



YWCA CANBERRA

2019-20 ACT Government

Budget Consultation Submission

caf@ywca-canberra.org.au

About YWCA Canberra

YWCA Canberra is a feminist not for profit organisation that has provided community services and represented women's issues in Canberra since 1929.

YWCA Canberra provides essential, quality services for women, girls and families in the ACT and surrounding regions. We work in the areas of children's services, community development, homelessness and affordable housing, youth services, personal and professional training, women's leadership and advocacy.

Through its national Affiliate Association with YWCA Australia, YWCA Canberra is part of the World YWCA network, which connects 120 countries across the globe.

YWCA Canberra's mission is 'We strengthen communities by supporting girls and women through our services and advocacy'.

Introduction

YWCA Canberra welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission for the 2019-20 ACT Government Budget consultation process. YWCA Canberra's submission outlines areas where immediate action can be taken to achieve a greater social impact within current Budget allocations, as well as areas where a modest additional investment can result in significant benefits to the community.

This submission also outlines ways to increase the economic and social participation of all Canberrans and ensure our most vulnerable community members are not left behind.

YWCA Canberra has a vision for a city with a supply of safe and affordable housing to meet the needs of our growing population, safety for women in public spaces, their homes and workplaces, with gender equality at the centre of government decision making.

Recommendations made in this Budget Submission align with our recommendations in the *Leading the Change: The Pathway to Gender Equality Report* and our role in providing safe and affordable housing and essential services for the most vulnerable in our community, with a focus on women and children. This submission covers the following areas:

1. Gender Responsive Budgeting and Governance
2. Building safe and affordable housing for women
3. Developing intersectional service models for housing
4. A life free from violence
5. Equality in the workplace
6. Girls and women thriving

Recommendations - Priority Policies

1. Gender Responsive Budgeting and Governance

The priorities listed under this category are those which focus on gender centric policy design and governance. Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is a means to measure a government's resource allocations against its own gender equity goals. The reintroduction of the women's Budget Statement provides the opportunity to undertake a rigorous gendered analysis of the Budget and to understand its impact on women across all areas of government services and policy design. We call on the ACT Government to include women and local women's organisations in this process and to publicly release the results of this analysis.

1.1 Reinstate Women's Budget Statements.

The Budget is a core policy mechanism of government and provides insight into the different social and economic roles, needs and contributions of men and women. GRB acknowledges that government policies are not gender neutral and that consideration of the gendered effects of policies can be used as a powerful means to promote equality and identify otherwise unforeseen and detrimental gender-based outcomes.

The last ACT Women's Budget Statement was released in 2008, which provided an overview of the government's achievements for women rather than a gendered critique of the impact of budget allocations on the lives of women and girls in the ACT. GRB can take a variety of forms, but its key components include assessment of the different needs and contributions of men and women within existing revenues, assessment of the differential effects of proposed or existing policy on men and women and identifying potential opportunities to advance women's participation and contribution through policy and budgetary allocations.

We call on the ACT Government to reinstate the ACT Women's Budget Statements, including a gendered critique of the impact of budget allocations on the lives of women and girls, in line with the Federal Labor party's position.

1.2 Strategic oversight of gender equality through positioning the Office for Women in the Chief Minister's Directorate.

In the ACT, the Office for Women was moved from the Chief Minister's Directorate to the Community Services Directorate in 2006, where it has since remained. Women and girls make up half the population and all policy development has the potential to impact on women and their wellbeing, due to their unique position in the labour market and broader society.

With this recommendation, we emphasise that moving the Office for Women to within the Chief Minister's portfolio, like the Office of LGBTIQ Affairs, would similarly place the Office within the centre of government and the executive, enabling the whole-of-government commitment and coordination that the successful implementation of the Women's Plan relies upon.

The relocation to the Chief Minister's portfolio would improve the status and resourcing for the Office of Women and support the embedding of the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026* across government.

1.3 Greater transparency in relation to resourcing for the Women's Plan.

YWCA Canberra welcomes the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026* and its objective to progress gender equality to improve the lives of women in Canberra as well as the allocation of funding provided in the 2018-19 ACT Budget to implement some aspects of the Plan.

We are however concerned at the lack of transparency around some elements of the year one reporting milestones¹, particularly the absence of quantifiable outcomes on some elements of the plan that are noted as 'completed', such as those around the uptake of vocational education opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. We therefore call for a more rigorous approach to reporting that outlines the uptake and/or success of the initiative against previously determined (and publicly available) evaluation measures.

Related to this, there is a lack of clarity around certain initiatives, such as the promotion of women's mentoring programs in male dominated ACT Government Directorates and the launch of the ACT Public Service Respect, Equity and Diversity (RED) Framework to empower employees to recognise and respond to sexual harassment in the workplace. In particular, there is an absence of information regarding the qualifications of the RED contact officers and what internal support is available to assist them in this role. In line with the Women's Plan, we also continue to call on the ACT Government to set new rules for the procurement and management of Government tenders to ensure that successful tenderers are compliant with the *Workplace Gender Equity Act 2012*.

We also note the proposal to establish a 'Gender Equity and Education' advisory group in schools, "to research the extent to which gender perception in schools impacts on the wellbeing of female students". YWCA Canberra believes that measures designed to improve the wellbeing of girls in ACT schools must include resources that focus on the links between gender, power and violence and support students, in an interactive way, to develop the skills and knowledge to reject attitudes that cultivate gender-based violence. In its current form, this measure risks replicating what is already known around gender stereotyping during school years. The need for the full implementation of Respectful Relationships in the ACT is discussed in greater detail later in this submission.

2. Priority Policy: Building Safe and Affordable Housing for Women

Appropriate, affordable and stable housing is essential to the wellbeing of both individuals and communities and is a critical first step to establishing everyday stability following personal crises. YWCA Canberra has a long history in providing housing support to women and their families. We provide supported accommodation services on behalf of the ACT Government and are a registered community housing provider. Many of our clients are migrant women with complex needs, requiring intensive personal support as well as assistance in navigating education or employment opportunities. We also provide Outreach Support to women and their families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

The rising cost of renting in the private market and growing wait lists for public and community housing is an everyday reality for many Canberra families. *Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot 2018* revealed an insufficient supply of affordable rentals in the Canberra region.² The 2018 *Vital Signs* of Canberra report indicates that Canberra has seen some of the highest

¹ http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1212471/First-Action-Plan-Detailed-Year-One-Reporting.pdf

² <http://www.anglicare.asn.au/docs/default-source/default-document-library/rental-affordability-snapshot---regional-report.pdf?sfvrsn=0>

annual rental increases in the country, behind only Hobart, and the rental vacancy rate is now at less than one per cent, placing enormous pressure on those looking to rent locally.³ Buying a house is an increasingly distant dream for many young people who, based on current trends, will spend more of their income and more of their life in the rental market. Aside from a small number of dwellings affordable to Aged Pensioner households, Anglicare also found there were no affordable housing options, in Canberra, to any household which derived its income from a Centrelink payment. Young people, single parents and older people were also found to be in particularly vulnerable to housing crises in the current rental squeeze.

We note that the recently launched *ACT Housing Strategy* attempts to respond to these complex problems including through increasing supply of affordable rentals, addressing service delivery gaps and improving pathways out of homelessness. We do however look forward to more information about how the *Strategy* will be delivered, how outcomes will be evaluated and measured and what the project and implementation timeline beyond 2018 will look like.

2.1 Provide exemptions or reductions in land tax to private landlords who lease their properties at 75% or less of market rate for properties managed by registered community housing providers.

While widespread community debate on housing affordability has tended to emphasise barriers to home ownership among millennials, the affordability of privately leased rentals in Canberra continues to be out of reach for many in our community. Our social housing system no longer provides a credible alternative to the private rental market for lower income earners. Those who are older, under-employed, unemployed or heading up single income families are unlikely to be able to buy a home anytime in the future.

We note that the *ACT Housing Strategy*, launched in October 2018, makes reference to encouraging the supply of affordable rentals through land tax concessions for landlords who lease properties at 75 per cent of market rent. These proposals replicate models which have already been implemented through Victoria's Launch Housing (formerly HomeGround Real Estate).⁴ While the *ACT Housing Strategy* is still in its infancy, we note the 'investigative' stage of some positive elements of the plan which seek to grow the supply of affordable rentals, including through tax-based incentives or lease variation charges. We look forward to more comprehensive information on how these objectives will be introduced and measured.

YWCA Canberra recommends that the ACT Government extend incentives to registered community housing organisations to provide affordable rental properties to those in need. Proposals in the *ACT Housing Strategy* to develop a client focused tenancy service are welcomed and we encourage the development of this service model to also provide qualified personal and social support in order work through the multiple and complex needs some housing clients require and to deliver them the most sustainable outcome.

2.2 Ensure that new ACT Housing Strategy includes targets to develop innovative housing models for older women.

Single, older women now represent the fastest growing group of Australians experiencing housing stress and homelessness, with 2016 Census data indicating that the number of older women who were homeless had increased by 31 per cent from the 2011 Census.⁵ In the ACT

³ <http://www.snowfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/VitalSignsCanberra-FINAL.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.launchhousing.org.au/homeground-real-estate/>

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing: Estimating Homelessness 2016, Canberra: ABS, 2018, accessed at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/2049.0> on 21 March 2018

between 2016-17, women accounted for more than half of the people accessing specialist homelessness services.⁶

Housing insecurity and homelessness among women, particularly older women, is a significant policy issue for governments. YWCA Canberra has maintained a consistent policy position on supporting innovative housing models for older, single women. We also have a proud history of providing housing support through our transitional, affordable and supportive tenancy services. Our houses for older women provide an innovative solution to older women who fall through the cracks or who fail to meet eligibility criteria for traditional housing options. As group homes, houses like Lady Heydon House and Betty Searle also provide the women with a much-needed safety net and social network, which older women may have lost due to housing insecurity or age-related isolation.

We therefore welcome the increased attention the *ACT Housing Strategy* gives to this demographic in the goal of responding to new and emerging groups that are susceptible to homelessness. Further to the broad goals of the *ACT Housing Strategy*, we also encourage targets for innovative housing models for women, including group housing models as well as more traditional options, such as appropriate and affordable single unit dwellings for older women. To adequately work with these emerging groups, we call for dedicated gender specialist services to be available within OneLink to carry out analysis and to improve the responsiveness of current services for women and older persons.

3. Priority Policy: Developing Intersectional Service Models for Housing

3.1 Fund specialist housing services that cater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and women who are recent migrants and embed culturally appropriate training for all mainstream housing employees and directors.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are over-represented in national homelessness statistics, and the links between homelessness and family violence are clear. In fact, 40 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seeking support from homelessness services are women fleeing violence in the home⁷. In this regard, we welcome the investment in the 2018-19 ACT Budget that saw the construction of new housing complexes dedicated to housing older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans.

The needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are unique and distinct from the needs of non-Indigenous women, and homelessness amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people cannot be understood without genuine appreciation of Australia's colonial history. For this reason, we continue to call for initiatives and housing support services that emphasise culturally sensitive and informed housing services within mainstream services. We acknowledge work that has been done in implementing trauma informed practices into homelessness services⁸ within Canberra, however there is a notable absence of the unique experiences by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women informing trauma responsiveness within mainstream service delivery. In particular, Indigenous staff and Indigenous leadership within housing organisations can play a key role in designing and delivering services to women in their communities and making mainstream services more accessible.

⁶ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Fact Sheet: Specialist Homelessness Services 2016-17: Australian Capital Territory, Canberra: AIHW, 2018, Table 1

⁷ <https://www.homelessnessnsw.org.au/resources/indigenous-people-and-homelessness>

⁸ ACT Shelter (2018) *Implementing trauma informed practice in ACT specialist homelessness services project*

Many women in YWCA Canberra's housing support caseload are also women of recent migration status, who are often unable to access other forms of housing due to visa restrictions and are sometimes unfamiliar with available services. These women are highly susceptible to becoming trapped in the refuge system while they await residency decisions.^{9,10} We welcome plans to address the gaps in services that are available for emerging groups such as migrant women, and call for culturally appropriate training as well as accommodation options, relevant to the needs and circumstances of migrant women to be progressed.

3.2 Fund accessibility upgrades to Canberra's existing refuge housing stock and ensure the unique needs of women living with disabilities inform policy and service responses to family violence.

Women with disabilities experience high incidences of domestic violence and sexual assault.¹¹ This cohort is largely invisible from the mainstream public conversation about gendered violence. Like the rest of the population, they are most likely to be assaulted by a man who is known to them and it will most likely occur in the home.¹² Compounding this, people with disabilities are often also underrepresented in the labour market and subjected to mainstream biases that label them as helpless and dependent, creating economic and social barriers to leaving abusive relationships.¹³

These barriers are currently reinforced by structural deficits in the accessibility of Canberra's existing refuge stock as well as assistance provided by mainstream housing services or case workers that is not sensitive to the unique needs of women with disabilities. This lack of appropriate servicing can be particularly acute when there are children involved. Where service providers are not trained in recognising their own biases against those with disabilities, women attempting to exit unsafe home environments with their children are often subjected to significant levels of scrutiny concerning their parenting and caring capabilities. To remove barriers for women living with disabilities who endeavour to leave unsafe home environments, we recommend the ACT Government fund appropriate accessibility upgrades to Canberra's existing refuge housing stock and undertake genuine consultation with the disability sector to develop training and policy responses that are sensitive to the needs of this cohort, including among child protection caseworkers.

4. Priority Policy: A Life Free from Violence

Violence against women is a pervasive issue in Australia, but it is also preventable, and we all have a role to play. Drivers of violence against women include condoning or downplaying gendered violence, exhibiting controlling behaviours, disrespect towards women and dismissing the abilities of women in line with socially entrenched and archaic stereotypes¹⁴. While gendered violence affects all women, in that it can impact on unrelated decision making (*should I walk to my car alone?*), some cohorts of women are more likely to experience intimate partner violence, including women with a disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, young women and those who have recently separated from an abusive partner.¹⁵

⁹ <https://www.toora.org.au/assets/a-call-for-justice-hr.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/national/act/crisis-accommodation-for-family-violence-victims-inundated-with-migrant-women-20180414-p4z9I9.html>

¹¹ [http://www.wdv.org.au/documents/WDV%20Violence%20Position%20Paper%20\(web%20version\).pdf](http://www.wdv.org.au/documents/WDV%20Violence%20Position%20Paper%20(web%20version).pdf)

¹² [ibid](#)

¹³ <http://wwda.org.au/issues/viol/viol2001/odds/>

¹⁴ Our Watch (2017) *Putting the prevention of violence against women into practice: how to change the story*, Our Watch: Melbourne, p. 11.

¹⁵ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/domestic-violence/family-domestic-sexual-violence-in-australia-2018/contents/summary>

Government responses must target the origins of gender-based violence in our community, consider and appropriately respond to intersectional experiences and provide sufficient resources for longer-term community and legislative responses. To achieve this, we need social change to the structures, gender-based norms and expectations that pervade our society. To facilitate generational change to these longstanding biases in our community, we need to include all elements of the community, particularly those settings which feature so heavily in our lives; the workplace and education settings.

4.1 Implementation of Respectful Relationships education for all staff and students from K-12 and the university setting.

A school culture, encompassing all elements of the community, that clearly shows commitment to gender equality is essential to creating an environment that can break down the systemic issues around gender stereotyping and gender-based violence. While we acknowledge the ACT Government's work to date in introducing some elements of Respectful Relationships Education in local schools, the current approach falls short of implementing the core features and evaluation requirements that Our Watch have flagged as being fundamental to delivering successful outcomes for individuals and communities.

In particular, the delivery of Respectful Relationships Education in ACT schools remains focused on holistic student wellbeing, building teacher confidence and skills and the distribution of resources, but lacks participatory and recurring curriculum activities, across a variety of coursework areas, which are subject to annual evaluation and review. We also remain concerned that where discussions on intimate partner violence, coercion or abuse do take place, they focus on hypothetical relationships between adults without engaging students on what might be taking place in their own relationships. We also reiterate the need for comprehensive Respectful Relationships Education in light of our concerns around positive consent and image abuse that young people, without a suitable reference point to draw upon, are not equipped to identify or respond to abuse that may be happening in their own lives.

Further to these concerns, we note that information from the Education Directorate's website¹⁶ indicates that *many schools* draw upon their school motto or other whole of school passive messaging as a partial indicator of their work in teaching Respectful Relationships Education. Other examples appear to conflate the provision of mainstream pastoral care as an indicator of progress against the objectives of Respectful Relationships Education.

We know that controlling and abusive behaviours occur in relationships between young people¹⁷ and that short circuiting those behaviours before they become normalised is crucial in tackling gendered violence in the home and in the community. The core elements of Respectful Relationships Education, advocated by Our Watch, to achieve effective and transformative outcomes include; addressing the drivers of gender-based violence, having long term vision and funding, whole of school inclusion, collaborating with community and families, annual evaluation and using participatory modules that can be implemented across subject areas. Without systematic and long-term delivery across ACT schools, incorporating these core elements, genuine change in Canberra will not occur.

Our Watch has established that the education of children and young people around the development and maintenance of respectful relationships is essential to achieving the results of the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children* (2010-2022). We call

¹⁶ https://www.education.act.gov.au/teaching_and_learning/respectful-relationships-education

¹⁷ <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/News-media/Latest-news/'You-can't-undo-violence'—Our-Watch-launches-new>

upon the ACT Government to comprehensively roll out Respectful Relationship education across all ACT Government schools for students from K-12, in line with their peers in every other jurisdiction except the Northern Territory.

In the university setting, issues of consent and sexual harassment are pervasive. The Australian Human Rights Commission report *Changing the Course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities* into the prevalence of sexual harassment and violence on university campuses found that Canberra's universities recorded one of the highest rates of sexual harassment, particularly in college settings and particularly against culturally and linguistically diverse students.¹⁸ We therefore call on the ACT Government to work with universities to create a city and campus life that is vibrant and safe for all students.

Furthermore, while we acknowledge that an inquiry into the applicability of the ACT's consent legislation is ongoing, we reaffirm our position and continue to support progress toward the introduction of a positive consent model into the *Crimes ACT 1900* (ACT) as a critical step in improving community understanding around consent.

4.2 Develop a new, funded ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy, in line with national commitments

In the past, the ACT Government took steps to embed the *National Plan to reduce violence against women and their children* (2010-2022) into territory level frameworks, including the *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy 2011-17* and the *Safer Families Package*. We welcome those initiatives funded under the *Safer Families Package*, such as a residential behaviour change program for men at risk of using violence and the community consultation to develop the Family Safety Hub in 2017.

However, the 2017 decision not to re-fund the now expired *ACT Prevention of Violence Against Women and Children Strategy* — instead supporting 'local initiatives' in line with the National Plan - is concerning. Under the National Plan, states and territories are required to support systemic domestic violence prevention programs and as Our Watch has found — 'isolated initiatives are not enough.'¹⁹ The Family Safety Hub does not negate the need for an up-to-date *Strategy* and a new local plan should be developed as an urgent priority, in line with ongoing plans that exist for the Commonwealth Government and other jurisdictions.

While the Safer Families Package has been developed as a local response strategy, it is funded through a 30-dollar flat rate 'domestic violence levy' imposed on all households rather than being viewed as a core responsibility of government. Despite this, the levy system as a mechanism to raise revenue brings the issue of family violence to the fore of the public's mind and we urge the ACT Government to pursue strong, ongoing public messaging and targeted reporting to continually ensure the levy is being used transparently and responsibly.

¹⁸ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/change-course-national-report-sexual-assault-and-sexual>

¹⁹ Our Watch, (2017) Submission No 23: Inquiry into domestic and family violence in the ACT – Policy Approaches and Responses, accessed at https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1128657/Sub-No.-23-Our-Watch.pdf on 20 April 2018, p. 11.

4.3 Increase funding to specialist women's services

YWCA Canberra welcomes the funding packages from the 2018-19 ACT Budget that delivered funding for counsellors and frontline homelessness services at some of Canberra's specialist crisis services, however clarity around the nature of funding going forward is needed.

Longer-term funding certainty for specialist providers is essential in the development of sustainable service models that are informed by best practice. Toora Women Inc., the Beryl and Doris Womens refuges, YWCA Canberra, Canberra Rape Crisis and Domestic Violence Crisis Service are local specialist women's services who provide front line support to women in crisis and who need funding certainty going forward. ACT Government procurement practices, including commissioning-based models, should be reviewed to ensure they are equipped to provide funding certainty for a sector that is already oversubscribed for women in need.

4.4 Commit to greater transparency and gender disaggregated data collection on women's safety

In line with our recommendation for the ACT Government to prioritise gender responsive government and budgeting, we call on the ACT Government to apply a gendered focus lens to women's safety.

We recognise the Women's Plan has several initiatives focused on improving the experiences of women in Canberra, including safety targets and safety audits for events, however we call for greater transparency regarding the methodology and results of these initiatives. For example, the ACT Policing Annual Report 2017-18 lists perceptions of safety amongst Canberrans when considering a variety of potential crimes. However, this data is not gender disaggregated²⁰ – even data that reports on fears of sexual violence. The presentation of the data in this way does not recognise that threats of sexual violence are more acutely felt amongst women and therefore does not reveal the reality of women's experiences when moving about our city.

Data that is not disaggregated by gender cannot paint an accurate picture for future policy makers. Additional information is required in relation to the progress that has been made in both the perception and reality of women's safety and what measures are being used that give a specific indication of women's safety in Canberra. We also note that The Women's Centre for Health Matters safety mapping survey is an excellent resource for members of the public and highlights how government planning can be informed by non-government innovation. The mapping tool is designed to gather information on perceptions of safety and we encourage its use in future design work and consultation undertaken by the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate into urban development and public safety.

Connected to this, we also ask for similar clarification around the Women's Safety Audits for events run by ACT Government. When women feel safe in public spaces, they are more likely to be involved in public activities and their wellbeing improves. The audits are an important tool in event planning and responsiveness to identified risks. We seek clarification on how the audits are conducted, the extent to which women from diverse backgrounds, age brackets and abilities are included and whether there has been measurable progress in women's safety and attendance at public events since the introduction of the safety audits. Given the Women's Safety Audits have been in place for several years, we also urge consideration to rolling out

²⁰ <https://police.act.gov.au/sites/default/files/PDF/ACTPAnnualReport2017-18.pdf>

the measure to non-Government events that receive investment or in-kind support from the ACT Government.

Investment in last year's Budget toward the expansion of the CBR NightCrew is also welcome, however, we wish to ensure specialised training is provided for NightCrew staff to enable them to adequately respond to trauma and gender-driven violence they may encounter in their work.

Recommendations - Ongoing Priorities

5. Equality in the Workplace

According to the 2018 Australia Human Rights Commission's Survey into Sexual Harassment in Australia's Workplaces²¹, the workplace remains a site of discrimination and harassment for many women across Australia. In their survey of young women, under 25, working in Canberra, UnionsACT found that harassment, bullying and wage theft were widespread and that the gender pay gap commences from the moment a young woman enters the workforce with wage-theft and casualisation more common amongst young female workers.²²

Gender pay gap analysis from the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) reveals the gender pay gap favours 'full-time working men over full-time working women in every industry and occupational category in Australia'.²³ As a large employer, the ACT Government should continue to implement reforms already outlined in the Women's Plan to promote equity and to continue to identify opportunities that build gender equality within the ACT public service.

5.1 Introduce progressive paid parental leave entitlements that encourage shared care arrangements and build a culture that normalises male employee's uptake of parenting leave.

Paid parental leave schemes not only help to redistribute unpaid care work between men and women, they contribute to tackling workplace cultures that have historically discriminated against women. In Australia, corporations are leading the way in terms of introducing generous paid parental leave schemes that recognise parents as equal partners. In part, this is due to the introduction of the national Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme, which opened opportunities for a shared responsibility approach to PPL provisions between government and employers.

From 2017, PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) has offered flexible parental leave with superannuation contributions, with no minimum service requirement, for both men and women for up to 18 weeks. Medibank also followed suit in 2018 and now offers all prospective parents, 14 weeks paid parenting leave within the first 24 months of a child's birth and includes the opportunity for both parents to take leave concurrently.

As a national leader in equity and inclusion, the ACT Government, as an employer, is in a position to introduce balanced parenting leave schemes to improve the historic division of labour between parents. We note that 'Bonding Leave' is available, for non-primary carers, for ten working days with the option of taking an additional five days of personal leave. A move to more equitable parenting leave, on par with standards that are emerging in the private sector however, delivers competitive recruitment incentives and is an opportunity to shift gender imbalances in child rearing. While 'Bonding Leave' provides a baseline for carers to

²¹ <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/sex-discrimination/publications/everyone-s-business-fourth-national-survey-sexual>

²² <https://www.unionsact.org.au/seven-ten-working-women-aged-25-experienced-wage-theft-unionsact-report/>

²³ See Workplace Gender Equality Agency, (February 2018) *Australia's gender pay gap statistics*, p. 2 for details on datasets used in calculating the gender pay gap.

take leave around the birth of a child, the limited duration available and the nomenclature itself, re-emphasises the division of caring responsibilities that can emerge in parenting.

5.2 Enact a Gender Equality Act that is informed by evidence-based international models and includes tangible targets

The Victorian Parliament recently completed consultation on a Gender Equality Act and legislation is expected to be considered early in 2019. The Bill, when introduced, will be progressively applied to all public sector organisations and entities with more than 100 full time employees. The Bill creates obligations for relevant organisations including promoting gender equality targets for executive positions and public boards, and reporting against targets, as well as introducing procurement guidelines that ensure a commitment to gender equality underpins government purchasing.

We note that the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026* saw the government investigate contemporary procurement practices which promote gender equality. We also welcomed consultation on the Secure Local Jobs Package that required tenderers to submit a workplace equity plan. However, while the Year One Reporting on the Women's Plan indicates this investigative work is completed, there is limited information about what emerged from this investigative work and how it will inform the practical solutions that are expected to be established in the forthcoming years. To this end we welcome further information on what the workplace equity plans will require from tenderers and contactors as a result of the Secure Local Jobs Package consultations.

6. Recommendations – Girls and Women Thriving Priorities

6.1 Building women and girls' wellbeing through greater participation in community level sport.

YWCA Canberra, as well as the global and national YWCA movement, has a strong history of identifying and providing diverse opportunities for women to participate in sport in their communities. We recognise that team sports can play a positive role in personal development, confidence building and holistic wellbeing. However, rates of sporting engagement amongst girls drops off during puberty.²⁴ While previous Budget initiatives, including 'supporting professional women's teams to back our female athletes and provide girls and women with positive role models'²⁵ are positive, this support for Canberra's elite sporting women will only be sustainable into the future when girls, playing grassroots sport, are provided every opportunity to stay engaged in their own chosen sport from a young age.

We also welcome initiatives under the ACT Women's Plan to introduce a target of 40 per cent representation of women on peak ACT sporting boards by 2020 and note that results to date have seen progress against the target.²⁶ We urge policy makers however, to consider more practical measures, that will encourage active participation in all facets of sport, beyond board level representation. Opportunities exist to expand the role of girls and women, not only as players, but as match officials, club administrators, coaches and code level officials should be considered avenues for future policy expansion.

We welcome initiatives that encourage and incentivise the participation of girls and women in local community sport. Further, as a measure of how those initiatives focused on board

²⁴ ABS, *Children's Participation in Cultural and Leisure Activities*, April 2003, p. 14.

²⁵ <https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/budget-2018-2019/budget-in-brief/women>

²⁶ http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/1212471/First-Action-Plan-Detailed-Year-One-Reporting.pdf

representation and elite women have improved outcomes for girls in grassroots sport, we also call for future analysis on the involvement and retention of girls in Canberra's local sporting clubs.

6.2 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

YWCA Canberra has been providing ECEC in the ACT for more than 30 years and we are also one of the largest employer-based providers of Family Day Care in Australia.

As a Children First Alliance member, we endorse the Alliance's 2019-20 Budget submission.