**Kat Reed**

**CEO, WWDACT**

*Women With Disabilities ACT acknowledges and pays respect to the Ngunnawal peoples, the traditional custodians of the ACT Region, on whose land our office is located. We pay our respects their Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge their spiritual, social, historical and ongoing connection to these lands and the contribution they make to the life of the Australian Capital Territory.*

**Women with Disabilities ACT**

**Budget Submission ACT 2021-22**

**16 June 2021**

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# Introduction

Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT) is a systemic advocacy and peer support organisation for women, girls, non-binary and feminine identifying people with disabilities in the ACT. WWDACT follows a human rights philosophy, based on the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Convention on the Elimination of (all forms of) Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). WWDACT is a Disabled People’s Organisation, governed by women\* with disabilities, and its proposals and recommendations to government are consistent with Article 4 (3), and Article 29 of CRPD which outline the imperative for consultation with disabled peoples.

WWDACT, through its membership, has strong links to relevant ACT advocacy organisations such as Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI), People with Disabilities ACT (PWDACT) and the Health Care Consumers Association of the ACT (HCCA). WWDACT also has a close association with ACT Disability and Aged Carer Advocacy Service, the Women’s Centre for Health Matters and Women with Disabilities Australia (WWDA), the peak organisation for women with all types of disabilities in Australia.

WWDACT wishes to highlight several key areas as significant for women, girls, non-binary and feminine identifying people with disabilities in the ACT for the financial year of 2021 – 2022:

* Funding for systemic gender-based disability advocacy
* Targeted community engagement during our Royal Commission
* Access to crisis shelters
* Youth leadership program for women and girls
* Support for Parents (and mothers) with disability
* Improve COVID-19 Vaccine communications

# Funding for Gendered Disability Advocacy

Women with Disabilities ACT is requesting an increase in our funding from the ACT government to support our increased activities in the ACT and expand our work representing women, girls, non-binary and feminine identifying people with disabilities. There are now 41, 900 women with disabilities in the ACT[[1]](#footnote-1) an increase of about 6,000 women since 2015.

Since our incorporation in 2017, WWDACT has expanded our membership more than 10-fold in just 4 years. Our social media now regularly reaches thousands of people in the Canberra region, and we have produced successful projects such as our reports on Contraception, Consent, Sexuality and Safe Relationships; the Pitch Your Passion Youth Leadership Program and our Social Drop Ins. WWDACT has also clarified our scope, to include gender diverse people with disabilities, broadening some of our work.

In Financial Year 2021-2022 WWDACT’s projects include action research on barriers women with disability face in accessing domestic violence crisis services (Better Safety Initiative), increased engagement with our community regarding the Disability Royal Commission, providing input on the Disability Health Strategy, and advising local government on COVID Vaccine rollout for women with disability.

WWDACT is seeking to increase our policy capacity to provide more work on violence and safety, housing, child protection, and improve representation of women\* with disabilities in all facets of life in the ACT. WWDACT is also seeking further funding to adequately support the important projects for this year such as Better Safety and the Disability Royal Commission.

In order to sustain the quality of our work while increasing engagement with our constituents, WWDACT needs to an additional $100,000 per year to:

* Extend working hours for our Policy and Advocacy Officer, to work on projects regarding Domestic and Family Violence and Safety for Women with Disabilities in the ACT.
* Hire a Community Engagement Officer, to work on projects that increase participation from women with disabilities in forums, advocacy and consultations.
* Maintain a larger office, cover administrative costs, and grow our capacity in line with the population.
* Adequately fund a part-time Administration Officer to support the CEO and Policy Officer.
* Increase staff wellbeing through monthly external supervision.

# Targeted Community Engagement During Our Royal Commission

WWDACT believes increased support and engagement is needed for women and with the intersection of CALD, LGBTIQ+ and First Nations during the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. Due to the high rates of violence against women\* with disabilities and increased high rates of women that are further compounded by multiple disadvantage, and the severe lack of engagement in the Royal Commission from particularly CALD, LGBTIQ+ and First Nations women currently, it is essential that organisations in the ACT sector have the capacity to provide adequate support and referrals for local clients during the Royal Commission.

WWDACT recommends that funding be made available for ACT community organisations to provide support and information to their clients and members over the course of the Disability Royal Commission, particularly within the women’s sector with particular focus on CALD, LGBTIQ+ and First Nations women with disability.

# Access to Crisis Shelters

Currently, women and their children with physical disabilities fleeing domestic and family violence are unable to access the crisis shelters in the ACT. This creates a barrier to leaving a violent situation and relies on crisis services such as DVCS finding hotel rooms to assist.

WWDACT recommends that approximately $100,000 be dedicated to upgrading two women’s crisis shelters in the ACT to have accessible bathrooms, level entry, and height adjustable benches kitchens. The refuges should be chosen in consultation with the Women’s Services Network to identify which 2 shelters would be most cost-effective to retrofit.

# Youth Leadership Program for Women and Girls

Young women with disability experience greater disadvantage in relation to education. Only 36% of people with disability ages 15-64 complete secondary education[[2]](#footnote-2). This decreased access to education leads to poor employment outcomes with lead to increased poverty for women with disabilities. Currently, there are limited programs and mentorships available to young women with disability in the ACT.

WWDACT seeks $30,000 to establish a Youth Leadership program for women and girls with disability in the ACT, in honour of the late Sue Salthouse. The program will provide mentorships, support, training and opportunities for young girls with disability aged between 16-25 years in the ACT.

# Support for Parents (and Mothers) With Disability

WWDACT’s Parenting Peer Support Group has found that parents and mothers with disability face increased stigma from health care professionals as well as disability specific support in maternal health services and other parenting services. Members expressed that due to these barriers, they experienced social isolation and decreased mental wellbeing as a result.

WWDACT recommends increased funding for organisations to provide social supports for parents with a disability such as disability specific peer support groups, accessible playgrounds and disability specific parenting and maternal healthcare workshops.

Further, in order to address stigma in healthcare services WWDACT recommends funding to further research and determine gaps in training for health and education professionals, support workers, and including family members and carers.

# Improve COVID-19 Vaccine Communication

WWDACT Members are supportive of the Covid-19 Vaccine Rollout and intend to get vaccinated. Our members would like more disability specific information to be provided, but where this does not exist members would like to know. Members would also like clearer definitions regarding rollout phases, and clearer information on the schedule for each phase.

The ACT Government should seek to provide Easy English facts sheets and adopt an emergency hotline service to help keep people with a disability safe and informed during emergencies like COVID. The hotline must be staffed by trained advocates who are supported by training and resources on local support services.

# Endorsements

WWDACT endorses the Joint Submission to the ACT Government Budget by ADACAS, AFI and Red Cross titled *Equitable experiences for Parents with Disability/Parents experiencing mental ill health where Child and Youth Protection services are involved*.

# Conclusion

WWDACT urges the ACT government to consider the recommendations in this submission and welcomes the opportunity for further conversation. We look forward to participating in future consultations.

1. [Survey of Disability Ageing and Carers](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40.nsf/mf/4430.0), Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018, Cat. No. 4430.0 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. UPR Disability Coordination Group, ‘Poor quality inclusive education for people with disability’, Factsheet for Australia’s Universal Periodic Review 2015 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)