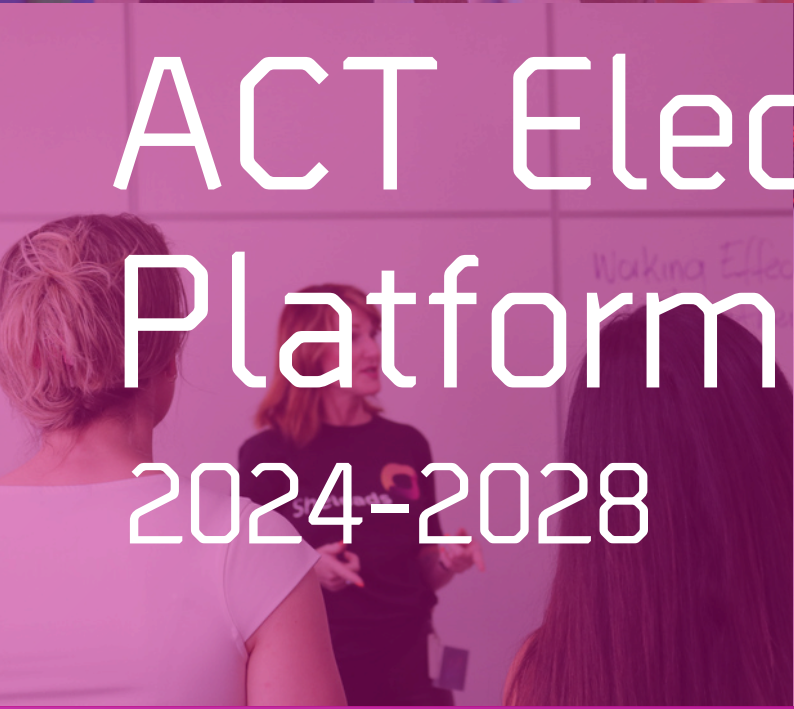




YWCA
CANBERRA

YWCA Canberra ACT Election Platform 2024-2028



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 have preserved the culture and practices of their communities on country for thousands of years.

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 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. 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.



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Introduction

For 95 years, YWCA Canberra has been a trusted partner of the Canberra community, supporting women and girls at every stage of their life journey. From early education to high-school leadership programs, and career-focused conferences and workshops, we also provide crucial frontline community services to the most vulnerable members of our community.

Since our establishment in 1929, we have witnessed significant positive changes in economic and social landscapes which offer women more opportunities, choices, and prosperity. However, while the trend towards gender equality is positive, we must remain vigilant to the gendered impacts of violence, poverty, and housing supply shortages. Public policy and decision-making lie at the heart of resolving all these issues.

Our 2023 survey, "Our Lives: Women in the ACT", revealed the alarming choices and stress facing many women in Canberra: 32% of respondents lack sufficient savings to cover one housing payment if they lost their income, 30% said they were in a state of financial stress or crisis, and 35% believe they will struggle in their retirement. All these figures are a deterioration of the findings recorded in the 2021 version of our survey.

Domestic and family violence remains the only personal crime that has continually seen an increase in reporting. The first four months of 2024, saw police respond to on average around 11 family or domestic violence-related incidents per day, an increase on the daily average recorded in previous years.

We use this election to reiterate long-standing priorities for the Canberra community and call for the future ACT Government to commit to addressing the following; safe, secure and affordable housing, cost of living relief, a life free of violence, securing the best start to life; early learning, and better investment in children, youth and family services.





Safe, Secure, and Affordable Housing

Despite measures to increase the supply of housing across the spectrum challenges persist and are now largely embedded.

Construction timelines continue to be at the mercy of the economy, while social and public housing builds, particularly in green-fill areas, are often subjected to long delays. Targets for public housing builds have not increased since 2020 and are not keeping pace with population growth.

Overcrowding in Canberra is increasing, going against national trends, which is unlikely to abate as economic conditions tighten, and people resort to cost-saving measures which may result in over-crowding.

Housing stress related to affordability and access in Canberra is now dire. The 2023 "Our Lives" survey indicated that housing costs are a major contributor to the cost-of-living pressures and more than half of respondents who paid private rent or had a mortgage reported they were spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

There remains an imbalance in the proposed delivery of affordable housing versus income-based social housing, and policy reform to lift the supply of income-based rentals significantly lags that driving affordable supply.

More than half of respondents who paid private rent or had a mortgage reported they were spending more than 30% of their income on housing.

While the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF), has set a target of 1200 new dwellings in the ACT, plus housing earmarked under the social housing accelerator funding, there is uncertainty about the delivery of the target in achieving desired social housing outcomes.

While an increase to the affordable housing stock is welcomed, there remains a longstanding deficit in social housing, which is unlikely to be abated through the HAFF alone, and, concerningly, a lack of understanding of the difference between "affordable" housing and "social" housing in government policy making.

YWCA Canberra urges the following:

1. Improve the affordability of land release to Community Housing Providers, reflecting the market value for the provision of social and affordable housing.

2. Increase the public housing target to keep pace with demand and population growth.

3. Introduce rates exemption for Community Housing Providers who provide affordable housing at significantly less than 75% of market rents.

4. Set and deliver a distinct social housing target.

5. Improve the public housing turnaround time for vacant stock to be tenanted.

6. Permit title deed variations to reflect a site's purpose and true valuation

7. Partner with Community Housing Providers to prepare for future HAFF funding rounds.

8. Increase funding for homelessness services and support to keep pace with increasing demand, via an innovative flexible funding pool to bridge the gap between new public housing and HAFF housing stock becoming available.





Cost of Living Relief

In recent years, cost-of-living pressures have been significant, and a growing number of Canberrans are now facing difficult choices.

The relief many on low incomes or income support payments felt during COVID-19 has thoroughly abated.

The Budget provided a welcome suite of cost-of-living relief for low-income Canberrans, however there is concern that when measured against price increases to utilities and public transport this relief will be short lived.

Compared to the pandemic period, Australian households now, have on average, \$10,700 less per annum to spend on non-essential items and households in the lowest income quintile are finding the cost of covering essentials greater than their monthly income.

Electricity disconnections and notices of disconnection are now increasingly affecting households with mortgages and in full-time employment. We are seeing this play out in real time at our Mura Lanyon food hub, which on average now sees 49 people each week visit to access food. Comparatively, in the first six months of 2022, the service averaged less than 30 people on food hub day.

For many Canberrans with children, food pressure is compounded by the everyday costs of raising children. Of the single parents who responded to the "Our Lives" survey, 49% said they struggled with daily expenses related to their children's needs.

We support an expansion of the existing concession scheme to support those on low incomes or single income households meet essential costs.

YWCA Canberra urges the following:

1. Review the Government's debt collection strategy and application of administrative charges.

2. Sustainably fund welfare services that provide financial counselling, food and emergency relief and material aid services into the longer term.





A Life Free from Violence

Legislative reform throughout Australia is favouring the criminalisation of coercive control. Rather than a series of one-off incidents of violence, coercive control is a tapestry of behaviours that occur in a relationship to intimidate, control and humiliate another. This behaviour can often include non-physical forms of violence.

The 2023 ACT Domestic and Family Violence death review found that coercive control was present in 9 out of 12 of the reviewed homicides between 2000 and 2022. In four of the nine homicides there was no evidence of physical violence prior to the homicide.

Responses to the “Our Lives” survey indicate a steady increase in the rates of interpersonal violence among respondents with 18% saying they had endured interpersonal violence from a current or former partner in the preceding 12 months.

Furthermore, latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics reveals a 15% increase in police reports of sexual assault over the past 12 months, and an increase in the victimisation rate.

While the 2024-2025 Budget announcement of \$12 million over four years towards frontline services is a welcome step, this funding must be sustainable and responsive to growing demand into the future.

Our own Domestic Violence Support Service (DVSS) will receive funding under this measure to allow us to employ two specialist staff. This is desperately needed as holds on referrals have been a recurring feature when demand outstrips capacity.

This is urgent given the forecast increases to the Safer Families Levy over the next two financial years, while frontline services continue to face significant increases to operating costs and overheads which impact on viability.

18% [of survey respondents] had endured interpersonal violence from a current or former partner in the preceding 12 months.

YWCA Canberra urges the following:

1. Criminalise coercive control

2. Introduce a specialised sexual assault list to improve the court's handling of sexual assault cases.

3. Develop a long-term strategy towards the elimination of domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT.

4. Sustainably fund the domestic and family violence sector to acknowledge the true costs of providing vital services on behalf of government.





Securing the best start to life; Early Learning

All children deserve the best start in life. For many children, a strong foundation with access to quality early education can be a critical component towards a thriving and healthy childhood development.

In the ACT over half (58.4 per cent) of children aged between 0 to 5 years attend Child Care Subsidy (CCS) approved early learning.

High quality early learning makes a significant and lasting positive impact on children throughout their lives. This can be particularly true for children who are in out of home care or child protection.

Until the first of July 2024, our early learning services provided 40 emergency placements for children in our services per week. Many of these children are vulnerable and present with complex trauma and developmental delays. Without the routine and opportunities of early learning, many will struggle to catch up to their peers.

Following lobbying from the sector, the ACT Government increased the placement funding for emergency childcare places without increasing the overall funding envelope.

Subsequently, centres have been forced to reduce the overall number of places available.

In practice this means our services, from 1 July, will only be able to provide 15 emergency places a week. If we are to continue providing 40 places a week to extremely vulnerable children, it will come at the expense of mainstream places.

YWCA Canberra supports the fee-free placement initiative for three-year olds. In practice however, the cap of 300 hours per child, limiting the placement to 6 hours a day, has led to confusion for parents on the scope of what is meant by 'universal access'.

Furthermore, the funding envelope for the three-year old initiative has consistently failed to keep pace with the true cost of service provision. Most recently the inclusion of GST in contracts has meant the funding arrangements are not sustainable. Without funding that reflects the true cost, we will be unable to deliver the initiative into 2025.

Without the routine and opportunities of early learning [many of these children] will struggle to catch up to their peers.

YWCA Canberra urges the following:

1. Adequately resource the emergency placement of children aged 0-5 years who are in early learning services without reducing capacity of services to provide mainstream places

2. Extend the emergency placement funding to include children of Primary School age to attend before and after school care.

3. Adequately resource the three-year-old initiative for vulnerable children, that provides sustainable funding to community sector partners contracted to deliver the program.

4. Provide a flexible funding pool to outside school hours care providers to assist in minor venue adaptations to cater to the special needs of children with disabilities.

5. Continue the ACT Early Childhood Educators Professional Development Fund.

6. Maintain peppercorn lease arrangements.





Children, Youth, and Families

Significant reforms have happened in the ACT in the youth space. Changes to the age of criminal responsibility have been welcomed as the social understanding of youth incarceration has evolved.

Through a tapestry of structural and legislative reforms, young people are increasingly aware of their rights in the workplace, in the home and in society. Decisions by the government however continue to impact young people, their wellbeing and the services they rely on.

Serious issues like youth homelessness remain as the number of homeless young people aged 12-24 increased by 16% between the 2016 and 2021 Censuses.

Despite Canberra's growing population, and reforms to youth policy and justice there has been no funding increase to youth, therapeutic counselling and community development services in the past 10 years.

Soft outreach services and community youth programs continue to operate on the same funding envelope as they received prior to significant policy reforms.

Programs like Network Coordination, which link at-risk young people and

their families, with support services and interventions are slated for defunding, despite a strong track record of delivering improved outcomes for vulnerable youth.

Our Mura Lanyon Youth and Community Centre sees increasing complexity among the young people who drop into the centre, often as part of their peer network, but who continue to use the centre because it is a safe place to socialise, and, for many safer than their homes.

YWCA Canberra urges the following:

1. Sustainably fund Canberra's place-based youth, therapeutic counselling, community development and community support services in line with population projections as well as structural reforms to youth justice and policy settings.

2. Continue funding Network Coordination services.



YWCA CANBERRA

Girls and Women thriving

www.ywca-canberra.org.au