

# **The Status of Women in the ACT**

Select Committee on the Status of Women in the ACT

November 2002

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory





## **Committee membership**

Ms Katy Gallagher MLA (Chair)

Mrs Helen Cross MLA (Deputy Chair)

Ms Roslyn Dundas MLA

Secretary: Mr David Skinner

Research Officer: Ms Lesley Wheeler

Administration: Ms Judy Moutia

## **Resolution of appointment and terms of reference**

To inquire into and report on the effectiveness of existing ACT Government programs including:

- a) their differential impact on women's –
  - i) equality of opportunity;
  - ii) economic independence and security;
  - iii) access to and support of healthy lifestyles;
  - iv) barriers to participation;
- b) violence prevention and personal and community safety for women;
- c) targeted support for women from specific groups within the community; and
- d) any other related matter.

Report by the last sitting day in November 2002

**Legislative Assembly Minutes of Proceedings, 11 December 2001.**

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# **Summary of recommendations**

## **Recommendation 1**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) extend outreach services in the community sector to meet the needs of disadvantaged and isolated women who may not be in a position to access current programs;**
- b) investigate the provision of funding for outreach workers to support women with mental health issues and their dependent children.**

## **Recommendation 2**

**The committee recommends that the Government look at ways to provide gender-specific accommodation options within a residential/institutional setting for those women with mental health issues.**

## **Recommendation 3**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the need to expand service delivery responses which provide counselling and support for women with body image and eating issues.**

## **Recommendation 4**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the need to provide gender-specific and culturally appropriate gambling counselling services that remove access barriers to women that are seeking help for gambling problems.**

## **Recommendation 5**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) increase the resources and capacity of mental health services to conduct mental health assessments and diagnosis in a timely manner and also to provide follow-up services to patients;**
- b) increase the level of services that are able to accommodate a person's dual diagnosis needs;**

**c) conduct further investigations into the barriers and accessibility of mental health services to the community and implement strategies to increase accessibility and safety.**

### **Recommendation 6**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

**a) investigate the provision of additional support to community organisations working in the areas of sexual and reproductive health to widely distribute material targeted at young people and presented in community languages.**

**b) develop training and other strategies which enable services to engage and educate women from culturally diverse backgrounds about issues such as sexual and reproductive health.**

**c) the Government liaise with all campuses to ensure that International Student Orientation programs have access to appropriately designed material on reproductive and sexual health issues including addressing cultural and religious taboos.**

### **Recommendation 7**

**The committee recommends that the Government ensure that factual, comprehensive sex education is taught in all ACT Government schools.**

### **Recommendation 8**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the provision of childcare facilities for women seeking treatment for drug and alcohol issues in a residential facility.**

### **Recommendation 9**

**The committee recommends that:**

**a) the Government consult with the General Division of General Practice to raise awareness about possible inappropriate prescribing practices in relation to benzodiazapines; and**

**b) the Government investigate the need for a specialist community worker to work with and assist people with benzodiazapine dependencies.**

### **Recommendation 10**

**The committee recommends that the Government direct additional resources towards outreach services for women with drug and alcohol problems.**

### **Recommendation 11**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) develop specialised educational responses to discourage girls and young women from taking up smoking; and**
- b) develop specialised smoking reduction and cessation programs aimed at women.**

### **Recommendation 12**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funding to the Junction Youth Health Service to extend its hours of operation and enhance the range and breadth of referral pathways for complex clients.**

### **Recommendation 13**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) the Government consult widely with Indigenous women and Indigenous organisations about how the government can best meet the needs of isolated and disadvantaged Indigenous women; and**
- b) enhance the capacity of services, particularly outreach services to meet the needs of isolated Indigenous women.**

### **Recommendation 14**

**The committee recommends that the government monitor and review the adequacy of the convalescent facility, especially in relation to how many women utilise it and the extent to which it meets the needs of older women in the ACT.**

### **Recommendation 15**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funds for community care services to extend access across the board.**

### **Recommendation 16**

**The committee recommends that the Government appoint a psychogeriatrician to assist in meeting the health needs of older women in the ACT.**

### **Recommendation 17**

**The committee recommends that the Government develop and implement disability action plans for all ACT Government departments and agencies.**

### **Recommendation 18**

**The committee recommends that the Government assess the need to provide more female interpreters in the health sector catering for women from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds.**

### **Recommendation 19**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the disparity between the cost of fee-based activities such as swimming and aquarobics versus that paid by people utilising playing grounds and that it consider options that remedy this disparity.**

### **Recommendation 20**

**The committee recommends that the Government, in consultation with relevant women's sporting groups, investigate how it can assist in facilitating the development of a mentoring and leadership program for women involved in sports.**

### **Recommendation 21**

**The committee recommends that the Government ensure that sports and recreation funding be allocated equitably between men's and women's sport in the ACT at all levels.**

### **Recommendation 22**

**The committee recommends that the Government increase the current paid maternity leave entitlement for ACT Government employees from 12 to 14 weeks in line with ILO Standards.**

### **Recommendation 23**

**The committee recommends that the Government develop and implement programs aimed at improving the employment skills of disadvantaged women seeking to re-enter the workforce.**

### **Recommendation 24**

**The committee recommends that the Government improve and expand respite care provision for women with children in need.**

### **Recommendation 25**

**The committee recommends that the Government review service purchasing to take into consideration enterprise bargaining agreements, including above-award SACS wages.**

### **Recommendation 26**

**The committee recommends that the Government identify and implement improved recruitment strategies in the area of respite care provision so as to encourage more Indigenous families to take on a respite caring role for Indigenous children in need of this type of care.**

### **Recommendation 27**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate policies which improve ease of access to appropriate, affordable housing for women escaping domestic violence.**

### **Recommendation 28**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate and implement public housing policies which allow women to avail themselves of drug rehabilitation services whilst not losing the security of tenure associated with their public housing property.**

### **Recommendation 29**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) investigate the need for the establishment of a youth night shelter; and**
- b) in consultation with stakeholders, investigate the viability of an accommodation voucher system for young people.**

### **Recommendation 30**

**The committee recommends that the Government play a facilitation role regarding the development of housing schemes which allow older people to realise the equity in their home to avail themselves of more appropriate accommodation.**

### **Recommendation 31**

**The committee recommends that the government ensure that young mothers and their children are individually supported in the ACT public school system, enabling them to continue their education.**

### **Recommendation 32**

**The committee recommends that the Government examine appropriate service delivery options for older women escaping from domestic violence that meet their specific needs with a view to opening up access to alternative accommodation for this group.**

### **Recommendation 33**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) undertake to examine unmet need in relation to culturally appropriate services, especially in terms of outreach and ongoing support for Indigenous women facing family violence;**
- b) allocate appropriate funding should this examination show significant gaps in service provision for Indigenous women; and**
- c) closely consult with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as to where a culturally appropriate crisis service would best be located.**

### **Recommendation 34**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the “cluster model” approach to crisis and refuge accommodation for women and their dependent children escaping family and domestic violence with a view to considering the application of the model in the ACT**

#### **Recommendation 35**

**The committee recommends that the Government rework the *Protection Orders Act* in relation to restraining orders so that legislative provisions regarding domestic violence be contained in a stand-alone Act.**

#### **Recommendation 36**

**The committee recommends that the Government undertake a comprehensive needs-mapping exercise in relation to emergency accommodation for women with and without children escaping domestic violence to identify gaps in service delivery responses and the establishment of funding priorities in this area.**

#### **Recommendation 37**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide, though increased funding measures, appropriate crisis accommodation, support systems and care for older women who have been placed in the situation of requiring safe accommodation because of having been subjected to domestic violence and/or abuse.**

#### **Recommendation 38**

**The committee recommends that the Government apply additional resources to appropriate services so as to ensure that practical support is available for women and their children who are re-establishing their lives after living with violence, including positive parenting support/modelling in the home.**

#### **Recommendation 39**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate options aimed at ensuring appropriate accommodation, support and care is provided for older men who have used violence in their domestic relationship so that women are able to continue living in the family home in safety.**



#### **Recommendation 40**

**The committee recommends that the Government continue to fund the Family Violence Intervention Project and ensure that the support of victims remains paramount to this program by identifying and allocating additional funding in relation to victim support services.**

#### **Recommendation 41**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funding to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to reduced waiting times for counselling and extend access to group counselling and support.**

#### **Recommendation 42**

**The committee recommends that the Government should identify those areas relating to safety on tertiary campuses over which it has potential influence and act to eliminate sexual assault and rape on campus and to ensure that students have accurate information, including information derived from Commonwealth authorities, the AFP and campus management bodies.**

#### **Recommendation 43**

**The committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, funding be applied to extend services geared towards counselling children who have been victims or have witnessed domestic violence as well as extending programs directed towards breaking the cycle of intergenerational violence.**

#### **Recommendation 44**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funding to early intervention programs to provide support and counselling to children that have experienced violence in their lives.**

#### **Recommendation 45**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) establish and resource a working party made up of representatives from areas including: law enforcement; health promotion, the women's sector; relevant community organisations; as well as educators and those responsible for the development of school curricula to develop and implement an across-the-board**

**information and education campaign regarding all aspects of violence against women, including sexual violence, with the view to including violence prevention education as part of the ACT Government school curriculum; and**

**b) build on this work with a broader community education and information campaign.**

#### **Recommendation 46**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

**a) prioritise the maintenance of lighting in bus interchanges and other public spaces in its maintenance program; and**

**b) should investigate the possibility of providing after-hours bus services with the flexibility to stop between bus stops in order to set passengers down as close to their homes as possible.**

#### **Recommendation 47**

**The committee recommends that:**

**a) the Government undertake research regarding sexual assault and public events in the ACT;**

**b) the Government develop and expand innovative strategies to educate children and young people about the impact of violence on individuals and the community;**

**c) event organisers be required to consult with a broad range of stakeholders to enact safety strategies to ensure events are safe for all members of the community;**

**d) increased funding is allocated to education campaigns aiming to address male and female stereotypes about violence against women; and**

**e) restricted alcohol use policies be enacted at all public events.**

#### **Recommendation 48**

**The committee recommends that the Government, in consultation, facilitate the establishment of a mentoring and peer support program**

**for women interested in sitting on government boards and committees, with a particular focus on attracting young women, older women, women with disabilities, Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.**

#### **Recommendation 49**

**The committee recommends that the government investigate the provision of ongoing funding for women's advocacy services.**

#### **Recommendation 50**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the development of a funding program to be administered by the ACT Office for Women for one-off funding for special projects in the women's sector.**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) the Government extend WiRC's telephone advisory service on a trial basis to operate on weekends and after hours and that the contact number is a free call 1800 number; and**
- b) that the service is widely promoted.**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) a new remand facility is built as a matter of urgency and includes innovative approaches to the accommodation of women on remand which provide them with safety, privacy and separate programs and support;**
- b) the detention of women prisoners be considered as a separate issues from the construction of the proposed prison, recognising their special needs and differing crime and incarceration patterns; and**
- c) the Government continue to develop and implement a range of progressive alternatives to sentencing for offenders.**

#### **Recommendation 53**

**The committee recommends that the Government initiate the development of a new women's action plan, involving extensive consultation with ACT women through the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women and other fora.**

#### **Recommendation 54**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) The Government systematically identify in which programs, government agencies and funding mechanisms will the reporting of gender-disaggregated data will add value to the policy development process;**
- b) the Government develop uniform reporting requirements in relation to the provision of gender statistics;**
- c) The Government analyse disaggregated data to assess the existence of any inequalities and to provide a basis for strategic policy development; and**
- d) The Government report analysis of this data to the community.**

#### **Recommendation 55**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) the ACT Office of Women prioritise policy development in areas affecting isolated and marginalised women in the ACT; and**
- b) developed specialised strategies, including outreach, to address the needs of women who are isolated in the community.**

#### **Recommendation 56**

**The Committee recommends the Government:**

- a) ensure its departments are educated about the importance of seeking advice from the ACT Office for Women during the preparation of cabinet submissions; and**
- b) require that where government departments are undertaking policy development work they demonstrate in cabinet submission documents the nature of the advice sought and provided by the ACT Office for Women.**

#### **Recommendation 57**

**The committee recommends that the Government produce an ACT women's report card to be published annually containing key**

**statistical indicators on the status of women in the community such as those outlined in the WA Women's Fact sheet.**

**Recommendation 58**

**The committee recommends that the Government outlines in the budget papers its yearly expenditure proposals in relation to women's programs and programs which impact on women.**

**Recommendation 59**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the establishment of women's research partnerships with one or more of Canberra's universities, aimed at undertaking specialised research projects on issues affecting women in the ACT.**



# Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Women have played a significant role throughout history, though their achievements were not always recognised at the time. Prior to the nineteenth century when women took centre stage in the fight for the right to vote alongside men, there was little acknowledgement of the status of women within society. Australia has a history of appreciation of the role and status of women. In 1902 women in Australia were given the right to vote in the new Federal elections, making Australia second in the world to achieve this following New Zealand (1893).

1.2. Since then, and largely thanks to huge inroads during the second half of the twentieth century, the rights of women have taken on an increasingly central role in government policy-making.

1.3. There is no longer any need for debate on the right of women to be recognised. Debate now centres on the rights of women to function in society with dignity and respect. Such issues as safety and violence, support in raising a family, access to education and employment are subjects under discussion by both men and women from across the social spectrum.

1.4. The challenge for women in 2002 and beyond is not to elicit a consensus on the existence of women's issues, but to remedy the separate problem areas that are specific to women.

1.5. Much of the policy debate today at all levels of government, is centred around issues relating to equality of opportunity. This includes the opportunity for education, employment, income, legal representation, safety, access to services, social and cultural support, and encouragement.

1.6. The committee recognises the changing nature of issues relating to women. These include among many others, the increase in numbers of single-parent families, of same-sex partnerships, and working hours. It also takes into account the dilemmas of agencies struggling to cope with the results of pressures arising from the stresses of modern culture.

## Background

1.7. On 11 December 2001 the Assembly established this select committee to examine and report on the status of women in the ACT. Specifically, the committee was tasked with examining the effectiveness,

or otherwise, of ACT Government programs and their differential impact on women.

1.8. The committee called for submissions, advertising in the local press and writing to key stakeholder groups in the community. The committee subsequently received 30 submissions.

1.9. The committee conducted two public hearings, one on 29 May 2002 and the other on 9 July 2002, receiving evidence from 24 organisations and individuals.

1.10. The committee met with members of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women and with representatives of Winnunga Nimmityjah, the ACT's Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service. The committee also received a briefing from the ACT Office for Women.

## **Structure and scope of report**

1.11. During the course of the inquiry, the committee heard from a wide range of organisations and individuals, all holding differing perspectives and with diverse focuses on women's issues. To a large extent, the committee's terms of reference guided the committee's own parameters for investigation and report. However, within those parameters, the committee has attempted to give ventilation to the full range of views expressed by submitters. In an attempt to give voice to the concerns and issues confronting women in their own words, the committee has included large sections of quotes from witnesses in the public hearings and from written submissions provided by organisations and individuals. The committee has also adopted many recommendations proposed by witnesses and submitters as recommendations for this report. The committee notes, however, that this report is not an exhaustive examination of the issues associated with the status of women in the ACT.

1.12. The committee acknowledges that the range of services and programs funded by government for the benefit of women are vast – not only do they include female-specific programs but every service delivery area in government from public transport and waste management through to motor vehicle registration and libraries. The committee did not attempt to comment on every conceivable service program but has instead relied on the issues presented by submitters and witnesses as being representative of the broad priorities in policy formulation and service delivery as perceived by women in the ACT.



1.13. Perhaps the main theme to present itself during the course of the inquiry was that of isolated women in the ACT community. The committee learned that women can find themselves marginalised and without support or social networks due to:

- homelessness;
- poverty;
- drug and alcohol misuse;
- mental health issues;
- disabilities;
- violence;
- children;
- age;
- indigenous backgrounds; and
- culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

1.14. The committee came to the position that the needs of isolated women are deserving of greater focus by government decision-makers.

1.15. The committee heard that various outreach programs targeting particular groups of women were essential for reaching and supporting these women in our community.

1.16. The committee's focus is the effectiveness of Government programs in relation to women, and the committee wished to highlight tangible barriers and gaps in services as well as where laws and other government policies are having a negative or unequal impact on women. The committee has construed the notion of 'government programs' broadly to include programs delivered by both government agencies and community sector organisations that receive government funding.

1.17. The committee proposes some suggestions and recommendations for the Government about an appropriate policy framework and service delivery priorities as expressed by the many women who made representations to the committee. The committee wishes to note that the Government, through its Ministerial Advisory Council and the Office for

Women, has undertaken significant work in the area of policy development around women's issues. The committee notes the ACT Women's Action Plan 2000-2001 was developed to address a wide range of issues affecting women. The ideas forwarded for the Government's consideration in this report should be received in this context. The committee will make all the submissions and evidence it received available to the Government, the Office for Women and the Ministerial Advisory Council to aid further discussion and analysis of the issues that were canvassed during the course of the inquiry.

1.18. The report is structured into six chapters. The first five chapters summarise the evidence received by the committee in relation to the service delivery side of the equation. The committee expresses its views on where gaps may exist and where additional work may need to be done at the program level to improve service delivery responses - the micro level. The committee also picks up on recommendations made by submitters in this regard. The final chapter, Chapter 6, contains the committee's analysis of the larger strategic policy approach appropriate required to bring about better co-ordination of women's policy issues and clarify how all areas of government can work together to produce better outcomes for women in the longer term – the macro level.

1.19. Chapter 2 examines access to, and support of, healthy lifestyles for women including health services, and sports and recreation programs. The committee examines some of the deficiencies, gaps and barriers associated with these areas of Government service delivery as relayed by submitters.

1.20. Chapter 3 looks at women's economic security and education, exploring some of the barriers that exist in relation to the achievement of pay equity. Legal anomalies regarding same-sex property rights and childcare are also discussed.

1.21. Chapter 4 examines violence against women and women's safety – both perceptions of safety and statistical expressions of the actuality. The committee discusses domestic violence, sexual assault, women's safety at public events, violence prevention and educational/attitudinal responses directed towards young men in relation to issues of violence against women.

1.22. Chapter 5 is on women's advocacy and the representation of women in community decision making roles.

1.23. Chapter 6 discusses the broad bureaucratic framework that currently exists in relation to the development of policies that affect women. Gender auditing, reporting processes, performance indicators, representation of women, co-ordination processes as well as interjurisdictional comparisons are also examined.

1.24. It is in this chapter that the committee expresses a view on how the Government could enhance strategic policy provisions to ensure that services met the needs of women and that broader social and political outcomes for women are considered and incorporated in government decision making.

1.25. The committee has included comment on the particular issues confronting targeted groups such as Indigenous women, women from non-English speaking backgrounds, older women and young women throughout the report where such issues have been raised by submitters and witnesses.

1.26. The committee would like to thank all those individuals and organisations that took the time to participate and assist the committee with its investigations. The committee understands the significant commitment of time and resources that must be applied in order to participate in proceedings of this nature and that often individuals are writing submissions and appearing at public hearings in their own time. The committee deeply appreciates that so many women were able to make a valuable contribution to its work.

1.27. The committee trusts that this report represents a useful and reasoned appraisal of the issues that came before it and hopes that the Government is now in a better position to assess its own priorities for service delivery and policy formulation in relation to women.

## **General ACT statistics and demographics**

1.28. In 1999 Demographics ACT and the Chief Minister's Department produced a demographic and social profile of women in the ACT, *Women in the ACT*. Much of the data included in this publication is ABS data from the 1996 Australian census as well as more recent surveys conducted on specific areas of interest. The committee has included portions of this publication throughout the report as well as including updated ABS data from the 2001 census and other relevant publications.

1.29. The committee has included the following breakdown of age and sex in the ACT population as determined by the recent census.

*Census Counts by Sex in the ACT*

	<b>2001</b>	<b>1996</b>	<b>% Change 1996 - 2001</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>% Change 1991 - 2001</b>
Male	153,388	147,830	<b>3.8%</b>	138,723	<b>11%</b>
Female	158,559	151,413	<b>4.7%</b>	140,600	<b>13%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>311,947</b>	<b>299,243</b>	<b>4.2%</b>	<b>279,323</b>	<b>12%</b>

*Age by Sex*

	<b>0-14 years</b>	<b>15-24 years</b>	<b>25-44 years</b>	<b>45-64 years</b>	<b>65 years and over</b>	<b>Total</b>
Male	33,415	25,358	47,385	34,750	11,158	<b>152,066</b>
Female	32,162	24,498	49,979	35,962	14,517	<b>157,118</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>65,577</b>	<b>49,856</b>	<b>97,364</b>	<b>70,712</b>	<b>25,675</b>	<b>309,184</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>21%</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>8.3%</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Chapter 2. Health and healthy lifestyles

2.1. Health is a broad concept. An early definition of health in the preamble to the World Health Organisation charter described it as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. There are many factors that impact on women's health such as: environmental factors; exercise; diet and genetic make-up.

2.2. In its submission to the committee, the Women's Centre for Health Matters noted that a discussion of health cannot be isolated from other factors in women's lives, the centre noted that, 'women's health cannot be understood purely from a medical perspective. Rather, health is inextricably intertwined with other aspects of women's lives: work, family, relationships, leisure time and the broader social and political context'<sup>1</sup>. The evidence received by the committee overwhelmingly supported this conceptualisation of health; health as an holistic notion encompassing every facet of a woman's life.

2.3. The committee notes the paper produced for the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women which argues that women's health outcomes can be affected via broader policy instruments, not just 'health policy'. In its paper, the Commission conceives that broader policy instruments must be directed towards improving the standing of women in society in order that improvements in health outcomes are realised. The Commission notes that:

Understanding the sources of ill health for women means understanding how cultural and economic forces interact to undermine their social status. If the goal of improving women's well-being from childhood through old age is to be achieved, "healthy" policies aimed at improving the social status of women are needed along with the "health policies" targeting the entire spectrum of women's health needs.<sup>2</sup>

2.4. The demographic and social profile, *Women in the ACT*, makes several observations about the health status of women noting that women in the ACT fair better than the national average. However, there are still several major health factors affecting women in the ACT including:

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<sup>1</sup> Submission 15, p 1.

<sup>2</sup> 'Women and Mental Health' access from UN website - <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/mental.htm>

- One in ten young women are underweight, and one in ten older women are either overweight or obese.
- One in four young ACT women continue to smoke and one in ten older women drink either hazardous or harmful amounts of alcohol.
- While ACT women are physically more active than the national average, as many as one in five young women are sedentary or inactive.
- There is a steady increase in inactivity with age, to a peak of half the women aged 70 and over being inactive.<sup>3</sup>

2.5. In this chapter, the committee presents the evidence it received in relation to women's health and access to healthy lifestyles. The chapter examines the following issues: general/primary health services; Indigenous women and their health; reproductive health; drug, alcohol and other dependencies; sports and recreation; disabilities; and psychological well-being. The committee acknowledges that this is not a comprehensive examination of service delivery but instead reflects the concerns and issues articulated by submitters and witnesses.

## **Psychological well-being and mental health**

2.6. Almost all witnesses and submitters advised the committee that additional resources must be directed towards the mental health sector as a matter of urgency. Many organisations advocated increased funding targeted at mental health services which specialise in meeting the needs of women, arguing that women's health requirements differ markedly from men's. A submission from the YWCA and the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL), both women's advocacy organisations, was typical of the views generally expressed in this regard: 'There is a need for a significant increase in the level of resources allocated to mental health services in the ACT and for services that specifically address the needs of women. We believe that women and men experience different mental health issues and require different strategies'.<sup>4</sup>

2.7. The committee agrees with the proposition that women and men have different mental health needs and that diverse, specialised service delivery responses are necessitated in many instances. The United Nations

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<sup>3</sup> ACT Government (1990) *Women in the ACT A social and demographic profile*, p 19.

<sup>4</sup> Submission 17, p 11.

Commission on the Status of Women also argues that women have unique mental health issues. The Commission points out that, ‘Epidemiologic[al] and anthropological data point to different patterns and clusters of psychiatric disorders and psychological distress among women than among men.’

2.8. The committee heard again and again that the gaps in mental health services have failed many women, especially those women who may be marginalised and isolated (The committee returns to the issue of isolation throughout the report – isolated women are identified as being in need of most attention by policy makers). The point was made that most problems arise from inadequate resourcing which stretches services and limits the degree to which the needs of women are met. In their submission to the inquiry, YWCA/WEL noted that:

Existing services are under-resourced and are therefore limited in their ability to respond to the mental health needs of the ACT community. This results in large gaps in service provision and places existing services such as YWCA Community Services under stress, with high case loads and supporting clients with high mental health needs. Additional services and resourcing of existing services, to provide specialised mental health support is needed to ensure that people are obtaining the most appropriate assistance and support.<sup>5</sup>

2.9. Toora Women, an ACT women’s shelter, noted in its submission that there is only one funded position for women with mental health issues in the ACT. This was seen as a significant weakness in the system’s capacity to respond to the specific needs of women and their mental health issues.<sup>6</sup>

2.10. Elaborating on some of the gaps in service delivery, planning and policy development in the mental health sector, Toora noted that:

- The National Mental Health Report 2000 does not provide any gender breakdown of service provision which is an indicator of the fact that in the mental health arena at a national and state and territory level the importance of gender in determining appropriate service delivery is not... [recognised].<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Submission 17, p 11.

<sup>6</sup> Submission 16, p 4.

<sup>7</sup> Submission 16, p 5.

2.11. With the previous point in mind, Toora also made the following observations also:

- The National Mental Health Report 2000 research portrays the ACT in a very poor light in the area of expenditure on mental health issues especially given the high prevalence of mental illness in the ACT.
- In 1997-98 the ACT had the lowest per capita expenditure of any state or territory and significantly under the national average with a very slow growth rate in expenditure recorded in the previous 5 years particularly compared with other jurisdictions...<sup>8</sup>

2.12. The lack of co-ordination between existing services was noted by Toora:

- The Mental Health Co-ordination Group, made up of representatives from Government, non-Government, hospitals, and consumers to provide high level advice on policy and purchasing issues was disbanded in June 2000 without any formal notice being provided to participants except that it would be reconvened. Whilst this did not have a specific focus on women it was an opportunity for specific gender and consumer related issues to be raised.<sup>9</sup>

2.13. Toora advocated that gender-sensitive services deliver the best outcomes for women regarding mental health issues and that outreach work in the community is a priority. The need for expanded and enhanced outreach services is a theme that was impressed upon the committee repeatedly and is explored further throughout the report.

## Generalist counselling services

2.14. The Women's Centre for Health Matters noted in its submission that it was supportive of the additional funding allocation in the budget for general counselling services for women noting that:

We applaud the initiative in the current 2001/2002 budget to provide additional counselling services for women and hold a confident expectation that *Women's Words* run by the Women's Health Service will provide significant benefits for ACT women. Generalist counselling services are an effective preventative and early intervention strategy in the

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<sup>8</sup> Submission 16, p 5.

<sup>9</sup> Submission 16, p 5.



area of depression which... is an enormous and growing health issue for women.<sup>10</sup>

2.15. The committee agrees that early intervention should be a guiding principle in all policy development concerning matters of health and well-being. In fact, in all areas of social service delivery, early intervention is both socially and economically sensible. The point was made that putting resources into preventing and/or ameliorating negative outcomes for women at the earliest possible stage is a sound investment for the individuals themselves and the public purse in the long term. The Centre saw value in the *Women's Words* program as an effective early intervention mechanism for women with mental health and other issues.

2.16. However, the Women's Centre for Health Matters noted that opportunities to access such programs are restricted for women who are isolated in the community, particularly as a result of poverty. The Centre argued that:

The affordability of such services is a major access and equity issue in the ACT as they [women living in poverty] are at a greater risk of depression and stress due to their poverty but are the least able to afford current services. We would encourage an outreach program and flexibility in service provision as a possible enhancement of *Women's Words*, with the aim that this type of service would be able to reach greater numbers of disadvantaged women.<sup>11</sup>

2.17. The committee supports the idea of extending the existing the *Women's Words* program or establishing a separate outreach program modelled on the *Women's Words* program to connect with disadvantaged women who may not be able to access the current service due to limitations on their mobility and/or limited financial capacity.

2.18. In a similar vein, the committee was also urged by Toora to recommend the need for improved outreach counselling services, more generally, as one means of providing continuity of care and assisting women in the community maintain their independence, especially in terms of living arrangements.

2.19. The committee supports the further investigation of these proposals.

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<sup>10</sup> Submission 15, p 2.

<sup>11</sup> Submission 15, p 2.

## **Recommendation 1**

### **The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) extend outreach services in the community sector to meet the needs of disadvantaged and isolated women who may not be in a position to access current programs;**
- b) investigate the provision of funding for outreach workers to support women with mental health issues and their dependent children.**

### **Female-specific mental health service**

2.20. A submission from a private citizen outlined her very personal experience with the mental health system in the ACT and relayed to the committee some of the difficulties she confronted, especially in terms of the need for alternative supports other than a hospital based system.

2.21. The submitter noted that:

It has occurred to me that I would be better off having supports other than just a hospital based system at certain times. I have also had many experiences of being turned away from hospital anyway because these resources are treated as more important than a particular sufferer's needs. The different phases and stages of becoming ill for me suggest that I would benefit from a wider range of support systems than is currently available in Canberra. As I am a lone women and most of the people I know are busy with their own lives and demands, I would like to have a residential alternative with twenty-four hour staff support. This would be different to the current acute care only that is brought into play at the most disturbed times.<sup>12</sup>

2.22. The submitter also made the point that due to some of her fears regarding men, that a female-specific support service would be of great assistance in meeting her needs. The submitter noted that:

As I have also been a victim of violence and abuse of the male dominated system I would ideally like to be in a female safe environment because I always feel threatened when I am ill by the presence of men. I have no

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<sup>12</sup> Submission 12, p 1.

control over this when I am unwell... On some occasion[s] when I have been in hospital I have been deliberately locked-up with men who were out of control. I know of a woman who was treated this way and who was subsequently attacked by the man. What happened to this unfortunate woman is my worst nightmare.<sup>13</sup>

2.23. The committee takes the point that the co-location of men and women in a facility dealing with mental health problems is fraught with danger for many reasons. The committee is interested to learn what protocols apply in relation to placing both men and women in a shared environment. It is disturbing to think that women seeking support and counselling for mental health issues may be ‘forced’ into situations that they find uncomfortable due to the limited accommodation options. The committee has made the following recommendation in this regard.

## **Recommendation 2**

**The committee recommends that the Government look at ways to provide gender-specific accommodation options within a residential/institutional setting for those women with mental health issues.**

## **Body image and eating issues**

2.24. The committee received evidence on issues associated with women’s and girls’ body image and attendant eating disorders. The committee was informed that eating issues come in many different forms and have far reaching effects on women that are so afflicted. In its submission, The Women’s Centre for Health Matters noted that, ‘The spectrum of body image and eating issues are many and varied such as, anorexia, bulimia, compulsive eating and binge eating, and can have devastating physical and emotional consequences for women over their entire life span’.<sup>14</sup>

2.25. Issues of body image have been of concern to women for many years. It is widely acknowledged that, through the media, women from all age groups are exposed on a daily basis to unrealistic and unattainable representations of women and their bodies. Women are encouraged to aspire to these representations as they are often seen to be tied-in with

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<sup>13</sup> Submission 12, p 1.

<sup>14</sup> Submission 15, p 2.

success, sexual attraction, health and popularity. It is widely acknowledged that negative perceptions of one's body can result in problematic eating behaviours and difficulties in other areas of one's life. According to Cash et al. (1986), "people's physical characteristics and body image affect personality development, self-esteem, interpersonal attractiveness, career opportunities, sexual adjustment, and the prevalence of disordered eating behavior"<sup>15</sup>.

2.26. Examining the influence of social normalisation in relation to the formation of body image, a paper from Wellesley College notes that:

Pre-adolescent and early adolescent girls are repeatedly told that they must adapt to socially acceptable norms. These norms include so-called "feminine" qualities: compliance, taking care of others, subduing their independent voices, and, of course, looking good (Gilligan et al.). Since a woman's sense of self is so influenced by how she sees herself in relationships, she puts extra effort in trying to be the person she thinks others want her to be. Gilligan, et al. emphasises the "loss of autonomous voice" that happens around age 13. Peers play an important role in this. Being accepted means adapting to one's perception of the expectations of one's peers--or at least it feels that way. And of course sexuality enters in--feeling attractive also means gaining the desired person's attention.<sup>16</sup>

2.27. The Women's Centre for Health Matters provides support services to women with body image and eating issues. In its submission, the Centre outlines some of the examples of work it has done on issues related to eating disorders and body image including:

...facilitation of groups addressing bulimia, childhood sexual abuse and eating issues, and a group for new mothers with body image or weight concerns following childbirth.

A group for larger women wanting to explore exercise and health issues, Living Large, was a recent initiative of our centre and is a prime example of community development. This particular group continues to grow in membership due to its uniqueness and innovative approach, [and] is now self-sustaining, recently becom[ing] incorporated and presented at the recent 4<sup>th</sup> Australian Narrative Therapy and Community Work conference. Another example of growth in this area is the support we are

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<sup>15</sup> Cash et al. "Body Dissatisfaction among Chinese Undergraduates and Implications for Eating Disorders in Hong Kong". *International Journal of Eating Disorders* Vol 20, No 1, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Gilligan, Carol, "In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development". Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982 cited in <http://www.wellesley.edu/Health/BodyImage/>

providing as the auspicing agency for a Healthpact grant, for the running of two Active Women groups – a group to introduce women to a wide variety of sporting activities.

2.28. However, the committee was informed in evidence before it that there was a degree of unmet demand in relation to support services for women with body image and eating issues. The Women’s Centre for Health Matters noted that, ‘We are always over-full; we always have waiting lists for women who would like to get into more groups that we run, but it is often limited by what sort of funding we have to enable those groups to run’.<sup>17</sup>

### **Recommendation 3**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the need to expand service delivery responses which provide counselling and support for women with body image and eating issues.**

#### **Self harm**

2.29. The committee was disturbed to learn that a large portion of women admitted to hospital presented as a result of self-harm. The YWCA/WEL submission cited a report *Youth in the ACT* which indicated that, ‘28% of all injuries resulting in hospitalisation of young women were due to self-harm’.<sup>18</sup> This is of great concern to the committee.

2.30. In the literature, self-harm is differentiated from suicide or attempted suicide<sup>19</sup> and is instead seen as a coping mechanism for people that are confronting difficult emotional experiences. Self harm is described as:

Self-injury (SI) is the act of physically hurting yourself on purpose without the intent of committing suicide. It is a method of coping during an emotionally difficult time that helps some people temporarily feel better because they have a way to physically express and release the tension and the pain they hold inside. In other people hurting themselves

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<sup>17</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 85, Ms Browne.

<sup>18</sup> Submission 17, p 11.

<sup>19</sup> The committee was informed that statistics compiled in the ACT do include suicide attempts as instances of self-harm.

produces chemical changes in their bodies that make them feel happier and more relaxed.<sup>20</sup>

2.31. The high incidence of self-harm amongst women in the ACT seems, on the surface, to indicate a deeper set of mental health concerns in this cohort and underlines the importance of ensuring that mental health services are properly addressing the spectrum of mental health issues.

## Gambling

2.32. The committee was advised through several sources that problem gambling amongst a significant portion of women in the ACT was having severe social costs. The committee received a report on a research project regarding women's gambling in the ACT produced by Helene Jacmon for the Women's Centre for Health Matters. As one indicator of the extent of women's gambling in the ACT the comprehensive report points out that, 'In 1999 female clients of Lifeline Gambling and Financial Counselling Service ACT made up 35% of the total number of clients for that year'. Given that the Productivity Commission survey on gambling indicated that less than half of those people that expressed a desire to seek help in relation to their gambling actually sought it, the numbers of women with problem gambling behaviours could be quite substantial.<sup>21</sup>

2.33. Problem gambling was said to have broad ranging impacts on finances; health; relationships; as well as intensifying other addictions.<sup>22</sup> The project noted that a nexus appeared to exist between gambling and mental health issues, substance misuse and family violence. The report points out that, 'The possible relationship between suicide attempts with problem gambling is alarming. A strong correlation between alcohol and gambling, and a high incidence of partner violence towards clients and their children has emerged as significant. A considerably high proportion of service providers also reported a possible relationship between gambling and histories of childhood abuse, sexual and physical'.<sup>23</sup>

2.34. The view that problem gambling behaviours are connected to other types of social and personal disadvantage was shared by service providers such as Beryl Women's Refuge. Beryl noted that the local club is often a

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.ratatosk.net/psyke/about.html>

<sup>21</sup> Jacomon, Helene (2001) 'Women and Gambling Project: Phase 1', p 9.

<sup>22</sup> Jacomon, Helene (2001) 'Women and Gambling Project: Phase 1', p iv.

<sup>23</sup> Jacomon, Helene (2001) 'Women and Gambling Project: Phase 1', p vii.

place that women in the refuge can go to socialise and that many women utilising their service gamble to such an extent that children are left short of money for school lunches. Beryl argued that gambling was a serious health concern for women as it is, ‘often combined with alcohol and tobacco use and is seen as recreation in spite of the fact that pay day is spent at the pokies and there may be no money for the rest of the week.’<sup>24</sup>

2.35. Beryl advocated the creation of specialised gambling counselling services that meet the specific needs of women, particularly Indigenous women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds. Beryl argued that:

There are no specific gambling intervention programs for women in the ACT, and no free childcare so that women can access the one service that offers gambling counselling. This service has a minimum three-week waiting period for those who request their services as they are under resourced to deal with such a population in need.

Gender specific counselling is essential and gambling education that reaches the low-level gamblers (frequently women, and frequently those who are Indigenous or of cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds).<sup>25</sup>

2.36. The report produced for the Women’s Centre for Health matters cited three main areas that need to be addressed in relation to women and problem gambling, noting that, ‘The three main suggestions by informants [in the survey project] for meeting the needs of women with gambling problems include: holding gender and culturally specific support meetings; offering alternatives to gambling; and improving accessibility to gambling specific services’.<sup>26</sup>

2.37. The committee supports the expansion of gambling support services that are gender-specific and culturally appropriate and recommends that the Government further investigate proposals to achieve this end.

## **Recommendation 4**

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<sup>24</sup> Submission 19, p 7.

<sup>25</sup> Submission 19, p 7.

<sup>26</sup> Jacomon, Helene (2001) ‘Women and Gambling Project: Phase 1’, p vi.

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the need to provide gender-specific and culturally appropriate gambling counselling services that remove access barriers to women that are seeking help for gambling problems.**

## **General recommendations**

2.38. In their submission, the YWCA/WEL raised several areas of concern about the need to improve and augment current service responses in the area of mental health. In particular, YWCA/WEL point to the need for more resources to address dual diagnoses issues, the removal of barriers to accessibility within the mental health sector and the need to ensure follow-up and continuity of care are undertaken. YWCA/WEL made several recommendations which the committee has incorporated into the report. These are made below.

### **Recommendation 5**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) increase the resources and capacity of mental health services to conduct mental health assessments and diagnosis in a timely manner and also to provide follow-up services to patients;**
- b) increase the level of services that are able to accommodate a person's dual diagnosis needs;**
- c) conduct further investigations into the barriers and accessibility of mental health services to the community and implement strategies to increase accessibility and safety.**

## **Reproductive health**

### **Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

2.39. The committee heard that more needed to be done to reach and educate women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds about reproductive and sexual health issues.

2.40. The YWCA and WEL noted in their submission that, 'The wide range of cultural and religious backgrounds represented in the Canberra



community, particularly amongst young adults living in the ACT for tertiary study, presents particular difficulties in conveying information about sexual and reproductive health'.<sup>27</sup>

2.41. The committee has adopted recommendations proposed by YWCA/WEL in this regard.

## **Recommendation 6**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) investigate the provision of additional support to community organisations working in the areas of sexual and reproductive health to widely distribute material targeted at young people and presented in community languages.**
- b) develop training and other strategies which enable services to engage and educate women from culturally diverse backgrounds about issues such as sexual and reproductive health.**
- c) the Government liaise with all campuses to ensure that International Student Orientation programs have access to appropriately designed material on reproductive and sexual health issues including addressing cultural and religious taboos.**

## **School students**

2.42. In evidence before the committee a representative of the Youth Coalition of the ACT working in the community education sector noted that young people are still in need of honest information about sex and about safe sex in particular. The committee was informed that some schools in the ACT prevent fulsome and candid sex education in their classrooms. The community educator argued that many young women are not practising safe sex, noting that:

Young women hear the same stories in the school setting over and over again. They continue not to practise [sex] safely. The information they're receiving is being censored. Teachers say that they're not equipped to

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<sup>27</sup> Submission 17, p

give this information out. They don't have the skill base to deliver the information, nor do some of them feel comfortable about talking about condoms and various methods of safe sex.<sup>28</sup>

2.43. The witness relayed to the committee a typical example of her experience teaching sex education in a school setting. The witness noted that:

Recently I went into a school and spoke with 140 young women about safe sex. The questions that were given out a week prior had been censored so severely that everything the young women wanted to ask they were no longer allowed to ask. We could talk about STIs [sexually transmitted infections], but we couldn't talk about how you could contract them. We couldn't talk about sexual contact, even though it was safe-sex education. We couldn't show a condom; we couldn't show a dental dam. This was due to parents maybe not being happy. These were high school students going into three different colleges in the ACT. So there's a lack of resources for teachers to be able to deliver this information and there is a lack of education for them on how to deliver it effectively.<sup>29</sup>

2.44. This is of great concern to the committee, as it believes that safe sex education is a crucial preventative measure. The committee believes that young women are not being well-served if schools are limiting and censoring honest, open discussions and information about sex and sexual health.

2.45. The committee considers the provision of frank, honest, evidence-based education and information on sexuality, safe sex and reproductive health is a matter of public health and should not be the prerogative of individual schools to hinder. Sexually active young people that have a limited understanding of safe sex practices are obviously at greater risk of spreading and receiving sexually transmitted infections. The committee believes that young women have the right to be educated about what risks are associated with sexual activity as well as how to reduce these risks.

## **Recommendation 7**

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<sup>28</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 34, Ms McGinn.

<sup>29</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 34, Ms McGinn.

**The committee recommends that the Government ensure that factual, comprehensive sex education is taught in all ACT Government schools.**

## **Drug and alcohol misuse**

2.46. Drug and alcohol misuse is a problem affecting people from all walks of life regardless of gender, age or socio-economic status. However, the committee received evidence that there are some specific problems confronting women in relation to the misuse of drugs and alcohol.

### **Drug treatment for women with dependent children**

2.47. In its submission, Beryl Women's Refuge made the point that women with dependent children face a dilemma when considering treatment for drug or alcohol dependencies. The refuge argued that women are fearful of losing custody of their children to their partner or to the child protection system should they choose to enter a residential drug treatment program. The refuge noted that:

Women with dependent children are not able to access residential therapeutic help in dealing with chemical dependencies. They fear that if they leave their children with a former partner they may lose custody of them and that if they seek help from respite care associations they will be branded as bad mothers and have their children removed by those with "power". This is particularly true for Aboriginal women whose legacy is one where theft of children was commonplace.<sup>30</sup>

2.48. The interests of women and their children are not being well-served when mothers feel unable to present for residential treatment due to the fear of losing their family. This situation is of concern to the committee as it represents a significant barrier to treatment access for some women. It is also the case that while other non-residential drug treatment options are available, they do not provide the same level of care, support and structure that many women with substance abuse issues require. The committee believes that the provision of childcare facilities for this client group would be a positive step towards opening up access to residential drug treatment services.

## **Recommendation 8**

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<sup>30</sup> Submission 19, p 7.

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the provision of childcare facilities for women seeking treatment for drug and alcohol issues in a residential facility.**

## **Benzodiazepines**

2.49. In its submission, Beryl make the case that misuse of benzodiazepines such as Valium or Serapax are a key health concern for many women. The committee heard that often mis-prescription and inadequate patient follow-up could lead to benzodiazepine addiction and misuse. Beryl noted that:

Many of our clients present with drug and/or alcohol dependencies. Of these many are dependent on licit drugs. This iatrogenic [caused by medical professionals] addiction is regularly overlooked by medical professionals who continue to prescribe the very drugs that are causing serious lifestyle damage. Dependence upon licit drugs, such as benzodiazepines, is still very much a women's issue and there is currently no specialist community worker specifically for this area.<sup>31</sup>

2.50. The committee is aware that benzodiazepine misuse often occurs concomitantly with the use of other licit and illicit drugs such as alcohol and heroin. The effects of poly-drug use of this kind are potentially very harmful as when these drugs are combined serious depressive effects on the respiratory system can occur which may result in overdose and heart failure. The committee is concerned to hear that some medical practitioners are still not cognisant of the issues associated with benzodiazepine misuse and are prescribing these drugs to women that are already dependent upon them.

2.51. The committee believes that more has to be done to educate general practitioners about prescribing guidelines for these types of medication to ensure that misuse is being limited. The committee also believes that the government would be wise to investigate whether there is a case for funding a specialist community worker to provide support and assistance to women with benzodiazepine dependencies.

## **Recommendation 9**

**The committee recommends that:**

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<sup>31</sup> Submission 19, p 7.

- a) **the Government consult with the General Division of General Practice to raise awareness about possible inappropriate prescribing practices in relation to benzodiazapines; and**
- b) **the Government investigate the need for a specialist community worker to work with and assist people with benzodiazapine dependencies.**

## **Need for outreach**

2.52. The committee was advised that WIRRED (Women’s Information, Resources and Referral on Drugs and Dependency), a service providing support to women with drug dependencies, is not funded to provide community outreach services. It was argued that outreach in this area was crucial in reaching marginalised women with drug and alcohol issues who may not be in a position to travel beyond a shelter or refuge. As noted earlier, the issue of outreach was raised repeatedly by witnesses and submitters about all areas of service delivery. In its submission Beryl noted that:

We are lucky in the ACT to have a unique service, WIRRED (Women’s Information, Resources and Referral on Drugs and Dependency) operated by Toora Women Inc. This is a service well supported in the women’s sector for it is our one avenue of advice, training and referral for women with dependencies. Our only difficulty in accessing WIRRED is that it is a service not funded for a vehicle, nor for outreach workers, which makes it difficult for the drug and alcohol experts to come to us. For women escaping domestic violence, this is essential, as they are often too fearful or too ashamed to venture out into the world. Whilst the WIRRED work team will always attempt to accommodate our needs, they are hampered by their own funding restrictions.<sup>32</sup>

2.53. The committee is greatly supportive of outreach work in the area of drug and alcohol counselling and support.

## **Recommendation 10**

**The committee recommends that the Government direct additional resources towards outreach services for women with drug and alcohol problems.**

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<sup>32</sup> Submission 19, p 7.

## Tobacco dependence

2.54. Smoking is one of the main causes of morbidity and mortality in the Australian community. In 1998, 19,000 Australians are estimated to have died from tobacco-related illnesses.<sup>33</sup>

2.55. The 1999 alcohol and drug survey of secondary students showed that more high school girls smoke than do boys. The results indicate that, 'Overall, 20.5% of students had smoked tobacco in the previous week with females (22.8%) more likely than males (18.2%) to report this'.<sup>34</sup>

2.56. Indeed, the National Drug Strategy Household Survey conducted by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that the take up rate of smoking amongst girls and young women in the ACT was out of step with the Australian average. The survey reported that 31.6 per cent of 14-19 year old females living in the ACT used tobacco daily as compared to the national average of 16.2 per cent.<sup>35</sup> This is of concern to the committee and the committee pondered whether specialised educational responses are required directly targeting young women and girls.

2.57. The committee was advised that smoking appears to service providers to be particularly prevalent amongst marginalised and disadvantaged women. In its submission, Beryl Women's Refuge noted that, 'It is a rare woman who accesses our service who doesn't have a serious tobacco dependence... Our clients, whilst on a meagre income, will always have enough for cigarettes. Many won't have enough for medications, children's outings, or bus fares, but they cannot go without their tobacco'.<sup>36</sup>

2.58. Beryl advocated specifically targeted smoking reduction and cessation programs for women noting that:

Smoking programs, particularly targeting women, day programs and residential detox type programs, could change the lives and the health of vast numbers of the ACT community. Nicotine dependence is responsible

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<sup>33</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2001) *The quantification of drug-caused mortality and morbidity in Australia*, p

<sup>34</sup> ACT Department of Health and Community Care (1999) *'1999 ACT Secondary Schools' Alcohol and Drug Survey – Summary results relating to tobacco use*, p 2.

<sup>35</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare *'2001 National Drug Strategy Household Survey - State and Territory Supplement'*.

<sup>36</sup> Submission 19, p 8.

for a vast number of illnesses and costs the health budget dearly. Individuals would see benefits of ceasing smoking in the short term, but government might not see the pay-off for some years, until we saw a dramatic decline in the illnesses associated with smoking that are big dollar items in terms of treatment.<sup>37</sup>

2.59. The committee notes the comments made by Beryl and agrees that proactive, smoking reduction campaigns and treatment options will certainly reap long-term economic and health improvements. The committee also believes that more has to be done to prevent the uptake of smoking in young women, through a specialised, targeted program of some kind.

## **Recommendation 11**

### **The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) develop specialised educational responses to discourage girls and young women from taking up smoking; and**
- b) develop specialised smoking reduction and cessation programs aimed at women.**

## **Young women**

### **Junction Youth Health Centre**

2.60. The committee was informed that one of the primary contact points for young women concerning health matters is the Junction Youth Health Centre. The Junction provides a range of primary health care services to young people – both men and women – and it was noted that, ‘the GPs at the Junction have been there for quite some time and have built up a rapport and a reputation with young women in the ACT’.<sup>38</sup>

2.61. However, the committee received evidence that the Junction’s current funding allocation only allows it to operate between 1 pm and 5pm on weekdays. A witness before the committee noted that this results

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<sup>37</sup> Submission 19, p 8.

<sup>38</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 40, Ms Horne.

in a situation whereby, ‘If a young person has an issue arising from a weekend, they have no point of contact until 1pm on Monday’.<sup>39</sup>

2.62. Another witness underlined the importance of the Junction but noted that the service is stretched and that more could be done to expand its operations to cater for a greater range of clients groups, particularly young women. The witness noted that:

A few young people in the school system know about the Junction Youth Health Centre, but because of the hours it’s open... it’s not accessible for the other groups of young people. The Junction is run off its feet. We need to look at more efficient funding so it can look at alternative hours, taking in more young people and running specific programs for young women. It can also look at referral points or pathways young women can go on to. It may be an outside program, but it all comes together under the umbrella of the Junction. One model alone is not usually enough, because there’s nowhere to refer on to. Under that funding, and with the hours it’s open, you can build up a dependency with your client group. It’s essential that you move them on, but there don’t appear to be the service providers and direct workers in the ACT. There’s nowhere to send them off to.<sup>40</sup>

2.63. This evidence points not only to the inability of the Junction to comprehensively meet the needs of its primary client group - young people - but also that specialised services to which Junction refers patients do not have the capacity to meet the full range and level of need. The Government submission also pointed to specific gaps in Junction’s service delivery responses noting that access to GP and nursing services is limited as well as noting that services for young carers are inadequate.<sup>41</sup>

## **Recommendation 12**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funding to the Junction Youth Health Service to extend its hours of operation and enhance the range and breadth of referral pathways for complex clients.**

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<sup>39</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 40, Ms Cahill.

<sup>40</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 40, Ms McGinn.

<sup>41</sup> Submission 1, p 18.



## Indigenous women

2.64. The committee was advised that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT is in many ways different from other Indigenous populations around Australia. It was noted that the ACT Indigenous population is relatively mobile and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT come from almost every part of Australia. This, it was said, created a somewhat fragmented community that faces special challenges.

2.65. The committee learned that the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is growing faster than the national average. Figures from last year's Census show that as at June 2002 there were 3576 Indigenous people in the ACT (1.2% of the ACT population). The number of Indigenous people in the ACT has increased 23% from 1996 and 125% since 1991 (national increase 16% since 1996 and 55% since 1991). The Indigenous population represents 2.2% of the total Australian population.

2.66. The committee notes a report from the Standing Committee on Health and Community Care of the Fourth Assembly - *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT*. The committee was disturbed to learn through this report that the age-standardised death rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in the ACT is 43.6 per 1000 persons while it is only 5.4 per thousand in the non-Indigenous female population.<sup>42</sup>

2.67. On 13 August 2002, the committee met with staff from Winnunga Nimmityjah, the ACT's community controlled Aboriginal health service. It was impressed upon the committee that Indigenous women face a unique set of social and health issues. Winnunga provides an holistic and integrated service, focusing on all facets of its patients' lives, not just the particular medical ailments that may be evident. In this regard, the committee notes the comments made in a submission from Winnunga Nimmityjah to the 2001 Assembly health committee inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health:

Current health problems are... multifactorial and related to past experiences as well as to present conditions. The Commonwealth Inquiry into Indigenous Health recognised that the health of Aboriginal and

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<sup>42</sup> 1996 Census of Population and Housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People cited in Standing Committee on Health and Community Care, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT* Fourth Assembly, p 19.

Torres Strait Islander people is affected by an interplay of socioeconomic status, social and cultural factors including past dispossession and dislocation, environmental factors and specific risk factors such as poor nutrition, alcohol misuse and high levels of tobacco consumption. Health is also linked to the provision of good quality health care with lack of cultural awareness, location, workforce limitations and financial circumstances acting as barriers to access by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>43</sup>

2.68. The committee was advised that some of the significant issues affecting Indigenous women's health in the ACT were:

- drug and alcohol misuse;
- mental health, particularly dual diagnosis;
- tobacco smoking;
- family violence;
- diabetes; and
- isolation in the community.

2.69. Winnunga Nimmityjah impressed upon the committee the importance of culturally appropriate health services for Aboriginal women. It was said that many mainstream services are ineffective in dealing with the health needs of Aboriginal women as they did not have the cultural and social tools to earn the respect and trust of patients that present to them.

2.70. The committee supports culturally appropriate facilities for Aboriginal women and applauds the work done by Winnunga in meeting Indigenous women's needs.

### **Recommendation 13**

**The committee recommends that:**

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<sup>43</sup> Submission 5, p 2.

- a) **the Government consult widely with Indigenous women and Indigenous organisations about how the government can best meet the needs of isolated and disadvantaged Indigenous women; and**
- b) **enhance the capacity of services, particularly outreach services to meet the needs of isolated Indigenous women.**

## **Older women**

### **Convalescent facility**

2.71. The Older Women's Network (OWN) noted in its submission that there is an urgent need for a convalescent facility in the ACT. The Network noted that:

We urge the Government to proceed with the proposed convalescent facility as soon as possible. The ACT community has shown strong support for such a facility and the need has been clearly demonstrated in a survey conducted by the OWN and a public meeting held in November 2000. A reference group and a steering committee have been deliberating on this issue and further delays will only exacerbate the situation.

The hospice is already inadequate to cope with current needs and this will become a greater problem as the population ages.<sup>44</sup>

2.72. The committee notes that the government recently launched a convalescence facility at Calvary Hospital.

### **Recommendation 14**

**The committee recommends that the government monitor and review the adequacy of the convalescent facility, especially in relation to how many women utilise it and the extent to which it meets the needs of older women in the ACT.**

### **Other health issues raised in OWN submission**

2.73. The Older Women's Network also called for an increase in community care services noting that, 'This service seems to give

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<sup>44</sup> Submission 13, pp 3-4.

excellent support to the most needy cases but those in need with less acute problems cannot access the service because of lack of funding'.<sup>45</sup>

2.74. The Network called for additional respite care places, particularly beds for people with dementia. This is a point made in the report of Standing Committee on Health and Community Care (Fourth Assembly) on Respite Care. In addition, the Network urged the government to consider the appointment of a psychogeriatrician, noting that the ACT is the only state or territory that does not currently have one.<sup>46</sup>

### **Recommendation 15**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funds for community care services to extend access across the board.**

### **Recommendation 16**

**The committee recommends that the Government appoint a psychogeriatrician to assist in meeting the health needs of older women in the ACT.**

### **Women with disabilities**

2.75. ABS data reproduced in *Women in the ACT: A social and demographic profile* shows that in 1998 there 27,600 females with a disability compared with 25,500 males.<sup>47</sup> As one would expect, ABS data shows that, 'the rate of disability steadily increases with age, increasing from 10.5% of the female population aged 25-34 to peak with 19% for women aged 75 and over. In contrast, the proportion of men with a disability increases more quickly for those aged from 55 to 69'.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Submission 3, p 10.

<sup>46</sup> Submission 13, p 4.

<sup>47</sup> ACT Government (1990) 'Women in the ACT A social and demographic profile', p 19.

<sup>48</sup> ACT Government (1990) 'Women in the ACT A social and demographic profile', p 20.

2.76. The committee heard that women with disabilities in the ACT experience a high degree of isolation in the community. In its evidence Women with Disabilities ACT (WWD ACT) cited a 1999 study which reported isolation as a key area of concern for women with disabilities. WWD ACT noted that isolation can have negative effects on a person's mental health, particularly when services are not able to support them.<sup>49</sup>

2.77. Contributing to isolation is the fact 51 per cent of women with a disability earn less than \$200 per week.<sup>50</sup> Pointing to the disadvantage and isolation experienced by women with disabilities, WWD ACT informed the committee that, '...we're talking about women being on pensions, living in government housing, having a lack of the support services they need, so they're not able to work.'<sup>51</sup>

2.78. WWD ACT advocated the creation of disability action plans for all ACT Government departments as a means of improving accessibility options and service delivery responses for people with disabilities. WWD ACT noted that:

A disability action plan is a formal document that outlines how over time an agency, department or whatever will make itself more accessible to and inclusive of people with disabilities. And the only thing that the human rights commission has lodged with it from the ACT is part of the accessible transport strategy, which is a national strategy based around the transport standards. So it's not even something that the ACT developed; it's more of a national thing that we've just got a sort of branch of. There should be a disability action plan for every single government department, as there is federally, and there should be one for every single agency.<sup>52</sup>

2.79. Of particular concern to WWD ACT was the need for developing gender disaggregated data in relation to the funding and use of disability services. WWD ACT advocated the collection of gender-disaggregated data in order to expose any discrepancies in funding between that directed towards men and that directed towards women. The committee examines the issue of disaggregated data in the final chapter of the report.

## **Recommendation 17**

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<sup>49</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 4, Ms Salthouse.

<sup>50</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 10, Ms Salthouse.

<sup>51</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 2, Ms Ryan.

<sup>52</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 6, Ms Ryan.

**The committee recommends that the Government develop and implement disability action plans for all ACT Government departments and agencies.**

## **Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

### **Translators**

2.80. The committee heard that more female interpreters are required to assist women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds in accessing health care services. Multicultural Women's Advocacy informed the committee that without more female interpreters, women from non-English-speaking backgrounds face a major hurdle in addressing their health needs. The Advocacy group noted that:

At the moment, for health interpreting, they contact TIS [Translating and Interpreting Service], which moved to Sydney. They don't take into account whether it's a woman or a man. Can you imagine a migrant woman from any part of the world going to have a pap smear and a breast check and a man coming to interpret? That happens a lot of times. First, the woman doesn't get interpreting. Second, she's embarrassed, and that creates a lot of problems.<sup>53</sup>

2.81. Multicultural Women's Advocacy also noted that present translation services in the health sector do not cater for a sufficient range of languages noting that:

... the Migrant Health Unit provides health care interpreters. They employ only a few women — I think three or four — who interpret in seven languages. We all know how many languages are spoken in the ACT. It's far more than seven. I know that one of those interpreters interprets in three languages. She represents three ethnic groups. She can't be everywhere.<sup>54</sup>

2.82. Multicultural Women's Advocacy pointed to the service operating in the Illawarra region as a much more desirable approach, noting that:

The health interpreters on their list represent more than 42 languages. They're not employed by anyone on a full-time basis; they're all on-call interpreters paid as contractors. The service doesn't have any responsibilities towards them, but they're available every day, 24 hours a

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<sup>53</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, pp 100-101, Ms Stankovic

<sup>54</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, pp 100-101, Ms Stankovic

day, for health interpreting, and they are paid only for the time they interpret.<sup>55</sup>

2.83. The committee believes that there is a need to put more resources into the provision of female interpreters in the health sector to ensure that women from a wide variety of linguistic backgrounds are better able to access health services.

## **Recommendation 18**

**The committee recommends that the Government assess the need to provide more female interpreters in the health sector catering for women from a wide range of linguistic backgrounds.**

## **Women's sport and recreation**

2.84. It is widely acknowledged that participation in sports, recreation and leisure activities contributes to health and well-being in many ways. The demographic profile of women produced by the Chief Minister's Department notes that women in the ACT are above average in terms of their participation in sports and recreation activities. In the profile it is noted that, 'ACT women participate in cultural, leisure and sporting activities more than the national average of women. This reflects their younger age profile, their higher level of education, appreciation of a diverse range of cultural activities, and their awareness of the importance of leisure to lifestyle, better health and well-being'.<sup>56</sup>

2.85. Despite this relatively high participation rate, the committee was advised that more emphasis still needs to be placed on encouraging women to participate in sport and recreational activities and that current funding disparities for men's and women's sport need to be addressed.

## **Disparity in recreation provisions**

2.86. The committee received a submission from two private citizens arguing that current government provisions for female recreational activities are disproportionate when compared with provisions for male recreational and sporting activities.

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<sup>55</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, pp 100-101, Ms Stankovic

<sup>56</sup> ACT Government (1990) *Women in the ACT A social and demographic profile*, p 10.

2.87. In the submission, the pair note that:

Looking around Canberra we see a very generous supply of playing fields providing, we believe costless or inexpensive access to team sporting facilities (mostly used by men). The ACT Government has something like 78 grounds to hire out for team sports... If one considers upkeep, opportunity cost of land, etc. clearly the government provides a significant subsidy for the use of these nice open spaces.<sup>57</sup>

2.88. While not objecting to the resources allocated to these types of activities, the submitters argue that, 'as women who have been medically advised that the best exercise for us is swimming and aquarobics, we find that the financial costs are very significant, and there appears to be no element of government support'.<sup>58</sup>

2.89. The submitters note that the minimum price they could find for access to a swimming pool was \$4.00 (\$2.50 where concessions were available) and that aquarobics cost almost double this amount.

2.90. The main point being made in the submission is that this pricing structure is inordinately disparate in relation to costs associated with the use of playing fields. The submitters note that:

Unenclosed ovals, when booked, cost from as little as \$1.59 an hour for netball training or \$3.41 for touch/six a side training to \$21.45 for an Aussie Rules match or \$39.82 for an athletics match. Of course these prices, unlike swimming and aquarobics prices are not per person, but are shared among the whole team/teams...

Of sport and physical activities, swimming is second only to walking in the ACT, with a participation rate of 18.1% (15.9% of men, 20.1% of women).<sup>59</sup>

2.91. The submitters requested that this issue be brought to the attention of policy makers. The committee agrees, that on the face of it, there is a disparity in these different types of activity which may have the effect of precluding women from access to the exercise regimes of their choice. The committee considers that the government should investigate whether there is a means of redressing this disparity.

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<sup>57</sup> Submission 5, p 1.

<sup>58</sup> Submission 5, p 1.

<sup>59</sup> Submission 5, p 1.



## **Recommendation 19**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the disparity between the cost of fee-based activities such as swimming and aquarobics versus that paid by people utilising playing grounds and that it consider options that remedy this disparity.**

### **Leadership in women's sport**

2.92. The committee was advised that more needs to be done to actively develop leadership opportunities for women involved in ACT sport. One witness argued that lack of leadership in this area was a significant barrier to access and that mentoring and education for women about leadership in sport was required. In evidence before the committee Women's Soccer Canberra argued that:

With regard to the barriers to women's participation in sport, in a true leadership and decision-making sense, we need to provide a little bit more active support for them. I am not necessarily talking about money. I am talking about a mentoring program or access to education—whether it is a director's course, or some other kind of leadership program.

The [limited] representation of women in presidential positions, or CEO positions, in sport in the ACT is also reflected at a national level. It would be less than 15 per cent. For example, I am often the only woman sitting around a board table with seven or eight blokes in suits. It is pretty tough if you are not very confident, or unaware of meeting procedures, and the way in which the industry works. There are issues about leadership across the board.<sup>60</sup>

2.93. The committee believes that there is merit in devising an education and mentoring program to assist women in developing leadership and management skills in the sports arena. The Government may be in a position to help facilitate the creation of such a program.

## **Recommendation 20**

**The committee recommends that the Government, in consultation with relevant women's sporting groups, investigate how it can assist**

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<sup>60</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 76, Ms Reid.

**in facilitating the development of a mentoring and leadership program for women involved in sports.**

2.94. Another issue of concern to Women's Soccer Canberra was the process that has previously been undertaken in relation to government funding for elite sports, noting that there were significant disparities in the allocations between men's and women's sports.

2.95. The committee notes the concerns expressed by Women's Soccer ACT in this regard and supports a more gender-balanced allocation of funds for sports and recreation at all levels.

### **Recommendation 21**

**The committee recommends that the Government ensure that sports and recreation funding be allocated equitably between men's and women's sport in the ACT at all levels.**

## Chapter 3. Economic security and education

3.1. Economic security and independence are in many ways prerequisites for self-determination, personal autonomy and quality of life for any woman, indeed for any individual. As the Commonwealth Office for the Status of Women notes, ‘Economic security is essential to providing women with the ability to make choices about how they want to live their lives.’<sup>61</sup>

3.2. However, women in the ACT are still not achieving equitable outcomes in terms of economic independence and security when compared with men. The committee was advised that a range of issues needed to be addressed in order that equitable economic outcomes between the sexes are achieved. The Office of the Status of Women notes that, ‘Economic self-sufficiency and security for women depends upon access to jobs, training and education, childcare, equal pay, fair division of family responsibilities and adequate superannuation and income security’.<sup>62</sup>

3.3. This chapter examines the evidence received in relation to women’s education, employment, housing, and general economic security.

### Employment opportunities

3.4. In the demographic and social profile of women produced by the Demographics ACT within the Chief Minister’s Department, it is noted that women living in the ACT are in many ways a unique population in the Australian context. The profile makes mention of high levels of education, relatively high socio-economic status and high levels of success for women in the ACT workforce. The committee summarises some of the profiles findings below.

- The demographic and social profile of women in the ACT is generally very different from most other parts of Australia.
- There are now more women graduating from ACT universities than males.

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<sup>61</sup> [http://www.osw.dpmc.gov.au/3rd\\_economic\\_suffic.cfm](http://www.osw.dpmc.gov.au/3rd_economic_suffic.cfm)

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.osw.dpmc.gov.au/3rd\\_economic\\_suffic.cfm](http://www.osw.dpmc.gov.au/3rd_economic_suffic.cfm)

- Women have gained most from the large increases in employment in the ACT over the last 20 years, and participation rates in the workforce remain the highest in Australia.
- ACT women have higher average income levels than the national average, mainly because of their high educational attainment and the nature of their work.
- However, women in the ACT still earn less than men in similar occupations and industries, and the earnings gap is larger in the lower skilled occupations and service oriented industries.<sup>63</sup>

3.5. The committee notes the following statistics regarding women's employment in the ACT, derived from the *ACT Women's Action Plan 2000-2001* the Women.

- The workforce participation level of women in the ACT is 65% (higher than the national average of 55%) and has increased by 10% in the last 20 years.
- In May 1999 there were 75 900 women employed in the ACT, 47 500 (62.5%) full time and 28 400 part time.
- The occupational profile of women shows that 30.7% are intermediate clerical, sales and service workers, 24.3% are professionals, 14.3% are elementary clerical, sales and service workers and 13.2% are associate professionals.
- Twenty four percent of women employed in the ACT work in government administration and defence compared to 5% nationally.
- However, women's income in each occupational group (except for elementary clerical and sales workers) was lower than that for men.
- 34.8% of small business operators in the ACT are women. Over two thirds were aged between 30 and 50 years.<sup>64</sup>

3.6. As noted above pay equity between men and women has not yet achieved parity; even in the ACT where women do achieve higher average earnings, the relative disparity prevails.

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<sup>63</sup> ACT Government (1999) 'Women in the ACT A social and demographic profile' p 9.

<sup>64</sup> Community Liaison and Indigenous Affairs (2000) '*ACT Women's Action Plan 2000-2001*' p 17.

3.7. In their submission, YWCA/WEL cite ABS figures in relation to pay disparities between men and women. They informed the committee that:

Pay equity has still not been achieved in the ACT or in Australia generally. The uneven industrial and occupational distribution of women in the workforce, and the concentration of women in part-time and casual jobs, mean that equal rates of pay in individual positions have not been translated into substantive economic equality for women.

In November 2001, the ACT average full time ordinary weekly earnings for women were \$856.80, compared with \$1000.90 for men. This represents a pay ratio of 85.6%. At the same time, the ACT average weekly total earnings (including part-time and casual jobs) were \$617.90 for women, compared with \$839.10 for men, a pay ratio of 73.6%.

In the same time period, Australian average fulltime ordinary time weekly earnings for women were \$759, compared with \$898.30 for men. This represents a pay ration of 85.4%. At the same time, the Australian average weekly total earnings for women were \$533.50, compared with \$811 for men. This represents a pay ratio of 65.8%.

These figures indicated the economic disadvantage that is still faced by women in the ACT and Australia generally.<sup>65</sup>

3.8. The issue of pay equity is not an easy one to address from a public policy point of view.

## Employment arrangements

3.9. As an employer, the ACT Government needs to ensure best practice in encouraging flexible employment arrangements which promote women's participation in the workforce.

3.10. This should be facilitated through legislation, certified agreements and guidelines that encourage equality of opportunity, merit selection, part-time arrangements, unconditional access to maternity leave, return to work programs and training for women who are returning to the workforce after a prolonged absence. Promotions and higher duties should also be monitored to ensure that women are having equal access and success to such opportunities within the ACT Government service.

3.11. Access to paid maternity leave is well recognised as an employment condition that encourages and facilitates women returning to work after

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<sup>65</sup> Submission 17, p 9.

having a child. The International Labour Organisation standard recommends 14 weeks paid maternity leave as the minimum standard. Northern Territory has recently announced the increase to 14 weeks for women employed in the Northern Territory Public Service.

### **Recommendation 22**

**The committee recommends that the Government increase the current paid maternity leave entitlement for ACT Government employees from 12 to 14 weeks in line with ILO Standards.**

### **Returning to the workforce**

3.12. Availability and affordability of childcare has a significant impact on a woman's employment opportunity and economic independence. The current lack of availability of childcare places in the ACT greatly reduces the opportunity for women who wish to return to the workforce, particularly after taking leave to care for children. If a woman is successful in gaining employment, without access to childcare these women may be forced to decline the offer of employment.

3.13. Whilst this impacts on women from all groups within the community, the committee is particularly concerned about the impact that this may have on women who are isolated, disadvantaged, sole parents, or the sole income earner in the family. This is discussed in more detail in the section on childcare below.

### **Recommendation 23**

**The committee recommends that the Government develop and implement programs aimed at improving the employment skills of disadvantaged women seeking to re-enter the workforce.**

### **Childcare**

3.14. It is still the case that women assume the bulk of responsibility for looking after children in the family. Childcare is a vital area of service delivery, improving women's access to employment and community participation. However, the committee was advised that current provisions for childcare are beyond the financial means of many families.

A witness involved in many aspects of the childcare sector advised the committee that:

Long-day care centres currently charge between \$45 and \$50 per day for one child in care, which is between \$210 and \$250 a week, a significant amount of money in anyone's terms. For family day care, the hourly rate is slightly less than that.

Linked to the affordability of child care is the federal government child-care benefit scheme, which the federal government proposes will enable low to middle-income workers to afford child care... It has never kept up is the actual cost of child care... The government imposes a ceiling up to which they will pay child-care benefit. That currently is \$2.66 an hour. Most child-care centres charge about \$4 an hour. The difference between the \$4 and the \$2.66 is referred to as the gap fee. That is the fee that all parents pay, irrespective of how their income has been assessed for child-care benefit. The gap fee for families on full child-care benefit, or 100 per cent child-care benefit, is about half of what their child care costs.<sup>66</sup>

3.15. The witness provided the committee with the following example of how the gap in the childcare benefit makes the viability of utilising these services beyond the reach of many families. The witness noted that, 'A family on an income of, say, \$35,000 a year, whether it be a sole-parent or combined income, with two children in long-day care, are eligible for about 100 per cent child-care benefit. Their child care would cost them about \$200 a week after tax, so that's from their net income. That leaves them approximately \$300 a week to cover all other expenses they have'.<sup>67</sup>

3.16. The witness argued that this cost-structure acted as an impediment to women participating in the workforce noting that:

In terms of affordability, it doesn't make a lot of sense for families on \$35,000, which isn't minimum income; it's fairly reasonable. So many families are now seriously questioning the worth of returning to work or working part time, and they're having to look at other options for child care.<sup>68</sup>

3.17. The committee was advised that these 'other options' often entailed the utilisation of family members and friends for childcare:

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<sup>66</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 108, Ms South.

<sup>67</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 108, Ms South.

<sup>68</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 108, Ms South.

Anecdotal evidence suggests there's an increasing number of informal care arrangements happening. If families are fortunate enough to have extended family, extended family will look after children.<sup>69</sup>

3.18. This point was reiterated in a public hearing by the Older Women's Network which made the point that older women are being forced into caring roles for grandchildren due to the absence of affordable child care facilities in the ACT. OWN noted that:

One of our concerns at the moment is that, because of the lack of child care in the ACT, a lot of older women are not having the leisure that they should be having in their retirement; they are working full time in child care with their grandchildren.<sup>70</sup>

3.19. The committee heard how the lack of affordable childcare options caused serious hardship for women trying to manage a business and for businesses retaining female staff. Flexibility in the provision of childcare was seen as important in this regard. In evidence the Chamber of Women in Business noted:

Business women in Canberra face a lot of economic challenges that all businesses face. One is retention of staff. Child care an issue for retention of female staff, as are flexible workplaces. Whilst that may be a federal funding issue, there must be a way to find better child-care facilities. Some of our members have been discussing this. They have to be flexible child-care arrangements. Child care between eight and six does not fit all our members. We might have members who are running businesses at night and need child care at night, which is a very difficult thing to find. Women in small business want to support other women in small business. They also need flexible child-care arrangements themselves. That's one of our biggest problems.<sup>71</sup>

3.20. Long day care was certainly the best known formal care arrangement referred to throughout the inquiry. The committee believes that more attention may need to be paid to the provision of Family Day Care arrangements offering more flexibility for women that work unusual hours.

3.21. The committee was advised that pay rates for childcare workers are completely inadequate.

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<sup>69</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 108, Ms South.

<sup>70</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 53, Ms Biles.

<sup>71</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, pp 14.15, Ms Fogarty.



A level 1 child-care worker, which is a entry level child-care worker, someone with no formal qualifications and no previous experience, would enter work in a children's service at \$11.53 per hour, which equates to about \$22,000 a year. That's entry level. The unfortunate component of that is that the child-care industry is still an industry that pays junior wages, and junior is until 21. If you were under 17 years of age and you work in children's services, you get about \$11,000 a year gross.

Level 4 child-care workers are the people we make completely responsible for the care and education of our children. They are team leaders. They are responsible for supervising staff, writing educational programs for the children in their group, delivering them and evaluating them. Currently they get \$14.90 an hour, which is about \$29,000 a year. This amount takes into account the \$18 living wage increase that was paid in May.<sup>72</sup>

3.22. General employment conditions in the childcare sector were also regarded as being problematic and that workers experience the perception that they are not valued in the eyes of the community. The committee was advised that:

The most common statement made by children's services workers at the moment is that they feel undervalued within the community as a whole. They say things like: "I'm still viewed as a babysitter" or "I don't do a professional service" or "People don't understand what I do." They feel that the general community values them like that. But often they also feel that the management of their service and the parents using their service undervalue what they provide and have no idea what it requires to work with children.

These services are mostly open 10 hours a day. Obviously, the staff aren't on the floor for 10 hours a day. Many of them are within the service building for nine hours a day, which is quite a long time to be surrounded by up to 90 children.

Child-care workers say that they find their work with the children and especially with the families, stressful. There is no career path for them. If you graduate with a diploma of children's services, your entry level of pay is \$14.90. Within two years you get to \$15.38, and that's the end. There's nowhere else to go.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 110, Ms South.

<sup>73</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 110, Ms South.

3.23. In 1997, the Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Teaching conducted a survey, commissioned by the Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union of ACT Child care employees in the ACT which found that 97.5% of child care staff were women.<sup>74</sup>

3.24. The ACT Government is currently undertaking an inquiry into the issues of demand and staffing in ACT child care facilities. The committee believes the information collected via this inquiry will help to inform the Government about current difficulties being faced by staff, parents and organisations. The committee looks forward to the findings of this inquiry and encourages the Office for Women to examine any recommendations that may arise from the inquiry.

3.25. The committee recognises the crucial role that affordable, quality childcare plays in opening up access for women to employment and community participation. The committee agrees that current Commonwealth funding in this area has been inadequate.

### *Childcare as Respite and crisis care for children*

3.26. In its submission to the inquiry, Beryl Women's Refuge noted that access to safe and trusted respite care for children is extremely important for women that have experienced domestic violence. It is often the case that children who have been exposed to domestic violence develop behavioural difficulties which can place enormous stresses on their mothers. However, Beryl informed the committee that there are currently significant gaps in this area, noting that:

Respite care is an integral part of the system of care in the ACT and we have a number of programs that work well and provide essential services to families in need. However, crisis respite care is almost impossible to find, particularly for children with serious behaviour problems, who are acting out as a result of the abuse they have experienced in the home. There are times when our women simply break down, incapable of taking care of their children, almost always a male child. Sadly, these boys are patterning the behaviours of the adult male in their lives and can create much pain, sorrow and despair for their mothers. It is not uncommon that, at a moment's notice we are looking for care for these children after their mothers have realised that they simply cannot cope any longer, and this is

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<sup>74</sup> Childcare Workers in the ACT: A survey of Earnings and Expenditure Patterns

extremely difficult to find in spite of well-meaning individuals and excellent, but under-resourced services.<sup>75</sup>

3.27. This obviously impacts not only on the capacity of these women to find work, but indeed on their capacity to function in the community at all.

3.28. The committee notes the report of the previous Assembly's Standing Committee on Health and Community care regarding respite care. That report outlined several areas of deficiency including the provision of respite care for children with behavioural difficulties, often children who have been exposed to violence.

## **Recommendation 24**

**The committee recommends that the Government improve and expand respite care provision for women with children in need.**

### **SACS award**

3.29. The committee was advised of concerns that the SACS award (Social and Community Service award) simplification process would result in reduced earnings for the predominantly female workers employed in the sector. In their submission YWCA/WEL note that:

We are concerned that the overall outcome of the award simplification process will be a minimum level of pay that is below the already low income that community sector staff are paid and a possible wage freeze for up to 10 years. This will have a huge impact on women's economic independence as a high proportion of women work in the community sector, in traditionally lower paid jobs.

3.30. YWCA/WEL also made the point that any erosion of the SACS award would impact on the level of service delivery in the social and community services sector, having negative flow-on effects for women that utilise these services. YWCA/WEL noted that a reduction in the SACS award '... has the potential to affect clients who the community sector supports, many of whom are women and families on low incomes, through a decrease in services that organisations are able to provide'.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Submission 19, p 6.

<sup>76</sup> It is noted that national wage increases for 1999-2001 have been postponed pending the award simplification process.

3.31. YWCA/WEL advised the committee that the low levels of pay already impede retention of staff in the community sector, noting that:

The community sector in the ACT competes directly with both the Commonwealth and ACT government for qualified staff, which results in a diminished capacity for community-based services to be able to obtain and retain staff. Many employees are seeking careers in government because these provide higher wages, better conditions and clearer career paths.<sup>77</sup>

3.32. YWCA/WEL provided the committee with a comparison between pay increases for employees paid under ACT SACS Award versus increases for government employees, pointing out the disparity that has existed for some time.

Year	Government Admin	SACS
1996	4.2%	3.59%
1997	3.95%	1.48%
1998	3.70%	1.77%
1999	3.18%	TBD <sup>78</sup>
2000	3.90%	“
2001	4.05%	“

3.33. In relation to these disparities, YWCA/WEL argued that:

Assuming that government wages continue their upward trend, a SACS wage freeze would increase the already substantial difference between SACS wages and government wages.

We are also concerned that the with the implementation of a minimum wage, government funding for community services will be allocated based on minimum award levels therefore not providing employers with the scope to pay above award, as is proposed by the Industrial Relations Commission, through enterprise bargaining agreements. Considering that the majority of service funding is allocated under a competitive tendering

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<sup>77</sup> Submission 17, pp 9-10

<sup>78</sup> It is noted that national wage increases for 1999-2001 have been postponed pending the award simplification process.

process, organisations that wish to pay employees wages that recognise the high level of skill and responsibility required may be at a disadvantage when compared to other organisations that submit a lower bid based on lower wages.<sup>79</sup>

3.34. Although the award simplification process is beyond the jurisdiction of this committee and indeed the Assembly, the view was put that the ACT Government needs to ensure that adequate remuneration is being provided to workers in the social and community services sector that it is responsible for funding. The committee supports a recommendation proposed by YWCA/WEL to provide scope in purchasing arrangements that would allow above-award wages to be negotiated between the workers in the sector and the purchasing arms of government.

### **Recommendation 25**

**The committee recommends that the Government review service purchasing to take into consideration enterprise bargaining agreements, including above-award SACS wages.**

### **Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

3.35. The committee heard that women arriving in the ACT from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can become isolated in the community and that access to fulfilling employment opportunities are limited. Multicultural Women's Advocacy informed that committee that:

Everybody who comes here [the ACT] comes with an expectation of a better life, of a better future. When women come here, they're stuck; they can't move. Women with huge work experience or careers come here and they can't find jobs. They're isolated. They stay at home or are forced to do jobs like cleaning or being a shop assistant. I can tell you that their self-esteem is absolutely zero.<sup>80</sup>

3.36. As noted throughout the report, isolation of women is of serious concern to the committee. In the final chapter of the report, the committee proposes a renewed focus on isolated women by government.

### ***Social Security***

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<sup>79</sup> Submission 17, pp 9-10

<sup>80</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 101, Ms Stankovic.

3.37. A submission from Beryl Women's Refuge made mention of the effects that current social security policies have on marginalised women seeking to escape from violence in their lives, particularly women from non-English speaking backgrounds and women that have only recently arrived in Australia. Beryl argued that many women live a 'hand-to-mouth' existence as they have no income due to restrictions on welfare payments or because Centrelink has breached them for reasons beyond their control. Beryl noted that:

Commonwealth legislation in relation to social welfare payments, particularly for women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who have not been in the country for two years, and those who are breached for reasons well beyond their control, is having a grave impact upon the economic independence of women in the ACT. We see too many women who are unable to feed their children or pay their rent due to the heartless measures taken by our federal government in relation to welfare recipients.

3.38. Beryl informed the committee that social security breaches place an additional burden on ACT service providers, noting that:

Women from other cultures come over here to marry men they have met briefly, or sometimes not at all, or are about to marry, a man for whom violence is an everyday tool to retain power and control over others. The lucky ones leave. The ACT homelessness sector accommodates a number of women with and without children who are ineligible for any income support, most of them escaping domestic violence. This leaves the burden of total responsibility upon the ACT service providers. It means that many of our clients walk the streets with absolutely no money in their pockets and exist solely due to the goodwill of their service providers. Some children remain in refuges for up to two years of their lives, living with a range of families all in crisis. This is not a reasonable start to life for any young person.

Refuges have a system in place where we share out the numbers of women who come to us with no income. Whilst we receive funding to operate accommodation services we are not funded for emergency relief and accommodating clients who have absolutely no income is a load for any of us.<sup>81</sup>

3.39. Obviously, issues related to the administration of the social security system are beyond the bailiwick of this committee. However, the committee believes the cost impact of Centrelink breaching does have an

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<sup>81</sup> Submission 19, p 5.

impact on the government and non-government services in the ACT as these agencies are called upon by a greater number of women due to lost social security support.

### ***Respite care for Indigenous children***

3.40. Beryl also made the point that there is a lack of appropriate respite provisions for Aboriginal children due to the fact that there are very few Aboriginal families prepared to take on respite care responsibilities.

...Aboriginal women have difficulty in accessing respite care at crisis periods, as there are very few Aboriginal families in the ACT who are willing to be respite carers. At times, Aboriginal children are put with inappropriate families because the options are so limited. We need to institute a program of positive encouragement and reward those Aboriginal families who are willing to take on a caring role in the lives of needy children.<sup>82</sup>

3.41. The committee supports a program of encouragement and incentive to recruit additional Aboriginal families to become involved in the provision of respite care. The committee sees that Aboriginal children and their mothers are much more comfortable in utilising respite care where there is cultural familiarity and support. This is best provided by Aboriginal families.

### **Recommendation 26**

**The committee recommends that the Government identify and implement improved recruitment strategies in the area of respite care provision so as to encourage more Indigenous families to take on a respite caring role for Indigenous children in need of this type of care.**

### **Affordable housing**

3.42. Issues of affordable housing in relation to women on low incomes are closely intertwined with several other areas of concern that this report addresses, in particular domestic violence, employment, substance abuse and mental health issues.

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<sup>82</sup> Submission 19, p 6.

3.43. In its submission YWCA/WEL argued that lack of sustainable and affordable housing severely impacts on women's ability to fully participate in the community, noting that, 'The health, well-being and life opportunities of families and individuals are inextricably linked to their need for affordable, long term and appropriate housing. It is therefore important that the ACT government takes an innovative, proactive approach to addressing these issues and increasing affordable housing in the ACT.'<sup>83</sup>

3.44. YWCA/WEL identified the following access barriers and problems associated with the availability of affordable housing:

People living on low incomes in the ACT currently face many challenges in accessing affordable and appropriate housing. YWCA's services have faced many obstacles while supporting families and young people to secure long term housing, such as long public housing waiting lists, lack of affordable private rental properties and discrimination. Lack of housing impacts on every aspect of an individual's life and often results in homelessness and overcrowding, family instability and breakdown, poorer access to employment opportunities, health problems, lower levels of educational attainment and crime. Evidence suggests that waiting lists for public housing are increasing and current resources are unable to adequately meet this demand.<sup>84</sup>

3.45. The Youth Coalition of the ACT commented that current ACT Housing policies are not producing the best outcomes for women experiencing domestic violence. The Coalition noted that:

ACT Housing has a policy around women escaping domestic violence, giving them an early allocation 1. This provides difficulty, because quite often ACT Housing requires proof, protection orders and support letters. Many women do not have access to, or have not accessed, the legal and support systems, which also reflects the isolation of experiencing domestic violence in their lives.

An early allocation 1 or 2 removes choice. Women are only given two choices in a wide geographical area – Civic or Belconnen – and this often results in inappropriate allocation, as the system relies on turnover and often less than desirable properties and allocations.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> Submission 1, p 7.7

<sup>84</sup> Submission 1, p 7.7

<sup>85</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 31, Ms Horne.



3.46. The committee agrees that women escaping domestic violence should be provided with appropriate, affordable accommodation as a priority. The committee believes that the government may need to investigate alternative processes and options in service responses in this regard.

### **Recommendation 27**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate policies which improve ease of access to appropriate, affordable housing for women escaping domestic violence.**

3.47. There was some criticism about ACT Housing policies which result in poor accommodation outcomes for women seeking rehabilitation from drug and/or alcohol use. A representative of the Youth Coalition of the ACT, also a manager of Anglicare ACT noted that:

We've worked with a lot of young women with children who try to secure a place in rehab. It might take six months to go into rehab, but ACT Housing policies often mean that they can't vacate their property for that long. They have to give up their security of tenure, go into a rehab service and come back out through the refuges and reapply for housing. Women who have drug and alcohol issues can maintain their properties while seeking rehabilitation. There are costs associated with maintaining their tenancy and paying for rehab and child care through that process.<sup>86</sup>

### **Recommendation 28**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate and implement public housing policies which allow women to avail themselves of drug rehabilitation services whilst not losing the security of tenure associated with their public housing property.**

### **Young women**

3.48. The Youth Coalition noted in evidence that:

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<sup>86</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 31, Ms Horne.

There is also a lack of appropriate accommodation for young women with really high needs or complex issues, particularly young women who use drugs and alcohol and/or have mental health issues. Many of these young women go in and out of our crisis accommodation services, but they often don't engage with them or they're kicked out due to their chaotic behaviour or their lifestyles. I think it would be great for us to address the resource and training needs of the existing services but also to look at other innovative ideas like the need for a youth night shelter — different options for these young women.<sup>87</sup>

3.49. The committee shares the concern of the Youth Coalition and supports further investigation of the establishment of a youth night shelter.

3.50. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a major problem for young people, but especially young women is that – particularly during the Saturday night of a public service pay week – there are many stranded in Civic; either they have missed the last bus, or they cannot find a taxi, or obtain a lift home.

3.51. Anecdotal evidence suggests that young people will often club together and take a single hotel or motel room to spend the night.

3.52. This is not a particularly good solution, which may have harmful effects, as the young people often have no control over whom they share a room, sometimes a bed with, in this situation.

3.53. A proposal forwarded by the committee in this regard is the development of a voucher system for overnight accommodation. Under such a proposal young people would be able to receive a night's accommodation in at a youth hostel or backpacker's hotel (YHC is in O'Connor, there are two low cost backpacker hotels in Civic ).

3.54. Under this scheme, vouchers can be purchased previously, or sold on the night by the youth hostels (ie., they will receive a payment for an empty bed, which they would otherwise not be receiving).

3.55. In this way, young women who cannot get back to their homes (no taxi fare money, or too intoxicated etc., to be allowed in a taxi,) and may be in danger of being on the streets may still have some shelter, at minimum cost. It can be worked out whether these should be purchased for minimum amounts (eg., \$20 for a dorm bed).

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<sup>87</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 31, Ms Robertson.

## **Recommendation 29**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) investigate the need for the establishment of a youth night shelter; and**
- b) in consultation with stakeholders, investigate the viability of an accommodation voucher system for young people.**

### ***Young mothers in public housing***

3.56. The Youth Coalition noted that, in many cases, young mothers are placed in accommodation that is completely inappropriate for their young children in terms of safety and security. The Coalition noted that:

At the moment there are inappropriate accommodation options for young mothers who are going into independent living. They are often allocated housing in the large government housing complexes that don't have facilities for children. They have a lot of stairs, and generally it's an unsafe environment. I recognise that ACT Housing doesn't necessarily want to put them there either, but because there's a lack of places and often a very urgent need they don't have a lot of choice.<sup>88</sup>

3.57. The committee agrees that a lot of accommodation provided for women on low-incomes is inappropriate for young children. It is important that the public housing system recognises the specific needs of mothers with young children, giving priority to these women in accessing appropriate accommodation.

### ***Sexual exploitation and accommodation***

3.58. In evidence before the committee, the Youth Coalition cited the Hayden Brown report, *Shadows and Whisper*, which indicated that approximately 90 per cent of homeless young women are sexual assault survivors. The committee was advised that the report also indicates that 76 per cent of these young women experience sexual abuse after they find themselves homeless.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 31, Ms Robertson.

<sup>89</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 32, Ms Robertson.

3.59. The committee was also informed of the worrying phenomenon of young, impoverished women who, finding themselves homeless, exchange sexual favours with men in return for accommodation. This was said to be the result of a crisis in affordable accommodation. The Young Coalition noted in evidence that:

Even young women who don't traditionally fall into an at-risk service stream are being locked out of affordable accommodation. The result is that we see many young women whose best option for accommodation is to hook up with an older man who can provide them with shelter, food and security, usually in exchange for sex. It would be good for us to look at these issues that are happening as a result of the accommodation situation for young women.<sup>90</sup>

3.60. The committee sees that if the only viable housing option for some young women is this type of arrangement then there is obviously a serious inadequacy in service delivery responses for this group. That such practices are occurring highlights the need provide additional resources for supporting these young women in finding appropriate accommodation.

## Older women

3.61. The committee heard that additional resources must be directed towards older person's units as the population of the ACT ages. In its submission, OWN argue that:

We consider the Older Person's Units provided in the ACT are excellent but feel with the ageing of the ACT population this program will need to be extended to prevent long waiting lists. We think it is important that older people can stay in the area they are familiar with and not be moved to outer areas.<sup>91</sup>

3.62. OWN also noted that self-funded retirees were not eligible for older person's units and that this had the effect of forcing many older people to live in inappropriate accommodation. A particular problem was said to exist for older people who had substantial assets such as a house but an insufficient income stream with which to realise aspirations for alternative accommodation. OWN noted that:

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<sup>90</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 32, Ms Robertson.

<sup>91</sup> Submission 10, p 2.

Many [self-funded retirees] live in houses that are no longer suitable for them but find it difficult to find suitable accommodation that they can afford. We urge the government to investigate ways in which developers provide a proportion of housing suitable for aged persons in areas near shops and on bus routes. The accommodation should be secure and have no steps... We would like the government to promote schemes that enable people to realise the equity in their housing asset as many older people are asset rich but income poor.<sup>92</sup>

3.63. The committee supports the active involvement of the ACT Government in facilitating the development of innovative housing schemes that allow older people to use the existing equity in their homes to avail themselves of more appropriate accommodation. The committee has made a recommendation to this effect below.

### **Recommendation 30**

**The committee recommends that the Government play a facilitation role regarding the development of housing schemes which allow older people to realise the equity in their home to avail themselves of more appropriate accommodation.**

### **Same-sex relationships and the law**

3.64. The committee received evidence regarding concerns about discriminatory provisions in ACT legislation pertaining to same-sex relationships, especially in terms of property rights. It was argued that people involved in same-sex relationships are not afforded the same rights and protections as people living in heterosexual relationships.

3.65. In a comprehensive submission prepared by Legal Aid Office (ACT) on the issues associated with same-sex relationships it was noted that, 'In some ACT legislation the sun shines equally regardless of the type of domestic relationship – married, de facto relationship or same sex. But, in some ACT legislation only married relationships are recognised and in other legislation only married and de facto relationships are recognised.'<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Submission 13, p 2.

<sup>93</sup> Submission 25, p 2.

3.66. The Legal Aid Office identified many legislative provisions in the ACT that discriminate against same sex couples including: guardianship; workers' compensation; protection orders; powers of attorney; and adoption to name a few.<sup>94</sup>

3.67. A submission from a private citizen made the point that the Commonwealth has been reluctant to remove discriminatory provisions in relation to same sex property rights. The submitter noted that:

I strongly support the position taken by the ACT Government..., in common with all other states and the NT, attempting to require the Commonwealth to accept a referral of power in relation to defacto and same-sex property. The Commonwealth has indicated that it will accept the first but not the second [same-sex property]. The Victorian Attorney-General referred to the Commonwealth's position as 'homophobic and 'discriminatory'. I agree with that analysis and I strongly urge the ACT to maintain its position and to take a leadership role with the other states and territories to maintain solidarity and resolve the issues.<sup>95</sup>

3.68. The committee, too, supports the ACT Government's endeavours in this regard and urges the government to continue applying pressure to the Commonwealth in relation law reform on the issue of same-sex property rights.

3.69. The committee is aware that the ACT Government has already undertaken work in identifying where discriminatory legislation exists in relation to same-sex couples and has found that some 70 Acts may discriminate against people in same sex relationships and will need amending. Whilst this is a considerable task the committee applauds this work as a positive step towards bringing about legal equality for same sex couples in the ACT and looks forward to amendments to the various acts being introduced at the earliest opportunity.

## **Education and training**

### **Young mothers**

3.70. The committee was advised that there are currently insufficient and inadequate options for young school-aged women who are pregnant or have young children. In evidence, the Youth Coalition noted that:

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<sup>94</sup> Submission 25, pp 2 – 14.

<sup>95</sup> Submission 3, p 5.

The closure of SWOW in the late 1990s left yet another gap for young women..., especially if they were pregnant during their school years.

Three alternative programs are available in the ACT. As they are not that flexible, there is a lack of pathways for young women. One is for young women to go to year 10 and year 12 at CIT. There are child care issues, the learning curriculum is not flexible and it is still school orientated. They're in a classroom setting, and that is a disadvantage. That is primarily one of the reasons why they leave school early.

Youth in the City also run a school program which is funded for 12 places. There is only room for a small number of people. A young woman who wanted to get into the program there had two children, one of school age and one a three-year-old. She couldn't get child care for the three-year-old, so she didn't go, nor did the five-year-old child, so all three of them are not in the education system. She is a young Indigenous woman. There's a lack of pathways to refer her on to anywhere else, and there is a lack of opportunities to try to support her to get child care.<sup>96</sup>

3.71. It is obvious to the committee that severe disadvantage results should young women be denied the opportunity to achieve a quality education. Opportunities for employment are reduced, and in the case mentioned above, it appears that the lack of options also had a negative impact on the schooling of the young children.

3.72. The committee was advised that there are currently no, 'specific system initiated programs to support the attendance of young mothers a government high schools and colleges'.<sup>97</sup>

3.73. However, the Government informed the committee that, 'each school and college takes a very supportive approach and implements a range of accommodations to meet the individual needs of the student'.<sup>98</sup>

## **Recommendation 31**

**The committee recommends that the government ensure that young mothers and their children are individually supported in the ACT public school system, enabling them to continue their education.**

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<sup>96</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 33, Ms McGinn.

<sup>97</sup> Correspondence with Chief Minister of the ACT, October 2002.

<sup>98</sup> Correspondence with Chief Minister of the ACT, October 2002.





# Chapter 4. Violence against women and women's safety

## Introduction

4.1. Violence against women is perhaps one of the most serious issues confronting women, not only in the ACT but also across all jurisdictions in Australia and indeed the world. The committee received a great deal of evidence both in the public hearings and in the written submissions about violence against women and women's safety in the community

4.2. The impacts of violence against women are far-reaching and affect the emotional, physical and psychological well-being of many women for large parts of their lives.

4.3. The United Nations *Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993)* defines violence against women as:

... "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

This encompasses, *inter alia*, "physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the family and in the general community, including battering, sexual abuse of children..., rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women, non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, sexual harassment and intimidation at work, in educational institutions and elsewhere, trafficking in women, forced prostitution, and violence perpetrated or condoned by the state."<sup>99</sup>

4.4. The World Health Organisation notes that most studies on violence against women indicate that:

- the perpetrators of violence against women are almost exclusively men;
- women are at greatest risk of violence from men they know;
- women and girls are the most frequent victims of violence within the family and between intimate partners;

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<sup>99</sup> <http://www.who.int/inf-fs/en/fact239.html>

- physical abuse in intimate relationships is almost always accompanied by severe psychological and verbal abuse;
- social institutions put in place to protect citizens too often blame or ignore battered women.<sup>100</sup>

4.5. The committee notes that many of these trends appear to hold true in relation to the ACT experience as well.

## General statistics

4.6. In a submission from the Chief Police Officer of the ACT it was noted that:

In the ACT, women and girls account for 45% of victims of crimes against the person. They comprise 43% of the victims of assault and 86% of the victims of sexual assault. A large portion of crimes committed against women and girls are perpetrated by someone known to them. Close to half of all assaults against females were perpetrated by offenders known to the victim and of the 119 sexual assaults against females recorded during 2001, 75 were committed by an offender known to the victim. However, crimes against the person constitute only a small portion (5.2% in 2001-2002) of the total number of crimes reported in the ACT.<sup>101</sup>

## Women's safety - fear of crime

4.7. The demographic profile, *Women in the ACT*, notes that women living in the ACT do have concerns about their safety. The profile notes that:

Many women in the ACT live with unease and concern about their personal safety. This includes the experience of harassment and lack of safety in various situations, particularly after dark in using public transport, walking in their local neighbourhoods, and even in their own homes. It is the younger and the older age groups of women in the ACT who report the greatest feelings of lack of safety.<sup>102</sup>

4.8. In evidence before the committee, the Chief Police Officer of the ACT distinguished fear of crime versus the actual risk of crime.

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<sup>100</sup> <http://www.who.int/inf-fs/en/fact239.html>

<sup>101</sup> Submission 29, p 1.

<sup>102</sup> ACT Government (1990) *Women in the ACT: A social and demographic profile*, p 19.

4.9. The committee is aware that the Government is currently in the process of devising a violence and safety framework and is conducting extensive community consultations. Consultations are aimed at identifying:

- key issues that exist around violence generally in the community, as well as violence and safety issues specific to women in the ACT;
- identification of strategies that are currently in place and working effectively;
- useful future strategies that could be undertaken;
- possible broad measures of success in relation to the outcomes;
- feedback on the proposed structure of the ACT model; and
- the suitability of the guiding principles adopted by the Reference Group, being used for the Framework.<sup>103</sup>

4.10. The committee looks forward to the finalisation of the framework, trusting that it will make an important contribution to realising the safety of women in the ACT community.

4.11. In this chapter, the committee has addressed the evidence provided in relation to domestic violence, sexual violence, violence prevention, education, violence against Indigenous women, and women's safety at public events. Although the committee acknowledges that many of these areas overlap, the committee has examined these issues under separate headings.

## **Domestic violence**

4.12. The committee was advised that domestic, or family, violence is one of the key contributors to the isolation experienced by many women in the ACT community. In its submission Beryl Women's Refuge noted that:

Women escaping domestic and family violence are rarely able to participate as functioning members of the ACT community. They often have to remain indoors, for fear of being seen and followed or harassed, and they are completely separated from their former lives and communities. They are forced out of their homes, often leaving the family

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<sup>103</sup> Consultation package on the violence and safety framework.

pets behind (many who are killed or brutally beaten), and most of their possessions are left behind.<sup>104</sup>

4.13. This sense of isolation and marginalisation within the community can be no more absolute. Women confronted by domestic violence often have every facet of their lives disrupted and the impact on physical and mental well-being is significant. The committee was advised that domestic or family violence can be defined in quite broad terms, beyond just physical violence. The Partnerships Against Domestic Violence program run out of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet conceptualises domestic or family violence in the following way:

Domestic violence is an abuse of power perpetrated mainly (but not only) by men against women in a relationship or after separation. It occurs when one partner attempts physically or psychologically to dominate and control the other. Domestic violence takes a number of forms. The most commonly acknowledged forms are physical and sexual violence, threats and intimidation, emotional and social abuse and economic deprivation. Many forms of domestic violence are against the law.

For many Indigenous people the term family violence is preferred as it encompasses all forms of violence in intimate, family and other relationships of mutual obligation and support.<sup>105</sup>

4.14. Domestic violence affects the entire community and it occurs in all areas of society, regardless of:

- geographic location;
- socio-economic status;
- age;
- culture and ethnic background; or
- religious belief.<sup>106</sup>

4.15. In its submission, Beryl Women's Refuge point out that equality of opportunity cannot be said to exist where a woman is confronted by violence. Opportunities for learning, employment and access to healthy

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<sup>104</sup> Submission 19, p 8.

<sup>105</sup> <http://www.padv.dpvc.gov.au/partdv.htm>

<sup>106</sup> <http://www.padv.dpvc.gov.au/partdv.htm>

lifestyles are significantly diminished for women who are in proximity and/or victims of violence. Beryl note in its submission that:

Women escaping violence in the home do not have equal access of opportunity to jobs, social and recreational pursuits, education, childcare, and almost every other aspect of life that we can name. They are crippled with fear, shame, lack of self-esteem and, frequently, poverty. They come to us [Beryl] scarred physically and emotionally, often fearing to leave the safety of the refuge for great lengths of time. Until and unless we sincerely make an impact upon the levels of violence that occur in ACT homes, women escaping domestic and family violence will never share equality of opportunity, not just with men, but with other women who are their peers.<sup>107</sup>

4.16. The committee acknowledges that it is a massive task that lies ahead for policy makers in terms of developing strategies to prevent violence against women and to provide appropriate service responses to meet the needs of women who have been victims of violence. Below the committee examines some of the prevailing themes that the committee picked up on during the inquiry.

### Issues and current service responses

4.17. In the ACT, there are a wide range of agencies involved in providing support, advice and advocacy for women who have been victims of violence: law enforcement; hospitals; legal services; social and community workers; refuge accommodation providers; mental health services; and drug and alcohol agencies all work to provide a network of support for these women and their dependent children.

4.18. The committee was informed repeatedly that while the professionals working in these areas are extremely dedicated, experienced and highly capable, the demand for their services is always higher than services' capacity to deliver within the budgets they have been allocated. The committee gained the view that more resources do need to be applied to this area but also that better co-ordination and integration of services and service models need to be undertaken.

4.19. The Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) is one of the main service agencies in the ACT involved in providing support services for both perpetrators and victims of family or domestic violence. In commenting about the service's role, DVCS noted in its submission that:

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<sup>107</sup> Submission 19, p 5.

DVCS works with all people affected by domestic violence. The people who have been subjected to domestic violence, people who use violence and/or abuse in their relationships (these categories include young people and older people) and children who have witnessed and/or been subjected to violence or abuse.

The priority of our service is for the safety of people, recognising that the majority are women and children, who have been subjected to domestic violence and the encouragement of self-responsibility and accountability by people who use violence and/or abuse in their relationships, recognising that the majority are men.<sup>108</sup>

### *Inanna – house for women in distress*

4.20. The committee received a submission from Inanna, a service set up to provide support and accommodation for women in distress - both accompanied or unaccompanied by children. The service pointed out that it operates on many levels, noting in its submission that, ‘The service aims to run a holistic integrated service, which responds to a broad range of needs of clients who access the service. One of the intentions of our service is to provide a sense of safe community to women who have experienced distress, trauma, abuse, and violence in their lives’.<sup>109</sup>

4.21. Inanna makes the point in its submission that feelings of safety and feeling safe have positive flow-on effects in all areas of women’s lives. Without a sense of security as well as physical and emotional safety many other facets of a women’s life can become unmanageable – a feeling of safety is a prerequisite for healthy, independent living. The service runs a well-being group for women which, as a group, outlined what a ‘safe place’ such as Inanna meant to them. In its submission, Inanna summed up these women’s views in the following way:

The idea for them was that the feelings of safety ventured out into other areas of their life, whether it be counselling, work, career, social activities, learning new life skills. Their sense was that this feeling was transportable to other areas of their life and it is something that can be lost to a life with lots of problems, mental health issues, living with effects of abuse and violence. In this safe space they are able to reclaim other stories they have about themselves as being competent and capable of independent steps.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Submission 9, p 1.

<sup>109</sup> Submission 11, p 1.

<sup>110</sup> Submission 11, p 1.

## *Older women*

4.22. The committee received evidence that older women living with domestic violence face a unique set of problems, especially when a previously loving partner may turn abusive following the onset of a degenerative disease such as Alzheimer's. In the public hearing, DVCS advised the committee of a typical case of this nature in the following terms:

The one I'm thinking of was a mother and a daughter. The daughter was an adult, with a mental disability, the father had Alzheimer's disease. He had not been violent throughout his life, but had become violent.

It was more abuse than physical violence. He was doing things like spitting at them, spitting in their food and throwing food. He was also being very abusive to the daughter with the mental disability. The dilemma was enormous for the mother, as you can imagine. She was protective towards the daughter. She also had had years of a loving relationship with the man prior to his change – prior to how he had become. Where was there for this family to go? What was possible? It was incredibly hard...<sup>111</sup>

4.23. DVCS noted that because support and accommodation services were not available for the abusive partner in question, the women was reluctant to leave the situation out of concern for the welfare of the male abuser. DVCS noted that, 'A big thing for that woman was that there would be somewhere for her partner to go before she could do anything. They continued to live in this abusive situation where we believed they were at risk because of the lack of services.'<sup>112</sup>

4.24. One point made both in the DVCS submission and in its evidence was that accommodation for older women escaping domestic violence was currently completely inappropriate as it co-located older women with young women and often their children. Witnesses observed that older women have remarkably different lifestyles than their younger peers and that this demands specialised responses from service delivery agencies.

4.24. The Older Women's Network noted in its evidence before the committee that, 'There is no way older women will go into a women's refuge; they are totally inappropriate places... It is totally inappropriate for women of my age to try and share with women and kids. It just does

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<sup>111</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 23.

<sup>112</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 23.

not work'.<sup>113</sup> The committee was particularly concerned to hear that, 'Older women who are bashed... will stay at home and cop it rather than go to a refuge like that'.<sup>114</sup>

4.25. The committee believes that the lack of appropriate accommodation for older women that have experienced domestic violence is a serious barrier to access and places the safety of this group of women in serious jeopardy.

### **Recommendation 32**

**The committee recommends that the Government examine appropriate service delivery options for older women escaping from domestic violence that meet their specific needs with a view to opening up access to alternative accommodation for this group.**

#### ***Indigenous women***

4.26. In evidence, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service noted that family violence produces devastating effects in the Indigenous community. The Service noted that it is often reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not consider mainstream domestic violence services to be culturally appropriate and therefore choose not to access them. Winnunga Nimmityjah staff also repeated this view.

4.27. However, despite this, DVCS noted that during 2001, it worked with 97 Indigenous clients and their families.<sup>115</sup> DVCS observed that many of these clients had a broad range of disadvantages affecting their situation. At the public hearing DVCS noted that:

Many of these [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] clients have sought support from our service over many years. For most of them their needs and complex and generally include issues of poverty, racism, housing, health, drug and alcohol.<sup>116</sup>

4.28. DVCS employs one part-time Indigenous family violence community worker to fulfil a networking and educational role within the

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<sup>113</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Wentworth, p 63.

<sup>114</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Wentworth, p 63.

<sup>115</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 21.

<sup>116</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 21.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT. However, the centre noted that it had intended to employ two Indigenous community workers, one male and one female, but that adequate ATSI funding was not forthcoming.<sup>117</sup>

4.29. DVCS informed the committee that the lack of funding to provide culturally appropriate services in relation to victims of domestic violence had impaired the centre's ability to operate in an optimum environment. The Centre noted that:

Family violence is identified as an area of major concern by the Aboriginal community and by federal, state and territory governments. DVCS identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients as a priority group. However, we are limited in the ongoing support we can currently offer because of our [lack of] resource issue. We are strongly of the opinion that the proposed service [one male + one female community worker] would work to address some of the issues with the Indigenous community.<sup>118</sup>

4.30. The loss of ATSI funding will diminish the extent to which the needs of Indigenous women are being met in the ACT and the ACT Government may need to examine funding this area of service delivery itself should ATSI funding not be forthcoming.

4.31. Beryl Women's refuge also informed the committee that it had many Indigenous clients and that there were several areas of unmet need in its service that required additional resources to address.

4.32. Beryl saw that many imposts were placed on its Indigenous workers beyond their direct frontline responsibilities and that this could potentially deplete the amount of work done in areas of counselling and support. Beryl noted that:

As the service that employs more Indigenous staff than any other SAAP service in the ACT we are overwhelmed by the requests that we have on a daily basis asking our workers to sit on boards or panels, give a speech, participate in training others, and the list goes on. Our Aboriginal staff could spend their entire days involved in community education and sitting on reference groups (mostly for government departments). We are also

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<sup>117</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 21.

<sup>118</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 22.

acutely aware that our Indigenous clients need specific, culturally appropriate support which can be hard to obtain everywhere.<sup>119</sup>

4.33. To remedy this situation Beryl advocated the creation of a Indigenous-specific education/training position to alleviate some of the current pressures on existing Indigenous staff. Beryl argued that:

We believe that it is well nigh time that an Indigenous specific position was developed which would allow expert advice to be obtained without draining the services. This position could develop training programs and work with services around access and equity strategies to ensure that we achieve our national SAAP goals for all not just some.<sup>120</sup>

4.34. Beryl also advocated the creation of more Indigenous-specific positions to provide outreach and ongoing support. Beryl noted:

We would also like to see SAAP work in partnership with other areas to look at the creation of specifically funded Indigenous positions. We are a rare service in that we received no funding outside of SAAP but we ensure a focus upon the Indigenous populations and we are committed to the employment of Aboriginal staff. We believe that we should be funded to do much of the outreach and drop-in support work that we do with our Indigenous clients, and that all services should be required to take their commitment to Indigenous Australians seriously. Some partnership work could bring in extra dollars to fund the work that is now often either being ignored or being done by volunteer labour at the end of very busy days.

In particular, we would like to see some outreach funded specifically for the Indigenous populations of our services. Many of our Koori clients return home but require ongoing support to help them learn to change patterns and live safely.<sup>121</sup>

4.35. The committee believes that the ACT Government needs to assess the unmet need in relation to services for Indigenous women suffering from family violence and, if necessary, provide funds for the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers to provide a culturally appropriate service for Indigenous women.

4.36. Winnunga Nimmityjah expressed a view that an Aboriginal community controlled facility is the most appropriate place from which to run a domestic violence crisis service targeted specifically towards

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<sup>119</sup> Submission 19, p 10.

<sup>120</sup> Submission 19, p

<sup>121</sup> Submission 19, p 12.

Indigenous women. Winnunga argued that only an Aboriginal controlled service agency can deliver truly culturally appropriate services for Indigenous women confronting domestic or family violence and that mainstream services will only ever be able to manage a ‘cultural sensitivity’ but not necessarily an effective set of responses and positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

4.37. The committee believes that it is crucial for the government to consult closely with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community about where they would like to see such a service delivered and how it might operate.

### **Recommendation 33**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) undertake to examine unmet need in relation to culturally appropriate services, especially in terms of outreach and ongoing support for Indigenous women facing family violence;**
- b) allocate appropriate funding should this examination show significant gaps in service provision for Indigenous women; and**
- c) closely consult with the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as to where a culturally appropriate crisis service would best be located.**

### ***Improving the service delivery model***

4.38. The committee received evidence from Beryl Women’s Refuge that the prevailing service delivery model provided to women who are escaping domestic or family violence is inadequate. Beryl noted that currently communal living is the standard option for women in this situation and that alternative living arrangements should be explored in order to produce the best outcomes for women. Beryl noted that:

The service delivery model is probably our greatest stumbling block in relation to outcomes for clients. Communal living is kind to almost no-one. Women in desperate need, already in trauma and experiencing extreme stress, are forced to share one small three bedroom house with two other families, strangers whose lifestyles and habits might differ

markedly. There is no choice involved. If a woman wants to flee the violence at home she is asked to live in sub-standard accommodation with no choice about whom she has to share with. From children's bedtimes, to nutrition, to health standards, to television programs and the list goes on ad infinitum, women's lives differ. The stresses and strains of living with other families whose entire ways of life are different to one's own take its toll. Many families are driven home to live in intolerable or unsafe environments.<sup>122</sup>

4.39. The refuge advised the committee that there are also health risks associated with communal living where numerous families share the same house. In particular, the refuge cited infectious diseases as being one of the chief health risks associated with too many people living in close proximity. The refuge noted that:

One of the major problems that we have in relation to offering women accommodation in a communal model is the spread of infectious diseases. School sores, chicken pox, lice, scabies, colds and flues, and every kind of virus known, and unknown, to the medical profession, run through our service with relative ease. Children share beds, couches, crockery and cutlery, toilets, toys and even clothes, making it almost impossible to stem the spread of any infection. In communal model accommodation children with infections cannot be separated from children who are free of infections because there is no space to do this. There is only one television, one lounge, one house to live in.<sup>123</sup>

4.40. The committee agrees that this type of environment is not conducive to good psychological or physical health for the women and their children that utilise these services. It is also a place unlikely to assist a woman in this situation with making important decisions about their future: the counselling they require need; seeking more permanent accommodation; making arrangements for their children's schooling; and taking time to deal with the emotional scars associated with the violence etc. Beryl made this point in its submission:

There is great benefit in clients having some communal space where they can share their experience, strength and hope. Peer support is an integral part of the healing process for women who have left violent situations. Full communal living, however, acts as a hindrance to clients moving forward as the bigger picture is often dominated by the smaller picture

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<sup>122</sup> Submission 19, p 9.

<sup>123</sup> Submission 19, p 10.

day-to-day issues about washing up and cleaning toilets taking precedence over recovery from trauma and abuse.<sup>124</sup>

4.41. Beryl argued that better service delivery models exist which have the capacity to facilitate improved integration of these women into the community as well as offering a degree of privacy and the opportunity to share their experiences with other women who find themselves in the same situation. In the model proposed, women live in self-contained units which are co-located with each other providing privacy and autonomy in the living environment as well as common areas where women can come together to share their experiences and support each other. In its submission, Beryl noted that:

Much research has been undertaken documenting the “cluster model” of housing for services such as ours. The South Australian government so seriously took the concerns of clients to heart that they re-modelled all of the women’s refuges in the urban areas to cluster model housing. There can be no doubt that this has a direct correlation upon a women’s capacity to deal with her issues of violence. Rather than spending all her time mediating between disputes with other household members, arguing of housework, children’s bedtimes, and other household details, a woman in her “own” unit is able to concentrate upon moving forward by dealing with the issues that have forced her into homelessness.<sup>125</sup>

4.42. The committee is of the view that there may be merit in the “cluster model” approach proposed in relation to refuge accommodation for women who have experienced violence. The committee thinks that the government should further investigate the cluster model of housing and its suitability for application in the ACT.

### **Recommendation 34**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the “cluster model” approach to crisis and refuge accommodation for women and their dependent children escaping family and domestic violence with a view to considering the application of the model in the ACT**

### ***Outreach***

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<sup>124</sup> Submission 19, p 10.

<sup>125</sup> Submission 19, p 10.

4.43. In its submission, Beryl Women's refuge made a compelling case for improving and extending outreach services for mothers and their dependent children that have experienced domestic violence. The committee believes that it is worth reproducing the arguments made by Beryl in full and has done so below.

Whilst we are not funded to provide an outreach service to our client population, it is inevitable that outreach forms a part of the work that we do, and this is how it should be. A woman should be able to maintain links with the service that she has grown to trust and should not be forced into disclosing her personal story once again upon leaving the shelter. In particular, the clients of non-English speaking and Aboriginal backgrounds find it very hard to sever a connection to the service, and to their particular support worker, which is entirely understandable because it takes quite a leap of faith to disclose the personal details about abuse to a stranger.

Outreach is an essential component in the continuum of care for those who enter the women's homelessness sector. For many, the entry into an accommodation service might not be necessary if we were able to access our clients when they first begin to experience difficulties. Across the women's homelessness sector there are numbers of women who will come in and out of our services, often losing their rented premises in the process. This is costly both in monetary and emotional terms. Outreach, a cost effective aspect of service delivery has the potential to free up beds for those most in crisis, and to alleviate many problems before they become too big to deal with.

Outreach and follow up work is particularly important in working towards breaking the cycle of intergenerational violence. Children who enter our services with their mothers frequently build up a close relationship with the Children's Support Workers and begin to identify and name the pain and trauma that they are feeling. If we seriously want to create an ACT that is safe for women then we must reach the children, so that potential perpetrators of violence can begin to understand and deal with their anger, and learn healthy alternatives, and those who are the potential victims of violence can learn that they do not have to accept the unacceptable. Short term measures for long term gain.

In service evaluation questionnaires, both during and post accommodation with our service, our clients frequently name that they would like to have follow-up work done with their children, by the workers whom the kids have come to know and trust. This, they say, would make an enormous difference to the functioning of the family unit, as the children need to be reminded of alternative mechanisms for dealing with the pain of growing

up with violence, and mothers are clear that it needs to be known and safe “outsiders” to do this work with their children.<sup>126</sup>

4.44. The committee supports completely the extension and expansion outreach services from all areas of service delivery as the best means of reaching isolated women in the community and makes a recommendation to this effect in the final chapter.

## **Protection Orders Act**

4.45. The committee received much comment regarding the *Protection Orders Act*, mainly centring around the repeal of stand-alone domestic violence legislation. As DVCS noted in evidence:

There has been one change that I think is a real shame – that is the loss of the DV [domestic violence] legislation as standalone legislation. The fact is that it is now a protection bill that comprises workplace violence and what were once called restraining orders. As a political stand and as a political statement, I believe it is important that we have domestic violence legislation that stands alone.<sup>127</sup>

4.46. The committee agrees. The committee believes that additional gravitas is conferred by the existence of stand-alone domestic violence legislation.

## **Recommendation 35**

**The committee recommends that the Government rework the *Protection Orders Act* in relation to restraining orders so that legislative provisions regarding domestic violence be contained in a stand-alone Act.**

## **DVCS recommendations**

4.47. In its submission, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service made several recommendations about ways to improve service delivery responses in relation to domestic violence. The committee believes that these suggestions have considerable merit and has adopted them as recommendations in this report. They are reproduced below.

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<sup>126</sup> Submission 19, p 14.

<sup>127</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 25.

### **Recommendation 36**

**The committee recommends that the Government undertake a comprehensive needs-mapping exercise in relation to emergency accommodation for women with and without children escaping domestic violence to identify gaps in service delivery responses and the establishment of funding priorities in this area.**

### **Recommendation 37**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide, though increased funding measures, appropriate crisis accommodation, support systems and care for older women who have been placed in the situation of requiring safe accommodation because of having been subjected to domestic violence and/or abuse.**

### **Recommendation 38**

**The committee recommends that the Government apply additional resources to appropriate services so as to ensure that practical support is available for women and their children who are re-establishing their lives after living with violence, including positive parenting support/modelling in the home.**

### **Recommendation 39**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate options aimed at ensuring appropriate accommodation, support and care is provided for older men who have used violence in their domestic relationship so that women are able to continue living in the family home in safety.**

### **Recommendation 40**

**The committee recommends that the Government continue to fund the Family Violence Intervention Project and ensure that the support of victims remains paramount to this program by identifying and allocating additional funding in relation to victim support services.**



## Sexual violence

4.48. Sexual violence against women is a significant issue in the ACT. The trauma of experiencing sexual violence has many long-term effects on women. The committee notes that, ‘The short and long term sequelae [secondary effects] of sexual violence can include gynaecological problems, somatic conditions, gastro-intestinal disorders, substance abuse, depression, eating disorders, high-risk behaviours and suicide.’<sup>128</sup>

4.49. Studies indicate that women who have experienced sexual violence tend to use health services more than other women and they tend to assess their general health as not very good.<sup>129</sup>

4.50. The committee was informed that most victims of sexual violence are acquainted with the perpetrator. The Chief Police Officer of the ACT informed the committee that, ‘... of the 109 sexual assaults against women during 2001, 75 were committed by someone whom the victim knew’.<sup>130</sup>

### Issues and current service responses to sexual violence.

4.51. The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC), one of the main support agencies for victims of sexual assault in the ACT, indicated in its submission that much has been done in recent years to provide effective services for people that have experienced sexual assault but that there are still areas requiring attention. The committee notes comments made by CRCC about the recent work that has been undertaken in relation to sexual violence:

Form CRCC’s perspective the ACT has finally been getting its act together in terms of its response to survivors of sexual violence since the Review of Services for adult survivors of sexual violence (Dept Health 1995). Since then the ACT Government has had an across-government approach to the issue and this has manifested in the Sexual Assault Services Advisory Committee which is facilitated and supported by the Dept of Education and Community Services. Since the Review of the ACT has established SAMSSA (Service Assisting Male Survivors of Sexual Assault) which is auspiced by CRCC, and most recently FAMSAC (Forensic and Medical Sexual Assault Care) which provide women doctors for forensic medical examinations and follow up

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<sup>128</sup> <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/violence/sexual/home.htm>

<sup>129</sup> <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/violence/sexual/home.htm>

<sup>130</sup> Transcript, 9 July 2002, p 127, Mr Murray

treatment for survivors of sexual violence. A review has also been recently completed into the services for children and young people who have experienced sexual violence. This review (which is yet to be released) has identified problems within the service system and hopefully changes will be made to ensure the appropriate and adequate response to those families and survivors. It is imperative that Family Services, the AFP Sexual Assault and Child Abuse Team (SACAT), the Director of Public Prosecutions and the services which support survivors work together well<sup>131</sup>.

4.52. The committee supports the recent endeavours of the government to address sexual violence. However, the committee was advised that the CRCC is currently operating beyond capacity in terms of its ability to offer counselling services. CRCC informed the committee that, ‘the CRCC sexual assault counselling service has quite a waiting list (between 3 to 4 months) for its adult service. This causes some distress but the limits we have already placed on the services, in terms of the number of counselling sessions available for example, mean that there is no room to make any further changes to deal with the waiting list’.<sup>132</sup>

4.53. CRCC also advised the committee that due to funding constraints it was unable to provide much access to group counselling sessions which it argued was of considerable benefit to survivors of sexual assault.

4.54. The committee believes that there are grounds to investigate additional funding for CRCC to reduce waiting times for counselling and to extend access to group counselling and support.

## **Recommendation 41**

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funding to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre to reduced waiting times for counselling and extend access to group counselling and support.**

### ***Indigenous women***

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<sup>131</sup> Submission 28, pp 2-3.

<sup>132</sup> Submission 28, p 3.

4.55. CRCC notes in its submission that it provides a specialist service directed towards assisting Aboriginal survivors of sexual violence. The Nguru program is funded by the ACT Department of Health and employs two Aboriginal workers to provide support, advocacy and counselling. The committee was advised that the program also provides education to non-Indigenous workers on how they can best meet the needs of Aboriginal survivors.<sup>133</sup>

4.56. However, CRCC points out in its submission to the committee that , ‘Needless to say barriers continue to exist for women from marginalised communities when trying to access services... Racism is still a major issue for Aboriginal women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds’.<sup>134</sup>

## Women’s safety on campus

4.57. The committee heard from several groups and individuals that safety at the ANU campus was of great concern to many women studying there. Of particular concern for some submitters was the fact that there appeared to be very minimal reportage on several incidents that have occurred on the campus in recent times. In its submission, the YWCA/WEL note that, ‘Recent reports have raised concern about sexual assault and rape on the ANU campus. As well as the right to safety, women attending educational institutions in the ACT have the right to accurate, responsible information about such incidents’<sup>135</sup>.

4.58. The Women’s Officer from the ANU made the point that sexual assaults on campus were a serious problem at the ANU noting that, ‘To my knowledge there have been five rapes on campus since O-Week. That’s only the ones I know of. There are going to be heaps more that are unreported, within colleges especially. There was one attack at 2 o’clock on a Sunday afternoon right outside Chifley Library, which is a major library open to the public’.<sup>136</sup>

4.59. The Women’s Officer noted that response times from ANU security, Unisafe, were inadequate with students sometimes having to wait up to 45 minutes for security to attend after a call had been placed.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Submission 28, p 4.

<sup>134</sup> Submission 28, p 4.

<sup>135</sup> Submission 17, p 16.

<sup>136</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 93, Ms Docrat.

<sup>137</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 92, Ms Docrat.

The committee was advised that additional security was required and that where serious situations arise police should be able to attend without an invitation from the university. The Women's Officer noted that, 'We need more security guards so there's a greater presence on campus, and if the police need to come in, then they should wait to be invited in situations like this [sexual assaults]. There should be some sort of mechanism that allows security to say, "We need police assistance," and it arrives immediately'.<sup>138</sup>

4.60. The YWCA/WEL proposed the following recommendation regarding some of the issues raised above which the committee has adopted as its own.

### **Recommendation 42**

**The committee recommends that the Government should identify those areas relating to safety on tertiary campuses over which it has potential influence and act to eliminate sexual assault and rape on campus and to ensure that students have accurate information, including information derived from Commonwealth authorities, the AFP and campus management bodies.**

### **Early intervention/violence prevention – attitudinal change and education**

4.61. The committee was informed through several channels that one of the keys to addressing violence against women is by raising the level of consciousness in the community about the phenomenon as well as implementing early intervention strategies directed towards young people. Advocacy, information and education are all important aspects of changing attitudes about violence against women.

### **ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council**

4.62. The committee is aware that the previous government established the ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council in 1998 to address the prevention side of the domestic violence equation. Explaining the role of the council in his tabling speech, the then Attorney-General noted that the Council would, 'have broad responsibility for the implementation of

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<sup>138</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 93, Ms Docrat.

domestic violence policy and programs in the ACT. And it would also play a co-ordinating and a monitoring role, acting as a clearing house for domestic violence issues in the ACT. Its responsibilities would cover criminal and civil issues, and include health, housing, education and other relevant areas'.<sup>139</sup>

4.63. The Council adopted a multi-layered prevention model consisting of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention activities. The Council noted that its position on prevention, '... is a layered concept requiring action at both strategic and service delivery levels including measures to ensure the protection of victims of violence as well as measures aimed at primary intervention'.<sup>140</sup> In the Council's Strategic Priorities document for 1997-1999, the council explained its tripartite approach in the following terms:

- Primary prevention – focusing on the social and physical environment and the factors that may influence risk, that is, addressing the root causes of crime;
- Secondary prevention – measures that deal with groups 'at risk' either of offending or of becoming victims; and
- Tertiary prevention – seeks to prevent re-offending and/or opportunities for re-offending.<sup>141</sup>

4.64. In its submission, the Council outlined five key areas of achievement including:

**Criminal justice reform** – support and oversight of Family Violence Intervention Program (FVIP); organised national conference in 1999 called Justice and Change: co-ordinated and integrated criminal justice responses to domestic and family violence;

**Indigenous Family Violence** – in 1999 convened a national two day Indigenous Workshop on family violence; followed this with an ACT Indigenous Roundtable that concluded with recommendations to the ACT ATSICC;

**Information Provision** – produced an information booklet called What's Love Got to do with it? With DVCS and VoCC;

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<sup>139</sup> Attorney General, tabling speech, August 1996.

<sup>140</sup> Submission 13, p4.

<sup>141</sup> ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council 'Strategic Priorities – 1997-1999' p 4.

**Service Standards** – initiated a process to develop, consider and consult on service standards for those working with victims and perpetrators of domestic violence. This project is nearing completion;

**Model Domestic Violence Laws** – initiated a review to consider the compatibility of the Commonwealth’s Model Domestic Violence Laws Report with ACT legislation.<sup>142</sup>

4.65. The committee applauds the work done by the Council and trusts that it will continue to be effective in its valuable role of preventing domestic violence in the ACT.

4.66. One submitter conceived social advocacy as key plank in the effort to eliminate violence against women and as crucial to the delivery of appropriate service delivery responses. The Canberra Rape Crisis Service argued in its submission that, ‘we believe that you can’t have an ethical support service without the social change advocacy. Without it the service perpetuates the medicalisation and pathologising of women who have experienced violence’.<sup>143</sup>

4.67. Pointing to the importance of community responses to violence against women the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre notes in its submission to the committee that:

The ACT Community must be knowledgeable about the issues related to the violence, and understanding of the complexities. The violence must be acknowledged and condemned and there must be community commitment to eliminate the violence. Then survivors are more likely to get their needs met within their own community rather than needing a service response.<sup>144</sup>

4.68. Beryl noted that:

Our service is all about safety for women and their dependent children. Whilst we are not established to specifically PREVENT violence, this is essentially part of our mandate. Early intervention in the lives of the children who access our services is, and must be, the most sensible and crucial role any service can take in helping reduce domestic and family violence. As a service that is beginning to see third and fourth generation

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<sup>142</sup> Submission 13, p 3.

<sup>143</sup> Submission 28, p 3.

<sup>144</sup> Submission 28, p 2.

clients we must acknowledge that violence begets violence and that wherever we ignore the children we do so at a great social cost.<sup>145</sup>

### ***Intergenerational family violence***

4.69. The committee received evidence about the fact that violence is handed down from generation to generation, that children exposed to or have witnessed violence are more likely to become both the victims and the perpetrators of domestic violence in the future. The committee heard that effective early intervention strategies must play a prominent role in the prevention of violence and improving the safety for women into the future. The Beryl submission noted that:

Children learn about domestic violence way too early in their little lives, and frequently grow to live out the patterns that they have learnt from their parents. If we are ever to create an ACT that is fair and equitable for all women, we must put more resources into the children who are a sitting population in our refuges. These are the children most at risk of either being victims or perpetrators of domestic violence in the future. Creating a safe ACT depends upon our commitment to our children at risk.<sup>146</sup>

4.70. The organisation argued that long-term counselling options and improved intervention strategies were required to stop the cycle of violence. The refuge noted that:

Child witnesses/victims of domestic violence and family violence also require access to long-term counselling in order to stem the cycle of violence. At our service we are seeing third and fourth generation child clients, an alarming concern for us. A recent client when asked how she was coping being at the refuge stated “oh it’s quite normal. My grandma was in the old refuge at Kingston...”. It is time to make some radical inroads into the cycle of violence. We do not want an ACT where the women find that living in a refuge is “quite normal”.<sup>147</sup>

4.71. The committee agrees. The committee was advised that providing appropriate support to children that have experienced violence in their lives is one of the key areas that needs to be addressed in order to make inroads to eliminating violence against women. Beryl Women’s Refuge pointed out in its submission that:

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<sup>145</sup> Submission 19, p 9.

<sup>146</sup> Submission 19, p 10.

<sup>147</sup> Submission 19, p 8.

Breaking the patterns of domestic violence must occur across all ages and lifestyles, but, unless we reach the children, we will continue to fail in our goal to eliminate the need for women and their children to flee from their own homes in fear of their lives and safety. Patterns develop early and intergenerational violence is almost so common to us that it is the norm. We simply must resource the children who are the witnesses and victims of domestic violence if we are ever to allow real equality of opportunity to all women in the ACT.<sup>148</sup>

4.72. Beryl advocated the adoption of a Western Australia model as one means of breaking the cycle of violence. Beryl noted that:

In Western Australia the Pat Giles Women's Refuge is funded to operate a counselling service for child survivors of domestic violence. They are able to offer a continuum of care to children post refuge accommodation, access to children before they ever need a refuge, and work towards the total elimination of intergenerational domestic violence. This is a model that we can learn from – we need to work with children if we are to catch the future victims and perpetrators of domestic and family violence. This is the key to long-term, real and permanent change.<sup>149</sup>

4.73. The committee supports the allocation of more resources to provide holistic counselling services to child witnesses/victims of domestic violence.

### **Recommendation 43**

**The committee recommends that, as a matter of urgency, funding be applied to extend services geared towards counselling children who have been victims or have witnessed domestic violence as well as extending programs directed towards breaking the cycle of intergenerational violence.**

4.74. The Beryl submission also noted that it had received funding, \$40,000 for this financial year, to provide support to children that come through the refuges such as Beryl's. It was argued that this sort of support

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<sup>148</sup> Submission 19, p 5.

<sup>149</sup> Submission 19, p 8.



has the capacity to act as an early intervention mechanism in helping children work through how violence has affected them as well as working towards the elimination and prevention of any inappropriate behaviours that may become evident.

4.75. However, Beryl informed the committee that the funding was not recurrent and that insufficient resources were being directed towards violence prevention and providing support services for children. Beryl noted that:

We are excited to have been granted brokerage funding, \$40,000 for this financial year, to work with accompanying children to help break the cycle of violence and homelessness. We are aware that this is one-off funding only and we must emphasise that early intervention is the most effective tool available for creating change. SAAP must find ongoing ways to continue putting resources into the children. They form the bulk of our client group yet they receive the least attention in terms of resources. There is not commitment to these funds being ongoing, so at June 30th our children's program looks like being reduced again, to one part-time worker whose workload is so intense that she cannot possibly be the intervention point for so many children in crisis...

We believe that the children who are sitting in refuges across the ACT are the homeless populations of our future, and that appropriate resourcing NOW could shape their little lives in a positive and powerful way, to help them to deal with the issues they will face all too soon. Recently our service ran a weekend camp for boys over the age of twelve who had lived through domestic violence. Just two days in these boys' lives has the potential to heal some pain, dislodge some trauma, and help these boys to look out of new eyes. We have the energy and motivation to be doing more of this essential work, we just don't have the resources. We believe that all children should be given the opportunity to access help because it will create a safer, freer, and more valuable ACT in the future.<sup>150</sup>

4.76. The committee supports the direction of additional resources to early intervention programs which support and counsel children who have experienced violence in their lives.

## **Recommendation 44**

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<sup>150</sup> Submission 19, pp 10-11.

**The committee recommends that the Government provide additional funding to early intervention programs to provide support and counselling to children that have experienced violence in their lives.**

4.77. The committee was advised that in order to address violence against women, it is necessary to attend to some of the negative aspects of male culture that condone or even promote violence against women. The committee stresses that not all men are prone to these attitudes and behaviours but it should be acknowledged that some sections of the community are and that educational responses are required to change these notions and behaviours which flow from them.

4.78. In evidence, DVCS made the point that more needs to be done to address male attitudes and behaviour regarding violence per se and in particular, violence against women. The service noted that gaining access to some schools to provide education relating to managing aggression and violent behaviour was difficult. However, DVCS made the point that prevention should not take place at the expense of providing crisis services which are already being stretched beyond their limits. When asked about whether violence prevention and early intervention needed greater emphasis, the service provided the following response:

I would definitely like to see more. I would not like to see us taking away from Peter to pay Paul. I believe we have to be very cautious about that. We continue to need the services that we have. We continue to see that they require additional funds for expanding the work that they are all doing – but preventative work is important.

I feel quite concerned that some schools can be hard to access. It is often a decision of the principal as to whether or not they are going to have particular sorts of curricula that involve things about positive relationships, things that might enable a young person to manage their lives in non-violent ways and give them information that they may not otherwise receive. I don not believe it is okay that it is up to principals to make the decisions on this sort of thing.

One of the areas that we find more difficult to get into than any other area is primary schools. To me, that is where we should be – in the primary schools. We should be with the kids when they are really young. Sometimes lots of things about them are already formed by the time we get to them. We are always in high schools and colleges. So that is a bit of a dilemma.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 27.

4.79. In a similar vein, YWCA noted in evidence that:

I think the main points were around culture and attitude change. It was commented that this needs to occur if violence against women is to be eliminated, and it is going to require the development and expansion of strategies to educate children and young people, as well as other members of the community, to understand the impact of violence and change negative stereotypes around women and violence.<sup>152</sup>

4.80. The committee agrees that more has to be done in terms of educating men and young males, in particular, about developing positive relationships with women, and indeed, with other males. The value of early intervention and education cannot be overestimated in relation to violence against women; it provides an opportunity to communicate various strategies for effective relationships that don't involve violence and has the capacity to instil the notion that all types of violence are unacceptable in our community.

4.81. DVCS relayed to the committee that it currently has one part-time community educator working 18 hours every week as well as its Indigenous community worker who also plays an education role in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as part of their job.<sup>153</sup>

4.82. The committee believes that more can be done to improve educational responses to violence against women, particularly in the school environment and that the level of resourcing to provide community educators to the schools is totally inadequate.

4.83. The committee supports an intersectoral approach to the development and implementation of education and information campaigns regarding violence against women. However, the committee sees that particular attention needs to be paid to issues of violence against women as part of violence prevention strategies within the school system. It may be the case that school curricula need to be re-examined and amended to provide educational responses to violence against women. The committee believes that it may be appropriate to convene a working party tasked with the job of developing an education and awareness campaign which addresses the issues surrounding violence against women.

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<sup>152</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 67, Ms Whyte.

<sup>153</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, Ms Simpson, p 27.

4.84. The Domestic Violence Prevention Council supported more early intervention and educational work in schools noting that, ‘the school community and the ACT as a whole would all benefit in the long term through investment, as envisaged by the National Crime Prevention report, *Pathways to Prevention*, in early intervention services for early years children and children and young people considered ‘at risk’ of both victimisation and delinquency.’<sup>154</sup>

4.85. The committee sees that it would be preferable to have a wide range of representation on such a working group with the police force, the education sector, community and social workers, the health sector and marketing and public relations professionals to be involved.

### **Recommendation 45**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) establish and resource a working party made up of representatives from areas including: law enforcement; health promotion, the women’s sector; relevant community organisations; as well as educators and those responsible for the development of school curricula to develop and implement an across-the-board information and education campaign regarding all aspects of violence against women, including sexual violence, with the view to including violence prevention education as part of the ACT Government school curriculum; and**
- b) build on this work with a broader community education and information campaign.**

4.86. The committee concludes its comments on violence against women by noting the following passage from a population report produced by the John Hopkins University Centre for Communication Programs:

Health workers alone cannot transform the cultural, social, and legal environment that gives rise to and condones widespread violence against women. Ending physical and sexual violence requires long-term commitment and strategies involving all parts of society. Many governments have committed themselves to overcoming violence against

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<sup>154</sup> Submission 13, p 10.

women by passing and enforcing laws that ensure women's legal rights and punish abusers. In addition, community-based strategies can focus on empowering women, reaching out to men, and changing the beliefs and attitudes that permit abusive behavior. Only when women gain their place as equal members of society will violence against women no longer be an invisible norm but, instead, a shocking aberration.<sup>155</sup>

## **Safety at public events and on public transport.**

### *Lighting in public areas*

4.87. In their submission to the committee, YWCA/WEL argued that more has to be done to improve security at bus interchanges noting that, 'Poor lighting and security in bus interchanges is a particular concern for women's safety'.<sup>156</sup> The committee notes that there is inadequate lighting in many areas of Canberra and that this impacts on perceptions of safety as well as providing increased opportunities for criminal activity. The two organisations made a recommendation in this regard that the committee has adopted.

### **Recommendation 46**

**The committee recommends that the Government:**

- a) prioritise the maintenance of lighting in bus interchanges and other public spaces in its maintenance program; and**
- b) should investigate the possibility of providing after-hours bus services with the flexibility to stop between bus stops in order to set passengers down as close to their homes as possible.**

### **Additional recommendations in relation to violence against women**

4.88. The committee has adopted the following proposed recommendations from the YWCA/WEL submission.

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<sup>156</sup> Submission 17, p 16.

## **Recommendation 47**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) the Government undertake research regarding sexual assault and public events in the ACT;**
- b) the Government develop and expand innovative strategies to educate children and young people about the impact of violence on individuals and the community;**
- c) event organisers be required to consult with a broad range of stakeholders to enact safety strategies to ensure events are safe for all members of the community;**
- d) increased funding is allocated to education campaigns aiming to address male and female stereotypes about violence against women; and**
- e) restricted alcohol use policies be enacted at all public events.**

## Chapter 5. General issues

5.1. In this chapter, the committee examines the issues of: representation of women in decision making roles and fora; women's advocacy; and miscellaneous general service delivery issues that emerged during the inquiry.

### Representation

5.2. Women's effective participation in decision-making is a key factor in bringing about positive outcomes for women. The participation of women in decision making can take many forms – from holding public office or sitting on a government consultative committee or statutory board, through to involvement in community advocacy or lobby groups.

5.3. The committee notes the Government's commitment to an ACT Office for Women as well as the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women - both providing excellent opportunities for the voices of women to be heard and a women's agenda advanced in the policy arena. A good example of policy advancement by women, for women, was the development and implementation of the *Women's Action Plan 2000-2001* (the committee speaks more about the ACT Office of Women, the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women and the action plan in the following chapter).

5.4. Being responsible for appointing individuals to advisory panels, consultative committees, and statutory boards, the ACT Government can play a major role in raising the levels of representation of women in decision-making positions. While previous efforts have been made to attain more gender balance on government boards and committees, the committee was informed that a renewed effort is required to work towards this goal.

5.5. Previous government efforts include the creation of a women's register for women who have expressed an interest in sitting on government boards and committees as well as the development of an 'early warning system' to provide advance notice to the ACT Office for Women as to when vacancies on boards become available. A public information campaign was also conducted with all ACT households receiving a brochure encouraging women to become involved in government boards and committees. In the final implementation report of the *Women's Action Plan 2000-2001*, it is noted that, 'The ACT has the highest level of female representation on Government boards and

committees across Australia at 46%. Recent increases in female membership on a number of government boards (including the Health Promotion Board and ACT Cultural Council) suggest that this figure is increasing.’<sup>157</sup>

5.6. It was stressed to the committee that a diverse range of women from the community need to have a representative voice in decision making processes – older women, women with disabilities, Indigenous women, young women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. It is noted in the *Women’s Action Plan 2000-2001* that, ‘More diversity in the membership of boards and committees allows those bodies to operate more effectively as their members’ different points of view lead to comprehensiveness in the range of decisions that they make. Boards and committees are more effective and efficient if their membership reflects the composition of the communities they serve’.<sup>158</sup> The committee supports the idea that representatives selected from a broad cross-section of the community will only improve the quality and specificity of advice to government about the needs of women in terms of service delivery and policy directions.

5.7. The Chamber of Women in Business advised the committee, however, that representation was concentrated on a small group of women and that a greater variety and number of women needed to be encouraged to participate in representational opportunities. The Chamber argued that this limited the range of views expressed in these fora as well as placing an inordinate impost on one or two individuals. The Chamber noted in evidence that:

A name will be picked, and that person will be on half a dozen free boards when they’re running their own business as well. There’s only so much you can volunteer for. There seems to be an over-representation by one person. That person will run themselves into the ground because they know it’s important that our voices be heard. But there are equally talented women. Names will come up in conversation, but because one person is known the position is given to her. It’s always a free position. We don’t have to pay her. She is taken out of her business. There is an economic throwback to her business. I don’t think that’s particularly fair.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> ACT Women’s Action Plan 2000-2001 – Final Implementation Report, p 1.

<sup>158</sup> ACT Government (2000) *‘ACT Women’s Action Plan 2000-2001’* p 6.

<sup>159</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 14, Ms Farrell.



5.8. Women With Disabilities ACT (WWD ACT), put a case to the committee that more women with disabilities need to be represented in decision making processes as part of the general principles of inclusiveness and equitable representation. WWD ACT advised the committee that:

I think that this is an area in which the ACT could show leadership to Australia in general, by taking pro-active steps to look at the composition of their advisory boards, to make sure that there is equitable representation of women with disabilities on those boards, both in disability areas and in general areas in the community. I think those general areas in the community need to be emphasised because, I think that, as a government and as a community, we need to be constantly looking for inclusive models that will assume that people with disabilities take their part in the community and that they are assisted to do so through the mechanisms of support that are there.<sup>160</sup>

5.9. WWD also commented on the Disability Reform Group membership which did not have a woman with a disability represented on it. The Committee believes that the ACT Government should keep this in mind when establishing the new consultative models outlined in the response to Gallop report.

5.10. In a similar vein, the Youth Coalition of the ACT made the observation that more has to be done to improve representation of young women on consultative and decision-making bodies. The Coalition argued that:

The Youth Coalition believes that the enhancement of the status of young women in the ACT must begin at the most critical area of development. To achieve rights for young women, and to bring these issues to the forefront of government policy, young women and/or the organisations that advocate for young women must be represented on all consultative and ministerial advisory boards. We believe that young women are not adequately represented on, and do not have the opportunity to equally participate in, the major decision-making advisory groups in the ACT...

The ACT Government, as mentioned in the ACT women's action plan, prides itself on having the highest representation in the country of women on boards and committees. However, on closer inspection of this document and on consultation with the ACT Office for Women, we find that there are no young women represented on any of the important

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<sup>160</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 4, Ms Salthouse.

advisory councils. We at the Youth Coalition see this as a significant gap in representation. The Ministerial Advisory Council on Women also has no young female representative and no organisation representing the rights of young women. Even after further discussion with the Office for Women, no changes have been made to this council.<sup>161</sup>

5.11. One proposal that has been implemented in one form is the creation of a mentoring program for women interested in participating in decision-making and representational roles. The Chamber of Women in Business advised the committee that it initiated such a program and received a great deal of interest with up to 30 women participating. The committee believes that such a program should be expanded and enhanced to target a broad range of women from the ACT community, particularly those from diverse backgrounds.

5.12. The YWCA also supported the development of a mentoring and peer support program for young women interesting in participating in decision making in the ACT community. YWCA noted in evidence that:

I think there is definitely room here for a formal peer support mentoring program. I feel that it is quite daunting to be involved in some boards and formal committees and other leadership opportunities when you don't have the networks... and a lot of women don't when they are sort of first starting off, especially disadvantaged young women. So if there were some formal processes around women that wanted to be involved, it would be, I guess, the foot in the door to start off with.<sup>162</sup>

5.13. Providing an open accessible mentoring program has the potential to open up opportunities for support and capacity building within the women's sector and the broader ACT female population. The committee believes that the Government may be able to play a facilitation role in the establishment of such a program.

## **Recommendation 48**

**The committee recommends that the Government, in consultation, facilitate the establishment of a mentoring and peer support program for women interested in sitting on government boards and**

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<sup>161</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, pp 29-30, Ms Cahill.

<sup>162</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 70, Ms Whyte.

**committees, with a particular focus on attracting young women, older women, women with disabilities, Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.**

## **Advocacy**

5.14. In the submission made by WEL/YWCA, the point was made that more funding should be directed towards women's advocacy groups. The two organisations noted that much of the advocacy and policy development work performed by organisations such as WEL and YWCA was provided by volunteers. It was suggested that recurrent operational funding would allow increased involvement and participation in the political and decision-making process. In their submission the two organisations noted that:

Operational funds to women's advocacy groups would allow those groups to engage in grassroots consultation and to improve the quality of the advice they can offer government. Operational funds enable mechanisms which open participation to a broader and more representative group. Operational funds can also mean that those few volunteer hours that are available to women, many of whom already work a double shift, can be spent on policy development and advocacy and not the base-line tasks of administration in order to enable their organisations to participate.<sup>163</sup>

5.15. Several organisations made similar comments to those outlined above. It has always been the case that funding for advocacy in any sector must be carefully balanced against the need to prioritise service delivery funding. That being said, the committee recognises that the opportunities for women and organisations representing women to participate in the political and community life are greatly served by adequately resourced advocacy organisations.

## **Recommendation 49**

**The committee recommends that the government investigate the provision of ongoing funding for women's advocacy services.**

### *Women's Grants*

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<sup>163</sup> Submission 17, p 6.

5.16. The committee was also urged to recommend the create of a women's grants program to allow the funding of specialised, one-off projects within the women sector. The YWCA/WEL submission argued strongly in favour of creating a system of women's grants in the ACT, citing the existence of programs of this type in other jurisdictions, noting that:

Many other jurisdictions in Australia operate small grant programmes for women's organisations interested in completing one off projects relevant to state/territory policies or within that locality. The absence of such a programme in the ACT severely limits the support available to women's organisations in undertaking project work.<sup>164</sup>

5.17. YWCA/WEL advised the committee that the lack of such a mechanism in the ACT has meant that important work in the women's sector is sometimes unable to proceed. YWCA/WEL gave the following example about the sort of projects that would benefit from a women-specific funding program:

For example the Organising Committee of the Women's Constitutional Convention 2002, on which both WEL and the YWCA are represented, approached the Chief Minister's office for support in organising this conference. We were unsuccessful as there was no mechanism available to support what is an important conference recognising the centenary of white women's suffrage and 40 years of Indigenous women having the vote.<sup>165</sup>

5.18. The committee believes there is a case for devising and implementing some form of funding program that would allow women's groups to apply for financial support for one-off projects. The committee thought it may be appropriate for the ACT Office for Women to Administer such a program.

## **Recommendation 50**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the development of a funding program to be administered by the ACT Office for Women for one-off funding for special projects in the women's sector.**

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<sup>164</sup> Submission 17, p 5.

<sup>165</sup> Submission 17, p 5.

## Access and referral

5.19. The committee heard that the Women’s Information and Referral Centre (WiRC) was the central, ‘one-stop shop’ for information and advice for women in the ACT. The committee was advised that the Centre operates a telephone service which allows women to seek information and referrals to the full gamut of services responsible for meeting the needs of women.

5.20. However, the committee is aware that the telephone service is only able to operate during normal business hours and the committee thought it might be appropriate to extend its hours of operation to weekends and after-hours. The committee thought that a 1800 (free call) number would be appropriate.

### **Recommendation 51**

#### **The committee recommends that:**

- a) the Government extend WiRC’s telephone advisory service on a trial basis to operate on weekends and after hours and that the contact number is a free call 1800 number; and**
- b) that the service is widely promoted.**

## Corrective services

5.21. The committee received evidence from Toora Women Inc. noting that there are currently 11 ACT women who are incarcerated. In relation to female prisoners, Toora argued that, ‘The importance of providing the opportunity to access alternatives to sentencing and to focus on the rehabilitation of offenders is paramount.’<sup>166</sup>

5.22. Toora proposed several recommendations in its submission which the committee has adopted.

### **Recommendation 52**

#### **The committee recommends that:**

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<sup>166</sup> Submission 16, p 13.

- a) a new remand facility is built as a matter of urgency and includes innovative approaches to the accommodation of women on remand which provide them with safety, privacy and separate programs and support;**
  
- b) the detention of women prisoners be considered as a separate issues from the construction of the proposed prison, recognising their special needs and differing crime and incarceration patterns; and**
  
- c) the Government continue to develop and implement a range of progressive alternatives to sentencing for offenders.**

## Chapter 6. Strategic directions

6.1. Since its election, the Government has announced many programs and policies directed towards addressing the needs of women in the ACT. The Government reconfigured the women's policy area of the Chief Minister's Department to open up a direct reporting chain through the ACT Office for Women as well as establishing the ACT Ministerial Advisory Council on Women. Both have already played an important and significant role in providing strategic policy advice to government.

6.2. During the course of the inquiry, the committee developed views on how the government can improve its service delivery responses, and the policy framework in which services operate, so as to achieve better outcomes for women.

6.3. The committee recognises that, as with all areas of government policy-making, policy directed towards the achievement of positive outcomes for women will be sustained by a clear vision of what the priorities for action are and where emphasis should be placed. Policy development and delivering on outcomes is, by nature, an incremental process, requiring analysis, planning and review. Quality data should inform policy decisions and an agreed set of policy principles need to be articulated and understood across government about how the government can better meet the needs of women.

6.4. The committee has identified where it believes improvement can be made in the following areas:

- government policy coordination processes;
- measurement of outcomes;
- the development of information and data;
- the role of the ACT Office of Women in directing policy; and
- providing policy focus in relation to isolated and marginalised women.

6.5. The committee is of the view that advancing policies that are of direct benefit to women is a whole-of-government responsibility and not merely the domain of a specialised women's agency. All public policy implementations affect the status of women in our community and it is

crucial that policy makers from all areas of government are cognisant of the issues and goals associated with women's policy.

## **Women's policy – recent background**

### **The Office for Women**

6.6. The Office for Women has a 'key role in the development of a co-ordinated strategic approach to women's issues, providing a framework to enable data collection, the identification of gaps and duplication, the establishment of performance measurement and reporting mechanisms, and the focusing of priorities'.<sup>167</sup> The ACT Office for Women is the key driver in coordinating a whole-of-government approach to women's policy.

6.7. The establishment of the Office for Women, underscores the Government's commitment to the advancement of women and the committee was impressed to learn that the Office reports directly to the Chief Minister rather than via the standard departmental chain of command. The committee believes that these reporting arrangements are advantageous to all involved with women's policy and the Minister for Women and should be continued.

### **Ministerial Advisory Council on Women**

6.8. The committee notes that, 'The Council has a key role in assisting the Government develop and implement policies to advance the status of women. In performing this role the Council will act as a link between ACT women and the Government'.<sup>168</sup>

6.9. The committee met with representatives of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women to discuss share information and ideas about the development of direction of women's policy issues. The committee was advised that the Council consults regularly with relevant community organisations and individuals to identify concerns and propose relevant action.

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<sup>167</sup> Submission 30, p iv.

<sup>168</sup> <http://www.act.gov.au/government/womenact/MACOW/macow.html>



## The Women's Action Plan

6.10. As noted earlier in the report, the previous government, through its Women's Consultative Council (precursor to the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women), developed an action plan for women: *ACT Women's Action Plan 2000-2001*. In its final implementation report on the Action Plan, the Office of Multicultural and Community Affairs outlined the background of the plan in the following terms:

The ACT Women's Action Plan 2000-2001 was launched in March 2000, as part of the Government's commitment to making a real and measurable difference to the status of women...

The ACT Women's Action Plan 2000-20001 was developed following an audit of ACT Government programs to see how well they were meeting the needs of women. The audit included:

- Focus groups and meetings with women in the community;
- A survey of ACT women about work and family issues;
- An assessment of recent ACT Government strategic plans;
- Collection of information from relevant government program managers to assess how well their programs and purchase agreements facilitate services meeting the needs of women; and
- A forum of government and non-government service providers.

The Action Plan is based around a range of government initiatives aimed at improving the status of women. The Action Plan also identifies issues and recommends strategies to raise the awareness of service providers about gender issues and their importance in relation to all clients' access to services programs. The Action Plan encourages government agencies to consider that all their policies and programs should meet women's needs, as well as continuing to support Government services for women such as the Women's Information and Referral Centre, the ACT Government Women's website and the Women's Health Service.

The Action Plan complements other government strategies including:

- Towards a Society for All Ages: Forward Plan for Older People in the ACT 2000-2003;
- ACT Young People's Framework;

- Framework for a Multicultural Australian Capital Territory 2001-2005; and
- ACT Government Response to: Sharing the Benefits Final Report of the Poverty Task Group.

The Action Plan provides a framework for a whole-of-government approach to improve the status of women in the ACT. It does not include all programs for women but addresses the most current issues.<sup>169</sup>

6.11. The committee heard that the action plan was a valuable tool for implementing and monitoring policies which advance the interests of women. A former member of the Women’s Consultative Council advised the committee that:

The Women’s Consultative Council was making sure that things were ticked off and actually done. It was very useful. Rather than waiting for someone to produce a report at the end of the time to say that it didn’t happen, we had a monitoring role and could say, “No, you haven’t done this; you haven’t done that.”. The chamber had monthly meetings and I was advised on how that was going.<sup>170</sup>

6.12. However, a view was also expressed that there was still significant work to be done in implementing some of the actions outlined in the plan. A former member of the consultative council advised the committee that, ‘From my point of view, it was not fully implemented by the change of the government’.<sup>171</sup> The committee supports the key themes outlined in the 2000-2001 action plan and the agenda for action articulated therein.

6.13. The committee believes that it is time to renew the women’s action planning process and suggests below that the Government’s submission to the inquiry already provides useful information on priority actions. In the development of a revised women’s action plan, the committee supports ongoing community consultation through the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women with the assistance of the ACT Office of Women.

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<sup>169</sup> ACT Women’s Action Plan 2000-2001 – Final Implementation Report, p 1.

<sup>170</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 13, Ms Fogarty.

<sup>171</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p 12, Ms Fogarty.

## Improving information and data collection

### Needs mapping

6.14. The committee received a submission from the Government outlining the entire range of ACT Government programs utilised by women. The document identifies: what needs-analysis has been conducted in relation to each area of service provision; gaps in services; any remedial measures that are being implemented to address gaps; and where interagency coordination and collaboration may bring about improved service delivery responses.

6.15. This comprehensive submission provides an excellent indication of where current services can be improved to more comprehensively address the needs of women. Indeed, the committee believes that it provides a substantial basis on which to devise a new women's action plan. The committee is aware that the information provided in the Government submission has been compiled in a database by the ACT Office of Women. The Government informed the committee that:

This database will include details of program objectives and performance measures. Ongoing review of this database, in collaboration with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, will assist in identifying gaps in service provision, overlapping initiatives, and provide ongoing analysis of programs. A high quality database that is continually reviewed will provide an effective mechanism for the coordination, development and delivery of programs relating to women at a whole-of-government level.<sup>172</sup>

6.16. The committee believes the compilation and analysis of this information will be a valuable tool in helping form service delivery priorities for women as well as women's policy directions.

6.17. It seems sensible that a new action plan should incorporate any unfinished action items from the 2000-2001 plan.

### Recommendation 53

**The committee recommends that the Government initiate the development of a new women's action plan, involving extensive consultation with ACT women through the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women and other fora.**

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<sup>172</sup> Submission 30, p vi.

## Gender auditing/disaggregated data

6.18. Many witnesses and submitters advocated the need for better empirical data about service funding and usage vis-à-vis women. In evidence before the committee WEL noted that, ‘...one of the things that WEL ACT and the YWCA Canberra would like to see is that all major statistical indicators within ACT government reports include a gender disaggregated component, and that these statistics be both compiled as a gender report and repeated through the individual departmental reports as well.’<sup>173</sup>

6.19. One key proposal forwarded in the ACT Women’s Action Plan 2000-2001 was the collection, analysis and reporting of gender disaggregated data on service use and funding. The committee is aware that this process is not yet completed. The implementation report on the plan notes that this process must continue, ‘to ensure that gender disaggregated data is used to inform policy development, and to ensure that this data is available for all areas within agencies, and used to report to women and the community’.<sup>174</sup>

6.20. The committee asked the Government to outline its policy on uniform reporting requirements for both government agencies and government-funded programs to provide statistics on service utilisation and funding with gender disaggregated components. The Government advised the committee that currently there is no requirement. However, the government noted that data was collected in the following ways:

- through a common data collection process where gender auditing occurs as part of this collection, though it is not compulsory for clients to provide this information. The data collection process is a contractual requirement for services but is not a performance reporting requirement for acquittal. (For example this is an agreement that the Domestic Violence Crisis Service has with Youth and Community Services);
- as part of their funding application services are required to provide information on the number of males and females who are using their services. (For example organisations funded through the Bureau of Sport and Recreation); and

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<sup>173</sup> Transcript, 29 May 2002, p64, Ms Andrew.

<sup>174</sup> ACT Women’s Action Plan 2000-2001 – Final Implementation Report, p 3.

- in some cases reporting of gender breakdown is part of the acquittal process for funding. This is demonstrated in the case of a number of the Schools as Communities Projects funded through family Services.

6.21. The committee supports an ongoing process to collect gender breakdowns in relation to funding, agencies and services. However, the committee is aware that disaggregated data from every service, agency and funding program may not be of any particular assistance to policy makers and that placing uniform requirements across the whole of government could result in unnecessary red tape.

6.22. Instead, the committee believes that the Government should systematically identify in which programs, agencies and funding mechanisms can gender disaggregated data add value to policy making and guide strategic planning. Following this Government should develop uniform reporting requirements so that data can be collected from the relevant areas in a compatible form, collated, analysed during policy reviews and reported to the community. In terms of reporting, this process should be incorporated into the committee's proposal to develop a women's report card in the ACT discussed below.

#### **Recommendation 54**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) The Government systematically identify in which programs, government agencies and funding mechanisms will the reporting of gender-disaggregated data will add value to the policy development process;**
- b) the Government develop uniform reporting requirements in relation to the provision of gender statistics;**
- c) The Government analyse disaggregated data to assess the existence of any inequalities and to provide a basis for strategic policy development; and**
- d) The Government report analysis of this data to the community.**

## **Policy focus on isolated women**

6.23. The committee came to the view that isolated and marginalised women are in need of greater attention in terms of policy development and service delivery. Isolated women are amongst the most disadvantaged in our community and should be a priority concern for government. The committee learnt that isolation can arise as a result of poverty, disability, violence, mental illness, drug and alcohol use, age, family responsibilities or homelessness. The committee also learned that many Indigenous women and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can be classified as isolated.

6.24. Isolation in the community entails limited mobility, the absence of social networks and a sense of being disconnected from other people and social structures. Many witnesses informed the committee that that outreach programs from a range of service delivery areas are an important service measure in reaching these women and beginning to address their needs. Following on from this, the committee would like to see the Government develop specialised strategies and outreach services for isolated women in the ACT community.

6.25. The committee also believes that the ACT Office of Women and its policy agenda would be well served by the recruitment of Indigenous staff and staff from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to provide ‘culturally-nuanced’ policy advice.

### **Recommendation 55**

**The committee recommends that:**

- a) the ACT Office of Women prioritise policy development in areas affecting isolated and marginalised women in the ACT; and**
- b) developed specialised strategies, including outreach, to address the needs of women who are isolated in the community.**

## **Interdepartmental co-ordination**

**The cabinet submission process**

6.26. The committee was advised that all cabinet submissions to Government must be reviewed by the ACT Office for Women to ensure

that women's issues are appropriately raised and addressed in government decision-making processes. The committee notes that the Office for Women only has this opportunity at the end of the cabinet submission process. This, in the committee's view, provides limited capacity for the Office for Women to provide effective input regarding women's issues. The committee was advised that the Office for Women has been promoting itself to government departments in an effort to encourage policy officers to contact their staff during the incipient stage of policy development to provide advice about the broader women's policy framework.

6.27. The committee supports a more active role for the Office of Women in providing input and advice on cabinet submissions. It seems that the Office can make a more meaningful contribution if its advice is provided *during* the preparation of cabinet submissions and not after. To this end, the committee believes that departments need to educate staff about the importance of consulting with the ACT Office for Women in the preparation of policy proposals that go before government. The committee believes that cabinet submission should identify what consultation has been undertaken with the ACT Office of Women, particularly in relation to policy proposals that impact on women.

## **Recommendation 56**

### **The Committee recommends the Government:**

- a) ensure its departments are educated about the importance of seeking advice from the ACT Office for Women during the preparation of cabinet submissions; and**
- b) require that where government departments are undertaking policy development work they demonstrate in cabinet submission documents the nature of the advice sought and provided by the ACT Office for Women.**

## **Reporting and monitoring**

### **Interjurisdictional comparisons**

6.28. The committee thought it useful to examine some of the reporting frameworks and processes of other states and territories in relation to

women's issues and services. The ACT Office for Women provided the committee with a detailed breakdown the manner in which women's policy is being directed, monitored and reported in the states, the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory. The committee has included this information as an attachment (Attachment A).

## Women's report card

6.29. The committee is aware that other jurisdictions regularly produce report card documents outlining key statistical indicators in relation to women. In particular, the committee reviewed the Western Australian Government's annual fact sheet which was produced by the WA Women's Policy Office in collaboration with the Australian Bureau of Statistics. It contains a wide range of useful indicators such as:

- age profiles;
- participation in sport;
- morbidity and mortality indicators;
- labour force participation;
- unemployment;
- drug and alcohol use;
- personal safety indicators – both perceptions of safety as well as criminal offences against women;
- average weekly earnings;
- women in senior positions within the bureaucracy, unions, academia, boards of directors and government boards and committees;
- numbers of women in the WA parliament, local councils and the Federal Parliament; and
- numbers of women who practice as barristers and members of the judiciary.

6.30. The committee believes that this document provides an excellent reporting model which the Government should consider adopting. The committee believes that a report card of this kind should identify emerging issues in relation to women's policy.



## **Recommendation 57**

**The committee recommends that the Government produce an ACT women's report card to be published annually containing key statistical indicators on the status of women in the community such as those outlined in the WA Women's Fact sheet.**

## **Budget papers**

6.31. The committee is aware that the Northern Territory Government provides details on policy proposals affecting women in its budget papers. The committee believes that this approach could play a positive role in highlighting the policy and funding issues that affect women as well as bringing a greater degree of focus and attention in the minds of all working in government to the needs of women.

## **Recommendation 58**

**The committee recommends that the Government outlines in the budget papers its yearly expenditure proposals in relation to women's programs and programs which impact on women.**

## **Social research**

6.32. The committee pondered whether the Government could develop closer linkages with post-graduate programs at Canberra's universities to facilitate social research projects on issues affecting women.

6.33. One of the methods adopted by universities in ensuring their research profile is diverse and relevant, is that they actively canvas for a student to take on a specific project which has been proposed by a university.

6.34. The other, is that candidates submit a proposal for a research project which is then assessed on its merit by the university, and then accepted as it stands, accepted with suggested adjustments, or is rejected. This is particularly the case for submission of proposals for a particular scholarship.

6.35. The committee proposes that the Government consider an alliance with a relevant faculty/department of one or more of the ACT's

universities whereby it sponsors a research position focusing on issues affecting women in the ACT.

6.36. This support could be in the form of a research scholarship. For example:

- Each year the Government could support research into a specified topic or problem affecting women in the ACT, eg. “the social impact of drug use on women in the ACT population”; or
- The Government could annually support “an appropriate research proposal which is relevant to issues affecting women in”. In this case, the university would present the opportunity to postgraduate students for submissions of research proposals which are targeted to this scholarship. The university and a Government representative could select the relevant candidate to receive the scholarship.

6.37. The university could offer a HECS position to a Masters or Honours programme with the Government providing a stipend to cover the costs of running the research (i.e. questionnaire application, paper/stationery costs, photocopying, recording equipment hire, cost of tapes, cost of transcription etc) to a specific amount.

6.38. The committee believes that such an initiative would give the Government a useful role in supporting and facilitating relevant research projects which it can use to help inform and assess policy options.

### **Recommendation 59**

**The committee recommends that the Government investigate the establishment of women’s research partnerships with one or more of Canberra’s universities, aimed at undertaking specialised research projects on issues affecting women in the ACT.**

Katy Gallagher  
Chair

15 November 2002

## **Appendix 1 – List of submissions**

1. ACT Government
2. Ms Christina Ryan
3. Ms Judy Harrison
4. Ms Patricia Eastreal
5. Val Thomson & Hazel Moir
6. Ms Marie Coleman, National Foundation of Australian Women
7. Ms Sara Bhas
8. Ms Mary Pekin, Relationships Australia Canberra & Region Inc
9. Ms Dennise Simpson, Domestic Violence Crisis Service Inc
10. Ms Julia Biles, Older Womens Network Inc
11. Ms Winsome Willow, Inanna Inc
12. Ms Maria Petriella
13. Ms Robyn Holder, ACT Domestic Violence Prevention Council
14. Ms Filomena Colavecchio, Conflict Resolution Service
15. Ms Tania Browne, Women’s Centre for Health Matters Inc
16. Ms Jacqui Pearce, Toora Women Inc
17. Ms Kasy Chambers, YWCA, Women’s Electoral Lobby ACT
18. Ms Mary Joseph, ACT Right to Life Assc
19. Ms Ara Cresswell, Beryl Women’s Refuge
20. Ms Rosemary Budavari, Women’s Legal Centre
21. Confidential submission
22. Ms Michelle Symons
23. Multicultural Women’s Advocacy ACT Inc

24. Ms Philida Sturgiss-Hoy
25. Ms Judy Harrison
26. Ms Christina Ryan, Women with Disabilities ACT
27. Canberra Rape Crisis Centre
28. Ms Diane Lucas, Canberra Rape Crisis Centre
29. Mr John Murray, Chief Police Officer of the ACT
30. ACT Government

## **Appendix 2 – List of witnesses**

### **Public hearing 29 May 2002**

1. Women with Disabilities ACT
2. Chamber of Women in Business
3. Domestic Violence Crisis Service
4. The Youth Coalition
5. Women's Legal Centre
6. Older Women's Network
7. YWCA
8. Women's Electoral Lobby ACT
9. Heather Reid
10. Women's Centre for Health Matters
11. Nadia Docrat, ANU Women's Officer

### **Public hearing 29 July**

1. Multicultural Women's Advocacy
2. Ms Sara South
3. Women's Information and Referral Centre
4. ACT office for Women
5. Australian Federal Police
6. Toora Women Inc.

## **Appendix 3 - Acronyms**

ABS – Australian Bureau of Statistics

ANU – Australian National University

DVCS – Domestic Violence Crisis Service

OWN – Older Women’s Network

WEL – Women’s Electoral Lobby

WiRC – Women’s Information and Referral Centre

WIRRED – Women’s Information, Resources and Referral on Drugs and Dependency

YWCA – Young Women’s Christian Association

WWD ACT – Women with Disabilities ACT





## Attachment A

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
CWLTH	Working for Women: Office of the Status of Women Strategic Directions 2001-2003.	2001-2003	OSW key policy goal areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ economic self-sufficiency and security for women throughout their lives;</li> <li>○ optimal status and position for women;</li> <li>○ the elimination of violence in the lives of women; and</li> <li>○ the maintenance of optimal health and well-being throughout women's lives.</li> </ul>	Monitoring and reporting is undertaken on two levels: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Internally – by way of reporting against a tactics outlined in a detailed work plan; and</li> <li>○ Externally – by reporting against work set out in Portfolio Budget Statements in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's Annual Report.</li> </ul>	<a href="http://www.osw.dpmc.gov.au/pdfs/Stratdirect/booklet.pdf">www.osw.dpmc.gov.au/pdfs/Stratdirect/booklet.pdf</a>

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
NSW	NSW Government  Action Plan for Women	2000 – 2002	<p>The Action Plan 2000–2002 outlines the NSW Government's commitments, priorities and initiatives for women. The Department for Women has collected information from a wide range of Government agencies about their activities and commitments for women to produce the Action Plan Updates for 2001. Also published is a subset of specific initiatives for Indigenous women, rural women, and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The Updates provide an overview of progress, new developments and renewed Action Plans in the key areas of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ families and communities;</li> <li>○ violence and safety;</li> <li>○ work;</li> <li>○ access to justice and equality before the law;</li> <li>○ power, decision-making and leadership;</li> <li>○ education and training; and</li> <li>○ health.</li> </ul>	<p>Over the next two years (from May 2001), in light of input and feedback from the community, ongoing analysis of women's needs and evaluation of the operation of government policies and services, changes and additions will be made to the Action Plan initiatives and commitments.</p> <p>Each year, a report and updated Action Plan will be published. Under the Annual Reports Act, agencies are required to report on their Action Plan Commitments in their Annual Reports.</p>	<p><a href="http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/pdf/action/ap2001.pdf">www.women.nsw.gov.au/pdf/action/ap2001.pdf</a></p>

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
WA	Plan currently in development.		<p>A Women's convention has been held where goals and priorities were developed in seven key areas. The key areas are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ fairness in the workplace;</li> <li>○ health;</li> <li>○ family care;</li> <li>○ seniors;</li> <li>○ safety;</li> <li>○ opportunity; and</li> <li>○ the law.</li> </ul> <p>Forums will be held with stakeholders shortly to develop this into a plan.</p>	Monitoring of progress of the plan will be by way of reporting in the Annual Report.	N/A

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
VIC	<p>Valuing Victoria's Women: Forward Plan</p> <p>(Key initiative in the Forward Plan – <i>Draft Women's Safety Strategy – Key Directions in Women's Safety</i>. A comprehensive five-year Strategy will be available from September.)</p>	2000 - 2003	<p>Valuing Victoria's Women details the strategies and initiatives being undertaken across Government to fulfil the Government's policy commitments for women.</p> <p>The Forward Plan addresses four key themes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Representation and Equity;</li> <li>○ Education, Work and Economic Independence;</li> <li>○ Health, Well-being and Community Strengthening; and</li> <li>○ Justice and Safety.</li> </ul> <p>It is in these four key themes that Government is implementing specific programs and policies to improve the lives of Victorian women and their families.</p>	<p>The <i>First Update Report 2001</i> provides an account of the progress of the Government's commitments to women outlined in the Forward Plan. It is organised according to the themes of the Forward Plan.</p> <p>The Report details the Key Achievements, Current Status and New Initiatives that have impacted on the Forward Plan.</p> <p>The <i>Key Achievements</i> section details a number of those initiatives, which have been completed or are substantially underway. It provides information on actions undertaken by Government to implement initiatives, and the impact of these on women.</p> <p>The Victorian Office for Women's Policy also prepares a Traffic Lights Report for the Minister and Agency Heads. The report indicates for each initiative whether they are green (on track), red (not on track) and yellow (happening but behind schedule).</p>	<p><a href="http://www.women.vic.gov.au/owasite.nsf/pages/publications">www.women.vic.gov.au/owasite.nsf/pages/publications</a></p>

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
TAS	No specific Plan or Strategy current in place.		<p>Goals to address issues for women are outlined in the Draft Corporate Plan 2002-2005 for the Tasmanian Department of Premier and Cabinet (not publicly available at this stage).</p> <p>The priority program areas are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ policy research and development in relation to priority issues including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women and Safety;</li> <li>- Women and Work;</li> <li>- Women and Human Rights.</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ women's development programs;</li> <li>○ information, referral and support service;</li> <li>○ administration of women's development small grants program; and</li> <li>○ women in decision-making and leadership.</li> </ul>	Each program or project has a defined target to measure whether or not each output has been achieved.	N/A
SA	No Plan or Strategy currently in place due to change of Government				

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
NT	<p>Currently updating the previous Action Plan <i>Looking Beyond 2000 Women in the Northern Territory</i> due to change of Government</p> <p>(also has Domestic Violence Strategy 2000 – 2004 and an Aboriginal Family Violence Strategy, both of which are currently being updated.)</p>	N/A	<p>The updated Plan will probably focus on the following three key program areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ leadership;</li> <li>○ achievers and Champions; and</li> <li>○ elimination of Violence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Focus groups and other community consultation currently being undertaken is providing feedback on what has been done and what issues need further attention.</li> <li>○ An Interdepartmental Committee Women’s Policy Roundtable meets to share information and to provide updates.</li> <li>○ An Indigenous Women’s Policy Roundtable to look at issues for Indigenous women is currently being established.</li> </ul>	N/A

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
QLD	Women and Girls in the <i>Smart State</i> – Annual Action Plan (AAP)	2001-2002	<p>The Government is developing its agenda for Queensland women and girls based on statewide consultations, research and best practice here and overseas. Four priority areas have been identified:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ improved economic security and long-term self-sufficiency;</li> <li>○ optimal health and well-being;</li> <li>○ freedom from violence and better access to justice; and</li> <li>○ better participation in leadership and decision-making.</li> </ul> <p>There will be a particular emphasis on meeting the needs of women and girls who are currently the most disadvantaged, including those living in poverty and members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.</p> <p>This is a whole-of-government plan, which relies on all sections of government taking responsibility for women as their clients. This means that all policies, services and programs should be assessed for the benefits they will provide to women, their impact upon women and their accessibility to women.</p> <p>To build on the AAP, the Office for Women is now working with key stakeholders to develop a strategic policy framework for women and girls in Queensland. This whole-of-government framework will allow</p>	<p>The Office for Women coordinates the plan's development across government agencies and has the responsibility to monitor and report on the outcomes. The plan includes timelines and responsible agencies.</p> <p>Future action plans will build on this plan and will report on progress and outcomes from the strategies.</p>	<a href="http://www.qldwomen.qld.gov.au">www.qldwomen.qld.gov.au</a>

State/ Territory	Title of Plan	Duration	Major Goals/targets	Monitoring & reporting	Website
NZ	Statement of intent of the NZ Ministry of Women's Affairs	2002 - 2005	<p>The Government has established clear expectations for the reduction of social inequality, modernising and transforming the economy and effectively responding to the challenge of globalisation, not least by ensuring that people are able to develop to their full potential.</p> <p>In this context, the Government has been working towards its longer-term Goals for Women:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ equity;</li> <li>○ opportunity and choice;</li> <li>○ full and active participation;</li> <li>○ adequate resources;</li> <li>○ no discrimination; and</li> <li>○ a society that values the contribution of women.</li> </ul> <p>The Government also expects that public sector agencies will engage appropriately with interest groups and communities.</p>	<p>The effectiveness of the Ministry's strategies to enhance outcomes for women is monitored through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ the uptake of gender analysis through GIS statements in Cabinet papers and the analysis of Cabinet papers going to the Cabinet Social Equity Committee;</li> <li>○ evaluation of papers and decisions that impact on women where the Ministry has given specific advice;</li> <li>○ feedback from the Minister of Women's Affairs on the Quarterly Report Questionnaire;</li> <li>○ feedback from government departments through relationship meetings; and</li> <li>○ feedback from stakeholders through regular meetings and periodic surveys.</li> </ul>	<p><a href="http://www.mwa.govt.nz/pdf/Statement_of_Intent_2002.pdf">www.mwa.govt.nz/pdf/Statement of Intent 2002.pdf</a></p>



