of 17 schools from across the ACT and two individual students used the funding for a wide range of activities, including enhancing entrepreneurial skills, mentoring programs, engineering programs, coding and robotics clubs, STEM enrichment programs, and STEM career focussed initiatives. Enhanced partnerships with ACT universities and employers were key impacts of the grants, and in total over 1000 individual students engaged in various aspects of the girls in STEM grants.

Final reports for the grants are now being submitted, and I am pleased to advise that preliminary data suggests there has been a distinct increase in the confidence of girls to engage in robotics and coding classes, an increase in numbers of girls attending STEM clubs, an increased proficiency when engaging with technology, and higher engagement in STEM competitions.

Supporting women into leadership roles so their voices can be heard equally, is an essential element of achieving gender equality. This is why the ACT Government has been working towards the target of 50 per cent female representation on all ACT Government boards and committees. I am so happy to share with you that as of January this year, 55 per cent of representatives on ACT Government boards and committees were women.

It has taken years of commitment to achieve this target, and I am incredibly proud of this outcome. Having increased female representation on boards and committees ensures women not only have a strong voice at the table, but are in positions to facilitate broader change across the community, and influence gender-sensitive policies.

I also look forward to the delivery of the second official ACT Public Services Women's Mentoring Program in 2022. The program, which was an action under the First Action Plan of the *ACT Women's Plan*, matches women from across the ACT Public Service with senior leaders to help them build their skills, confidence, networks, and leadership qualities.

I am very proud of what we have achieved in 2021 and the work that continues in 2022, but there is always more to do. We have commenced planning for the future of the ACT Women's Plan, and this year, we will commence consultations for the Third Action Plan of the Women's Plan, which will be released in the 2022-23 Financial Year.

I look forward to continuing to work with the women's sector and the community to shape the Third Action Plan to ensure it is truly reflective of the aims of our community, and the ambitions of so many Canberrans to see gender equality become a reality.

While there is much to be proud of as we reflect on the achievements of 2021, I encourage us all to continue to consider how our approaches to recovery from the pandemic, and future policies, services, partnerships, and programs can be more gender-responsive. Not only this, but we must remember the women in our community are diverse, and intersectionality must be front of mind for all of us.

There is a clear commitment across Government and community to support and empower women and girls in our community, but there is still a lot of work we must all do to see lasting change.

I would like to leave you today with something that stuck with me from International Women's Day this year. While we are living in unique times, the resilience of our city has been remarkable. While in many instances we may not have sat directly across the table from one another to celebrate International Women's Day this year, we met, shared, and listened in other ways. This kind of creativity, ingenuity, and resolve is something we can all keep learning from. I challenge everyone here today to continue to adopt these values that, while not new, have served us well in 2020, 2021, and now into 2022. Let every one of us consider how we can continue harnessing our creativity, ingenuity, and resolve to make gender equality our reality in the ACT.