

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO *THE STATUS OF
WOMEN IN THE ACT* REPORT**

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Executive Summary

Background

In the lead up to the 2001 Election, the current Government committed to implement an Agenda for the benefit of all women in the Canberra community. This included support for the choices that women want to make in their lives, opportunities for women to participate fully in community life and action to ensure that women can make an equal contribution in public life. Part of this commitment included establishing a Legislative Assembly Select Committee to report on the effectiveness of existing activities and make recommendations for future priorities on issues affecting women.

The Legislative Assembly agreed to the formation of the Select Committee in November 2001. The members of the Committee were Katy Gallagher MLA (Chair), Helen Cross MLA (Deputy Chair), and Roslyn Dundas MLA .

The terms of reference for the Committee were:

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.

The Select Committee tabled the Report, *the Status of Women In the ACT*, in the Legislative Assembly on 21 November 2002.

This document outlines the ACT Government response to the Select Committee's recommendations.

Overview

The *Status of Women in the ACT* Report (the Report) makes 59 recommendations across a broad range of areas impacting on women. Key areas covered by the recommendations include: increasing the level of outreach services, particularly in areas of women's health; increasing the provision of housing for women, including crisis accommodation; increasing resources to protect women from violence; improving safety at public events; provision of counselling, education and support for children, particularly those living with violence; increasing the role for the Office for Women in policy development across Government, including the development of a new Women's Action Plan and working with agencies to improve information, data collection and the reporting and monitoring of issues relating to women.

A theme emphasised throughout the Report is the need to direct a policy focus on meeting the needs of isolated and disadvantaged women in the ACT community. This includes women who 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.

Government Response

Strategic Directions

The ACT Government is committed to a holistic and collaborative cross-agency approach to addressing issues impacting on women. To this end we have established an Office for Women and opened up reporting processes so that the Director of this Office can report directly to the Minister for Women and so enhance the capacity of the Office to advance the interests of women. The Office for Women plays a key role in the development of a coordinated strategic approach and is working closely with all Government agencies to embed processes and practices that will help to maximise outcomes for women in the ACT. This includes the development of a new Strategic Plan for Women, which will identify key outcome areas, and assist to establish processes that provide a strong and sustainable basis for informing and directing Government policies and programs.

This across Government approach will link the new Strategic Plan for Women to other whole of Territory plans such as the Social and Spatial Plans, Towards a Sustainable ACT, the Health Action Plan and the ACT Homelessness Strategy. A key priority for this Government is to develop policies and programs that protect the vulnerable and support those in need. The new Strategic Plan for Women will support a focus on meeting the needs of the isolated and marginalised women in the ACT, referred to in the Report.

This Government is also highly committed to working in partnership with a broad range of community stakeholders and the process for the development of this Strategic Plan will encourage and enable this to occur. The valuable role of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, in providing comment and advice on issues relating to women, is also recognised and the Council will play a key role in contributing to the development of the new Strategic Plan and its ongoing monitoring.

Health and Healthy Lifestyles

The Health Action Plan sets the directions for public health services in the ACT for the next three to five years. The Plan includes the vision for health, the values that underpin our health system and strategic areas of focus.

While the implementation of the Health Action Plan is likely to benefit the whole of the ACT community, there is a strong focus on protecting and supporting those who are vulnerable, including isolated and disadvantaged women. Women's health is a priority area for action in the Plan, which commits to programs for women that have a holistic focus, addressing the social, emotional and physical aspects of health. Maximising accessibility through strategies such as outreach service delivery and regional based services are recognised as an important strategy, not only in relation to health services, but for all services for women.

A key area of the Plan, 'Healthy People', comprises actions and strategies that aim to improve or maximise the health and wellbeing of the population as a whole, and of individuals within the community. These encompass areas highlighted in the health and healthy lifestyles section of the Report and include:

- promoting healthy living/wellbeing;
- improving mental health;
- meeting the health needs of an ageing population;
- working with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for better health outcomes;
- dealing with problematic alcohol and drug use; and
- improving the health of detainees.

The Government recognises the need for comprehensive, cross agency approaches to respond effectively to the social determinants of health. This cross agency approach will link the Health Action Plan to other whole of Territory plans, including the new Strategic Plan for Women.

Economic Security and Education

As an employer, the ACT Government is committed to best practice in encouraging flexible employment arrangements that promote women's participation in the workforce. The Equity and Diversity Framework for the ACT Public Service assists agencies to achieve three key outcomes:

- organisational cultures are inclusive, respectful and responsive and permit and facilitate access to work, equitable career opportunity and maximum participation for all employees;
- EEO target groups are employed at all levels in a workplace marked by an absence of all forms of discrimination; and
- procedural fairness is a feature of all human resource strategies, systems and practices.

The recent introduction of a package of enhanced maternity leave provisions demonstrates this Government's recognition of, and commitment to, the challenges that parents face in balancing work and other commitments.

Women dominate care in the ACT, representing 82% of the 5,200 primary carers and 53% of the total pool of 43,100 carers. The ACT Government is currently developing a 'Caring for Carers' policy and a Carers Advisory Group, made up of representatives from Government, community organisations, carers and care recipients, will oversee its development. The policy will progress the support needs of women who are carers.

Work has also commenced on the development of a Children's Strategy. This across agency Strategy will provide a cohesive overarching direction for children aged 0-12 years. The Strategy will also address the needs of women and families, recognising that the health and well being of children is impacted by factors affecting the family unit as a whole.

The Government recognises that access to relevant and ongoing education and training is important at all stages of peoples' lives, and that the particular needs of different groups of girls and women must be addressed. The ACT Government Schools Plan 2002 - 2004 provides a broad vision for learning and teaching and requires schools to

provide education environments that respect all students and their diverse backgrounds, needs, interests and achievements. The Government also supports a range of training and education programs across the ACT community, including programs targeted at developing employment skills for groups identified as at risk of disadvantage, such as women re-entering the workforce.

Affordable housing is critically important for overall economic and social well being, and is an issue often impacting on the lives of disadvantaged and isolated women. The Affordable Housing Taskforce, established in February 2002, has produced a report making recommendations for strategies to address affordable housing. The Government is currently giving careful consideration to the report recommendations.

Violence Against Women and Women's Safety

The Government recognises the right of everyone in the ACT community to participate, contribute and feel safe in all aspects of their lives. A key component of our commitment to improving women's lives is that every woman in the ACT is free from violence and the fear of violence.

In early 2002, a joint Community and Government Reference Group was formed to oversee the development of an across agency policy Framework to address issues of violence and safety for women in the ACT. This Framework, released in April 2003, will improve outcomes for individuals and families in the ACT who are affected by violence through:

- developing and encouraging an holistic approach to addressing violence and safety issues for women through promotion, coordination and collaboration in policy development, programs and services;
- supporting and enhancing current effective programs through a shared, strategic and measurable approach; and
- encouraging 'best practice' as agencies work in a more collaborative manner to address the needs of women from a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences.

The Framework, and the processes associated with it, will be incorporated into the broader Strategic Plan for Women currently under development.

The ACT Homelessness Strategy, due to be released in September 2003, will also link closely with the Strategic Plan for Women. This Strategy will consider the wide range of issues which impact on women and children escaping domestic violence, who are at high risk of experiencing homelessness. The findings of the Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT, which makes recommendations relating to addressing issues for a range of women, will inform the Strategy.

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS

Health and Healthy Lifestyles

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;**

RESPONSE

Supported

The need for outreach services to isolated and disadvantaged women, including counselling, support and women's health care is acknowledged.

To meet this need, ACT Health provided 'Women's Words' counselling and support outreach services to Tuggeranong, Phillip and Belconnen Health Centres, commencing in February 2003.

A range of outreach services are already available to women in the ACT, such as women's health checks, pap smears and breast examination by nurses at the Belconnen and Tuggeranong Health Centres.

Maternal and Child Health nurses are also available to visit clients with babies in their home, to provide advice on parenting and maternal health issues. All new families are contacted by telephone and are offered this service within two weeks after the birth of a child. More than ninety percent of families in Canberra elect to use this service.

Family care nurses can also deliver services to mothers and young children in their own home, and advise on parenting issues, postnatal depression and child behaviour problems.

Social work and physiotherapy services are also available through ACT Community Care to new mothers and to children in their own home, if required.

- b) investigate the provision of funding for outreach workers to support women with mental health issues and their dependent children.**

RESPONSE

Supported

Support and respite for parents with mental illness and children with mental health problems are currently funded by Mental Health ACT in Respite Care ACT and Barnardos.

Children of parents with mental illness (COPMI) are the focus of the newly funded Child & Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAHMS) Promotion Officer's role. It will be a priority to develop services and strategies to COPMI.

The value of outreach support in sustaining improved outcomes was highlighted in the Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT. The capacity of the SAAP sector to respond to the needs of women leaving SAAP services will be considered in the context of Government priorities in relation to homelessness services, in the development of the Homelessness Strategy.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The provision of appropriate accommodation for clients is part of overall mental health service delivery.

Services currently offering gender specific residential / institutional care for women with mental health issues are: Mental Health Foundation, Creeda, Inanna, Richmond Fellowship and Centacare. Services are available to clients through these organisations either by outreach in their own home, or in a gender specific, home-style, community setting.

Supported accommodation options are currently being considered in the context of the ACT Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Government is active in providing information and services relating to eating disorders issues and has contributed funds to epidemiology research and health promotion to be conducted in the ACT in 2003.

The Mental Health ACT Throsby Place Eating Disorders Program is evaluated regularly to identify service gaps. The need to alter or expand existing services will be considered in this context.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services currently provides funding to gambling counselling services provided by Lifeline and will consider with the service what barriers exist to women accessing this service and how the service delivery model may be improved to better facilitate their access.

The Government will request the ACT Gambling and Racing Commission to examine, in consultation with stakeholders, the possibility of undertaking survey-based research in the Territory to:

- determine if women encounter access barriers when seeking help for gambling problems; and
- if barriers are encountered (or perceived to be encountered), what gender-specific and culturally appropriate gambling counselling services should be provided.

The Government will also request that this issue be placed on the research agenda of the National Gambling Research Program, which was established by the Ministerial Council on Gambling. The Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments will jointly fund this program, which is presently being administered by the Victorian Gambling Research Panel on behalf of the National Gambling Research Secretariat.

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;**

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The 2002/2003 Budget allocated \$1.9million in additional funds to Mental Health Services in the ACT. Increasing capacity for the child and adolescent mental health

sectors, and for older persons' mental health, were selected as priority areas of focus for 2002/03.

This recommendation will be progressed through the implementation of the recommendations of the Mental Health Risk Report, released on 12 December 2002.

b) increase the level of services that are able to accommodate a person's dual diagnosis needs;

RESPONSE

Supported

At present, ACT Health provides funding for the employment of a Dual Diagnosis Project Officer to manage the proposed change process, involving ACT Community Care's Drug and Alcohol Program and Mental Health ACT. Part of the role of the Project Officer is to ensure that Drug and Alcohol and Mental Health services work in an integrated manner to meet the needs of clients presenting with multiple issues.

ACT Health has funded a series of training courses focusing on the needs and management of dual diagnosis clients, resulting in the establishment of a Dual Diagnosis Team, comprising of specialist dual diagnosis case managers. As the training is applied to clinical practice, the service will be able to better 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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The ACT Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan, due to be completed in May 2003, will investigate these issues in consultation with consumers, carers and other stakeholders, and with reference to previous reviews and recommendations.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The availability of appropriate materials in the ACT and other jurisdictions will be investigated. The Office of the Chief Health Officer will discuss this recommendation with service providers and the Office of Multicultural Affairs, to determine appropriate strategies to progress this issue.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

ACT Health will discuss this issue with the Office of Multicultural Affairs and service providers, and give consideration to the best approach to meet this need.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Office of the Chief Health Officer will liaise with the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services (DEYFS), campus sexuality and health promotion officers, and international student officers/advisers to discuss what materials are currently available, the relevance of such materials and what needs to be provided in the future.

DEYFS already requests agents offshore to include safe sex practices information in pre-departure briefings for International secondary school students.

Recommendation 7

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

RESPONSE

Supported

Specialist health education teachers deliver sex education programs via the health curriculum and professional development on sexual health matters is available.

Via the *Health Promoting Schools* program, health committees in individual schools have a role in ensuring the provision of appropriate, up to date, sex education for students. Sex education programs are also delivered within schools via such organisations as Family Planning, the YWCA and the AIDS Action Council.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

Childcare is available at Karralika rehabilitation centre for clients of any residential treatment service provided through the Alcohol and Drug Foundation of the ACT (ADFACT).

In consultation with the ACT drug and alcohol sector, ACT Health will investigate the current provision of childcare services to women seeking drug and alcohol treatment in a residential facility, and identify current needs for the provision of childcare for women seeking drug and alcohol treatment in a residential facility. This will be completed by the end of 2003.

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that:

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

RESPONSE

Supported

A 'benzodiazepines needs assessment', will be undertaken in 2003, including consultation with The ACT Division of General Practice.

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

RESPONSE

Supported

A project plan was developed in late 2002, recommending further investigation into the appropriateness of employing a specialist 'benzodiazepine' worker.

Support and treatment are currently available to those with benzodiazepine dependency through the ACT Drug and Alcohol Service, in consultation with the person's own treating doctor.

A voluntary 'benzodiazepine contract system' is also in place, which enables those with a benzodiazepine dependency to register with a single medical practitioner and a single pharmacist for benzodiazepine prescription, preventing them from obtaining excess doses of the drug by 'doctor shopping'.

Recommendation 10

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

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Drug and Alcohol Taskforce will consider this issue, when the needs of 'highly marginalised groups' are discussed. The Government will then give consideration to the recommendations of the Taskforce.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the Government:

a) develop specialised educational responses to discourage girls and young women from taking up smoking; and

RESPONSE

Supported

The Youth Smoking Prevention Strategy will develop specific education and skills development components that target young women. This program is expected to begin in 2003.

b) develop specialised smoking reduction and cessation programs aimed at women.

RESPONSE

Supported

The ACT Health Promotion Board (Healthpact) has provided a \$35,000 grant to the Cancer Council ACT for a smoking cessation and prevention program for young adolescent females in 2002/2003.

As Healthpact funds are application driven (services need to apply to Healthpact for funds to provide such services), the future of such programs will depend on the range of applications received.

ACT Health will consider this recommendation when negotiating its next contract with the Cancer Council ACT.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Government will consider a range of options, not just the extension of services provided by the Junction Youth Health Service, to address the need for improved services to young clients, and to enhance referral pathways for those with complex needs.

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**

RESPONSE

Supported

The ACT Government will consult with the Indigenous community on these issues through the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Forum, the Moving Out of Boundaries (MOB) Partnership, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Council and the Ngunnawal Country Indigenous Women's Circle.

This recommendation will also be considered in the context of the 2003/2004 Review of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Plan.

A Complex Needs Project has been established for twelve months to assist Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) providers to provide effective responses to diverse and complex needs. An Indigenous worker will be engaged to assist SAAP providers to address the needs of Indigenous homeless women. A reference group of Indigenous women, who work in SAAP services, will inform the project.

Urban Services Community Partnerships Program will continue to work with communities of interest, including Indigenous women, to develop projects that complement core business and improve customer service.

b) enhance the capacity of services, particularly outreach services to meet the needs of isolated Indigenous women.

RESPONSE

Supported

This recommendation will be considered in the context of the 2003/2004 Review of the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, as well as being a matter for consideration for the Working Group on Optimising Funding and Service Delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT.

The Homelessness Strategy will also provide a mechanism to ensure the systemic response to the needs of Indigenous homeless women and Indigenous women who are at risk of homelessness, are informed by community need and appropriately resourced.

Urban Services is conducting a pilot program of small-scale park-based community events in Belconnen, Gungahlin and Tuggeranong. One of the objectives of the pilot program is to address issues of social isolation for women in the ACT.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The concept of an ACT convalescent facility has been supported by a number of agencies such as the Older Women's Network and the Council on the Ageing. The ACT Convalescent Service was established in September 2002 at Calvary Hospital, and currently operates as a twelve-month pilot project. Co-location of the ACT Convalescent Service within an existing hospital was favoured, as there were considerable efficiencies in using the established infrastructure of a hospital to provide such a service, both in relation to nursing staff, allied health and ancillary services. Co-location was also preferred, as it would enable better access for clients to medical and other health staff. The Convalescent Service is currently used by women on a ratio of 2:1 with men, and the average age of users is 76 years.

ACT Health meets with Calvary Hospital staff to monitor the progress of the Service on a monthly basis. This forum provides an ongoing opportunity to also review procedures, and improve performance.

A sub acute feasibility study currently being undertaken by the ACT Government will be considering a number of services including rehabilitation services, post hospitalisation/transitional care services, Older Persons Mental Health Services – both

acute and extended care, and dementia respite services. The provision of existing post-hospitalisation services will be considered as part of the feasibility study.

Recommendation 15

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

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

Home and Community Care Program (a joint ACT / Commonwealth program) funding in the ACT has increased by \$1.5 million in 2002/2003. Services are provided to support frail older persons, people with a disability and their carers to remain in the community and to prevent inappropriate or early entry into nursing home care. The range of services includes domestic assistance, personal care, home maintenance, meals on wheels, respite care, home nursing and community based transport.

The ACT Government has provided an additional \$1million for respite care across all areas of need. The majority of this year's funding has been allocated. Future allocations will be informed by an empirical study of respite care needs. Additional residential respite care places have been funded by the Commonwealth, including 4 high care places and 1 emergency respite place at Jindalee Nursing Home. These beds are managed by the Carers Association and have had a high level of usage by clients with dementia.

A second psychogeriatrician was been appointed to the Older Persons Mental Health Service in December 2002 and will provide clinical services as well as developing an Academic Department of Old Age Psychiatry.

Community based professional counselling services for women who have experienced grief and loss, severe family conflict, or substance use will be extended in 2003, and will be available in Regional Health Centres of Tuggeranong, Belconnen and Phillip.

Recommendation 16

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

RESPONSE

Supported

A psychogeriatrician was appointed in December 2002, following allocation of additional resources to the Older Person's Mental Health Service in the 2002/2003 Budget.

Recommendation 17

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

RESPONSE

Supported

Disability ACT, in partnership with the Disability Advisory Council, has developed an Access to Government strategy, in which all Government departments will be required to develop access plans. The strategy will be launched during 2003.

The first of these plans to be developed and implemented is the Urban Services Access Action Plan 2003-2004 that covers access to public transport, buildings and facilities, information, employment and planning and design.

The ACT Access and Planning Committee has a specific representative from the peak group Women with Disabilities to ensure that the needs of women with disabilities are adequately addressed.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Government will request that the Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs to undertake an investigation of this matter and provide advice on their findings.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

Sport and Recreation ACT will undertake to investigate this issue and the matter will also be referred to the Sport and Recreation Ministerial Advisory Council for consideration.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

This matter will be referred to the Sport and Recreation Ministerial Advisory Council for consideration.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

Equitable allocation of funding will occur whenever possible, however gender desegregation in grant allocations is not always possible. 48% of allocated Sport and Recreation Development Grant Program grants went to women's sport. In recent years, there were no significant gender discrepancies in the funding of organised sport and recreation activities in the ACT.

In 2002, the aims, objectives and guidelines of the National Sporting Teams Marketing Program funding were reviewed. As a result, funding in 2002/3 was increased to provide greater equity between men and women's national league teams.

Economic Security and Education

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

Paid maternity leave entitlements for ACT Public Servants have been increased to 14 weeks. This entitlement is included in the template enterprise bargaining agreement finalised on 20 December 2002 and will take effect as agency agreements are certified.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

Training and Adult Education offer training programs in the Pathways to Employment Programs for disadvantaged groups in the labour market. Women re-entering the workforce is one such group. The Adult, English, Language, Literacy and Numeracy program, run by the CIT, also offers training programs in Certificate 1 Learning Options-Pathways for Women run by the Canberra Institute of Technology (CIT).

The ACT Government's Workplace Experience and Support Program (WESP) is designed to help ACT residents from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds become more job ready by providing them with opportunities to improve their skills and confidence and develop important networks within the ACT Public Service and selected private sector businesses. Migrant women make up the majority of participants of WESP and a high percentage are successful in obtaining employment on completion of the program.

The ACT Government's Digital Divide program focuses on a range of initiatives to ensure that all members of the ACT community have equitable access to Information Technology (IT) and connectivity to online information. The program specifically targets those groups identified as most at risk of being on the disadvantaged side of the digital divide, namely women, seniors, people with a disability, people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, people from low socio-economic groups, including the unemployed, people from non English-speaking background or those with low literacy and young people. Initiatives already implemented include the allocation of grants to 19 community groups for the provision of computer equipment

and online access, together with one on one training in general computer and internet proficiency.

Examples of these include:

- *Beryl Women's Refuge* - funded to provide PC access to shelter residents who include disadvantaged and low income women, and multicultural and Indigenous women and their families. The refuge purchase PCs, computer furniture, internet connections and training from the CIT Roving Trainer.
- *Women's Information and Referral Centre (WiRC)* - received funding to provide introductory computer and internet information sessions for disadvantaged and low income women, and multicultural and Indigenous women and their families. WiRC employed Bi-lingual trainers to conduct some of these courses in a number of different languages.

Recommendation 24

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

RESPONSE

Supported

The Government provided \$1 million in the 2002-03 budget to improve respite care services. Areas targeted for funding include:

- innovative respite care pilots;
- additional family support respite care packages;
- innovative Dementia Respite Service;
- reduction of fragmentation of respite care service provision; and
- carers of people with a mental illness.

Consultants 'Enduring Solutions' have been engaged to review the provision of respite care services in the ACT.

Recommendation 25

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

RESPONSE

Supported

The ACT Government has provided significant additional funding to the community sector in recognition of the financial impact on the sector of the 2001 SACS award increases.

Government has provided funding to ACT community organisations to assist with award-related cost increases, including where organisations have enterprise bargaining agreements that are comparable with award conditions.

The ACT Government is currently working with the community sector to address issues and identify potential areas for reform to non-government services purchasing arrangements. Implications of the Australian Industrial Relations Commission's (AIRC) decision of July 2002 relating to the ACT SACS Award are also currently under consideration.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

Consultants 'Better Enterprises' were engaged to review Indigenous foster care services in the ACT. The ACT Government is currently considering their final report. A key recommendation is the development of Indigenous family preservation services. Indigenous family support and kinship care will be considered in the context of future Government priorities.

Recommendation 27

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

RESPONSE

Supported

ACT Housing currently provides priority access (Early Allocation Category 1) to women escaping domestic violence. People approved for early allocation are provided with ACT Housing accommodation more quickly than others already registered on the Applicants List, on a lower allocation category. Applicants are provided with accommodation as soon as a suitable property becomes available. The waiting time will depend on the type of housing, eligibility and how many other early allocation approvals are ahead of applicants.

The Affordable Housing Taskforce investigated and recommended strategies to increase housing affordability to all ACT residents. This report was released in December 2002. The Government is currently considering and assessing the report.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

ACT Housing will reaccommodate women who are public housing tenants who enter drug rehabilitation services, although the capacity to accommodate the person in the same property will depend on the length of time of their rehabilitation program.

ACT Housing is currently investigating and developing a policy for public housing tenants entering rehabilitation services.

Recommendation 29

The committee recommends that the Government:

a) investigate the need for the establishment of a youth night shelter; and

RESPONSE

Supported

This recommendation will be forwarded to the Homelessness Advisory Group (HAG) for consideration in the context of the ACT Homelessness Strategy, due for release in September 2003. The strategy will include responses to homeless young people.

b) in consultation with stakeholders, investigate the viability of an accommodation voucher system for young people.

RESPONSE

Supported

This will be considered in the context of the development of the ACT Homelessness Strategy.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services currently funds a Housing Options Adviser position through the Council of the Ageing to provide advice and information to older people about appropriate accommodation options.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Department of Education, Youth, and Family Services policy on Pregnant Students is that 'all students attending or seeking to attend ACT Government schools, including pregnant students, should have equal access to educational programs'. The *Sex Discrimination Act* guarantees the rights of pregnant students to attend school.

Departmental policy and guidelines assist schools in supporting young pregnant women to complete their education. There are no system initiated programs to support the attendance of young mothers at government high schools and colleges. Each school takes a supportive approach and implements a range of accommodations to meet the individual needs of students.

There is no provision of childcare at school or college sites but schools often help students to access community-based childcare services.

Violence against women and women's safety

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The need for a range of responses to homelessness is acknowledged. The capacity of existing services to respond to the needs of older women requires further consideration in relation to alternative models. This recommendation will be considered in the context of the ACT Homelessness Strategy currently under development.

The ACT Government is funding a boarding house for older women who require supportive accommodation as a result of domestic violence and/or abuse. A site has been identified and consultation with key stakeholders is currently occurring on the development of the boarding house, which is due to be completed in 2003. The boarding house will be operated by a community organisation, which will undertake tenancy management and facilitate access to support services.

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.**

RESPONSE

Supported

The Working Group on Optimising Funding and Service Delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT will consider this issue.

The Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT also provides some information in relation to the needs of Indigenous women facing family violence, and confirms the need for a broad range of service responses. The analysis confirmed the need for:

- enhanced access to culturally appropriate specialist services including drug and alcohol and mental health services;
- low cost temporary accommodation to reduce overcrowding (a contributing factor to violence); and
- culturally appropriate initiatives to prevent Indigenous family violence.

The Homelessness Advisory Group is developing an ACT Homelessness Strategy, due for release in September 2003. This Homelessness Strategy will include preventative responses for Indigenous people experiencing violence.

The Department of Disability Housing and Community Services will develop an Indigenous Housing Program, which will be informed by the following:

- the recommendations from the Report on the Viability Study (to examine the establishment of a sustainable organisational model to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing in the ACT). The report is expected to be finalized by the end of April, and to go out for community consultation in May 2003;
- the housing priorities to be identified by the Steering Committee to be established (by the end of June 2003) under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trilateral Housing Agreement between the ACT Government, ATSIC Queanbeyan Regional Council, and FaCS; and
- the final community housing framework.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The cluster model for supported accommodation for women and children escaping domestic violence is already provided in the ACT. The following services are provided within a cluster model:

- St Judes (the Society of St Vincent De Paul) provides medium term supported accommodation for couples and individuals with children;
- Family Housing Outreach Service (YWCA) provides medium term supported accommodation for couples and individuals with children; and

- Doris Womens Refuge provides crisis and medium term supported accomodation to women with accompanying children, who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Protection Orders Act 2001 includes a legislative requirement to review the operation of the domestic violence provisions in the Act. The Government is currently reviewing the legislation and will release a discussion paper in 2003.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Government released the Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT in June 2002. This project undertook an extensive assessment of current and future needs of specific population groups. Needs were identified for single women, single women with children, partnered women with children, women from a culturally and linguistically diverse background, Indigenous women, women with a disability, older women, young women, women with mental health issues and women leaving custody. The analysis identified gaps in support and accommodation.

Responses to people experiencing homelessness, including women with and without children, will be considered by the Homelessness Advisory Group in the context of developing an ACT Homelessness Strategy, due for release in September 2003.

Funding priorities will be considered in the context of relative government priorities for homelessness services.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Council has established a sub-committee to examine and provide advice on issues of domestic violence and housing. It is expected that the

terms of reference for the sub-committee will enable it to also address issues relevant to this recommendation.

Recommendation 37

The committee recommends that the Government provide, through 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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Homelessness Strategy will map out the Government response to homelessness as a consequence of family violence and make recommendations in relation to strategies responding to this need. The ACT Homelessness Strategy is due for release in September 2003.

The Government's response to addressing issues of Elder Abuse include initiatives that will develop community awareness and support mechanisms, including a telephone hotline.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

Responses to women and children who have experienced homelessness as a result of domestic violence, are being considered in the context of the Homelessness Strategy, due for release in September 2003. Additional resources will be considered in the context of relative government priorities for homelessness services.

The Women's Health Service provides specialist medical, counselling, training and support services to women and their children who experienced violence in their lives. The service also runs joint programs with Toora Women's Shelter, aiming to develop skills in women escaping domestic violence.

Positive Parenting Programs are also available to families in Canberra, through Regional Health Centres.

Services by a Social Worker or Family Care Nurse can also be arranged in the client's own home, if required.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

Responses to violence, including the provision of accommodation and support for older men who have used violence, is being considered in the context of the Homelessness Strategy, due for release in September 2003.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Government notes that the Family Violence Intervention Program has improved the support provided to victims of family violence through the establishment of the position of Domestic Violence Project Coordinator, and Witness Assistant within the Director of Public Prosecution's office. Police Victim Liaison Officers have also played a greater role in providing information and support to victims.

In addition, the creation of the Victims Support Service provides a source of support for victims of crime, including victims of domestic violence.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Government will consider this recommendation in the context of ongoing service purchasing reviews.

The Government notes that in addition to the CRCC, the Victims Support Service, provides counselling services to survivors of sexual assault.

The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC) has been allocated \$24 000 to conduct community support groups for survivors of sexual violence, from the Canberra Community Foundation Grants Program 2002/03.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Government supports the involvement of relevant agencies, such as the police, in developing and implementing strategies to prevent sexual assaults at tertiary institutions in the Territory. The Government, through the Office for Women, will ensure that the committee's views are conveyed to the relevant university officials and will indicate its willingness for ACT agencies to participate in any strategies which tertiary institutions may undertake to reduce sexual crimes on campus.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

This recommendation relating to counselling services for children will be considered in the context of relative Government priorities for homelessness services.

Victims Services Scheme provides counselling to anyone who has been affected by a crime committed in the ACT. This includes children who have witnessed domestic violence.

The need for additional services for children affected by violence in the ACT will be examined. The possibility of expanding already existing services, such as the 'Hidden Hurts' program of the Child at Risk Assessment Unit will be considered in the context of the current review of this service.

Responses to women and children who have experienced homelessness as a result of domestic or family violence are being considered in the development of the Homelessness Strategy.

This issue will also be considered in the development of the recently announced whole of Government Children's Plan.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The ACT Children's Plan will provide evidence-based approaches to address this area of need. It is envisaged that recommendations for inter-sectoral, early intervention programs targeting these children, will be included in the ACT Children's Plan.

In addition, maternal and child health home visiting services have been found effective as a sustainable, non-stigmatising, community based intervention.

Funding to support children who have experienced domestic violence will be considered in the context of relative Government priorities for homelessness services.

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**

RESPONSE

Supported

DEYFS will liaise through the education subcommittee of the Domestic Violence Prevention Council to review current violence prevention education in school curricula.

Each year, DEYFS provides system-wide as well as school-based professional development opportunities for teachers on issues of violence, bullying and sexual harassment and to help promote positive behaviours in schools.

DEYFS' *Safe Schools Policy Framework* promotes safe and supportive learning environments.

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

RESPONSE

Supported

The ACT Government provides funding for a range of services to provide community education to community members, services providers and schools about the causes, effects and responses to sexual violence and domestic violence as follows:

- Canberra Rape Crisis Centre provides 780 hours of community education per annum;
- Service Assisting Male Survivors of Sexual Assault (Canberra Rape Crisis Centre) provides 260 hours of community education per annum; and
- Domestic Violence Crisis Service provides 800 hours of community education per annum.

Service provision levels, and subsequent allocation of community education hours, can be renegotiated with individual service providers within existing levels of funding.

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

RESPONSE

Supported

Neighbourhood planning strategies currently involve working with local communities (including all those with an interest in the suburbs undergoing neighbourhood plans - whether they live, work, learn, play or invest in the suburb) to identify safety issues in order to ensure the quality design of public spaces and assets. Implementation plans will address the issues raised by the community. Plans will initially be developed for the Inner North and Inner South. Ultimately all suburbs will have neighbourhood plans.

The Department of Urban Services (DUS) has developed the ACT Crime and Urban Design Manual to address crime prevention through environmental design principles. This manual is currently being implemented.

DUS currently implements a Streetlighting Minor New Works program and a Pedestrian Crime Prevention Lighting program to address public safety issues through improved street lighting.

The Government is also currently conducting a review of all bus interchanges with planning for the upgrade/relocation of the Belconnen interchange well advanced. It is proposed that future interchanges will incorporate comfortable and well-lit waiting areas incorporated into or a close to the shopping centre as possible.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

ACTION is currently exploring a pilot for night-time services in certain area/s. This trial would include the driver stopping (where it is safe to do so) between bus stops in order to set down passengers as close to their home as possible.

Recommendation 47

The committee recommends that:

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

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJACS) is currently piloting the enhanced collection of sexual assault data with a view to using it to inform law reform and legal policy. This data will inform DJACS in determining priority issues around sexual assault including potential areas for research. The need to research sexual assault and public events in the ACT will be considered in this context.

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

RESPONSE

Supported

DEYFS *Safe Schools Policy Framework* contains a range of approaches used by schools to combat violence. Through the study of safety and human relations in the health curriculum, students are helped to understand the nature of relationships and the outcomes and impacts of violence within relationships. Gender equity is included across the 8 key learning areas of the curriculum.

Staff training equips staff with skills to implement strategies that encourage and support safe school environments. Programs include: Playsafe playground package for primary schools; protective behaviours program; anti-bullying programs; playground mediators; peer support; anger management; conflict resolution and social skills.

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;

RESPONSE

Supported

There are legal requirements for event organisers to ensure that events are safe and stakeholders are consulted. This happens through mechanisms such as venue hiring contracts, OHS legislation, public health legislation, public liability insurance contracts and securing of permits (eg fireworks, road closures). This is regulated through organisations such as ACT Workcover, Office of Fair Trading (DJACS), Health Protection Service, DUS, the Emergency Services Bureau and the AFP.

Organisers may also have responsibilities under common law to people who may be affected by their activities.

To assist events organisers in their obligations, the Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation (CTEC) has developed a Guide for Planning and Conduct of Special Events in the ACT. This Guide outlines various responsibilities and requirements of special event organisers. Recommended strategies for issues such as safety, security, lighting, transport and emergency and support services are included in the guide.

The ACT Office of Fair Trading and Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation are currently developing a new Guide for Planning and Conduct of Special Events.

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

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The ACT Government provides funding for a range of services to provide community education community members, services providers and schools about the causes, effects and responses to sexual violence and domestic violence as follows:

- Canberra Rape Crisis Centre provides 780 hours of community education per annum;
- Service Assisting Male Survivors of Sexual Assault (Canberra Rape Crisis Centre) provides 260 hours of community education per annum; and
- Domestic Violence Crisis Service provides 800 hours of community education per annum.

Consideration will be given to service provision levels, and subsequent allocation of community education hours, which can be renegotiated with individual service providers within existing levels of funding.

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

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The ACT Office of Fair Trading received the support of Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation for the development and production of a new Guide for Planning and Conduct of Special Events in the ACT.

This guide will outline various responsibilities and requirements of special event organisers. Recommended strategies for issues such as safety, security, lighting, transport and emergency and support services are included in the guide. The guide will also explain the importance of liquor management at special events. Liquor management strategies include running a liquor-free event, the establishment of dry areas, physically isolating licensed areas from the event activity zones, the promotion of low-alcohol beverages at the event, and making events sell only low-alcohol beverages. In the course of finalising the guide consultation will take place with organisations, such as, the Australian Federal Police, DUS, National Capital Authority and the ACT Health.

General issues

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Office for Women, in partnership with the YWCA, are currently running a series of workshops aimed at providing information, support and skill development for women interested in sitting on Government boards and committees. This includes sessions focussed on networking and building up of support bases. Advertising of these sessions has been targeted at a diverse range of women.

The Office for Women is also working to support the Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs to develop appropriate programs to support migrant women, focussed on addressing barriers to participation that have been identified by the women.

Leadership has been identified as an issue in the ACT Indigenous Women's Action Plan and the Office for Women, together with the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, is working with the Ngunnawal Country Indigenous Women's Circle to determine appropriate ways forward.

Recommendation 49

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

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Women's Centre for Health Matters and the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre's Indigenous Program are funded by ACT Health to provide advocacy services on women's health and well-being issues, and representation in public consultation. Both organisations have received ongoing funding for this service over a number of years.

Other bodies funded by ACT Health to provide advocacy on behalf of ACT mental health clients and their carers are: Mental Health Consumers Network, Carers ACT, and paid consumer representatives attached to Mental Health ACT.

Toora Women's Inc and WIREDD (Women's Information, Referral and Education on Drugs of Dependency) are funded to participate in public consultation and to provide advocacy on behalf of women with drug and alcohol issues.

Both the Division of General Practice and the AIDS Action Council of the ACT are funded for the provision of advocacy services, with a particular emphasis on people with HIV infection, and on health care workers.

The ACT Health contract with the AIDS Action Council of the ACT also provides for advocacy services for sex workers, who are mainly women, and their clients.

This recommendation will be considered in the context of service contract reviews.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Office for Women will, in consultation with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, undertake an investigation for the need for such a program, and possible target areas.

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

RESPONSE

Not Supported

WiRC is an advisory service that is funded to provide services during business hours. This is seen as appropriate as it is not a crisis service. Information regarding the service, and information about services throughout the ACT can be accessed through the ACT Government Website.

Telephone access to the service can be provided through two direct phone lines or through Canberra Connect. The charge for this is a local call. The services provided by the Centre are free of charge to residents of the ACT.

b) that the service is widely promoted.

RESPONSE

Supported

WiRC's services are promoted widely across the ACT and internally via the ACT Government email network.

The Community Calendar for Women is produced twice yearly and promotes the Centre's own activities as well as a variety of different activities for women in the ACT. The Calendar is distributed widely to individuals and services, in hard copy and electronic formats.

WiRC produces an information brochure for community services on their services and visits a range of organisations to discuss issues relevant to their client group.

Support groups conducted by WiRC are advertised in a variety of generic and client-specific newspapers.

Recommendation 52

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;**

RESPONSE

Supported

The Government is currently considering options for addressing the ACT's future correctional needs. A \$50m planning provision has been included in the 2003-04 forward estimates for a new permanent remand facility. The Government is committed to meeting the needs of women in the construction of the new facility. In planning for the new remand centre the Government is considering the provision of residential style accommodation for the majority of the ACT's women remandees as well as ready access to gender appropriate programs and visiting facilities suitable for children. As is currently the case, the appropriateness of accommodating mothers who are breast feeding with their babies would be assessed on an individual basis, with the well being of children being the primary consideration. A new remand centre, through careful planning and innovative design would be more conducive to accommodating breast feeding mothers and their babies.

- 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**

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

Planning for an ACT prison is continuing.

The special needs of women, as well as other special needs groups, will be fully considered in the event that the Government proceeds to establish a prison in the ACT.

Studies on the maintenance of family and community ties for prisoners, invariably conclude there are substantial benefits for prisoners, families and particularly children, through regular access. Family involvement in prisoner pre-release planning and re-integration is also beneficial. As women generally carry primary carer responsibilities, women prisoners would greatly benefit from location within the community to which they are likely to return upon release.

c) the Government continue to develop and implement a range of progressive alternatives to sentencing for offenders.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Government established a review into sentencing in 2002 to examine the purposes of sentencing and consider whether the existing sentencing options available in the ACT are effective at achieving those purposes. The review will assess the sentencing options/programs available for offenders who are chronically sick or elderly, have a disability, personality disorder or substance abuse problem, are indigenous Australians, young persons, women, mentally ill and/or are persons whose first language is not English. Particular consideration will be given by the review to extending the range and use of non-custodial sentencing options. The review will release a discussion paper early 2003 on the use of diversionary and other non-custodial sentencing options in the ACT.

However, it should be noted that a considerable range of sentencing alternatives to imprisonment is already available in the Territory.

For example, Community Based Orders (CBOs) are widely used as a sanction. In fact, the ACT has the 3rd highest rate of offenders on CBOs and the lowest rate of imprisonment among all Australian jurisdictions. A Cognitive Skills program specifically for women is available to assist female offenders on CBOs to address their offending behaviour.

Home Detention combines intensive supervision and case management with a restriction of freedom, has been available in the ACT since October 2001. This option allows offenders to maintain their life in the community and minimises disruption to the family, and would seem to be particularly suitable for female offenders, who often have family responsibilities.

Periodic Detention allows offenders to serve their sentence on weekends, which again minimises disruption and allows offenders to maintain their normal responsibilities and community ties. The ACT and NSW are the only two Australian jurisdictions where this option of serving a sentence is available.

*Strategic directions***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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Office for Women has established an inter-departmental committee. This Committee will work in close consultation with the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women to ensure extensive consultation with ACT community on the development of a new Strategic Plan for Women.

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.**

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Chief Minister's Department is currently developing a framework for evidence-based research and analysis to support policy development and program delivery. The framework will look at the examination and interpretation of data and other information to provide insights to improve the formulation of policy and the delivery of services. Among other issues it will look at data needs across government, current data collection and problems surrounding data collection and analysis. The importance and value of gender disaggregated data will be addressed.

Recommendation 55

The committee recommends that:

- a) the ACT Office for 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.**

RESPONSE

Supported

This recommendation will be addressed through the development of a new Strategic Plan for Women (see response to recommendation 53).

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**

RESPONSE

Supported

The requirements that Cabinet Submissions should (a) discuss how proposals would affect and impact on women and (b) provide information on any consultations with relevant women's organisations are clearly set out in the Cabinet Handbook.

The Office for Women will also investigate gender mainstreaming models from other jurisdictions with a view to providing resources to support agencies in undertaking gender analysis as a core tenet of policy development.

- 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.**

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The Cabinet Handbook already requires that the impact on women be addressed on the cover page of all Cabinet Submissions.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

As part of the development of a new Strategic Plan for Women, monitoring and reporting mechanisms will be considered.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported-in-principle

The separate identification of all programs that relate to women would be difficult as many programs have a multiplicity of aims and issues in relation to boundaries and information sources provide significant challenge.

The Government will investigate possible options and mechanisms for the inclusion of information on Government programs and initiatives impacting on women for future budget processes.

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.

RESPONSE

Supported

The Office for Women will investigate the establishment of women's research partnerships with one or more of Canberra's universities.