

TOWARDS 2024



YWCA Canberra's 2020 ACT election platform



YWCA CANBERRA

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. Our mission is 'we strengthen communities by supporting girls and women through our services and advocacy' and our vision is 'girls and women thriving'. We provide 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. We are externally accredited against the Quality Improvement Council (QIC) Health and Community Service Standards (7th Edition). Accreditation against the QIC standards supports us to improve client and community engagement, diversity and cultural appropriateness, management systems, governance and service delivery while committing to a cycle of continuous quality improvement. In addition to the QIC standards, we are accredited against the following external client-related service standards for our key areas of work:

- Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission
- National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care and School Aged Care
- National Regulatory System for Community Housing
- Registered Training Organisations Standards
- We also benchmark our work in homelessness and affordable housing against the Community Housing Standards.

Through our national Affiliate Association with YWCA Australia, we are part of the World YWCA network, which connects 120 countries across the globe. As a member of the Children's First Alliance YWCA Canberra also supports their advocacy on behalf of the early childhood education and care sector.

Acknowledgement

YWCA Canberra proudly recognises the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to own and control their cultures and pays our respect to these rights. YWCA Canberra acknowledges the need to respect and encourage the diversity of Indigenous cultures and to respect Indigenous worldviews, lifestyles, and customary laws. We extend our respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women who for thousands of years have preserved the culture and practices of their communities on country. This land was never surrendered, and we acknowledge that it always was and will continue to always be Aboriginal land.

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INTRODUCTION

For 90 years, YWCA Canberra has been a trusted contributor to the Canberra community. Our work reaches women and girls in all stages of their life journey from early education to high-school leadership programs and career-focused conferences and workshops, while our front-line community services programs provide outreach and support to the most vulnerable members of our community.

Since our establishment in 1929, we have witnessed decades of positive economic and social change that has opened the lives of women to opportunity, choice, and prosperity.

Women who witnessed this transformation were filled with hope that the next generation would not have to endure the inequality they experienced. While we continue to welcome the growing public discussion on violence against women and poverty in retirement, gender inequality remains an inter-generational issue.

Gender inequality manifests in multiple ways. Our survey of more than 1000 Canberra women conducted in 2019, *Our Lives: Women in the ACT* found that around one third had turned down paid work to perform unpaid caring duties in the previous 12 months.

For women aged 18-34, 70 per cent said they had experienced sexist behaviour in the previous 12 months, with the workplace being the most common location¹. These experiences have been heightened during COVID-19 and evidence indicates that rates of online sexual harassment escalated during this time².

With the forthcoming 2020 ACT Election taking place against a backdrop of increased financial insecurity impacting disproportionately on female workers, additional unpaid care and a greater risk of domestic and family violence, it is more important than ever that the priorities of Canberra's women and children are central to the election and the next ACT Government's plan. We call on political leaders to consider the priorities of this election platform and build lasting change for women and girls in Canberra.

Our priorities for action include **safe, secure and affordable housing, preventing violence against women, and valuing early childhood education and promoting access.**

We welcome the opportunity to discuss these priorities and our vision for Canberra with all parties and candidates.

SAFE, SECURE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING

The importance of shelter as a core component of public health has been highlighted by COVID-19 and social distancing guidelines. These measures, while necessary, alienated those without secure housing and meant many women and children were confined to their homes with people who use violence against them. The intersection between domestic violence and housing crisis during this period was evident in the 170 per cent increase in referrals for YWCA Canberra's housing support team.

The response by some state governments to immediately accommodate homeless persons in local hotels has highlighted that a housing-first model is achievable within short timeframes. Homelessness is not an intractable problem; a well-resourced community housing sector and a diversity of affordable housing options, capable of meeting the needs of individuals and families, plays an important role in public wellbeing and meeting the housing needs of a community.

Recommendations

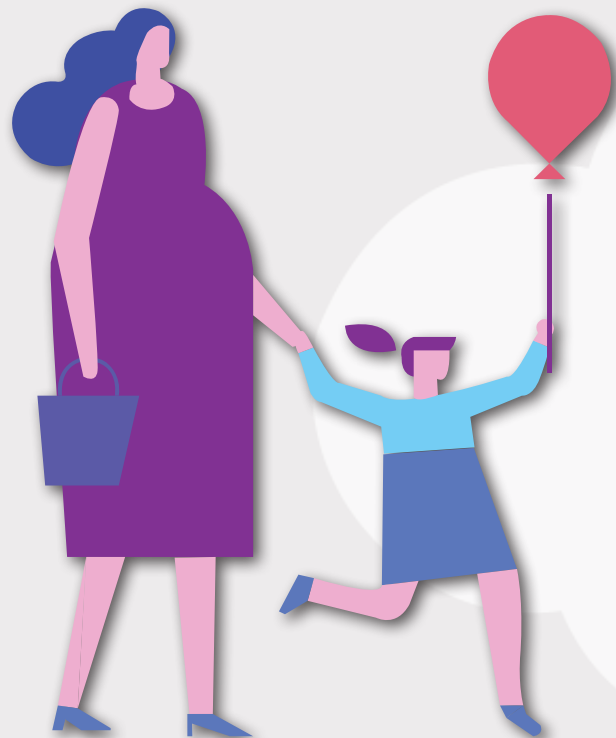
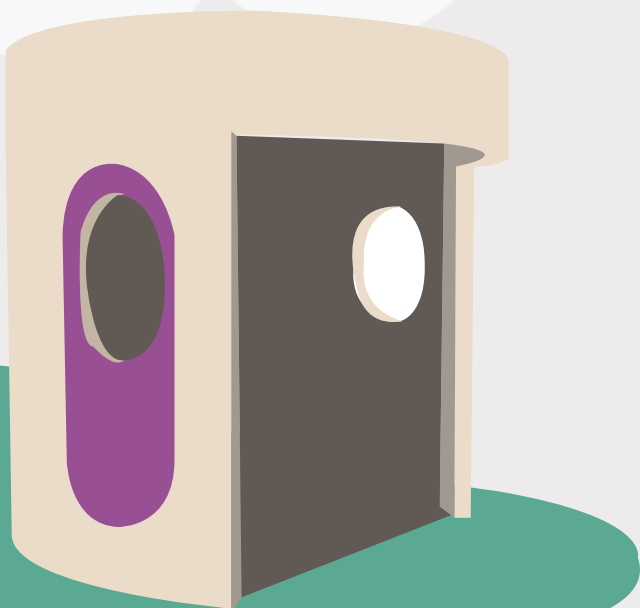
- Invest in building capacity within the sector for appropriate services and supported housing to assist gender and sexually diverse persons escape family and domestic violence.
- Fund specialist and culturally appropriate housing and homelessness services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women escaping domestic violence.
- Upgrade Canberra's existing refuge housing stock to ensure access for women with disabilities who require crisis housing.
- Implement recommendation two of the ACT Select Committee on the COVID-19 Pandemic Response to remove the current 100 property limit on the land tax concession scheme for landlords who rent properties through a community housing provider, and make this scheme a permanent feature of the ACT's housing strategy.
- Lift the supply of three and four-bedroom dwellings available through the Affordable Home Purchase Program to better meet market demand, as recommended by the ACT Audit Office review of land supply and development.

PREVENTING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The policy framework of responding to family violence is too late for some women and children. We call for visionary and evidence-based primary prevention strategies that eliminate violence before it starts and creates a future without violence for Canberra girls.

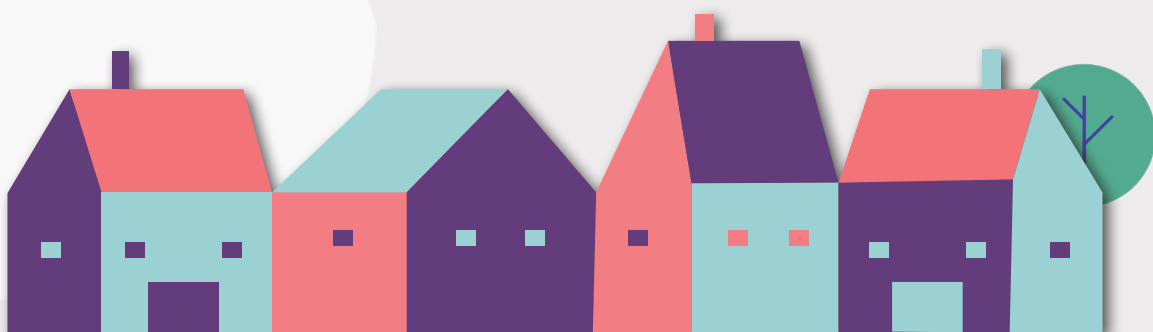
Sexual harassment in public and in the workplace limits women's economic and social participation and has been subject to national surveys and inquiries. The #MeToo movement has not abated and continues to expose systemic issues of workplace sexual harassment which, when unaddressed, displaces capable women from their chosen profession across a range of industries.

Compounding this is evidence demonstrating that young people are failing to grasp key concepts of sexual consent and awareness of what constitutes sexual harassment³ and violence⁴. We urge the government to prioritise addressing sexual harassment of women to build both broader gender equality and workplace productivity. Comprehensive and evidence-based primary prevention methods that address the issue of gender-based violence in the community before they take hold are also needed.



Recommendations

- Collect and publicise anonymised data relating to workplace sexual harassment and develop annual reporting of sexual harassment in Canberra workplaces.
- Collect and publicise gender-disaggregated and intersectional data on perceptions of personal safety and harassment in public spaces in Canberra for women.
- Lobby the Australian Government to adopt the legislative reform recommendations of the Australian Human Rights Commission Respect@Work report on workplace sexual harassment.
- Include the prevention of sexual harassment in workplaces, educational and public settings as a priority area, with measurable outcomes, in the implementation of the ACT Women's Plan and Fourth Action Plan.
- Amend the Crimes Act (ACT 1900) to include the concept of positive consent, as recommended by the corrigendum to the Inquiry into Crimes (Consent) Amendment Bill.
- Establish the cross-government, cross-sector working group to advise on how prosecution outcomes for victims of sexual assault can be improved, as recommended by the Inquiry into the Crimes (Consent) Amendment Bill.
- Broaden the scope of the Family Safety Hub to respond to violence that occurs between intimate partners who do not constitute a family unit.
- Implement Respectful Relationships Education for students from P-12 and tertiary education, including students in special needs educational settings, in line with Our Watch's recommended whole-of-school approach.



VALUING EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND PROMOTING ACCESS

Access to Early Childhood Education and Care provides children with the best start in life, and we believe every child in the ACT should have the opportunity to access early education. Our services, as well as providing formative education, also introduce children to life-long and valuable concepts, in an age-appropriate format, including reconciliation and respectful relationships. We believe this approach can build a better, safer, and more inclusive society in the long term.

COVID-19 highlighted the value of early education services to the economy and families. We believe there is a pressing need to recalibrate how policymakers conceive of early childhood education and care. Rather than being viewed as ‘babysitting’ or ‘childminding’, quality early childhood education and care is an investment in the future economy of our nation and we call on the next ACT Government to recognise this value and join us in supporting the equal pay case for early educators.

Recommendations

- Fund the extension of universal access to early childhood education and care to three-year-old children (in line with the Australian Government Child Care Subsidy maximum hourly fee cap for children below school age).
- Lobby the federal government to support equal pay for educators.
- Create an ACT Early Childhood Educators Professional Development Fund to support ongoing professional development in the sector.
- Re-establish the Early Childhood Advisory Council to streamline sector insight and advice to the relevant Minister.

¹ YWCA Canberra (2019) Our Lives: women in the ACT https://ywca-canberra.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/YWCA-Our-Lives_web.pdf

² <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/library/publications/2020/brief-online-and-ict-facilitated-violence-against-women-and-girls-during-covid-19-en.pdf?la=en&vs=2519>

³ Australian Human Rights Commission Op. Cit, p. 24

⁴ National Community Attitudes towards Violence against Women Survey (NCAS) 2017 found that many young people believe it is natural for a male intimate partner or workplace colleague to be in control and in leadership and that domestic violence is a normal reaction to everyday stress <https://d2rn9gno7zhxqg.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/05051743/2017NCAS-Youth-SubReport.pdf>