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Time for the ACT to lead the change for gender equality

Wednesday 7 March 2018

YWCA Canberra has released a report card today assessing the ACT Government's progress on gender equality since 2016.

The *Leading the Change: The Pathway to Gender Equality* report card has been released to coincide with International Women's Day, and highlights that progress has been slow on many key gender equality indicators, such as primary prevention for violence against women, workplace gender equality and sexual harassment.

Frances Crimmins, Executive Director of YWCA Canberra, said the organisation saw gender parity in the ACT Legislative Assembly and the development of an ACT Women's Plan in 2016 as positive signs, but that ACT women were still waiting to see real outcomes from year one of the ten-year Plan.

"It is concerning that the Plan remains unfunded, with no clear targets or evaluation measures to track progress," Ms Crimmins said.

"The promised implementation of Gender Impact Statements and rigorous triple bottom line assessments with a gendered focus would demonstrate that the ACT Government recognises that gender inequality cuts across all areas of the Government's work."

The Report Card also provides policy recommendations to create an equitable ACT, with a focus on primary prevention to eliminate violence against women and girls through the mandatory Respectful Relationships education that exists in other states. Other key asks include a commitment to working with universities to end endemic sexual assault and harassment on campus, and increased funding for specialised women's services.

Ms Crimmins welcomed progress in some important areas, including funding to develop the Family Safety Hub and the introduction of a behavioural change program for men at risk of using violence. The ACT Government has also made it illegal to discriminate against someone who is being subjected to domestic or family violence and criminalised the sharing of intimate text images without consent.

"YWCA Canberra have created this report card based on a belief that the ACT can be the leading jurisdiction for gender equality in Australia, and we will continue to monitor the implementation of the Plan and support the ACT Government to push for progress."

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Leading the Change report card recommendations:

1. Fast track the implementation of the ACT Women's Plan through dedicated resources for the Office for Women with transparent targets and evaluation measures and ensure it is applied across government.
2. Streamline strategic over-sight of gender equality in the ACT through positioning Office for women in Chief-Minister's Directorate.
3. Establish whole-of-government approach to women's rights and reinstate gender budget analysis to ensure that budgetary decisions contribute to gender equality.
4. Develop a Gender Equality Act that is informed by evidence-based international models and includes tangible quotas and targets.
5. Incentivise and support companies to introduce progressive gender equality policies and practices, including:
 - Providing resources and support for employers to undertake a gender pay audit.
 - Paid parental leave entitlements that encourage shared care arrangements, build a culture that normalises male employee's uptake and supports the development of the bond between mother and child.
 - Support staff who are experiencing domestic violence, with the introduction of 10 days of paid domestic violence leave.
 - Reviewing sexual harassment and discrimination procedures to ensure claims are resolved sensitively, promptly and without recourse for the complainant.
 - Provide recognition of exemplar employers, including preferential selection for government awards and contracts.
6. Introduce a long-term strategy for primary prevention for violence against women, including funding a mandatory roll-out of respectful relationships education from kindergarten to year 12, in line with other jurisdictions in Australia, to drive attitudinal change.
7. Adopt a shared responsibility approach to work with ACT based universities to end endemic sexual assault and harassment on campus by ensuring a consistent approach to primary prevention, with all new students provided with mandatory respectful relationships and consent education that is relevant to diverse student populations.
8. Introduce a statutory definition of consent that is based on the concept of free and voluntary agreement.
9. Increase funding to specialist women's services to end violence against women, recognising the proven effectiveness of the specialist women's services sector and the gendered dynamics of violence. This should include services equipped to appropriately respond to intersecting forms of discrimination based on factors such as disability, religion, race and sexuality.
10. Undertake research to understand the multiple and intersecting levels of inequality in the ACT to inform future policy development.