

Priority Issue: Women and Housing

ACT Context

The issues around housing affordability in the ACT are well known and well documented. These include the very high cost of housing in the ACT, high rents and low vacancy rates, and increased pressure on the ACT public housing system.

There have been a number of initiatives introduced in recent years to address the issues of homelessness and housing affordability in Australia including the National Rental Affordability Scheme and the new taxation regimes that were part of this year's budget announcements. However, there is a significant need to target assistance beyond those who may one day be able to afford to purchase their own home, and support those who are most vulnerable and in need.

Whilst there has been an increasing focus on the issue, there has been limited discussion about the gendered aspects of homelessness. Women often experience homelessness due to domestic and family violence. Older women are also emerging as a particular group at risk of homelessness. Affordable and safe housing for women needs to be a priority in the Territory.

YWCA of Canberra and WEL ACT perspective

We continue to witness great hardship for families in the ACT due to the lack of affordable housing with limited rental options for people on low incomes in both public housing and the private rental market. The Government must continue to ensure that an appropriate level of public housing stock is invested in, and that this stock is well located and appropriate for changing needs and demographics. Ensuring that services are available to respond to the particular needs of women escaping violence and young women remain particularly important. With national agreements around social housing and homelessness services being renegotiated, Government must ensure that the level of support to ACT citizens is not reduced, particularly when the issues are growing in complexity and scale.

While there has been significant success in the affordable housing market in the ACT, we believe that there are particular groups at risk that are not sharing in this new area of work. Affordable housing for women and their families, particularly for older women, is of particular concern. Addressing homelessness and housing affordability requires a holistic response, and we believe that there are significant opportunities for innovation and collaboration between the community sector, Government and the private sector to address these issues in the ACT.

Key Recommendations for Political Parties:

The YWCA of Canberra and WEL ACT call on political parties to:

1. Commit to maintaining the current level of public and social housing currently supported in the ACT.
2. Commit to ensuring that there continues to be support for gender specific homelessness services and the provision of safe spaces for women within generalist services to ensure the most vulnerable women are safe and supported.
3. Commit to working on innovative solutions around affordable housing (particularly affordable rental issues) in partnership with the community and business sectors.

