

2017

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE  
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT  
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2017

Presented by  
Ms Yvette Berry MLA  
Minister for Women  
March 2017

Madam Speaker

It's great to once again mark International Women's Day by providing a Statement to the Assembly about the status of women and girls in the ACT.

This also gives me the opportunity to update Members on our most recent announcement on strategies to work on building a better city for women and girls – with the release of the *ACT Women's Plan 2016-2026 First Action Plan* this month.

On 8 March 2017, the world celebrated International Women's Day which is an annual, global celebration where we commemorate women's achievements – socially, economically, culturally and politically.

This year the theme for International Women's Day was 'Be Bold for Change', calling on communities, governments and individuals to help forge a better world – a more gender inclusive world.

Achieving gender equality requires commitment and leadership.

Each of us can be a leader within our own spheres of influence and we can all take action to ensure women and girls reach their potential.

The ACT Government strongly supports women and girls in our community, and the past year has been an incredibly important one in many different areas.

Before we focus on this work, I would like to outline the clear disparities that still exist in almost all areas:

For example, 90% of adult victims of sexual assault are women, while 95% of offenders are men.

22% of Australians still believe domestic violence is acceptable, and over 70 women are killed every year by a current or former partner in Australia.

As Minister for Sport and Recreation, I am acutely aware that in professional sport, women earn a fraction of the money made by their male counterparts. Only 8.7% of televised sports news covers women's sport.

We also know that pathways for women and girls to stay in sport and progress their way up to the elite level are not as prevalent as they are for their male counterparts.

There is still an unacceptable gender pay gap of 16% nationally – although we've seen an improvement in the last 12 months of a 1.2% reduction.

Here in the ACT, our pay gap is much lower at 11.5%; and even lower in the ACT Public Service at 3.6%.

In the media, women make up 55% of journalists, but it's still primarily men who decide what we watch and read, with only 7.4% of senior managers being women.

Some studies show boys receive eight times more attention than girls in the average classroom.

Women are still under-represented in the legal profession, with only 3.4% of all managing partners, and 15.6% of equity partners being women.

And in terms of leadership in business, only 12% of CEO positions are held by women in Australia.

The ACT is doing well in many areas where women and equality is concerned, but we know there are many in our community that are not doing so well.

Madam Speaker, we want to do better.

We want to improve the lives of those people that may be vulnerable, isolated or experiencing discrimination. The ACT Government is working hard to address these issues.

The *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26*, tabled here in August 2016, sets out the key directions and priorities for improving outcomes for women and girls living in the ACT.

The priorities to be addressed over this ten year period are:

- health and wellbeing;
- housing and homelessness;
- safety;
- economic security; and
- leadership.

The plan has a particular emphasis on improving outcomes for women who are vulnerable or experience discrimination, including women with disability, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, older women, women heading single parent families and women who are socially isolated.

The plan also recognises that women may be even more vulnerable where there are multiple layers of disadvantage, commonly referred to as intersectionality.

The *ACT Women's Plan 2016-26* will be implemented through a series of Action Plans and I was pleased to be able to launch the First Action Plan at the ACT Women's Day Awards on the 7<sup>th</sup> of March.

The First Action Plan addressing 'health and wellbeing' provides practical ways that we can work with, and engage community members, the community sector and the private sector to actively work towards creating true equality for women and girls.

The Plan contains two key priority areas – 'equity and wellbeing' and 'physical and mental health'.

The first priority area 'equity and wellbeing' acknowledges that gender equality benefits everyone in our community.

The Plan includes actions to drive cultural change, and incorporates women's perspectives and the principles of gender equality in education, recreation, employment, our city planning and Government policies.

For example, the ACT Public Service will look at the impact of new programs and policies on gender, and educate staff about the impact of unconscious bias on the status and wellbeing of women and girls.

The second priority of 'physical and mental health' seeks to make sure that women and girls have access to the right services at the right time.

Health is such an important area for women and girls in our community.

Some of the focus areas include peri-natal services, active lifestyles and mental health, as well as improving information and services for women and girls from diverse backgrounds.

Sadly Madam Speaker, whilst we can look at improving a range of preventative health measures, the rate of violence against women does not seem to be reducing.

The Domestic Violence Crisis Service has reported a 23% increase in demand over the last 12 months, with nearly 51,000 crisis intervention contacts being made with the service in 2015-16. That's almost 1,000 per week.

Similarly, the Canberra Rape Crisis Service reports an increase in demand for their services with 18,488 calls to their crisis line in 2015-16, representing a 156% increase since 2010-11.

Yet, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 72% of Australian women who experience physical or sexual violence don't report the matter to the police.

This means it is difficult to establish the cause of the increase - whether they represent an actual increase of incident, or whether they are indicative of women having a better understanding of their rights and understand there is support there.

Whatever the reason, we take these statistics very seriously and the ACT has become a national leader in declaring violence against women a 'whole of community' challenge.

In the 2016 Budget, we announced the \$21.42 million Safer Families package and levy to secure much needed funding for new services and legal responses to domestic and family violence.

There were a number of key pieces of work which helped build the evidence base in 2016.

This included:

- the Report of the Board of Inquiry into the system level responses to family violence in the ACT by Laurie Glanfield AM;
- the ACT Domestic Violence Service System Gap Analysis ; from our own Community Services Directorate, and
- the Findings and Recommendations from the Domestic Violence Prevention Council's 'Review of Domestic and Family Violence Deaths in the Australian Capital Territory'.

The ACT Government accepted the recommendations from all of these reports.

The Safer Families package has already seen the establishment of a full-time Coordinator-General for Family Safety, who will be leading the work in this area; along with the appointment of the first ever Minister directly responsible for the Prevention of Domestic and Family Violence – a position I am happy to hold.

The ACT Government is also implementing the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22* through the *ACT Prevention of Violence against Women and Children Strategy 2011-17 – Our Responsibility: Ending Violence against Women and Children*.

The Second Implementation Plan under the strategy will be concluding at the end of this year, and I look forward to seeing the results of how the ACT Government's work in this area has positively impacted on women in our community.

Our Government acknowledges that gender inequality is at the core of the problem of violence against women; and so gender equality must be at the heart of the solution.

Madam Speaker, the ACT Government is committed to acknowledging and celebrating the contribution of women and one way that we do this, is through the annual ACT Women's Awards.

This year's awards were held on the Eve of International Women's Day and we applauded the commitment from three amazing Canberra women – Mary-Louise Corkhill as ACT Woman of the Year, Andrea Hotchkiss as Senior Woman of the Year, and Francesca MacLean as Young Woman of the Year.

In 2016, the first ACT Violence Prevention Awards were held. These awards were previously known as the Partners in Prevention Awards.

Recipients of the awards were celebrated for their work in media, sports, the private sector, community sector and education.

These awards further help to raise awareness of domestic and family violence, and the need for a united approach involving the whole community.

The ACT Women's Grants provide funding for initiatives that improve the safety, status and wellbeing of women and girls in the ACT.

Through the 2016-17 grants program, the ACT Government will invest up to \$180,000 to support innovative projects which will lead to positive outcomes for women and girls.

Further, the ACT Government supports young women in our community through the Audrey Fagan Churchill Fellowship and Enrichment Grants.

The ACT Government strives to achieve gender equality on boards and committees, a strategy which is critical in ensuring the voices of women are heard in Government and in our community.

Our strategies continue to be successful, and we are leading all other states and territories with women making up 48% of the membership on boards and committees in the ACT where the ACT can influence appointments.

This represents a 4% increase in just two years.

Madam speaker, domestic violence is the leading cause of homelessness for women in the ACT, and over coming months we will progress a number of commitments to housing and homelessness which will benefit women, including the development of a new Housing Strategy which will of course look at issues of affordability, supply and social and community housing models.

In 2017, the Government will hold a housing and homelessness summit to bring together all stakeholders to explore innovative ways to address the housing challenges faced by all Canberrans, including women.

We know that the impact of an ageing population has a gendered component with women making up an increasing proportion of lone person households in older demographics.

The ACT Government continues to work directly with women by providing information and referrals on a wide range of issues.

This includes personal and professional development, relationships, violence support services, wellbeing and parenting.

The Women's Information Service has provided 1,636 occasions of support to women to access relevant and timely information to make choices that impact on their quality of life.

The ACT Government also supports women returning to the paid workforce following caring responsibilities.

126 women were the beneficiaries of the Return to Work Grant in 2016, receiving \$1,000 each to assist them to achieve their employment or educational goals.

The program provided assistance to all eligible women, with a particular focus on women from diverse backgrounds.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women made up 9% of total recipients, 44% were women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, 6% had disability and 15% were caring for a family member with additional needs.

Through working one on one with women, the ACT Government is helping to build women's capacity and confidence, and assisting them to overcome barriers to their full participation in the community.

This includes, of course participation in sport and recreation.

We know with certainty that physical activity is essential for our physical health, but so is connecting with others. Many studies are now showing that being socially disconnected has the equivalent impact as smoking 15 cigarettes or drinking six units of alcohol a day. So you can see Madam Speaker that participating in sport and active recreation has the dual benefit of getting us moving and connecting us with others. It's simply great for our health and wellbeing.

Unfortunately, we know that many women and girls are making the choice not to participate in active recreation.

By the time girls reach adolescence, their participation in physical activities decreases significantly.

We can observe this trend in our high schools, our local parks and the sporting fields. Girls tend to become 'watchers', not participants.

Research in the area identifies a number of barriers, such as concerns about body image; fear of being criticised; and of course the social and cultural expectations of how women should behave.

We also know, as I mentioned earlier, that the pathways to a higher level of participation are often non-existent for women in some sports.

This research was reflected in the many consultations I conducted in 2016, including a round-table discussion in May with athletes, administrators, media representatives and students to delve deeper into the challenges facing women and girls in sport.

Some of these young women told me that the lack of appropriate infrastructure and clear social connections, were contributors to their non-participation.

The government's election platform takes direct action to address these challenges, and ensure girls have increased opportunities in sport at all levels, including playing and administration.

We have committed \$2.5 million in funding to women's sports, including a new four-year funding deal with both the Canberra Capitals WNBL and Canberra United W-League teams to inspire a new generation of female athletes; \$500,000 for a female-friendly sports infrastructure program; a \$400,000 incentive grant for sports to lead the way in promoting gender equality; and \$100,000 towards a new 'Active' online community which will act as a hub for sports to connect with women and girls, grow participation and celebrate achievements.

We are also working with all Canberra sporting organisations towards at least 40 % female representation on their boards.

So, while doors to high performance opportunities have been slower to open for female athletes when compared to our male counterparts, I can confirm that changes are afoot in this area.

In the Education portfolio, it is worth noting that we are leading the country in terms of women's leadership roles in schools.

National research shows that 81% of primary teachers are female but hold only 65% of leadership positions; and 58% of secondary teachers are females but they hold 48% of leadership positions.

In ACT Public Schools we do quite well - where 77% of the workforce is female, approximately 75% of the Executive Teacher positions and close to 73% of Deputy Principal positions are held by women.

We need to do further work to support women to thrive in the role of School Principal as only 59% of current principal roles are held by women.

So today, in acknowledging and celebrating International Women's Day 2017, I want to applaud the gains we've made in the ACT.

In addition to the work I've already mentioned, I need to again acknowledge the fact that the ACT Parliament has shattered the glass ceiling with a majority of women for the first time holding the most seats in the ACT Legislative Assembly.

This is an Australian first so we do need to keep acknowledging it.

We also have strong leadership credentials in the ACT Public Service, with women making up 42% of executive positions.

A great accomplishment compared to the broader community.

But as we know, there is still work to be done, with deeply entrenched stereotypical attitudes impacting negatively on the wellbeing of women and girls.

Madam Speaker, while government can't be solely responsible for changing these attitudes and addressing gender inequality, we can certainly be a leader and an agent for social change in this field.

We can all be 'game changers'.

So, I call upon every person present, and all people in our community, to 'Be Bold for Change'.

Each person plays a part, and the responsibility rests with us.

Together, we can achieve a gender inclusive community which values, respects and supports women and girls.

Thank you