

2020

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

STATEMENT

**ANNUAL STATEMENT ON THE
STATUS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN THE ACT**

**Presented by
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Minister for Women**

As the Minister for Women and the Minister for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence, I welcome the opportunity to once again acknowledge and celebrate International Women's Day on 8 March by providing a Statement to the Assembly on the Status of Women and Girls in the ACT.

The first International Women's Day rally in Australia was held in Sydney in March 1928. Over 90 years later, we have made significant progress towards gender equality. However, 90 years is a long time and we still have a lot of progress to make.

This year, the theme for International Women's Day was **Each for Equal**. It acknowledged that in an equal world we are all empowered to participate and thrive. It also highlights the essential role that we each play in realising equality. "Individually, we're all responsible for our own thoughts and actions - all day, every day. Collectively, each one of us can help create a gender equal world."

Making meaningful changes to gender equality requires two things: it requires us to consider our actions, challenge the way we understand gender and to act to bring about change. It requires thoughts and actions.

There are still many areas of women's lives that are different to men's – access to the same employment opportunities, safety in their own homes and out in our community, the expectation by many that women still undertake the majority of household and caring duties despite also taking part in paid employment.

In order to change these experiences and expectations, we need to change the larger narrative about women and men, girls and boys, that perpetuates the unequal opportunities for, and safety of, women and girls in our community.

Gender inequality is the primary driver of violence against women. As a community, we need to take every opportunity to challenge ourselves and those around us in relation to how we view and treat women.

In the ACT, there are many dedicated organisations and individuals, including the ACT Government, who continue to strive towards equality for women and girls. The ACT is already on its way, for example, the ACT has the highest level of workforce participation by women at 67.6 per cent compared to 59.8 per cent nationally. We also have a lower unemployment rate for women at 3.1 per cent in the ACT compared to 4.0 per cent nationally. Average weekly earnings for women in the ACT, as of May 2019, were just over \$1,300, more than \$300 higher than the national average.

Canberra is one of the best places to be a woman, but disadvantage is often hidden behind high averages. In the ACT, women retire with significantly less superannuation than men, and we continue to see more women than men accessing homelessness services. More young women in the ACT have mental health issues such as depression and anxiety than in the rest of Australia, and women still take on the bulk of unpaid work.

International Women's Day 2020 was a special one for the ACT, in that it also marked the launch and commencement of **Equity Together**, the ACT Government's *Second Action Plan 2020-22* under the 10-year *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26*. The Second Action Plan officially launched at the *ACT Women's Awards* on 5 March.

The ACT Women's Plan, which is being implemented through a series of three-year action plans, aims to create a Canberra community that 'values and respects women and girls, commits to gender equality and promotes and protects the rights, wellbeing and potential of all women and girls'.

The theme of this year's International Women's Day, **Each for Equal**, is consistent with the theme of the government's own Second Action Plan, which commits us to achieving **Equity Together**. Equity is about fairness. It is about acknowledging that women start in different places and are not all afforded equal opportunities. Together, we must strive to make equity for women a reality.

International Women's Day 2020 was also marked by UN Women's theme: **I am Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights**. The theme is aligned with UN Women's new multigenerational campaign, **Generation Equality**, which marks the 25th anniversary of the **Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action**, the visionary agenda for women's rights and empowerment everywhere.

Generation Equality is about equal pay; shared unpaid care and domestic work; an end to sexual harassment and all forms of violence; health-care services that respond to women's needs; and equal participation in political life for women and girls.

The Second Action Plan includes targeted actions to improve outcomes for women and girls in the ACT and ensure they are supported to access the same opportunities as men and boys. In order to pursue equity for all women and girls, it is essential to acknowledge people's unique experiences and needs and the differing support they may require depending on factors such as cultural background, level of education and sexuality. Some women and girls are more likely to face additional barriers to inclusion and will need more support to overcome these.

The Second Action Plan was developed together with community. **Equity Together** is the result of the generous and valuable contributions made by many members of the ACT community over almost a year of consultation, including a Women's Summit held in October 2019.

In particular, I would like to thank my Ministerial Advisory Council on Women for their ongoing and dedicated advice, and support in the development of the Second Action Plan.

Through consultation for the Second Action Plan, we heard from the community that our focus should be in the areas of mental health and wellbeing, gender equity in workplaces, a safe community for women and girls, improved housing support, and accessible services and programs for women and girls. The Second Action Plan has 29 actions grouped under these five objectives.

The ACT Government will continue to work with the community sector and broader ACT community in the delivery of this action plan, ensuring ongoing engagement over the life of the plan so that the best possible outcomes for women and girls can be achieved.

The development of the Second Action Plan was informed by lessons learnt from the *First Action Plan* under the ACT Women's Plan, which ran from 2017-2019. The First Action Plan was ambitious and committed to delivering 100 actions over three years. Ninety-six per cent of the 100 actions to be delivered under the First Action Plan have been completed or are underway. Of the remaining actions, the Office for Women has been working with Directorates to workshop the best ways to achieve these outcomes. Supporting women in the community is, and will always be, the priority of these plans.

Year three of the First Action Plan was dedicated to a review. The year three review of the First Action Plan and reporting against years one and two are all available on the Office for Women website.

The review influenced developing the Second Action Plan. It is targeted and actions were identified through ongoing engagement with the community and drawing on an existing strong research base in order to establish a baseline for progress.

The ACT Women's Summit, held on 14 October 2019, was a significant part of community consultation toward developing the Second Action Plan.

The Summit brought together over 165 stakeholders from the community sector, businesses and government. Attendees with a diverse range of knowledge, expertise, and lived experience worked together to provide advice on actions to be delivered over the next three years.

The Second Action Plan will deliver clear outcomes, through targeted actions and ongoing engagement and coordination with the community, the sector and across the ACT Government.

Given the ongoing disadvantage faced by some women and girls in Canberra, the ACT Government's continued commitment through the ACT Women's Plan and other initiatives is essential. In 2019, the ACT Government delivered a broad range of initiatives to support women and girls in the ACT.

In the area of health, a number of initiatives to better understand and accommodate the needs of women have been progressed. Canberra Health Services now run childbirth classes in languages other than English to increase attendance of non-English speaking women, an initiative that has also won the 2019 Quality in Healthcare ACT Award for person centred care.

Through the First Action Plan, the ACT Government has been working to model best practice gender equality in the workplace, by making the ACT Government one of the best employers for women in the ACT. Initiatives include training on discrimination and equality in the workplace, establishing targets for women on ACT Government boards and committees and developing a women's ACT Public Service mentoring program.

Supporting women into leadership roles so their voices can be heard equally in our community and in business is an essential element of achieving gender equality. This is why the ACT Government has set a target for 50 per cent female representation on all ACT Government boards and committees, which we are very close to meeting at 48 per cent.

Under the First Action Plan, we also set a target for 40 per cent female representation on triennially funded sporting organisations boards by 2020. The majority of ACT peak sporting bodies have met this target and many others are well on their way.

This 40 per cent target has been strongly committed to with achievement of the target being linked to funding post-2019. A 10 per cent funding bonus will be applied in 2020 for those that have achieved the target as at 31 December 2019.

The ACT Government continues to support women into positions of leadership, professionally and otherwise, through our Audrey Fagan Leadership Program. Run by the Office for Women, this program includes a range of free workshops and mentoring to ACT women and is aimed at increasing women's confidence, self-promotion and governance skills. This year we launched the Audrey Fagan Communication program which is aimed at improving women's confidence in public speaking and self-promotion, both of which are identified as significant barriers for women seeking to progress their careers. In 2019, more than 80 women participated in the Audrey Fagan Leadership programs.

Female students have also been supported to have their voices heard in 2019. For example, the *Girls: It's Your Move* program supported female students to lead change in their schools by encouraging them to develop innovative projects to empower, inspire and motivate young women to get active.

In November 2019 a *Girls: It's Your Move Festival of Great Ideas* was held, with more than 75 female students from three schools sharing solutions they identified throughout 2019.

For International Women's Day, ACT Public School students were invited to a system-wide event that brought students together to celebrate, look at real-life issues relating to equity, and empower students to be change-makers in their local communities.

Five students from each ACT public secondary school attended the event which included keynote speakers sharing their experiences of equality and how they have influenced change throughout their careers. The event was recognised as a Winner for Best Practice in the International Women's Day Awards.

Improving the opportunities available to women in traditionally male-dominated roles has also remained a priority in 2019. The Women in Trades Grants Program again supported this priority by funding eight programs to improve advocacy, engagement, information sharing and support for the attraction and retention of women in traditionally male-dominated trades.

The ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) continued targeted recruitment in ACT Fire & Rescue, which increased the number of women in firefighter roles by four in 2019, bringing the total number of female firefighters to 18.

In 2019, Ms Georgiena Whelan was appointed the first female Commissioner of the ESA, and ACT Fire & Rescue appointed Ms Katherine Bonn, the first female to reach the rank of Commander. The visibility of women in roles such as these is extremely important. The more women and girls see this, the more they will be able to imagine the possibility for themselves.

In order to further grow awareness and shape change around female participation in male-dominated roles, the Canberra Institute of Technology is developing an advertising campaign featuring women in traditionally male-dominated roles to encourage more women to undertake study for these careers.

The government has continued to roll out initiatives under the Safer Families Package which seeks to address domestic and family violence, improve women's safety and provide additional supports to families, women and children dealing with the psychological, physical, emotional and financial costs of violence.

As part of the Safer Families Package, the ACT Government committed to developing and delivering frontline worker training. The training will provide 21,000 public service staff with the capability to recognise and respond effectively to domestic and family violence.

Roll out of foundation training for ACT public servants and managers commenced in 2019. More intensive training for frontline roles will commence in 2020.

Addressing family violence within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community is also a strategic priority under the *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028* which Minister Stephen-Smith launched in March 2019.

It is vital that women and girls can participate fully and equally in our community. In order to support them to do this, the Office for Women provides grants each year for projects that improve the status and lives of women and girls, help them return to the workforce, prevent violence against women and their children, and allow young women to pursue their interests and passions. Each year almost \$360,000 is available through four grants programs. These grants are highly regarded and have worked to change the lives of many women and girls in the ACT.

In 2019, the Office for Women expanded the Return to Work Program to address the barriers that women face in returning to the workforce. Funding through the Future Skills for Future Work grants program is supporting a partnership with community organisations to deliver additional mentoring and wrap around support for women receiving Return to Work grants.

This funding is also supporting delivery of a series of workshops in north and south Canberra to provide women with the skills, practical support and confidence to return to employment or education and training.

During 2019, the ACT Government introduced several new programs and initiatives at the Alexander Maconochie Centre which supported improved participation by female detainees through the provision of gender-responsive and culturally relevant programs. The introduction of these initiatives led to enriched cultural services for women detainees, assisted with maintaining cultural identity, enhanced opportunities for learning, and helped to equip women with general living skills required for transition back to the community.

In the area of housing, the ACT government committed over \$6.5 million in the 2018-19 budget to provide more front line homelessness services. As part of this funding, the ACT Government successfully launched two new homelessness services in 2019 to support vulnerable women. The first of these is the YWCA's Next Door which is a specialist service that assists older women to access and maintain affordable and safe homes in the ACT. Since this was launched in August 2019, 32 women have been supported through the accommodation program. Twelve of these women have secured tenancies.

The second service is the Homelessness Service for Asylum Seekers and families with uncertain immigration status which is managed by the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services.

This program was launched in May 2019 and has so far provided medium term accommodation and case management to support 10 clients, four of whom are single women with children.

The ACT Government is also progressing the design of a second Common Ground in Dickson which is based on Housing First principles and will provide 40 social and affordable homes. In addition to single people and couples, the second Common Ground in Dickson will support older women, single parents and families with children. The Common Ground model is designed to accommodate a mix of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and low-income tenants.

These are just a small number of the important initiatives taking place across our community to support improved opportunities and outcomes for women and girls in the ACT.

In closing, I would like to reiterate how important working collaboratively is to achieving gender equality.

In delivering the Second Action Plan, the ACT Government will be working with the community sector and broader community to encourage and support the changes required to achieve gender equality.

The Second Action Plan is part of the ACT Women's Plan, but it is not only for those who identify as women and girls, it is for everybody in our community.

This goal can only be realised with engagement and commitment from across the Canberra community. Achieving gender equality is not just the role of women and girls. It is not just the role of government. It is the role of community organisations, schools, businesses and individuals.

I encourage everyone to take the time to consider the influence each of us can have in our workplaces, at home and in public places. To model appropriate behaviours. To shape perceptions of gender. To improve gender equality for our daughters, partners, mothers, sisters and all women and girls living in the ACT.

Gender equality is critical to ensuring a safe, vibrant and fair Canberra.