

2025

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

Coercive Control – Criminalisation

Assembly Resolution of 20 March 2025 - Government Response

**Presented by
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September 2025**



ACT
Government

Coercive Control - Criminalisation Assembly Resolution of 20 March 2025

**Government Response
September 2025**

Introduction

- 1) On 20 March 2025, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed an Assembly motion entitled ‘coercive control – criminalisation’ with government amendments (the Assembly motion). The Opposition leader Ms Leanne Castley MLA originally presented the Assembly motion. The Assembly motion called on the ACT Government to:
 - a. Consult with the Domestic Violence Prevention Council in relation to best practice responses to coercive control
 - b. Continue to develop the ACT’s Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy with specialist ACT agencies to ensure a coordinated response to domestic, family and sexual violence
 - c. Conduct a review of legislation in relation to the criminalisation of coercive control nationally to assess implementation, effectiveness and identify any gaps, assess the ACT’s current legislative framework in so far as it captures coercive control, and introduce legislation informed by the review
 - d. Enhance support and resources for people experiencing coercive control and improve awareness of, and responses, to coercive control in the ACT community
 - e. Increase the capacity of frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services to respond to coercive control
 - f. Improve the provision of training and education to police and other justice agencies, including the judiciary, in relation to coercive control, and
 - g. Report back to the Assembly within six months on progress in relation to these activities, including in relation to a timeline for legislation.
- 2) The Government Response provides an update on the elements of the motion.

Background

- 3) Coercive control occurs where perpetrators exert power and dominance over victim-survivors using patterns of abusive behaviour over time that create fear and deny a victim-survivor their liberty and autonomy. Coercive control is an inextricable part of domestic and family violence (DFV) and almost always an underpinning dynamic of DFV and a key indicator of risk and lethality.
- 4) The ACT Government is committed to addressing and responding to coercive control. It was a 2024 election commitment to continue to educate around coercive control and work with stakeholders towards criminalising coercive control.

- 5) The ACT already recognises coercive control within the family violence order framework and has recognised coercive and controlling behaviour as part family violence since 2016 when the *Family Violence Act 2016* was first introduced in the Territory.
- 6) Currently, victim-survivors can apply for a family violence order if they are experiencing coercion from a family member or any other behaviour that controls them and makes them fear for their safety and wellbeing or the safety and wellbeing of others. Family violence orders are an important part of the ACT's response to domestic and family violence, providing protection to victim-survivors, and holding perpetrators accountable. Breaching a family violence order is a serious offence which can lead to imprisonment for up to 5 years.
- 7) *The Crimes Act 1900* also already criminalises individual acts of coercive and controlling behaviour such as threats to inflict grievous bodily harm (s31), forcible confinement (s34) and stalking (s35).
- 8) The ACT Government recognises the importance of also strengthening non-legal responses to coercive control and has:
 - a. continued to invest in frontline services to bolster capacity;
 - b. undertaken a public education campaign to build community awareness about coercive control; and
 - c. invested in uplifts for non-specialist services, especially justice agencies, so they are better able to recognise and respond to coercive control. These measures are outlined in the progress update section below.

Progress Update

Assembly motion	ACT Government Response	
(a) Consult with the Domestic Violence Prevention Council in relation to best practice responses to coercive control	Noted	The ACT Government considered advice from the Domestic Violence Prevention Council (DVPC) provided between 2022 and 2024 in developing this response. The Minister for the Prevention of Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence also hosted a targeted roundtable on criminalisation of coercive control on 13 August 2025 to hear directly from key specialist domestic, family and sexual violence sector stakeholders and intersecting services. In recognition of the importance of the expertise of community sector agencies in criminalising coercive control, the ACT Government will continue to consult with key stakeholders to establish a steering committee to advise on the criminalisation of coercive control.
(b) Continue to develop the ACT's Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy with specialist ACT agencies to ensure a coordinated response to domestic, family and sexual violence	Agree	The ACT Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Strategy (the Strategy) is currently being developed. Consultation has been undertaken with specialist services, intersecting, and universal services, as well as government agencies. The Strategy will set the long-term direction for preventing and responding to gender-based violence, including coercive control, in the ACT. The ACT Government anticipates launching the Strategy in the first half of 2026.
(c) Conduct a review of legislation relating to the criminalisation of coercive control nationally to assess implementation, effectiveness and identify any	Agree	The ACT Government has commenced this review. More time and consultation beyond the Government Response's timeline is required for a comprehensive desktop review of national coercive control laws and effectiveness. This work is ongoing as the models in other jurisdictions mature, which will support the ACT Government to determine the best scope for new legislation in the ACT.

gaps, assess the ACT's current legislative framework in so far as it captures coercive control, and introduce legislation informed by the review		Preliminary work on the review indicates that the standalone coercive control offence and oversight mechanisms/safeguards accompanying the offence vary across jurisdictions. For example, the offence provision in NSW and South Australia are confined to coercive behaviours between current or former intimate/domestic partners whereas the offence in Queensland is broader and covers coercive behaviours between people who are or were in relationships beyond domestic partner relationships such as family relationships and informal care relationships. The ACT Government will introduce legislation to criminalise coercive control by mid-2026.
(d) Enhance support and resources for people experiencing coercive control and improve awareness of, and responses, to coercive control in the ACT community	Agree in principle	The ACT Government 2024-25 Budget invested \$375,000 for a coercive control response package to build awareness and capacity across the ACT Government and the community to better understand, identify and respond to coercive control. The package is now being delivered and includes developing training for ACT Policing and Courts; a public education campaign, focusing on culturally and linguistically diverse communities which commenced in May 2025; and integrating coercive control in the ACT Domestic and Family Violence Risk Assessment and Management Framework, to ensure consistent definitions and responses to coercive control. The updated Framework is expected to be finalised by the end of 2025. The ACT Government recognises ongoing awareness raising around coercive control has been a foundational component of criminalising coercive control in other jurisdictions.
(e) Increase the capacity of frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services to respond to coercive control	Agree in principle	The ACT Government has continued to prioritise investment in frontline services. The 2025-26 ACT Budget included a \$30.5 million investment in frontline services and information is published in the Addressing Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence factsheet is available online at Domestic, family and sexual violence budget factsheet 2025 to 2026. Further work to prepare for the criminalisation of coercive control will include working with specialists to understand the expected impact of the legislative reform.

(f) Improve the provision of training and education to police and other justice agencies, including the judiciary, in relation to coercive control	Agree in principle	See response above to (d). The ACT Government 2024-25 Budget invested \$375,000 for a coercive control response package to build awareness and capacity across the ACT Government and the community to better understand, identify and respond to coercive control. The ACT Government recognises ongoing awareness raising around coercive control has been a foundational component of criminalising coercive control in other jurisdictions.
(g) Report back to the Assembly within six months on progress in relation to these activities, including in relation to a timeline for legislation	Agree	The ACT Government intends to introduce legislation to criminalise coercive control by mid-2026, following the necessary Government processes. Further activities will follow future Budget processes and Cabinet agreement.