

2025

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

ELEVENTH ASSEMBLY

**REGISTRY WEDDINGS - PROPOSED ESTABLISHMENT
ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION OF 16 MAY 2024
GOVERNMENT RESPONSE**

**Presented by
Tara Cheyne MLA
Minister for City and Government Services
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Introduction

On 14 May 2024, the ACT Legislative Assembly passed a resolution regarding the establishment of Registry Marriages, calling on the ACT Government to investigate the establishment of registry marriages in the ACT in consultation with the community.

The below provides a summary response against the call on Government within the Assembly Resolution.

Response to Assembly Resolution

The ACT Government acknowledges that the cost-of-living pressures can be challenging for many of our community members and recognises that couples choosing to marry will incur additional costs associated with the legal process of marriage.

To be legally married, a couple must meet the requirements under the *Marriage Act 1961* and *Marriage Regulations 2017* which include:

- Giving a Notice of Intended Marriage form to an authorised marriage celebrant at least 1 month and no more than 18 months before the wedding date.
- Being married by an authorised marriage celebrant.
- Understanding what marriage means and freely agree to marry.
- The use of specific words during the ceremony.
- Not being already married.
- Not marrying a parent, grandparent, child, grandchild, brother or sister.
- Being at least 18 years old, unless a court has approved a marriage where one person is 16-18 years old.

In 2024, a total of 1,520 marriages were registered in the ACT.

It is important to differentiate between the two key components of a wedding. The first is the ceremony, where the 'legal requirements' are fulfilled, and the second is the reception, a celebratory event typically held afterward, which usually constitutes a greater portion of the wedding expenses.

The notion of a registry wedding is a simple and straightforward civil marriage ceremony held at a government-run venue, where the legal formalities of marriage are completed. It typically excludes a reception or additional celebrations, making it a lower cost option for couples.

The ACT Government has investigated whether there is a demand for a registry wedding service before committing further resources and public funds to estimate the costs of key factors necessary for implementing the service such as a government venue, staffing, administrative processes, marketing, training, equipment and ongoing day to day costs.

A scan of Australian jurisdictions offering registry weddings showed fees ranging between \$373 to \$1,399.

There are currently over 200 authorised civil celebrants in the ACT who can perform marriages and are considered as the key stakeholders in relation to this motion.

A scan of a sample of ACT celebrant websites showed a 'legal only' option as part of their standard services. This service includes the basic administrative and ceremonial requirements for a legal marriage and appears to be the equivalent of a registry wedding.

The ACT Government consulted with ACT celebrants and 25 celebrants took part in a survey posted on the Canberra Marriage Celebrants Facebook.

The following responses were provided:

- All celebrants offer a 'legal only' service option
- 4% charge less than \$300 for the legal only service
- 52% charge between \$301 to \$500
- 36% charge between \$501 to \$700
- 8% charge over \$701
- 48% of the celebrants surveyed spent between 4-6 hours preparing for and conducting the 'legal only' service, with the next highest bracket being 2-4 hours for 32% of celebrants
- 95% of celebrants allow a couple to choose any location in the Canberra area for their 'legal only' ceremony.

Furthermore, feedback from celebrants included concerns that Government Registry weddings would take away business in a service category that is already well established and catering to varying budgets.

Access Canberra's Births Deaths and Marriages Registry is not aware of any requests from couples seeking a registry style wedding in the past 6 months.

Having considered the information collected through the survey, website scans and discussions with key stakeholders, there does not appear to be a demand for a registry wedding as a low-cost option for marriage because low-cost options already exist.

The current marriage ceremonies offered by celebrants meet all the legal requirements and also afford the opportunity for couples to take advantage of the vast range of possible ceremony locations across the ACT, including their own backyard.

The implementation of ACT Government registry weddings would require considerable resourcing efforts and costs to deliver a service on par with what is currently available in the market.

I am confident that couples seeking to be married in the ACT can engage with one of the many authorised marriage celebrants to find a ceremony option that suits their own preferences and there is no need to establish ACT registry weddings.