

2017

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

ANNUAL SAFER FAMILIES STATEMENT 2017

Presented by
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Madam Speaker

Today I deliver the first annual Safer Families Statement. This statement provides the opportunity to reflect on the solid work done to date to reduce the prevalence of domestic and family violence in our community, but also serves to remind us there is much still to be done.

We know domestic and family violence is a widespread social problem.

We see it locally, nationally and globally. It has a significant and lasting impact on all sectors of our community.

Statistics provided by the Australian National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, or ANROWS, found that one in six women, and one in 19 men have experienced physical or sexual violence by a current or former partner.

For 62% of the women who had experienced physical assault at the hands of a man, the most recent incident was in their home. More than one woman is killed every week.

This violence often happens behind closed doors, in a place that is supposed to be a safe haven.

It happens to people regardless of their beliefs or social, cultural or economic situation, and can have devastating consequences.

In May 2015, the Australian Institute of Criminology found that, despite the national rate of homicide declining, two in every five homicide victims are killed by a family member.

Up to 88% of those deaths occurred within the victim's home.

Research also tells us that domestic and family violence accounts for more preventable ill-health and premature death among women under the age of 45 years than any other of the well known risk factors including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking.

Domestic and family violence might often happen behind closed doors, but it is everyone's responsibility to help guard against this insidious type of violence.

As I will remind Members today – it takes more than just governments to commit the will and the funding to create real change. It takes action and commitment from the whole community.

Three detailed reports were undertaken in the ACT in 2015 and 2016 which served to identify, dissect and investigate the full ambit of issues from all angles and ensure we have a full picture of this issue.

The Government response made 38 separate commitments to this issue.

Our goal is to deliver whole of community change to achieve a zero tolerance for domestic and family violence in the ACT.

We all know that this goal will be difficult to measure as we continue to build the evidence base on the effectiveness of our efforts.

And we know that for real change to occur, we need to keep at it.

In the 2015-16 financial year:

- ACT policing attended over 3,400 family violence incidents and recorded over 2,200 offences for family violence, with the three main offences being assault, property damage or breaching a domestic violence protection order;
- The Director of Public Prosecutions commenced 710 criminal proceedings relating to domestic and family violence -up 37% from the year prior;
- The Domestic Violence Crisis Service answered around 24,000 incoming contacts to the 24/7 crisis line and is already predicting an increase in demand for services;
- Legal Aid provided 1,745 advice and assistance services related to domestic violence and personal protection order matters which is a 27% increase from the prior year,

We are yet to receive the latest data for 2016-17, but we do know:

- Legal Aid has provided assistance to an additional 100 victims in the first three quarters of 2016-2017 compared to the same period in the previous year;
- that between July-December 2016, the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) made crisis intervention visits to 773 families and received an 12,800 calls for telephone support and crisis counselling; and
- for the first three quarters of 2016-17, ACT Policing attended over 2,200 family violence related incidents.

We know that the demand for services will likely increase in the short and medium term as infrastructure improves and awareness increases. Increased reporting means that more people feel able to seek help.

The \$21.42 million dollar *Safer Families* package funded in last year's budget represents the single largest spending and policy commitment to address family violence in the ACT's history.

This is also the first time in the ACT's history that there has been such a dedicated, interconnected, whole of government and across community commitment to address domestic and family violence.

Importantly, the commitment and reform program commits to a new model for integration across Government and with the community sector led by a dedicated Coordinator-General for Family Safety.

Funding was allocated to priorities across Directorates providing for:

- \$9.6 million for Justice and Community Safety including Legal Aid
- \$8.4 million for the Community Services Directorate, including money for front-line services
- \$2.0 million for ACT Health
- \$1.3 million for the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

As we reported in the Budget papers, our financial investment to the Safer Families agenda in 2016-17 was substantial with \$4.669m in investment in our first year, against a budget of \$5.629m.

All funding that was not fully spent this year will be reprofiled to 2017-18 to either continue or offset other safer families' initiatives.

The Government's commitment to family safety will continue in the years ahead, with an investment of \$23.5 million over the four years from 2017-18.

But as I've said a number of times, funding alone is not the answer.

Real change requires strong leadership.

Through a whole of Government approach, the Coordinator-General is supported by a dedicated Safer Families Team, and is uniquely positioned to drive cultural change and lead reform in partnership with government agencies, non-government services and the Canberra community.

Our commitment is to build a system that is person and family centred, that builds confidence so that more people seek help, and that is able to identify and support families at risk much earlier before the violence escalates.

That kind of change takes long term effort, and an approach to implementation that is focused on learning from what works and what doesn't, refining and adapting and trying again. This year has seen great progress.

- We have achieved major legislative reforms that offer much better protection with new laws enacted from 1 May 2017 to provide a broader definition of family violence to protect victims from the full range of coercive, controlling and abusive behaviours.

- More family violence victims and survivors are getting help through government support for Legal Aid ACT; the Domestic Violence Crisis Service; and Canberra Rape Crisis Centre.
- There have been specific investments to improve access to justice processes and Family Violence Orders:
 - Supporting Canberrans throughout the court process by providing increased access to translating and interpreting services.
 - Assisting members of the public to apply for and obtain a Family Violence Order by funding two new Family Violence Order Liaison Officers at ACT Policing.
- Assisting victims to escape family violence with immediate expenses by delivering a brokerage and bond fund.
- We are testing innovative approaches, including two important family-centred programs to help families break the cycle of violence
 - Room4Change is now in operation - a therapeutic residential behaviour change program for perpetrators that also supports women and children to stay safely in the home, providing case management, group work and support programs.
 - Delivering the Justice Reinvestment Trial in partnership with Winnunga Nimmityjah to deliver a family-focused approach to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the justice system.
- And in recognition of the important intersections between family violence and safety for children and young people, we have continued the important reforms by establishing a Case Analysis Team within Child and Youth Protection Services to provide independent advice on individual cases at key decision making points and to inform training priorities and development of new policies and procedures.

This year has also been a significant year of design and development for key initiatives.

The Coordinator-General for Family Safety has been leading a whole of government and whole of community co-design process to develop a Family Safety Hub for the ACT.

The intent of the co-design process is to ensure that frontline and client perspectives are central to the design of the Family Safety Hub. That has meant being flexible to ensure the process provides real opportunities for input, and people can see how their input is being used. Fifty people have participated in interviews about their experience of the system and the opportunities they see for reform.

The Coordinator-General is also leading work across Government to improve the awareness, understanding and capability of our frontline workforce to respond to family violence. A whole of government strategy is being developed to be delivered in 2017-18.

In our approach to implementation this year we have been prepared to be flexible and open to new ideas to ensure that our commitments are delivered well, and take advantage of new developments, thinking and best practice.

As I have said many times, we need everyone on board. Government alone cannot change how our whole community thinks and acts on this issue.

We will continue to drive an 'all-in' approach to this complex issue and I am pleased that the community continues to embrace this approach.

There are also many great things happening across our whole community that you would also see:

- last week Canberra Milk made a \$20,000 donation to the Domestic Violence Crisis Service;
- The ANU is currently undertaking work on gender equality and towards eliminating sexual assault from their campuses and surrounding areas and I'm advised they will be funding an officer from Canberra Rape Crisis Service on campus beginning in coming weeks;
- The Domestic Violence Crisis Service has set up a new partnership with Swinburne university to work with training around perpetrators which runs for 5 or 15 days.
- The Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drug Association of the ACT (ATODA) held a symposium this year about alcohol and drug use, and domestic and family violence.
- This month, a new privately funded Micro Finance facility will be launched that aims to close the gap for the missing middle experiencing domestic and family violence with one-off, no interest loans to provide financial stability in times of need.
- Domestic Violence training is being developed for both financial institutions and the insurance sector, and will be trialled in the ACT, starting with Beyond Bank, and;
- In November last year, we held our 16 days of global activism against gender based violence campaign which garnered support from people and organisations across the ACT— people such as Alan Tongue, 2017 ACT Australian of the Year who continues to do great things in this space.

Collaboration and coordination are key and ensure that we can put the needs of victims and survivors at the centre of everything we do.

The ACT Government again reconfirms its unwavering commitment to continuing to work towards eliminating family violence for our whole community.

ENDS