



**Women with Disabilities ACT**  
**Building One, Pearce Community Centre**  
**Pearce ACT 2607**

**Preventative and Population Health Policy**  
**ACT Health**  
**ACT Government**

Dear ACT Health,

Women with Disabilities ACT (WWDACT) are writing to provide our feedback on the ACT Preventative Health Plan 2020-2025. WWDACT is the peak body for women\* with disabilities in the ACT region.

WWDACT conducted a brief consultation with our Policy Advisory Committee (PAC) in June, to discuss the Preventative Health Care Strategy and Action Plan and its implications for women\* with disabilities. The overwhelming sentiment of the group was that the strategy and action plan did not feel inclusive of women\* with disabilities. The issues that affect the everyday lives of those with disabilities or chronic conditions were not captured in the strategy scope nor the consultation questions. There was nothing that acknowledged the importance of preventative health for people who already had disabilities or chronic conditions, even though this is a risk factor for developing further health issues. A strategy that is only written with healthy and able-bodied people in mind misses its opportunity to seek initiatives for all members of the ACT community to live healthy lives.

The PAC members noted that the capacity of the healthcare system in the ACT makes accessing basic healthcare (such as accessing a GP or getting scripts renewed) more difficult. It is difficult to talk about preventative healthcare when these structures are not in place to ensure women\* with disabilities can have their basic healthcare needs met. For example, one member raised that adults with ADHD can't see publicly funded psychiatrists in the ACT, and long waitlists and prohibitive costs can prevent access to medications or renewals of scripts. When the healthcare system is inefficient and there is a shortage of specialists, women\* with disabilities cannot access the care they need and are at higher risk of developing further chronic conditions.

*Winner 2012 International Women's Day Award, Community Category*

*Winner 2015 ACT Chief Minister's Inclusion Awards, Excellence in Championing Human Rights*

**STRONG WOMEN STRONG VOICES**

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The PAC members also noted that the emphasis on active travel, particularly cycling and upkeep of cycle networks, is only applicable to a specific part of the ACT population. There are many circumstances which would stop people from using active travel to get around. These include but are not limited to mobility, physical and fatigue barriers as a result of disability; caring responsibilities (for example, needing to travel with kids); not living within close distance to the destination (often place of employment, often inner city); commuting outside of the 'standard' 9-5 work day; needing to access shopping or groceries and carry these home. Women\* with disabilities are more likely to be impacted by these factors, and a strong focus on bike path networks in the preventative health strategy ignores this. PAC members mentioned that investments in public transport are far more valuable for many women\* with disabilities, who rely on this method to get 'out and about' when cars or active travel are inaccessible. Disruptions and reductions to the ACT public transportation network mean many women\* with disabilities are prevented from leaving their homes, reducing their incidental exercise and leaving them at higher risk of developing chronic health conditions.

It is important that the Preventative Health Strategy recognises that accessing healthy lifestyles and preventative healthcare is important for all Canberrans, particularly women\* with disabilities. Many women\* with disabilities face additional barriers to living healthy lifestyles, and they should not be left behind in strategies that aim to address these issues.

With regards,

Kat Reed

CEO, WWDACT

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