



Submission to the *ACT Women's Plan*

September 2009

www.youthcoalition.net

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Indigenous cultures and the invaluable contribution they make to our community.

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September 2009

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Thank you to the Youth Coalition staff team for their support.

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1. Introduction

Section 1 of this submission provides contextual information about Youth Coalition of the ACT (Youth Coalition), an overview of young women in the ACT, and the process by which this submission was developed.

1.1 Youth Coalition of the ACT

The Youth Coalition of the ACT is the peak youth affairs body in the ACT. Comprised of 75 members, programs, and individuals the Youth Coalition is responsible for representing and promoting the interests and wellbeing of people aged between 12 and 25 years and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT Government Advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on youth issues as well as providing information to youth services about policy and program matters.

A key role of the Youth Coalition is the development and analysis of ACT social policy and program decisions for young people and youth services. The Youth Coalition facilitates the development of strong linkages and promotes collaboration between the community, government and private sectors to achieve better outcomes for young people in the ACT.

1.2 Young Women in the ACT

Young women are a distinct population group aged between 12 and 25 years of age. There are approximately 33,894 young women in the ACT, representing over 11% of Canberra total population, and over 20% of the total female population in the ACT.¹ With over one fifth of Canberra's female population comprised of young women, it is important that the wellbeing of young women be regarded as a key indicator in the further development, implementation and evaluation of the Women's Plan.

The years of 12 – 25 are a key developmental period for women, and can be defined as 'a period within the lifespan when most of the individual's biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics are changing'². The discrete issues experienced by young women are becoming increasingly complex and interrelated. Key issues such as health (including mental health, alcohol and other drugs, safety and related health issues), housing, education, employment and family circumstances impact upon each other. Consequently, a holistic, integrated response is required to support young people.

In light of this, young women aged 12 – 25 would be a key focus in progressing an ACT Women's Plan that is equitable in its further development and implementation.

1.3 Process for Developing and Format of this Submission

The Youth Coalition welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the ACT Women's Plan (the Plan). We would like to congratulate the ACT Government on its commitment to progressing the interests of women through the development of the Plan.

This submission is one of many made over a ten year period by the Youth Coalition and is based on the following:

- The priority areas highlighted in the *Youth Coalition Strategic Plan 2007-10*;
- The policy positions outlined in the *Youth Coalition Policy Platform*;
- The views of participants of the Youth Coalition's Biennial Policy Forum;
- The issues raised at consultations on the 2010/11 ACT Government Budget;
- The issues raised at consultation on the 2009 – 2014 Young People's Plan;
- Previous Youth Coalition submissions to the ACT Government;
- One-on-one consultations with member services and organisations; and,
- Current and topical research on youth affairs.

This submission has been divided into 7 sections, which include the following:

1. Introduction (this section)
2. Summary of recommendations
3. Vision, Policy Context and Principles of the Plan
4. Objectives of the Plan
5. Accessibility and Governance of the Plan
6. Future Plans for Women in the ACT
7. Conclusion
8. References

This submission represents an opportunity for the Youth Coalition and stakeholders to identify and advise ACT Government of emerging issues, areas in need of additional resources and collaboratively develop social policy in the ACT.

2. Summary of Recommendations

Section 2 provides a summary of the recommendations this submission makes to the further development and implementation of the Women's Plan. It is vital that these recommendations be referred to in the context of the broader submission.

Vision, Policy Context and Principles of the Women's Plan

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Women's Plan include a clear purpose, role, target group, and overarching timeframe.

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Women's Plan include a policy matrix of local and national policies, strategies and frameworks, relevant to its further development and implementation.

Recommendation 3

That in line with the following principles underpinning the ACT Women's Plan: participation, equity, diversity and collaborative approaches; the Plan include specific strategies and actions relating to young women.

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Women's Plan be underpinned by the additional principles of: human rights, evidence based, and responsive and accountable.

Objectives of the Plan

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

Recommendation 6

That Objective 1 in the ACT Women's Plan be expanded to: 'Representation, Participation and Recognition'.

Recommendation 7

That Objective 1 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success relating to support provided to young women to participate, be represented and recognised in government and community processes;
- Specific strategies and indicators of success to recognise women, including young women, in informal and formal ways, recognising the varied contributions women make to the community; and,
- Analytic mechanisms in assessing gender aggregated data, to seek to identify outcomes for diverse groups of women, including young women.

Recommendation 8

That Objective 2 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success relating to improving the health and wellbeing of young women, in relation to their primary health, mental health, sexual health, and alcohol and other drug use; and,
- Specific strategies and indicators of success to increasing the accessibility and affordability of health services for all women, including young women.

Recommendation 9

That Objective 3 of the ACT Women's Plan include specific strategies and indicators of success relating to providing appropriate, stable, affordable and safe housing options for young women in the ACT; including but not limited to those aged 12 – 14, or exiting the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 10

That Objective 4 in the ACT Women's Plan be expanded to: 'Positive Connections with Safe, Inclusive Communities and Families'.

Recommendation 11

That Objective 4 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to removing barriers and supporting diverse groups of young women to form positive connections with, and participate in, their families and communities; and,
- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to progressing the viability of the community sector in the ACT, including issues of wage inequity.

Recommendation 12

That Objective 5 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to supporting young women to develop skills, access decent employment and be supported in the workplace; and,
- Specific and holistic strategies and indicators of success that relate to support young women who may be experiencing financial disadvantage; including young women exiting the criminal justice system, unemployed women, women with disabilities and other diverse groups of women who are more at-risk of experiencing disadvantage.

Recommendation 13

That Objective 6 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to supporting young women to develop skills, access education and training, and be supported in those environments; and,
- Specific and holistic strategies and indicators of success that relate to support young women who require additional support to access education and training, including young women exiting the criminal justice system, women with disabilities, multicultural young people and other diverse groups of women who are more at-risk of experiencing disadvantage.

Accessibility and Accountability of the Plan

Recommendation 14

That the ACT Women's Plan seeks to become more accessible to its target groups by:

- Ensuring the Plan is a 'living document' that is actively utilised in the progression of women's interests in the ACT;
- Implementing participatory and consultative mechanisms that engage diverse groups of women, including young women, in its further development, implementation and evaluation;
- Ensuring regular reporting, accountability and evaluation mechanisms are implemented, documented and made available to the Plan's target groups; and,
- Ensuring the Plan is responsive to the emerging needs and issues of women in the ACT.

Recommendation 15

That additional participatory, consultative and feedback mechanisms are established to ensure that key stakeholders, including young women, are supported to contribute to the further development, implementation and evaluation of the ACT Women's Plan.

Recommendation 16

That each Annual Action Plan in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Consultative mechanisms to ensure key stakeholders can contribute to their development, implementation and evaluation;
- A clear timeframe for the development, implementation and evaluation of each Annual Action Plan, to ensure continuity of the ACT Women's Plan's broader implementation; and,
- Clear identification of agencies and services that are responsible for each component of the Annual Action Plans' implementation.

Recommendation 17

That the ACT Women's Plan include a clear monitoring, reporting and evaluation framework, with clearly linked and measurable indicators of success.

Future Plans for Women in the ACT

Recommendation 18

That the ACT Women's Plan include a timeframe and workplan by which to develop the following ACT Women's Plan, in 2015.

3. Vision, Policy Context and Principles of the Plan

Section 3 of this submission seeks to respond to the following questions outlined in the *ACT Government's Discussion Paper: Looking Forward* (the Discussion Paper):

1. Vision: Does the ACT Government's vision statement for women reflect your / the community's aspirations for women and girls in the ACT?
2. Policy Context: Should other policy, legislation and/or supporting structures be included in the policy context of the Plan?
3. Supporting Principles: Do the supporting principles adequately inform the diversity of women policy and program approaches in the ACT?

3.1 Vision of the ACT Women's Plan

The Discussion Paper states that the ACT Government's vision for women in the ACT is:

*'That women in the ACT reach their potential, be recognised for their contribution and share the benefits of our community.'*³

While the Youth Coalition supports the ACT Government's vision for women in the ACT, we note that this is not the aim for the Plan itself. The Plan should include a clear purpose, role, target group, and overarching timeframe.

Recommendation 1

That the ACT Women's Plan include a clear purpose, role, target group, and overarching timeframe.

3.2 Policy Context of the ACT Women's Plan

The Youth Coalition is pleased that the Discussion Paper includes a policy context, with references to specific legislation and policy documents. We would like to highlight the need to include, and develop synergies with, other key strategies and initiatives in the ACT and in Australia.

The *Draft Building a Strong Foundation: A Framework for Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT 2009 – 2014*⁴, and the *Draft ACT Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014*⁵, both include a policy matrix of ACT and national strategies, plans and frameworks that are relevant to their planning and implementation. The Youth Coalition calls for the Plan to include a similar policy matrix.

Key Government Strategies and Frameworks that are relevant to the further development of the Plan include (but are not limited to):

- A National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women, Australian Government;
- Access Health – Health care for All in the ACT, ACT Government;
- ACT Children's Plan, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services;
- ACT Government Policy Framework for Children and Young People with a Disability and their Families, ACT Government;
- ACT Population Projections: For Suburbs and Districts 2007 – 2019, ACT Government;
- ACT Skills Future: Key Initiatives in a Long Term Strategy to Address the Skills Challenge, ACT Government;

- Affordable Housing Action Plan, ACT Government;
- Caring for Carers Policy, ACT Health;
- Challenge 2014: A 10 Year Vision for Disability in the ACT, ACT Government;
- Children and Young People's Justice Health Services Plan 2008 – 2012, ACT Health;
- Closing the Gap on Indigenous Disadvantage and National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Australian Government;
- Community Sector Funding Policy, ACT Government;
- Draft ACT Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs Strategy 2009 – 2012, ACT Health;
- Draft ACT Mental Health Services Plan 2008 – 2013, ACT Health;
- Draft ACT Multicultural Strategy 2010 – 2013, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS);
- Draft Building a Strong Foundation: A Framework for Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT 2009 – 2014, ACT Health;
- Draft Comorbidity Strategy, ACT Health;
- Draft Managing the Risk of Suicide Two: A Suicide Prevention Strategy for the ACT 2009 – 2014, ACT Health;
- Draft Young People's Plan 2009 – 2014, Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services;
- Future Directions: Towards Challenge 2014, ACT Government;
- ACT Human Rights Act 2004, ACT Government
- National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020, Australian Government;
- National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions, Australian Government;
- People, Place, Prosperity: A Policy for Sustainability in the ACT, ACT Government;
- Sustainable Transport Action Plan 2010 – 2016, ACT Government;
- The Road Home: Homelessness White Paper and National Partnership on Homelessness, Australian Government;
- The Social Compact, ACT Government;
- Towards a Sustainable Community Sector in the ACT, ACT Government.

Recommendation 2

That the ACT Women's Plan include a policy matrix of local and national policies, strategies and frameworks, relevant to its further development and implementation.

3.3 Principles of the ACT Women's Plan

The Discussion Paper states that the principles of the Plan are participation, equity, diversity and collaborative approaches. The Youth Coalition commends the Plan for including these principles, and responds in further detail to each principle below. Section 3.3.5 includes recommendations for additional principles that should underpin the Plan.

3.3.1 Participation

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the inclusion of 'participation' as a key principle underpinning the further development and implementation of the Plan.

Providing opportunities for young people to participate in Government policy, programs and services that affect them is an important aspect of a representative and democratic society.⁶ This is further acknowledged through the ACT Government's commitment to work towards a 'child and youth friendly city'⁷ in the draft ACT Young

People's Plan 2009 - 2014. A 'child and youth friendly city' is one that 'promotes children and young people's active involvement in issues that affect them; listening to their views and taking them into consideration in decision-making processes'.⁸

It is important to note that specific strategies and resources are required to ensure effective youth participation. Participation by young people must be respected, valuable and appropriate. It should also aim to be beneficial, building on young people's knowledge and skills. Good youth participation recognises the barriers of young people to participation and the diverse needs and backgrounds of young people.⁹

Young women have a number of strengths, and may experience additional needs or barriers to participation, that should be considered in the further development and implementation of the Plan. Research indicates that young women have a higher level of interest than young males, in influencing decision-making bodies; and like to participate because they enjoy contributing, working in groups, learning new things, and because they are passionate about an issue(s). However, young women may also experience specific barriers to participation, more so than young males, including:

- Feeling they have the right to participate in decisions that affect them;
- Feeling their opinions are valued and taken seriously by adults;
- Feeling comfortable to speak out and get involved;
- Feeling safe to participate;
- Knowing how to get involved in local youth bodies and organisations; and,
- Receiving feedback on how their involvement has changed things.¹⁰

Other barriers to participation identified by young women included having access to relevant information, knowledge and training; making sure they can get to important meetings or activities; knowing how formal meetings work; and knowing how Government works.¹¹

3.3.2 *Equity*

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the inclusion of 'equity' as a key principle underpinning the further development and implementation of the Plan.

The years of 12 – 25 are a key developmental period for women, and can be defined as 'a period within the lifespan when most of the individual's biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics are changing'¹². In light of this, young women aged 12 – 25 would be a key focus in progressing a Plan that is equitable in its further development and implementation.

Furthermore, the Plan should include specific strategies and actions relating to the groups of young women who may require additional supports; including (but not limited to):

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women;
- Young women experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness;
- Young women affected by alcohol and other drugs;
- Young women affected by mental health issues;
- Young women with disabilities;
- Young women who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex;
- Multicultural young women;
- Newly arrived young women, or young women with a refugee background;

- Young women with caring responsibilities;
- Young parents;
- Young women in care or who have been in care; and,
- Young women in the criminal justice system.

3.3.3 Diversity

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the inclusion of 'diversity' as a key principle underpinning the further development and implementation of the Plan.

Young women are a diverse group of people, with varying backgrounds, experiences, and life circumstances. Some groups of young women may require additional supports, including (but not limited to):

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women;
- Young women experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness;
- Young women affected by alcohol and other drugs;
- Young women affected by mental health issues;
- Young women with disabilities;
- Young women who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or intersex;
- Multicultural young women;
- Newly arrived young women, or young women with a refugee background;
- Young women with caring responsibilities;
- Young parents;
- Young women in care or who have been in care; and,
- Young women in the criminal justice system.

3.3.4 Collaborative Approaches

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the inclusion of 'collaborative approaches' as a key principle underpinning the further development and implementation of the Plan.

The discrete issues experienced by young women are becoming increasingly complex and interrelated. Key issues such as health (including mental health, alcohol and other drugs, safety and related health issues), housing, education, employment and family circumstances impact upon each other. Consequently, a holistic, integrated response is required to support young people.

As a whole-of-ACT Government policy, the further development of the Plan provides a key opportunity for the ACT Government to develop policy that builds upon this holistic, integrated approach. The Plan should aim to develop synergies between other key strategies / plans, Government agencies, and sectors.

The draft *Building a Strong Foundation: A Framework for Promoting Mental Health and Wellbeing in the ACT 2009 – 2014*; and the draft *ACT Young People's Plan 2009 - 2014* include a policy matrix of ACT and national strategies, plans and frameworks that are relevant to their planning and implementation. The Youth Coalition calls for the Women's Plan to include a similar policy matrix (see Section 3.2 for more information).

Recommendation 3

That in line with the following principles underpinning the ACT Women's Plan: participation, equity, diversity and collaborative approaches; the Plan include specific strategies and actions relating to young women.

3.3.5 Additional Principles for Inclusion in the ACT Women's Plan

In addition to the principles outlined above, the Youth Coalition believes that the following principles should also underpin the Plan (these are outlined in further detail below):

- Human rights;
- Evidence based; and,
- Responsive and Accountable.

Human Rights

Under a human rights-based approach, the plans, policies and processes of the Women's Plan would be anchored in a system of rights and corresponding obligations established and supported by both international and domestic law. The Australian Government's five priorities for human rights are:

- Promoting a strong, free democracy;
- Human rights education and awareness;
- Assisting disadvantaged groups to become more independent;
- Supporting the family, and,
- Promoting human rights internationally.¹³

If Australia's human rights policies are very strongly oriented towards achieving practical outcomes that improve the rights of individuals¹⁴, then ensuring that the ACT Women's Plan is founded on a rights-based approach will echo the sentiment and priority areas of the Australian Government, and set a national benchmark.

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for taking leadership in Australia in being one of only two jurisdictions with its own Human Rights Act, incorporating provisions of the ICCPR into ACT law, which the ACT Legislative Assembly adopted in 2004. The Youth Coalition calls for the ACT Government to further build on this by developing the ACT Women's Plan within a human rights framework.

Evidence Based

'Evidence Based Policy Development' is defined as being 'based upon research that has undergone some form of quality assurance and scrutiny'¹⁵. It is crucial that the ACT Government is committed to 'evidence based' policy development. Governments are expected to develop policies, programs and projects based on clear evidence that link accurate information and rigorous analysis to proposed actions. While consultation, values and opinions are important, the demand for greater public accountability for resources, new and competing sources of research and knowledge both within and outside government, and an increasingly educated society, makes the need for evidence based policy and program development essential and urgent.

It can be challenging to develop evidence-based policy when there are clear gaps in the information. This is why the Youth Coalition has been calling for the development of an updated social and demographic profile of young people to be a priority action for the newly appointed Demographer in the ACT, as announced in the 2008/2009 ACT Budget. The previous profile, *Youth in the ACT: A Social and Demographic Profile* was released in 2002, primarily using now out of date data from 1996. This information would assist the ACT Government in its development of key policy

documents, including the ACT Women's Plan, over the next few years and support agencies to develop evidence based policy and programs.

It is also important that the Plan build in mechanisms by which to collect and analyse evidence relating to women in the ACT; to ensure that all future strategies, plans and programs (including the Women's Plan in 2015) build on an up-to-date profile.

Responsive and Accountable

Effective policy development and implementation aligns with milestones and targets, and is able to respond rapidly to emerging challenges and changes of direction.¹⁶ It is important that accountability underpins the further development, implementation and evaluation of the Women's Plan, while still ensuring the Plan is responsive to emerging issues and needs of women in the ACT.

Ensuring transparent, accountable and responsive processes will also work towards supporting women to participate in the development, implementation and evaluation of the Plan; with 'participation' being a key principle of the new Plan.

Recommendation 4

That the ACT Women's Plan be underpinned by the additional principles of: human rights, evidence based, and responsive and accountable.

4. Objectives of the Plan

Section 4 of this submission seeks to respond to the following questions outlined in the Discussion Paper:

4. Objectives of the ACT Women's Plan: Do they reflect the key priorities for women in the ACT? Are they still relevant? Should other key themes / priorities be included?
5. Areas of Action for Objectives: What other actions are needed to focus a new ACT Women's Plan?
6. Indicators of success for each objective: Are the Indicators of Success useful and relevant? What, if any other indicators are needed?

Section 4.1 provides general comments on the objectives, while Section 4.2 – 4.7 address each objective.

4.1 General Comments on the Objectives

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for including specific action areas and indicators of success in the Women's Plan.

However, we are concerned that in the current Plan, the indicators of success do not match specifically with all of the issues outlined in the background to each objective. For example, in *Objective 1: Representation and Recognition*, it is recognised that 'mentoring and training of young women as leaders in the community is important'¹⁷. However, this is not linked with an indicator of success to assess whether this issue was addressed.

The Youth Coalition believes that each objective of the new Plan should include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic and age groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic and age group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic and age group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

4.2 Objective 1: Representation and Recognition

Appropriate and adequate representation and recognition is an important issue for women in the ACT, particularly young women. The current Plan acknowledges that this is an area in which 'on-going measures need to be in place to overcome discrimination towards women and girls'¹⁸. Further to this, young women may experience additional barriers to representation and recognition in the broader community and in decision-making arenas, due to their age.

4.2.1 Expansion of Objective 1 to include 'Participation'

The Youth Coalition believes this objective should be expanded to '*Representation, Participation and Recognition*'. The issues raised in the background to this objective relate not only to women taking on representative roles, and being recognised for their contributions; but also the need to support women to meaningfully participate in these roles, and in all aspects of the community.

Recommendation 6

That Objective 1 in the ACT Women's Plan be expanded to: 'Representation, Participation and Recognition'.

4.2.2 Aligning the Background, Areas for Action, and Indicators of Success

As outlined in Section 4.1, the Youth Coalition is concerned that the indicators of success in the current Plan do not relate specifically to the issues raised in the background / context information. For example, the following issues highlighted in the current Plan do not link with specific indicators of success:

- All women and girls should have access to a range of opportunities to develop skills and to undertake leadership roles;
- Mentoring and training of young women as leaders in the community is important;
- Valuing the contribution of women to all aspects of community life through formal and informal processes; and,
- Women specific strategies, including ones that cater for the diverse groups of women and girls in the ACT, are often essential if needs are to be met appropriately.¹⁹

The Youth Coalition recommends that the new Plan include specific strategies, areas for action, and indicators of success for specific demographic and age groups, including young women.

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

4.2.3 Additional Content for Objective 1: Representation and Recognition

As discussed in Section 3.3.1, young women have a higher level of interest than young males, in influencing decision-making bodies; and like to participate because they enjoy contributing, working in groups, learning new things, and because they are passionate about an issue(s).

However, young women may experience specific needs or barriers to participation, that should be considered in the further development and implementation of the Plan. Some identified barriers include:

- Feeling they have the right to participate in decisions that affect them;
- Feel their opinions are valued and taken seriously by adults;
- Feeling comfortable to speak out and get involved;
- Feeling safe to participate;
- Knowing how to get involved in local youth bodies and organisations; and,
- Receiving feedback on how their involvement has changed things.

Other barriers to participation identified by young women included having access to relevant information, knowledge and training; making sure they can get to important meetings or activities; knowing how formal meetings work; and knowing how Government works.²⁰

While increasing the number of women on boards and committees is an important indicator of women's representation and recognition in decision-making arenas, the Youth Coalition believes it is also crucial to consider other ways in which women, including young women, can participate, be represented, and recognised. The Ministerial Conference on the Status of Women also acknowledged the importance of recognising women's broad range of contributions, highlighting:

As well as women taking on formal leadership positions, it is equally important that women's participation in informal, community leadership roles is acknowledged and valued. It is important to challenge the community's understanding of leadership to include many types of leading including the vital role women play everyday. This in turn will provide more opportunities for women to participate more broadly in leadership.²¹

In supporting the inclusion of 'gender aggregated data' as a focus in the Plan, the Youth Coalition highlights the importance of ensuring that adequate gender analysis is applied to that data, in order to identify primary and secondary outcomes, and how activities could work towards better improving outcomes for diverse demographic groups of women.

Recommendation 7

That Objective 1 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success relating to support provided to young women to participate, be represented and recognised in government and community processes;
- Specific strategies and indicators of success to recognise women, including young women, in informal and formal ways, recognising the varied contributions women make to the community; and,
- Analytic mechanisms in assessing gender aggregated data, to seek to identify outcomes for diverse groups of women, including young women.

4.3 Objective 2: Good Health and Wellbeing

The Youth Coalition strongly supports 'Good Health and Wellbeing' as a key objective in the Women's Plan, and commend the ACT Government for recognising that women's health and wellbeing is influenced by a range of social, cultural, environmental and economic factors; that need to be addressed as part of a holistic, integrated approach.²²

4.3.1 *Aligning the Background, Areas for Action, and Indicators of Success*

As outlined in Section 4.1, the Youth Coalition is concerned that the indicators of success in the current Plan do not relate specifically to the issues raised in the background / context information. For example, the following issues highlighted in the current Plan do not link with specific indicators of success:

- Women and girls have particular health needs at different times of their lifecycle;
- Women need access to appropriate and responsive health care services, such as nutrition, sexual health, child health and breast screening centres
- Women and girls need access to timely health information in order to make informed choices about their wellbeing. Greater awareness of the options for monitoring and maintaining health is important;
- Health services for women need to be accessible and gender sensitive, as well as being culturally sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and lesbians;
- There are many social, cultural, environmental and economic factors that influence women's health and wellbeing and these need to be addressed as part of a holistic, integrated approach;
- Health and wellbeing programs need to address not only women's individual needs, but also those of their immediate, extended and blended families. Many women provide care to children, older persons and family members with a disability and need recognition in these roles;
- Timely access to prevention and early intervention programs is essential;
- Women experiencing financial disadvantage can have difficulty accessing available health services;
- Women with disabilities may have a range of health issues which need to be addressed, including their physical access to services;
- Factors such as mental illness and substance dependency can have a major impact on women's lives and those of their families;
- Violence against a girl or a woman can have persistent and severe impacts on their current and future physical, emotional, psychological and sexual wellbeing and life pathways;
- Women with eating disorders require specific support to overcome their problems; and,
- Women at different stages of their lives may need outreach support, respite care programs and home and community care assistance.²³

The current Plan recognises that 'women and girls have particular health needs at different times of their lifecycles'. It is important that the new Plan include specific strategies, areas for action, and indicators of success for specific demographic and age groups, including young women.

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

4.3.1 Additional Content for Objective 2

Health issues for young people can be significant, with the years 12 – 25 being a key developmental period that can be defined as 'a period within the lifespan when most of the individual's biological, cognitive, psychosocial and social characteristics are changing'²⁴. Health outcomes in young people are influenced by a range of social factors, including social exclusion, work, social support, access to accommodation and transport, and stress.

Youth services in the ACT consistently raise mental health, and alcohol and other drug issues, as two of the top three issues for young people in the ACT (housing and homelessness being the other). 70% of mental health issues manifest between the ages of 15 and 25²⁵, with mental health issues likely to affect more than 25% of young people aged 18 – 25 in any given 12 month period²⁶. Across Australia, about 90% of students have tried alcohol by the age of 14²⁷, and the average age of initiation into illicit drug use is 19 years²⁸.

In addition to the health issues that all young people may experience, young women are more likely to experience specific health issues, which highlight the need for specific early intervention and prevention strategies relating to the health and wellbeing of young women. Almost 90% of eating disorders occur in women²⁹, and the burden of anxiety and depression is almost twice as high in women than in men³⁰. Research also indicates that young women are especially vulnerable to unsafe sex practices, with only 40% of Year 12 students regularly using condoms during sexual intercourse³¹.

Youth services in the ACT have reported an increase in depression, self-harm and suicide attempts among young women who access their services and support groups. It was reported that young women are particularly interested in information on identifying the symptoms of depression, and how they can support themselves, and their peers, who may be experiencing depression.

Health services in the ACT can often be inaccessible to the whole community, with a shortage of general practitioners and the lowest bulk-billing rates in Australia. Young people face an increased range of barriers to accessing health services, including cost, discrimination, lack of transport options, a general unawareness that services exist, confidentiality concerns and possible stigma. These issues are recognised in the current Plan, and the Youth Coalition recommends that the new Plan develop specific strategies to seek to address this.

Recommendation 8

That Objective 2 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success relating to improving the health and wellbeing of young women, in relation to their primary health, mental health, sexual health, and alcohol and other drug use; and,
- Specific strategies and indicators of success to increasing the accessibility and affordability of health services for all women, including young women.

4.4 Objective 3: Responsive Housing

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of 'responsive housing' as an objective in the ACT Women's Plan. Housing and homelessness is consistently raised by youth services as one of the top 3 issues experienced by young people in the ACT. Similar to health (see Section 4.3), it should also be noted that housing and homelessness is also affected by a range of social, cultural, environmental and economic factors; that need to be addressed as part of a holistic, integrated approach.

4.4.1 *Aligning the Background, Areas for Action, and Indicators of Success*

As outlined in Section 4.1, the Youth Coalition is concerned that the indicators of success in the current Plan do not relate specifically to the issues raised in the background / context information. For example, the following issues highlighted in the current Plan do not link with specific indicators of success:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women from diverse backgrounds can have unique family situations and needs which impact on their housing requirements;
- Women exiting the criminal justice system need particular assistance when obtaining appropriate long term accommodation and housing;
- Respite accommodation for people with high level needs should be an available resource for carers; and,
- Appropriate and affordable private rental accommodation should be available. Assistance with private rental bonds is necessary for low-income women who do not meet the entry requirements for public housing.

It is important that the new Plan include specific strategies, areas for action, and indicators of success for specific demographic and age groups, including young women.

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

4.4.2 *Additional Content for Objective 3*

The Youth Coalition strongly believes that young women should be a key target group in initiatives to provide responsive housing to women in the ACT. It is estimated that youth homelessness accounts for nearly 50% of all homelessness in Australia³².

Appropriate, stable, affordable and safe housing options remain among the highest priorities for young people in the ACT, and is reported by youth services as one of the top three issues for young people in the ACT. A number of youth centres in the ACT recently reported an increase in young people seeking assistance for tertiary homelessness (rough sleeping). Due to a lack of crisis housing; and limited brokerage funds, youth centres report having to give young people tents and extra clothes to sleep outside.

Homelessness for young people aged 12 – 14 is a significant issue in the ACT with 26% of young people experiencing homelessness in this age group³³. Housing and homelessness services cannot be accessed by young people aged under 15 years. These young people are viewed as being under the jurisdiction of Care and Protection Services (CPS) in the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services (DHCS). Currently, CPS accommodation services, such as Marlow Cottage, are only available to young people under a Care and Protection Order. Homelessness, or being at-risk of homelessness, is insufficient grounds for being granted an order.

Young people often experience discrimination in the private rental market, or cannot afford to rent privately; highlighting the need for a robust public housing sector. Public housing is a key exit point for young people in the homelessness service sector, but long waiting lists lead to difficult transitions. In addition, youth services report that young people exiting Bimberi Youth Justice Centre are often placed into crisis accommodation, rather than stable housing.

Recommendation 9

That Objective 3 of the ACT Women's Plan include specific strategies and indicators of success relating to providing appropriate, stable, affordable and safe housing options for young women in the ACT; including but not limited to those aged 12 – 14, or exiting the criminal justice system.

4.5 Objective 4: Safe Inclusive Communities

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of 'safe inclusive communities' as an objective in the Women's Plan; however believe it should be expanded to include 'positive connections and families' (see Section 4.5.1 below). Safe inclusive communities are an important protective factor for young women, supporting them to avoid difficulties and lessening risk factors³⁴.

4.5.1 Expansion of Objective 4 to include Positive Connections and Families

The Youth Coalition believes this objective should be expanded to *Positive Connections with Safe, Inclusive Communities and Families*. While the Youth Coalition supports the commitment in this objective to address violence against women, we believe this objective should be extended to also address other community issues experienced by women in the ACT (see Section 4.5.3 for more information).

Recommendation 10

That Objective 4 in the ACT Women's Plan be expanded to: 'Positive Connections with Safe, Inclusive Communities and Families'.

4.5.2 *Aligning the Background, Areas for Action, and Indicators of Success*

As outlined in Section 4.1, the Youth Coalition is concerned that the indicators of success in the current Plan do not relate specifically to the issues raised in the background / context information. For example, the following issues highlighted in the current Plan do not link with specific indicators of success:

- Strategies that support the rights and particular needs of women and girls within the criminal justice system must be in place;
- Supported and appropriate elder abuse prevention strategies, policies and programs must be in place;
- Women with disabilities are more vulnerable to violence, family breakdown, abuse and harassment in the community;
- Responsibility for caring for the vulnerable in our community falls disproportionately on women, who as carers need recognition and support;
- The voluntary work that underpins community wellbeing is often undertaken by women who contribute their resources, time and expertise to assist others;
- A viable community sector is necessary to respond effectively to needs. Currently this sector depends heavily on women's labour and contributions, and its' value is not given true recognition;
- Neighbourhood planning and urban design for community living needs to involve women and reflect their perspectives; and,
- All women, particularly those who are marginalised or isolated, should be supported to participate fully in community activities.

It is important that the new Plan include specific strategies, areas for action, and indicators of success for specific demographic and age groups, including young women.

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

4.5.3 *Additional Content for Objective 4*

Safe inclusive communities are an important protective factor for young women, supporting them to avoid difficulties and lessening risk factors. Positive protective factors in relation to family and community include positive relationships and attachment, participation and engagement, and access to supports³⁵. The ACT Government has also highlighted its commitment to building a 'child and youth friendly city', which ensures that young people can, among other things:

- Influence decisions about their city;
- Express their opinion on the city they want;
- Participate in family, community and social life;
- Walk safely in the streets on their own;
- Meet friends and play;
- Participate in cultural and social events; and,
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.³⁶

Research indicates that young women are particularly interested in engaging in the community, and are more likely to participate in activities such as cultural activities and volunteering, than young men³⁷, highlighting a key opportunity that the Women's Plan could build upon.

However, despite young women's interest in participating in community planning, groups and activities; young women can experience a number of barriers to participation, including:

- Limitations of the public transport system in the ACT;
- Lack of appropriate services or activities;
- Affordability of services and activities;
- Location of services; and,
- Discrimination against young people.

In relation to family issues, youth services have reported that young women are increasingly experiencing family conflicts, and being affected by parental separation. While family issues tend to be lower level conflicts that could be addressed through early intervention and prevention strategies, some young people are still experiencing domestic and family violence issues.

Youth services are reporting that young mothers are also experiencing specific challenges, particularly in relation to accessing playgroups and support groups. Young mothers have reported that while they would like the choice to attend either youth-specific support groups, or mainstream groups, they are experiencing difficulties accessing mainstream groups due to discrimination and a feeling of being judged on the basis of their age.

Multicultural young women also experience quite unique and discrete challenges relating to families and communities. Particular issues relating to multicultural (including newly arrived and refugee background) young women can include:

- Diverse roles and obligations of family members;
- Juggling family and community expectations;
- Many families have been completely restructured;
- Cultural constructions of families;
- Discrimination in the community;
- Financial pressures (many young people whose families are based overseas may be required to send funds home to their families);
- Young people taking on the role of advocate for their families;
- Intergenerational conflicts; and,
- Families' fears about young people's acculturation.

The current Plan also highlights the need for a viable community sector to respond effectively to community needs. Youth services in the ACT play a critical role in many young people's lives by ensuring that young people, particularly young people experiencing disadvantage, have access to resources and are supported to contribute to the economic, social and political life in the ACT.

Sector viability is important, to ensure that the service system is set up to support young people, able to further develop to address emerging issues and provide targeted support to young people. The Canberra Social Compact states:

In working with the community sector, the ACT Government should recognise the importance of and support the sustainability and long-term capacity of the community sector.³⁸

Additionally, a key goal of the Canberra Social Plan is to recognise and support the role played by community organisations in the ACT³⁹. In addition, it is important that the new Plan address issues of wage inequity experienced by employment fields that are traditionally dominated by women, including the community sector.

Recommendation 11

That Objective 4 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to removing barriers and supporting diverse groups of young women to form positive connections with, and participate in, their families and communities; and,
- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to progressing the viability of the community sector in the ACT, including issues of wage inequity.

4.6 Objective 5: Economic Security and Opportunities

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of 'economic security and opportunities' as an objective in the Women's Plan. Economic and employment issues can have a wide ranging impact upon young women's health and wellbeing, housing, education, and other circumstances; and vice versa. This highlights the need for economic security and opportunities to be addressed as part of a holistic, integrated approach.

4.6.1 *Aligning the Background, Areas for Action, and Indicators of Success*

As outlined in Section 4.1, the Youth Coalition is concerned that the indicators of success in the current Plan do not relate specifically to the issues raised in the background / context information. For example, the following issues highlighted in the current Plan do not link with specific indicators of success:

- Women across all socio-economic backgrounds can experience financial disadvantage and should be supported to achieve economic independence;
- Young women must be assisted to complete their formal education and gain employment skills as a basis for financial security;
- Women who experience financial disadvantage can need support to meet the costs associated with housing, transport, electricity, gas and education through government concessions and programs;
- Women who experience gambling problems require particular support to achieve long term financial security;
- Women in, or exiting, the criminal justice system, or supporting children or family members while partners are in prison, need additional support to become self supporting and financially independent;
- Women leaving relationships can be economically vulnerable and require support;
- Women must have access to financial information throughout their lives to enable them to plan for and achieve economic independence;
- Information on superannuation is vital for women;
- Greater recognition of those occupational areas traditionally dominated by women should be promoted through improved training support, career pathways and work conditions;
- Strategies that promote and support workplace cultures that enable employees at all levels to actively engage in and progress their careers, whilst

- valuing and recognising the role of unpaid work and its' essential role in strengthening our community, are key;
- Appropriate and responsive childcare is necessary to support parents and carers;
- Women with disabilities need particular assistance to access part and full time employment to achieve economic security;
- Valuing diversity in the workplace will assist to ensure that the full spectrum of women have access to employment opportunities and promotion; and,
- Unemployed women and women re-entering the workforce, need to be provided with support to gain ongoing employment.

It is important that the new Plan include specific strategies, areas for action, and indicators of success for specific demographic and age groups, including young women.

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

4.6.2 Additional Content for Objective 5

In addition to the issues highlighted in the current Plan in relation to economic security and employment for women, including discrimination and inequality, young women may experience additional challenges.

While the national unemployment rate is set to rise to 7.5%, the rate of youth unemployment was recently reported to be at 12% nationally. A high proportion of young people who are employed; are employed in part-time, temporary or casual work; and are typically less experienced than older workers. Consequently, the Australian Bureau of Statistics has identified young people as a particularly vulnerable group.⁴⁰

With the introduction of the 'Earn or Learn' national policy agenda, the Youth Coalition is also concerned that young women who are disengaged from employment or education may become particularly vulnerable and require additional support.

While the 'ACT Women's Return to Work Grants' have the potential to be a supporting factor in assisting women to obtain employment, youth services in the ACT have reported difficulties in accessing the grant for young women who may benefit from it; due to the eligibility criteria. The eligibility criteria identifies that women must be engaged in study but not employed, to apply. Youth services, however, have identified young women who are studying, and that would benefit from the grant; but that have been working on a casual or part-time basis. Adapting the eligibility criteria for this grant could support these young women to set themselves up to access further employment hours, or gain employment in their area of interest.

In addition, it is important that the new Plan address issues of wage inequity experienced by employment fields that are traditionally dominated by women, including the community sector (see Section 4.5 for more information).

Recommendation 12

That Objective 5 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to supporting young women to develop skills, access decent employment and be supported in the workplace; and,
- Specific and holistic strategies and indicators of success that relate to support young women who may be experiencing financial disadvantage; including young women exiting the criminal justice system, unemployed women, women with disabilities and other diverse groups of women who are more at-risk of experiencing disadvantage.

4.7 Objective 6: Flexible Education and Training

The Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of 'flexible education and training' as an objective in the Women's Plan, and the recognition within the current Plan that young women, particularly those considered to be at-risk, may need support to complete formal schooling.

4.7.1 *Aligning the Background, Areas for Action, and Indicators of Success*

As outlined in Section 4.1, the Youth Coalition is concerned that the indicators of success in the current Plan do not relate specifically to the issues raised in the background / context information. For example, the following issues highlighted in the current Plan do not link with specific indicators of success:

- Education and training programs need to be responsive to girls' and women's particular needs, learning styles and backgrounds;
- Young women, particularly those at risk due to factors such as ill health, addiction, family circumstances and pregnancy, need to be assisted to complete their formal schooling. Female school leavers who do not enter employment or continue their studies are most at risk of prolonged periods of unemployment and poverty;
- Inclusive educational environments, free of sexual harassment including homophobia, are essential;
- Women with disabilities, those from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can need specific support to complete formal education and training courses;
- Women experiencing disadvantage often have not completed their formal education and need assistance to obtain skills for employment; and,
- Women in, or exiting, the criminal justice system need to be supported to access education and training programs that take their particular educational and life circumstances into accounts.

It is important that the new Plan include specific strategies, areas for action, and indicators of success for specific demographic and age groups, including young women.

Recommendation 5

That each objective in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- An overview of the issues / contextual information for specific demographic groups, including young women;
- Specific action areas relating to each demographic group, including young women;
- Indicators of success specifically linked to issues and action areas, for each demographic group, including young women; and,
- Information on how each of the indicators of success will be measured.

4.7.2 Additional Content for Objective 5

All young women have the right to development opportunities and education. Access to education, and different forms of education, are the basis for enabling participation by young women.

It is important to recognise that young women learn in different ways, and should therefore have access to a range of educational options. The Youth Coalition believes that alternative options should be made available to all young people, including young women, on the basis of their informed choice, and not limited for use as a behavioural management strategy. However, young women who are accessing community-based alternative education settings should also have opportunities equal to those in mainstream settings.

With the introduction of the 'Earn or Learn' national policy agenda, the Youth Coalition is also concerned that young women who are disengaged from employment or education may become particularly vulnerable and require additional support. The Youth Coalition supports strategies by schools aimed at reducing risk factors, promoting protective factors, and building resilience in young people. The role for student support services in schools can strongly contribute to ensure students' experiences of education occur in safe, healthy and supportive environments⁴¹.

It is also important to consider the learning needs of specific groups of young women, including (but not limited to) multicultural young women (including newly arrived and refugee), young women with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young women, and young women exiting the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 13

That Objective 6 of the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Specific strategies and indicators of success that relate to supporting young women to develop skills, access education and training, and be supported in those environments; and,
- Specific and holistic strategies and indicators of success that relate to support young women who require additional support to access education and training, including young women exiting the criminal justice system, women with disabilities, multicultural young people and other diverse groups of women who are more at-risk of experiencing disadvantage.

5. Accessibility and Governance of the Plan

Section 5 of this submission seeks to respond to the following question outlined in the Discussion Paper:

7. Accessibility of the Plan: What strategies can you suggest to improve accessibility and increase knowledge of a new ACT Women's Plan?

It also makes further recommendations relating to the governance of the Plan.

5.1 Accessibility of the ACT Women's Plan

The Youth Coalition commends the ACT Government for its commitment to ensuring the Women's Plan is accessible to those affected by it. In exploring whether the Plan is accessible, we put forward the following questions for consideration and inclusion in the Plan:

- Who is the target group of the Plan?
For example, the ACT Government, the community sector, the private sector, the broader community in the ACT.
- Why should the Plan be accessible?
For example, the accessibility of the Plan may ensure it is more accountable in its implementation.
- How will the Plan's target groups benefit from being aware of the Plan?
For example, women in the ACT will be able to contribute to the further development, implementation and evaluation of the Plan.

In seeking to make the Plan accessible to its target groups, it is important that the ACT Government view the Plan as a vital document that is actively utilised in the progression of women's interests in the ACT. The ACT Government can seek to make the Plan more accessible to its target groups by:

- Ensuring the Plan is a 'living document' that is actively utilised in the progression of women's interests in the ACT;
- Implementing participatory and consultative mechanisms that engage diverse groups of women, including young women, in its further development, implementation and evaluation;
- Ensuring regular reporting, accountability and evaluation mechanisms are implemented, documented and made available to the Plan's target groups; and,
- Ensuring the Plan is responsive to the emerging needs and issues of women in the ACT.

Recommendation 14

That the ACT Women's Plan seeks to become more accessible to its target groups by:

- Ensuring the Plan is a 'living document' that is actively utilised in the progression of women's interests in the ACT;
- Implementing participatory and consultative mechanisms that engage diverse groups of women, including young women, in its further development, implementation and evaluation;
- Ensuring regular reporting, accountability and evaluation mechanisms are implemented, documented and made available to the Plan's target groups; and,
- Ensuring the Plan is responsive to the emerging needs and issues of women in the ACT.

5.2 Governance of the ACT Women's Plan

The Commission on Human Rights identified the key attributes of 'good governance' as being:

- Transparency;
- Responsibility;
- Accountability;
- Participation; and,
- Responsiveness (to the needs of the people).⁴²

The Youth Coalition believes these attributes should be the key components in further developing the governance framework of the new Plan.

5.2.1 Inter-Departmental Committee

The Youth Coalition supports the continued implementation of an inter-departmental committee (IDC), with representation from the Ministerial Advisory Council on Women, to oversee the further development, implementation and evaluation of the Plan.

It is crucial, however, to ensure that additional participatory, consultative and feedback mechanisms are established to ensure that other key stakeholders, including young women, are supported to contribute to the further development, implementation and evaluation of the Plan; in line with the principle of 'participation' which underpins the Plan.

Recommendation 15

That additional participatory, consultative and feedback mechanisms are established to ensure that key stakeholders, including young women, are supported to contribute to the further development, implementation and evaluation of the ACT Women's Plan.

5.2.2 Annual Action Plans

The Youth Coalition supports the development of Annual Action Plans to guide the implementation of the new Plan over the next five years. Annual Action Plans have the capacity to be responsive to emerging needs and issues experienced by women in the ACT.

The Youth Coalition highlights the importance of ensuring that these Annual Action Plans are developed, implemented, and evaluated, in conjunction with key stakeholders, including community services and young women.

In order to ensure that Annual Actions Plans are effective, it is also important that a timeframe be established for each Annual Action Plan that takes into account consultative, development and evaluation mechanisms, while ensuring that Annual Action Plans are released in a timely manner that ensures continuity of the Plan's implementation.

Annual Action Plans should also include a clear identification of agencies and services that are responsible for each component of the Annual Actions Plans' implementation, to ensure accountability and synergies across ACT Government departments and other key stakeholders in the implementation of the Plan.

Recommendation 16

That each Annual Action Plan in the ACT Women's Plan include:

- Consultative mechanisms to ensure key stakeholders can contribute to their development, implementation and evaluation;
- A clear timeframe for the development, implementation and evaluation of each Annual Action Plan, to ensure continuity of the ACT Women's Plan's implementation; and,
- Clear identification of agencies and services that are responsible for each component of the Annual Action Plans' implementation.

5.2.3 Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation Mechanisms

Monitoring and reporting mechanisms are crucial to the accountability, successful implementation and ownership of any plan or policy document. Monitoring mechanisms will assist in assessing the level and success of the implementation of various parts of the Plan and in measuring its progress.⁴³ Monitoring should identify obstacles and suggest suitable measures that would contribute to the continued implementation of the Plan in the context of outcomes for women.

As discussed in Section 4.1, the Youth Coalition supports the inclusion of 'indicators of success', but believe these indicators must be clearly linked to the issues raised in the contextual information, the areas for action; and to specific demographic and age groups of women, including young women. While the Youth Coalition supports the measurement of indicators every two years, the Plan also needs to include information on how each of these indicators will be measured.

The Youth Coalition supports the development of annual reports on the progress of the Plan; and highlights the importance of including a variety of evaluation mechanisms, as part of the reporting process and the broader implementation of the Plan. Beyond measuring indicators of success, the Plan should also seek to evaluate its own development and implementation processes, consultative mechanisms and governance arrangements; to ensure the Plan continues to be relevant and effective.

Recommendation 17

That the ACT Women's Plan include a clear monitoring, reporting and evaluation framework, with clearly linked and measurable indicators of success.

6. Future Plans for Women in the ACT

Section 6 of this submission seeks to respond to the following question outlined in the Discussion Paper:

8. Future Plans: What other priorities and future actions are required to advance the status of ACT women and girls?

6.1 Planning for the ACT Women's Plan 2015 +

This year has seen a number of key ACT Government strategies and frameworks be updated, and the Youth Coalition is concerned that adequate processes are not in place to ensure continuity of implementation across each of these strategies and frameworks.

The development of this new Plan provides a key opportunity for the ACT Government to begin planning for the development of the next ACT Women's Plan in 2015. As discussed in Section 5.2, a clear evaluation framework will support the ACT Government to work towards developing an effective Plan in 2015.

In order to advance the status of ACT women and girls through future priorities and actions, the new Plan should include a timeframe and workplan by which to develop the following ACT Women's Plan, in 2015.

Recommendation 18

That the ACT Women's Plan include a timeframe and workplan by which to develop the following ACT Women's Plan, in 2015.

7. Conclusion

The Youth Coalition would like to thank the ACT Government for providing this opportunity to contribute to the further development of the ACT Women's Plan. We commend the commitment by the ACT Government to developing a Plan based upon community consultation and key stakeholder feedback.

This submission identifies many opportunities by which the ACT Government can build upon the existing strengths of the Plan. In particular, the Youth Coalition calls for the further development of the Plan to outline specific issues, strategies and indicators of success for diverse groups of women, including young women.

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- ⁴³ United Nations (accessed July 2009) The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities; Monitoring Mechanism, United Nations Enable