## Achieving equity for women and girls in the ACT Report on What We Heard

The full participation of women and girls in all areas of society is important for the wellbeing of our whole community. Gender equality benefits everyone.

The *ACT Women’s Plan 2016-26* is an ambitious 10-year plan to create an ACT that values and respects women and girls and commits to achieving gender equality. It is being implemented through a series of 3-year action plans. The *First Action Plan 2017-19* is complete, and the *Second Action Plan 2020-22* ended in 2022.

The *Third Action Plan 2023-26* includes a number of actions to progress by 2026 that expand on existing work to achieve gender equality and identify areas where more work is needed.

## THE CONVERSATION

Community consultation to inform development of the Third Action Plan was undertaken via the ACT Government’s YourSay Conversations website.

The consultation opened on 28 November 2022 and closed on 28 February 2023. It focused on 5 priority areas; Health and wellbeing, Safety and inclusion, Leadership and workforce participation, Housing and homelessness, and Appropriate and accessible services.

## WHO WE ENGAGED

**We received input from a broad range of stakeholders across the ACT community.**

We received over 30 submissions and group survey responses through the TAP community consultation, from a diverse group of stakeholders across the community, representing: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the LGBTIQ+ community, Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups, women with disability, young women, carers, various community organisations, and the health, education and ICT sectors.

Over 200 individual surveys were completed via the YourSay website, and a separate YourSay Community Panel survey received 1,483 responses. Several key themes were identified across the consultation input, and these have been used to inform development of the TAP actions, and will continue to be used to inform implementation.

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| Key insights from the community |
| Health and wellbeing   * We heard stakeholders would like more informational resources on women’s and girls’ health and wellbeing, particularly around menstruation, perimenopause and menopause, health requirements such as what check-ups women and girls should get and when. These resources should be inclusive, and available in different languages and formats. * We heard mental health is a key topic for stakeholders and they would like more funding for community mental health organisations, targeted mental health and wellbeing initiatives for young women, including trans young women and girls, and improvements to online suicide prevention tools. There was also discussion of mental health in the workplace, with flexible working arrangements and ensuring work/life balance identified as the most important areas for improvement. * A key theme was that women and girls often feel they are not taken seriously by health practitioners, particularly male health practitioners, and feel they need to justify why they are seeking healthcare. We heard of the need for non-judgemental, culturally appropriate care and for healthcare practitioners to be more gender and trauma-informed. * The need for greater availability of free menstrual health products was highlighted by several stakeholders. Key barriers identified by stakeholders include embarrassment, cost, and lack of information. * We heard of the need to ensure affordability of reproductive healthcare including contraception, birth control and abortions, as well as improved timeliness of access to appointments, and streamlined referral pathways. Stakeholders raised the need to increase the scope of funded fertility treatments to include non-heterosexual families. * Several stakeholders raised the health challenges faced by women with disability, in particular when accessing fertility services, and we heard of instances of women with disability being discouraged by health practitioners from having children. We also heard of the overwhelming cost of healthcare services for women with disability, and of the need for support to help women with disability interact with the healthcare system. * For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, we heard of the need to ensure culturally responsible service delivery models and greater access to culturally responsive early education and preventative health programs for girls and young women that focus on healthy relationships, sexual health and pregnancy. * We heard that LGBTIQ+ women are impacted by additional barriers to accessing health services and supports, including misinformation about their healthcare needs. |
| Safety and inclusion   * Domestic and family violence was identified as one of the highest priority issues to address, and several stakeholders highlighted the increasing demand on frontline support services for women impacted by domestic violence, and the need for greater resourcing, including for legal services. Another key insight was the need for more safe and affordable housing for women who have experienced domestic violence. * Many stakeholders raised the need for education from an early age on respect and appropriate behaviour, as well as more public education on consent, and what is and is not appropriate language towards women. * There was a lot of support amongst stakeholders for urban design measures that contribute to public safety. Particularly important features of public spaces include lighting, visibility, accessible exits, footpaths in good condition, security cameras. * Several stakeholders commented on the importance of transport options to support inclusivity in the community, give women and girls independence, and support safety. |
| Leadership and workforce participation   * Balancing work and care was identified as one of the highest priority issues to address for women and girls. Many stakeholders highlighted the importance of flexible work to support women, and of continuing to have the option to work from home. * There was support for increased visibility of employee rights and employer responsibilities, and improved accessibility of reporting and accountability mechanisms. We heard that for women and girls working in casual settings, it can be difficult to speak up when their employee rights have been degraded or they do not feel safe in the workplace. * We heard that a supportive and safe culture is the most important factor for attracting more women to traditionally male-dominated industries. * It was also suggested that there be more information about traineeships in male-dominated industries, and more outreach programs, for women and girls in schools - to encourage girls into STEM careers, we heard of the need for more education and awareness programs for school students that break down stereotypes. * For the construction industry, we heard of the need for greater understanding about women’s health (e.g. menstruation and pregnancy) and revision of policies to provide greater job flexibility and safety for women. * We heard support for the ACT Government to implement gender responsive procurement practices, including a requirement for organisations applying for ACT Government grants to provide information on their policies and practices to support gender equity. * Several stakeholders raised the need to redefine what leadership looks like and make it more gender neutral, to address the perception that women should behave like men in leadership roles. * There was support to mandate provision of reasonable accommodations to ensure women with disability are safe, as well as encouraging organisations to adapt their recruitment procedures to ensure they are accessible to women with disability. * We heard of the need to ensure economic safety and security for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, including by co-designing a new community development approach to build skills, and creating accessible and affordable education and training opportunities. * We heard the need to increase pay and improve working conditions in sectors that are dominated by women and gender diverse people, such as health care and social assistance, and education and training sectors. |
| Housing and homelessness   * A clear message was the need for greater availability of social and affordable housing, particularly housing that can be accessed quickly for women experiencing domestic and family violence. * Several stakeholders noted that housing and homelessness impact women differently; for example, we heard that the gender wage gap can create a barrier as housing is expensive to secure. * We heard of the need to ensure sufficient housing to suit the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families, including by investing in culturally appropriate housing models. * We also heard of the need for specific housing programs for older women, and to increase the stock of accessible social and affordable housing, fund affordable housing solutions and work alongside services commonly accessed by older women, to improve identification of those at risk of homelessness. |
| Appropriate and accessible services   * We heard that the most important factors for women are availability, affordability and competing time priorities, such as needing time off work to attend appointments, or caring for children. * Stakeholders shared that it is helpful to know what the service will be like ahead of time, be able to book services online, be able to find the bus schedule and plan the whole trip easily. * Lengthy wait lists to access services was highlighted by several stakeholders as a key risk. * It was noted that community service providers need to be aware of complexity as vulnerable women and girls are often experiencing multiple disadvantages together. * We heard that services need to be more visible, as women and girls who are in need will not necessarily know what services are available. Language barriers and limited computer literacy were also identified as barriers. * We heard the need for representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women at all levels of decision-making to identify key priority areas and types of services and programs funded within communities. |

## What’s Next?

Following the community consultation, the Community Services Directorate reviewed all the input and used this to inform development of the Third Action Plan.

To find out more about the *ACT Women’s Plan 2016-26* and its supporting Action Plans, visit: [www.communityservices.act.gov.au/women](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/women)

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| THANK YOU FOR YOUR FEEDBACK |