

A GENDER LED RECOVERY, A RE-SET ON GENDER EQUALITY

CREATING A BETTER NORMAL THROUGH A GREEN NEW DEAL:

We need a strategy to challenge the structural inequalities that underpin our society and economy as we map out a COVID-19 economic recovery, and which manifest in the disproportionate impact COVID-19 has had on women. If we don't address these inequalities, women will continue to be disproportionately impacted long into the future.

To do this, we need to disrupt the current patriarchal system, and embed gender-transformative strategies into all aspects of government, and support and encourage these strategies to be taken up by all of society - to build a better normal.

Assistance packages coming from governments intended to provide economic stimulus since the pandemic began, have in the main been a stimulus for male dominated industries such as infrastructure maintenance and construction, whilst at the same time, the first workers to lose access to the Jobkeeper payment are early childhood education workers, who are predominantly female.

Even before the COVID-19 crisis, women in Canberra were already being let down by the status quo. On average, women in Canberra earn 91 cents for every male dollar earned, are twice as likely to be working part-time, and undertake the majority of unpaid work.

HOW DO WE REDRESS THE BALANCE?

We can stimulate the economy in a way that employs the demographic that is most impacted by COVID-19 paid work losses - women, and we can make sure that women are specifically thought about when the government is considering how and where to invest.

Our Gender Led Recovery package is informed by the need to build a better normal for women and that in turn will help us to build a stronger and better society.

THROUGH OUR GENDER LED RECOVERY PLAN, WE WILL:

1. Support more women in education and employment by:
 - a. Creating more jobs and certainty in the female dominated community services industry;
 - b. Enabling and promoting permanent flexible working arrangements in the ACT Public Service and beyond, which include options for 4 day week contracts and working from home regularly;
 - c. work with the early childhood education providers to accelerate the roll out of 15 hours a week of universal childcare for all 3 year olds in the ACT by the 2021 school year; and
 - d. Develop a specific women's employment strategy to close the income gap by supporting more women to enter higher paid, male dominated industries.
2. Strengthen responses to domestic, family and sexual violence.
3. Put the right governance structures in place to inform, monitor, assess and progress the status of women in the ACT.
4. Make it safer for women to move around the city.
5. Invest in more social, community and affordable housing, which is disproportionately needed by women in the ACT.
6. Improve health outcomes for women.

DETAIL:

1. SUPPORT MORE WOMEN IN EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT, BY:

1.A) CREATING MORE JOBS AND CERTAINTY IN THE FEMALE DOMINATED COMMUNITY SERVICES INDUSTRY:

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted and increased the existing inequities faced by women. Through COVID women have experienced a greater economic impact in terms of loss of hours of work, and therefore income, than men. At the same time, women have experienced a greater increase in the burden of unpaid care work. This may be the reason why the labour

force participation rate reduced more for women than men in the second month after COVID-19 restrictions impacted employment.

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For Australians approaching retirement age in 2020 (born 1960-64), men have an average of 1.7 times higher superannuation account balance than women. Pressure to withdraw funds from superannuation during this economic crisis is likely to be greater for women, who have experienced a greater loss in paid work and have a smaller superannuation balance (and therefore a greater impact from reduced compound interest when they are able to earn more income).

Because 84% of workers in community service industries are women, and the Community Services sector is the third largest employer in the ACT, we must invest in jobs in that sector. By doing this, we not only provide more support for those who need it in our community, but we provide more jobs for women.

That is why:

We will create more jobs and certainty in the community services industry by:

- boosting capacity of all specialist housing and homelessness services to meet demand - through our previously announced \$51.5 million investment, (this is both provision of supports and jobs and includes physical and mental health support, drug and alcohol support, domestic and family violence support)
- providing more job certainty and security by ensuring that funding agreements with key community services sector organisations are indexed to match population growth and are five years in length
- building or repurposing community spaces across Canberra to ensure sufficient access to meet the needs of women's led groups in the ACT (providing staff, access to shared facilities including meeting rooms, kitchens and community garden spaces).

1.B) ENABLING AND PROMOTING PERMANENT FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS IN THE ACT PUBLIC SERVICE AND BEYOND, WHICH INCLUDE OPTIONS FOR 4 DAY WEEK CONTRACTS AND WORKING FROM HOME REGULARLY:

COVID has shown us that many more of us can work from home than previously ever imagined. This has provided flexibility and balance in our lives, particularly for those of us trying to balance unpaid care work and paid work. We all know now that we don't need to force people to do 5 regular working days in the office - we now have the opportunity to redefine working arrangements for the post COVID period to set a new and better normal. That is why we will enable and promote ongoing flexible working arrangements where possible, starting with the ACT public service. We can also offer 4 day working weeks to those who want them, thereby contributing to a better life/work balance.

We have seen with COVID that the proportion of time women have spent undertaking unpaid domestic and caring duties has increased much more than it has for men. These flexible working arrangements will not only allow more women to work from home but also men, transforming long standing gender norms around the division of unpaid work.

1.C) WORK WITH THE EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION PROVIDERS TO ACCELERATE THE ROLL OUT OF 15 HOURS A WEEK OF UNIVERSAL EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION FOR ALL 3 YEAR OLDS IN THE ACT BY THE 2021 SCHOOL YEAR:

We all understand that the availability and affordability of childcare is key to women's workforce participation. The Commonwealth Government recognised this when it rolled out free childcare during the initial months of the COVID pandemic. Unfortunately it wasn't long lasting. Now, not only with free childcare no longer available, but with early childhood educators the first to lose access to Jobkeeper, we have a sector in crisis. Women make up 96% of workers in early childhood education.

Whilst the current ACT Government has a plan for universal access for 3 year olds, their phase in approach is currently only providing education for a small number of children. We also understand that the formula being used was not the one recommended by the Productivity Commission, thereby resulting in some centres not even participating in the trial.

That is why we will work with providers and use advice from the Productivity Commission to accelerate the roll out of 15 hours a week of universal early childhood education for all 3 year olds in the ACT by the 2021 school year.

This will enable more workforce participation for all parents of 3 year olds, which we know will mostly be mothers.

Importantly, this will also benefit our children. Many studies have shown that the earlier children are exposed to education and socialisation in an early education environment, the better they will thrive. Access to quality early childhood education has the potential to foster generational change and is an investment in the future economy of our nation, building a better normal.

1.D) DEVELOPING A SPECIFIC WOMEN'S EMPLOYMENT AND EDUCATION STRATEGY TO CLOSE THE INCOME GAP BY SUPPORTING MORE WOMEN TO ENTER HIGHER PAID, MALE DOMINATED INDUSTRIES:

One of the reasons we have a gender pay gap is that women traditionally dominate the lower paid caring industries while men dominate the higher paid industries such as trades and construction, and in Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) and renewable energy technology. The two industries with the greatest job losses as a result of COVID were accommodation and food services, and arts and recreation services. Both these industries employ large numbers of women, mostly part time and on low pay. That is why we want to develop a specific women's employment strategy that focuses on getting women into those higher paid jobs. The Strategy will include:

- ensuring gender weighting in criteria for funding or contracts with companies that employ people in technical roles, making sure women get an equal opportunity to have green jobs in environment care, and innovation in renewable technology
- developing programs to boost enrolments and graduates in courses at CIT Information Technology and Engineering and Related Technologies courses
- providing scholarships and more programs to boost work experience opportunities for year 9 & 10 girls in trades and the renewable energy sector
- increasing ACT Government traineeships and graduate programs, particularly in STEM areas - which will benefit more young women.

2. STRENGTHEN RESPONSES TO DOMESTIC, FAMILY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE:

We already know that by far, the majority of victims of domestic, family and sexual violence are women. We know too that these are underreported crimes and that because of COVID, it has been more difficult for women to reach out for help when living with such violence. Much of this violence occurs because of gender stereotypical attitudes.

We must capitalise on the momentum and focus that began with the #MeToo movement and the current revelations of sexual harassment in the legal sector. Sexual harassment in public and in the workplace limits women's economic and social participation and we must persist with challenging its existence and working towards a society that has gender equality.

Key to this is understanding that not all misogynists are violent towards women, but all violence against women begins with misogyny, disrespect and holding violence-supportive attitudes.

That's why we will:

- increase capacity of domestic and family and sexual violence services
- ensure well-funded systemic women's advocacy groups, including community legal centres, women's legal centres and women's resource centres.
- improve early intervention and support for those who use violence by developing wrap around support and intervention programs for people who use violence against their partners, family or pets.
- ensure respectful relationships education in schools is delivered by community sector experts
- work with the legal sector to highlight and reduce the incidence of sexual harassment and ensure appropriate supports. This could include collection and analysis of anonymised data relating to workplace sexual harassment and develop annual reporting of sexual harassment in Canberra workplaces
- Continue Caroline Le Couteur's advocacy to change the crimes legislation to include a positive definition of consent.

3. ENSURE THAT WE HAVE THE RIGHT GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES IN PLACE TO INFORM, MONITOR, ASSESS AND PROGRESS THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE ACT:

The Greens have led the way in promoting considerations of gender in the development of government policy and legislation, through three Parliamentary Agreements. These Agreements have required the government to undertake triple bottom line analysis of the economic, environmental and social - including gendered - impacts of its major decisions. But the Greens say this is still lacking and we need a more concerted, deliberate and unified effort. That is why we will:

- Introduce a Standing Committee on Gender Equity. This Standing Committee will have the role of applying a gender lens across legislative and policy proposals – particularly economic ones, with membership comprising members from all parties, thereby making it a shared and whole of Assembly responsibility.
- Develop legislation that directs public sector entities with over 50 staff to have gender action plans, undertake gender impact assessment and publish their results (including

all public service agencies, such as but not limited to the DPP, Courts, the CIT and University of Canberra).

- Maintain and build on a gendered lens for policy and program development through gender responsive budgeting and producing a meaningful annual women's budget statement that spells out the impacts and benefits for women.

4. MAKE IT SAFER FOR WOMEN TO MOVE AROUND THE CITY:

Urban planning experts say we need to plan our urban environment and transport systems with all people in mind. However, all too often the views and safety of women and other marginalised groups are not taken into account. There is much to be said for developing urban spaces that suit women, because when it suits women, including women with disability and mothers with prams, it suits us all. We know that there are hot spots around our city where women feel less safe. We know that fewer women than men ride bicycles for a range of reasons, but one of them is definitely safety, especially at night.

That is why we will:

- create an Access Committee to provide advice to government in urban planning and transport design, that must include women, people with disability and other diverse cohorts
- make it safer for women to move around the city, by rolling out women's safety upgrades such as increased lighting on bike paths and public transport stops, separated bike lanes and improvements to active travel infrastructure, starting with locations with a track record of crimes against women and high potential use by women at night
- enhance on-demand and flexibus services, enabling night buses to drop off closer to home, particularly where there are safety concerns.

5. INVEST IN MORE SOCIAL, COMMUNITY AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING, WHICH IS DISPROPORTIONATELY NEEDED BY WOMEN IN THE ACT:

In 2018, in the ACT, there were 20,093 women and girls and 17,109 men and boys living in low income households. This includes 8000 children. We know that over 80% of single parent families are headed by women and that they will be the main beneficiaries of our investment. Our \$400m investment into new social housing stock and new community housing, will deliver over 1,000 properties. By providing safe, secure and appropriate housing for those doing it tough, and using a gender lens when we do it, we are building a better normal and promoting gender equality.

6. IMPROVE HEALTH OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN IN THE ACT:

Women are the primary seekers of health and wellbeing information in the ACT. Since women are the main family decision makers for health issues and the main family carers, their access to appropriate health and wellbeing information is crucial. They need to be able to make informed choices about their own and their family's health, and access relevant services and support. Women have specific health and wellbeing needs that we can enhance by:

- implementing dedicated times at public swimming pools for muslim women
- improving the accessibility and affordability of sexual and reproductive health services across the ACT, and ending medical discrimination towards women on the basis of religious beliefs
- providing more women-specific counselling through the Women's Health Service, and meeting rooms for peer health support groups at community health centres.

CONCLUSION:

The ACT Greens acknowledge that women are a diverse group and that some women experience multiple disadvantage. In particular, First Nations women, women with disabilities, trans, lesbian and bi sexual women, women in prison, women from diverse cultural backgrounds and those experiencing violence, mental health and/or drug and alcohol issues or who are older, all experience additional barriers to full participation. In our efforts to reduce inequality, we are clear we must bear these intersectionalities in mind and that responses must be deliberately tailored to ensure equitable access.

These initiatives are designed to mitigate existing gendered inequalities that have not only existed for millennia but have been exacerbated by the Covid pandemic. The Greens believe that full and supported access to education and economic opportunities for women provides benefits for the whole community and that women's increased participation and sense of safety will help us to build a better normal.