



YWCA CANBERRA

Submission to ACT Budget 2023-2024 Community Consultation

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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 have been long-standing contributors to the ACT Government's community consultation process on the Territory Budget. We have used these opportunities to draw attention to the lives of women, girls, and families in the ACT.

With cost-of-living pressures increasing across the community and more people being affected by inflation, interest hikes, and housing shortages, demand for Canberra's frontline community services has increased significantly in the last 12 months. Across the sector, we are responding to increasingly more and more complex cases, often taking the pressure off government services. This is evident throughout our community services portfolio as well as in the growing wait lists for our early learning services, which as community-run services, are often an affordable alternative for families looking to cut expenses.

We use this budget submission to draw attention to several core front line issues, but also to highlight to government the immeasurable value of our services to the community.

Valuing Community Services

Rent Remittance Model

Canberra's community services make an enormous contribution to individual and collective wellbeing. Well-resourced and viable community services provide opportunity for all Canberrans in difficult circumstances to access the help they need. As a provider of community services for 90 years, YWCA Canberra are acutely aware of the value of these services in the lives of our clients. However, we are concerned that rather than reflecting the value these services provide to the community, recent rhetoric by the ACT Government appears to perceive of these services as a 'cost-burden'.

YWCA Canberra are deeply concerned by some of the discussions accompanying the homelessness commissioning process and Sector Sounding Papers in January 2023. Specifically,

we were concerned by the intention for further consultation and review of the Rent Remittance Model with the view of achieving a “more sustainable model” for the Government. The current model, under which Housing ACT maintains headlease rent at 33% of market rent, emerged as a response to the significant funding cuts women’s specialist services were subject to in the 2013-14 Commonwealth Budget and was part of the contracted services. This model also provides sustainability for the 25% income-based rent that homeless clients are charged by specialist homeless services. For many clients, their rent arrangement could be zero dollars if they are not eligible for income support or at most 25% of welfare income, such as JobKeeper. As specialist housing providers are not collecting market rent from homeless clients, there is no capacity to pay market rent for head leased properties. The subsidised rent provided to homeless clients supported by contracted specialist homeless services must continue to be part of the funding model provided by the ACT Government. Any retained rent in the current model also permits service providers to then subsidise those who have no income to pay any rent, which is common for women escaping violence.

Community services play a fundamental role in assisting the ACT Government to achieve its housing strategy objectives by responding to some of the region’s most complex cases of homelessness and supporting vulnerable individuals’ transition to longer-term tenancies, including ACT Housing properties, where possible. As a leading organisation of Canberra’s frontline women’s sector, we provide support to clients across a range of accommodation services, including transitional and affordable housing services, supportive tenancies, and specialist services from older women at risk of, or experiencing homelessness.

The rent cap afforded under the rent remittance model means we can provide these services, on behalf of the Government, without drawing upon our own resources to house people with no, or little capacity to pay rent. Any repeal or alteration of the rent remittance model, in pursuit of a \$5.5 million saving, would detrimentally impact our clients and the sector’s capacity to respond to the growing rate of homelessness among women and children in the ACT.

Early Childhood Education and Care

As a longstanding for-purpose provider of Early Childhood Education and Care in the ACT, YWCA Canberra cares for around 3,000 children each week through our children's services. Knowing the first five years are formative in a child's cognitive, social, and emotional development, we are proud to provide community-run children's services that are inclusive, affordable, and that support children and their families to participate fully in our community. This includes providing Community Services Directorate emergency placements and delivering the vulnerable three-year-old initiative.

We support the policy position of the ACT Government that emergency placements and the three-year-old initiative for vulnerable children be delivered by community providers. An expanding Canberra means demand for these valuable services are increasing beyond capacity. For example, in Gungahlin there are only three community providers. Newer suburbs like Bonner, Moncrieff, Forde, and Amaroo, as well as other new suburban areas such as Molonglo Valley are serviced only by privately-owned and commercial Early Learning providers. Feedback from parents who are on waiting lists at our services, articulate the prohibitive cost of these providers and exemplify the value of quality and affordable services such as ours.

Across the Canberra region, the need for more community-delivered centres using government-owned facilities to accommodate additional places for vulnerable three-year-olds is becoming urgent. YWCA Canberra urges that the number of government-owned, community-managed centres across Canberra increase to meet demand. Especially as the three-year-old initiative moves toward expanding to include universal access by all three-year-olds in Canberra. The ACT Government has an integral role to play in providing and strengthening the structural supports that will enable community-providers to extend their services across an expanding Canberra, and thus, in ensuring all children and families in our community have access to affordable quality Early Childhood Education and Care.

YWCA Canberra is also concerned by the demonstrable trend away from extending or granting new peppercorn leases. Peppercorn leases are an important feature of the effective and

affordable delivery of quality community services. To support the expansion and delivery of the three-year-old initiative and affordable early learning, there is an evident need to ensure they are maintained and extended to ensure access, affordability and wrap around support. Our own experience trying to extend the peppercorn lease at our Conder Early Learning Centre has highlighted this current trend and has led YWCA Canberra hold concerns about the continuity of our lease.

Without the maintenance and extension of peppercorn leasing arrangements for community providers to continue delivering quality and affordable Early Childhood Education, it will become untenable for community providers to participate in these programs without passing on costs to parents. Already, the daily per-child rate paid by the ACT government for the emergency placements and vulnerable three-year-old initiative are lagging behind market rate – meaning organisations like YWCA Canberra are effectively subsidising an ACT government election commitment.

Freight Levy Costs

ACT food pantries have been subject to ongoing funding uncertainty since November 2022. Increased freight levy costs, largely due to shifts in the price of petrol and on-road costs have meant funding arrangements have been prematurely expended and community food pantries across Canberra are now being faced with the possibility of needing to cover food delivery costs from their own limited budgets. While a short-term solution has been implemented, this arrangement is not sustainable for the long-term and the ongoing feasibility of Canberra services receiving fresh food at affordable prices is in question. YWCA Canberra, which runs the Mura Lanyon food hub, is particularly concerned potential future funding arrangements will not cover the freight costs of larger organisations, such as ourselves and Communities at Work.

Food security among vulnerable cohorts in the ACT is at a crisis point. Our Mura Lanyon food hub, which is run on a free membership basis for those experiencing financial distress, allows members to access the pantry once each fortnight. We also have an emergency relief form for individuals within the community who only need the relief of a once-off shop. Over the last 12

months, the pantry has seen a 50% increase in demand, as well as a changing demographic of users. Typically, users of this services are older women in receipt of the age or disability pension, but what we are seeing now is an increasing number of young families and men in regular employment. To us, this signals that the community need for the service is now particularly dire. With the full impact of interest rate rises and inflation not yet felt and winter on the approach, we expect this demand to continue climbing.

Without funding certainty, YWCA Canberra is worried the Mura Lanyon food pantries, and other services like ours, will be unable to providing members in our community with free fresh and other food products. Particularly as our budget continues to stretch to accommodate surging uptake. To cover freight costs, we would be forced to reduce our fortnightly spend on actual food or to consider other delivery models, which would significantly compromise our ability to support vulnerable members of the Canberra community and undoubtedly leave families going hungry.

Safe, Secure, and Affordable Housing

Support for the ‘Missing Middle’

At the 2021 Census, around 63 percent of Canberra dwellings were detached homes, reflecting the reality that on 80% of Canberra’s residential land medium-size dwellings are prohibited. Housing supply is a key driver of price movement. Locked up inner suburban parcels of RZ1 land are a hand break on achieving affordability. Reforming existing planning regulations in RZ1 areas offers opportunity for a circuit breaker to Canberra’s growing affordability issues. YWCA Canberra supports the call for reforms to ACT zoning laws that would enable increased Missing Middle housing – medium density dwellings that enable people to live closer to their jobs, essential services, and community. Missing middle housing would provide more homes for Canberrans and would be a major step toward a city where no suburb is out of reach for those on modest incomes.

We urge the ACT Government to adopt the proposals of the Missing Middle campaign to allow for more duplexes and townhouses on larger blocks will contribute significantly to alleviating the ongoing housing shortage and high rents and ensuring those on low and modest incomes are not priced out of the housing market.

Coordinator General for Housing

The appointment of a Coordinator General for Housing to oversee the delivery of a suite of priorities – including improving housing access, affordability, and choice – presents a unique opportunity for the ACT Government to embed its housing strategy within broader city-wide objectives around safety and social welfare.

YWCA Canberra is particularly keen to see how the new Coordinator General role will interlink with the ACT Government's responses to the National Housing Accord and the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children. A targeted response between the Coordinator General and the ACT Government's commitments under these national strategies has unique potential to support housing deliverables for vulnerable Canberrans and to develop a progressive roster of mutually reinforcing action plans toward achieving quality outcomes in key target areas of women's safety and affordable housing supply. Acknowledging that around 150 women in Canberra return to an abusive partner to avoid becoming homeless, we cannot delink the role of housing supply in responding to domestic and family violence. The Coordinator General is in an inimitable position to ensure actions included under each of these frameworks are aligned in their understanding of housing as integral to women's safety and wellbeing.

This should include overseeing the commitment under the ACT Government Parliamentary Agreement to deliver 600 affordable dwellings to the ACT by 2025 and the Housing Australia Future Fund's injection of 500 homes into the Canberra region remain as two distinct figures, ushering the delivery of over 1000 new homes. The Coordinator General's office has an essential role to play in ensuring the ACT Government's build targets exist separately to the Federal Government's housing investment in Canberra and making sure Canberra sees a

meaningful growth in housing stock in line with our efforts to rapidly house everyone in need. Provided these two targets do not become conflated, these commitments will be instrumental to offsetting the region's current affordability and supply issues.

Accountability of the Family Safety Levy

Investment in early intervention

Demand on our Domestic Violence Support Service continues to exceed capacity. This service acts as a circuit-breaker for women and their children who require early intervention before crisis. Pre-crisis services are a crucial element in the suite of services people living with violence may need, and a core component of achieving the outcomes of the National Plan. It is critical the ACT Government aligns its 2023-24 Budget priorities with the targets of both the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, one of which is early intervention.

Our service, like those from across the sector, is seeing a growing number of increasingly complex cases. In 2022, the number of incoming referrals to YWCA Canberra's Domestic Violence Support Service increased by more than 15 per cent to a total of 216. Of these, our service provided support to 147 women. Due to oversubscription and under-resourcing, 62 women were not accepted into the service* and seven were diverted to a waitlist. Yet this demonstrable demand does not appear to be being met with forthcoming financial support from the ACT Government. Successive grant applications to secure support for this service have been unsuccessful. Without urgent direct investment in services such as ours, women leaving violence will continue to encounter services at breaking point and to be left unable to access the timely support and security promised to them.

It is difficult to comprehend, given the recent increase to the household Family Safety Levy contribution, how early intervention services such as ours continue to go unfunded by the ACT Government. YWCA Canberra continue to call for greater transparency regarding the use of the Family Safety Levy. As we have stated in several consecutive budget submissions, we reiterate our concern about the proportion of the Safer Families Levy that funds core government

expenditure such as national partnership funding obligations towards ANROWS, overheads, and in-house professional development.

Our concerns also extend to the continuation and sustainability of the escaping violence payment, specifically our inability to secure funding for a client after being told the funding pool had been exhausted. As a frontline service provider, we know firsthand how crucial access to financial assets, such as the escaping violence payment, can be a key deciding factor in a woman's decision about whether she leaves violence. If a core aim of the Safer Families Levy is to improve outcomes for victims of domestic violence and their families, it seems illogical that the increasing pool of funding being drawn from ACT households does not support the ongoing availability of this vital payment. YWCA Canberra urge the ACT Government to realign its funding priorities with the core rationale of the safer families levy and aims of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children, and to ensure mechanisms such as the escaping violence payment, which are fundamental to a woman's ability to leave violence, remain perennially accessible.

*The service was required to close its doors to referrals from Supportlink for approximately three months of 2022. As such, the real number of women not accepted into the service is predicted to be higher.