



YWCA CANBERRA

Submission to the 2021-2022 ACT Budget
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Acknowledgement of Country

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.

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 support 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](#)

Through our national Affiliate Association with YWCA Australia, we are part of the World YWCA network, which connects 120 countries across the globe.

Introduction

YWCA Canberra welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission for the 2021-2022 Budget consultation process. As the first Budget to be measured against the Wellbeing Framework, the ACT is at a unique moment in time to measure outcomes in terms of holistic wellbeing and address ongoing and systemic societal problems around poverty, housing affordability and community safety. We also offer observations in how effective governance and gender-budgeting is fundamental to establishing ambitious gender-equality objectives and greater wellbeing for women.

Canberrans and their Government rightly consider themselves as leading the country in terms of progressive community policies and there is ample evidence to support this. However, in a city of affluence the privation of many can go forgotten as the community strives for greater gains in identity and progress. As the Canberra economy bounces back from COVID-19 our concern is that those whose wellbeing was already precarious at the onset of the pandemic, will be further left behind.

Recommendations made in this submission align with recommendations outlined in our election platform [Towards 2024](#) released in October 2020 in the lead up to the ACT Election. As a member of the Children's First Alliance, a network of for purpose providers of early learning and school aged care in Canberra, YWCA Canberra also supports the priorities outlined in the Alliance's submission. This submission covers the following priority areas:

1. Gender responsive budgeting and governance
2. Safe secure and affordable housing
3. A life without violence
4. Valuing early childhood education

Priority 1: Gender responsive budgeting and governance

Wellbeing Framework Domain: Governance and Institutions

1.1 Develop a best-practice Women's Budget Statement

YWCA Canberra welcomed the ACT Government's effort to re-instate the Women's Budget Statement as part of the 2019-2020 Territory Budget. Our feedback in response to this Budget highlighted to the ACT Government that it did not meet expectations of a comprehensive gender budget and that we welcomed the opportunity to provide guidance on future releases. As part of our contribution to the 2019-2020 Budget Estimates process, we specifically gave evidence on notice of what a best-practice gender-informed budget

portfolio areas were cognisant of and reporting on women's wellbeing as a routine part of the Budget development process.

Other Australian governments have improved their processes around gender responsive budgeting. For example, the 2021-2022 Victorian Budget provided funding to establish a Gender Responsive Budgeting Unit within the Department of Treasury and Finance. Once established, this unit is expected to monitor the State Budget against the State's Gender Equality Act and to ensure that desired outcomes for women are considered as part of budget processes.²

1.3 Accountability of the Safer Families Levy

YWCA Canberra supports the Safer Families Levy as a sustainable revenue source for the ACT Government to respond to domestic and family violence in the long-term without the uncertainty of Budget cycles. The levy was fundamental in establishing the role of the Family Safety Hub and capacity building to respond to domestic and family violence through innovation and collaboration. However, as it is resourced via a \$30 fee against all ACT rate payers, we believe this necessitates a robust level of transparency with regards to its expenditure.

Women who experience domestic and family violence in Canberra are currently subjected to congested wait times to access vital services that are fundamental in achieving safety, such as housing, legal assistance, or counselling. These experiences can prolong trauma and delay recovery. Swift access to housing support in particular, is crucial to provide safe exits and alternatives to returning to the home where violence occurred. Front-line reporting demonstrates that accessing support can be cumbersome for women living with violence. The Smart Accommodation Report released by DVCS ACT in 2020 highlighted cases where victim-survivors were forced into homelessness in order to become eligible to access support for housing while others moved back in with perpetrators of violence as safe alternatives were not available.³

Of the referrals to our Transitional Housing Program in the previous twelve months, all 36 referrals were clients who co-presented with domestic and family violence. Furthermore, our Domestic Violence Support Service has assisted 136 women in the 12 months to April 2021. As we receive referrals from a broad range of community links including the community services, ACT Policing, DVCS, hospitals, OneLink as well as self-referrals, we believe these

² Gender Equality Budget Statement <https://www.budget.vic.gov.au/gender-equality-budget-statement>

³ Domestic Violence Crisis Service ACT (December 2020) "Smart Accommodation Report" pp. 15-18.

are clients whose support needs would not have otherwise been met through the existing network of services. Due to staff resourcing limitations however, we are left having to manage the number of incoming referrals we receive due to capacity. Were this resourcing not an issue, our estimation is that we would be able to service another 10-12 clients per month.

At \$5 million/year, the Safer Families Levy has enormous potential to tangibly change the lives of women and children escaping family and domestic violence by improving access to and support from the services they rely on. Given the reality of women's experiences in accessing services and the resourcing limitations observed by the sector, we are concerned with the proportion of the Safer Families Levy that goes towards ostensibly core government expenditure, staffing costs and professional development. The line items 'delivering the family safety hub', 'safer families team' which are almost entirely used to support salaries, as well as 'training' account for nearly half of the total annual revenue collected from the levy. YWCA Canberra questions the decision to fund operational costs through the levy which when introduced was earmarked to provide enhanced community support for survivors.⁴

Previous Budget submissions by YWCA Canberra welcomed the move to provide training to frontline ACT Government employees to recognise and respond to family and domestic violence as it may present in client-facing roles. The ACTPS Core Learning Policy (2018)⁵ however built upon this front-line targeting and the policy was transitioned to all employees 'regardless of the directorate they work in' to ensure service wide staff wellbeing.⁶ Despite the training now being expanded to all ACT Government employees there appears to be no effort to revisit the funding rationale and whether the Safer Families Levy is an appropriate means to resource professional development.

In achieving better accountability for the use of the Levy, we draw your attention to Recommendation 60 of the Report on Inquiry into Domestic and Family Violence tabled by the Justice and Community Safety Committee in 2019: *The committee recommends that progress of the Family Safety Hub, its developing role and any measurable outcomes, be the subject of regular reporting.*⁷

⁴ ACT Revenue Office, Safer Families Levy <https://www.revenue.act.gov.au/levies/safer-families-levy>

⁵ Core Learning in the ACT Public Service (2018)

https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/1181117/Core-learning-policy.pdf

⁶ The ACT Government Domestic and Family Violence Training Strategy (2021)

https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/1730015/DFV-Training-Strategy.pdf

⁷ https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1405372/9th-JCS-06-Report-on-Inquiry-into-Domestic-and-Family-ViolencePolicy-Approaches-and-Responses.pdf

Recommendation 1.1: Develop a robust 2021-2022 Women's Budget Statement in line with best practice examples.

Recommendation 1.2: Position the Office for Women in the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Recommendation 1.3: Review the allocation of the Safer Families Levy revenue with a view to increase allocation to community services in line with the Government's own gender equality targets and messaging.

Recommendation 1.4: Review the funding rationale for ACTPS wide training on domestic and family violence with a view to transitioning the cost to existing government resources thus substantially freeing up the Safer Families Levy for prevention, response and crisis work in the community.

Priority 2: Safe, secure, and affordable housing

Wellbeing Framework Domains: Housing and home, living standards, and social connection.

2.1 Better targeting of the Indicative Land Release Program

There is no other indicator so inextricably linked to improved societal outcomes than housing and the current crisis in housing affordability and supply is therefore a crisis in community wellbeing. YWCA Canberra has been providing housing services to women and their families for nearly 80 years. As a provider of transitional and supported housing we understand the importance of housing in achieving greater social wellbeing.

Access to affordable and secure housing is the foundation from which people can connect to the community, economy, and essential services. For families on modest incomes, single-parents, students and those on low-incomes however, the pathway to affordable housing is diminishing as they are locked in a cycle of escalating rents in a tight and competitive market. For families who are paying on average \$700/week to rent a family home, each rent cycle is one step further away from being able to save for a property with repayments they can comfortably afford.

Despite a key action of the ACT Housing Strategy (2018) being to 'dedicate at least 15 per cent of the Indicative Land Release Program each year to affordable, community and public housing', the ACT Auditor General found that targets for affordable housing were not met in

2017-18 and 2018-19.⁸ The Auditor General surmised that this was due to an oversupply of 1- and 2-bedroom dwellings at the expense of sufficient family sized dwellings, which were preferred by purchasers.

The 2020-2021 Budget indicated that following the impact of COVID-19 on the local economy, revenue from land sales played a crucial role in improving the Territory's overall bottom-line.⁹ In 2019-2020, the proportion of affordable land releases that were appropriated for either public housing, community housing or released to the market was roughly 18 percent of total land sales.¹⁰ In 2020-2021, despite affordability becoming a serious concern, this proportion has dropped to 10 percent.¹¹ While YWCA Canberra acknowledges the importance of land sales to the Territory's revenue base, locking down affordable releases and poorly targeting the affordable release that are made available to the market does little to address the housing needs of individuals or contribute to overall social wellbeing. We call on the ACT Government to better target affordable releases to families and those on modest incomes and explore options such as shared equity arrangements and land tax exemptions to be available to community housing providers to participate in land purchasing for affordable supply purposes.

2.2: Affordable release of land to Community Housing Providers

The first months of 2021 saw the biggest spike in Australian house prices of the last 17 years.¹² The Canberra market was the strongest performer nationally, with a 10.9 per cent increase in property prices in the last 12 months¹³ facilitated by record low interest rates, a supply deficit, a relatively stable public income base and an improving economic landscape. YWCA Canberra supports a housing strategy that is diverse in its composition and meets the needs of the changing demographics currently experiencing homelessness or housing crisis. For many single parents, older women and nuclear families on modest incomes trying to compete in either the private rental or buyer markets, it is the unaffordability of housing that

⁸ https://www.audit.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1564581/Media-Release-Report-No.-4-of-2020-Residential-Land-Supply-and-Development.pdf

⁹ <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7117680/land-sales-give-act-budget-a-big-boost/?cs=14329>

¹⁰ Budget Statement E 2019-2020 https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/1369788/E-Environment,-Planning-and-Sustainable-Development-Directorate.pdf p. 83.

¹¹ The August 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update notes that the proportion for 2020-2021 is 16% however this is achieved by removing the suburbs of Whitlam, Throsby and Taylor from the calculation as these suburbs still had an allocation of public, social and affordable housing left over from previous years. It is unclear how this method of calculation still shows an overall increase in overall affordable supply and whether the affordable releases excluded in the above suburbs were not taken up purchasers due to poor targeting as identified by the Auditor General https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/1619308/August-2020-Economic-and-Fiscal-Update.pdf (see foot note 9) page 152.

¹² <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7147311/biggest-spike-in-house-prices-in-17-years-recorded/>

¹³ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/economy/price-indexes-and-inflation/residential-property-price-indexes-eight-capital-cities/latest-release>

is precluding them from achieving greater wellbeing rather than underlying complex needs. Community housing providers are well-positioned to meet this growing need with high levels of tenant satisfaction for community housing providers relative to public housing.¹⁴ Community housing developments, like our proposed Y-Homes build for older women and women escaping violence in Ainslie, can play a significant role in lifting supply but require substantial amounts of capital. Without targeted affordable supply, incentivised purchasing or opportunities for shared equity the pathways for community housing organisations to contribute to building affordable homes are limited.

Recommendation 2.1: Review and amend the nature and type of affordable housing dwellings offered to the market through the Affordable Home Purchase Program in order to better meet market demand, as per the recommendations of the ACT Auditor General.

Recommendation 2.2: Lift the supply of properties available through community housing providers by implementing strategies that lead to more affordable purchasing, shared equity or improved targeting of affordable releases.

Priority 3: A Life without violence

Wellbeing Framework Domains: Safety and health.

3.1 Respectful Relationships Education

YWCA Canberra sees first-hand the impact of gender inequality in terms of women's safety at home. How government and community respond to gendered violence must be balanced in a way that incorporates preventative measures, crisis intervention and perpetrator responses. YWCA Canberra supports preventative measures that work with children and young people in education settings to create social change in reducing the likelihood that a woman will experience violence in her lifetime. We continue to call for a greater focus on community wide preventative measures, than is previously resourced in the ACT Budget.

As a partner to the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, the ACT Government lists the training provided to ACT Public Servants as the only preventative initiative deliverable under the Fourth Action Plan. Measures that are targeted to young people, where the lifetime impact of early education can be most effective in reducing

¹⁴ Report on Government Services (2021) Table 18A. 42 <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2021/housing-and-homelessness/housing>

violence, are absent.¹⁵ Respectful Relationships Education (RRE) is an evidence-based approach to preventing gender-based violence. The whole of school approach to RRE supported by Our Watch uses the education system as a catalyst for generational and cultural change, to comprehensively address the drivers of gender-based violence and create a future free from violence.

Rather than implementing RRE across the whole of school system as is recommended by OurWatch, the ACT Government has preferred a model of student behavioural management known as Positive Behaviours for Learning (PBL) which is being progressively introduced across some schools. We understand that some schools also contract out incursions by non-expert wellbeing groups, on a discretionary basis, which may cover topics such as respect for women. It is important to note that PBL and RRE should not be conflated as achieving the same aims. While PBL is a model for behavioural expectations of students taking into account the physical school environment, it is not designed to assist students explore life-long concepts like relationships, gender inequality, power imbalances, boundaries and consent. Further, as PBL is a student-focused initiative, it does not extend to the school as both a community and workplace. Alongside the ad-hoc incursions from non-expert community groups and the preference for PBL over evidence-based RRE approaches to violence prevention, our concern is that opportunities for government to pursue a consistent, system-wide approach to preventing gender-based violence is not being adopted.

Recommendation 3.1: Implement Respectful Relationships Education for all staff and students from P-12 including students in special needs schools.

Priority 4: Valuing Early Childhood Education and Care

Wellbeing Framework Domains: Education and lifelong learning

4.1 Children's First Alliance

As a member of the Children's First Alliance, we contributed to the Alliance's Budget submission. We support calls for greater investment in early learning to improve access and service sustainability and to value early educators.

¹⁵ National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children
<https://plan4womenssafety.dss.gov.au/implementation-plan/initiatives/?keyword=&priority=priority-1&responsibility=02-act&order=alpha&filter=Filter>