

Women with Disabilities ACT

Budget Submission: Sexual and Reproductive Health for Women* with Disabilities in the ACT

This submission builds on the previous joint budget submission made by Women with Disabilities ACT in December 2023, together with Advocacy for Inclusion, ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability, and Mental Health Community Coalition ACT. You can view this submission [here](#).

Women with Disabilities ACT has also called for an [increase in funding](#) to systemic advocacy organisations.

This submission outlines budget items specific to women, non-binary and gender diverse people (women*) with disabilities in the ACT.

[Affordable and accessible assisted reproductive technology – support for new parents](#)

What: A funding package for accessible and affordable assisted reproductive technology (ART) in the ACT. The package should include funding for scoping and implementation, progressing recommendations from the *ACT Government Response to Assisted Reproductive Technology: Regulation and Access*ⁱ. Funding should be provided for a subsidised, disability-aware fertility health clinic which is local and accessible for people with disabilities. The package should ensure that all people in the ACT have equal access to fertility treatments and technology regardless of disabilities or economic position.

The package should be developed in conjunction with increased support packages for parents with disabilities, so parents are supported by the healthcare system and the community through every step of their

parenting journey. For more details please refer to *Support package for parents with a disability* within our [joint budget asks](#).

Rationale: Increasing access and reducing cost of ART were next steps in the *ACT Government Response to Assisted Reproductive Technology: Regulation and Access*. Although this is an issue for many in the ACT, women* with disabilities face unique barriers in accessing ART. WWDACT's membership has reported complications accessing fertility treatment, facing discrimination and misinformation from treatment providers and being subjected to unnecessary and confusing legal requirements including additional waivers. They report feeling alienated by ART services as service providers rarely encounter people with disabilities. People with disabilities experience additional struggles to afford costs of treatment and are less able to travel interstate to access lower-cost options. Any budget measures implementing affordable and accessible ART should consider the needs of people with disabilities and should ensure that services are disability-informed.

We note that there is also broad lack of formal and community supports for parents with disabilities in the ACT, particularly parents with intellectual disability. In addition, parents with disabilities may continue to face stigma and discrimination from health professionals, support workers and others throughout their parenting journey. This has ultimately led to their overrepresentation in the child protection system. The ACT should inquire into and develop a comprehensive support package for parents with disabilities, to ensure parents and children receive the ongoing support they need and are able to seek help without fear. For more details please refer to *Support package for parents with a disability* within our [joint budget asks](#).

[End forced sterilisation in the ACT](#)

What: Funding for an inquiry into forced or coerced sterilisation, contraception, and abortion experienced by women* with disabilities in the ACT. The inquiry should include in its scope both procedures which are irreversible (those that come under the courts and tribunal process) as well as chemical sterilisation (for example, being forced to take a contraceptive pill in the long-term without consent).

The inquiry should investigate the history and current legislation which allows for forced sterilisation in the ACT, noting there is no law prohibiting forced sterilisation. The inquiry should be undertaken by local disability advocacy organisations who can be resourced to consult with their communities safely and effectively on this sensitive issue.

Rationale: Forced sterilisation has been identified as an act of violence, a form of social control and a form of torture by the UN Special Rapporteur on Tortureⁱⁱ and as a form of violence by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC)ⁱⁱⁱ. It is in breach of the UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD)^{iv}. There is no law in Australia that explicitly prohibits forced sterilisation of children or of adults except in circumstances where there is a serious threat to health or life^v. The absence of this legislation in the ACT is in breach of human rights and is against the ACT's obligations as a human rights jurisdiction. It also means there is very little information on the prevalence of forced sterilisation practices in the ACT. It is important to consider the current impact and complexity of the issue, to investigate legislative, policy and social change to prevent this form of violence against women* with disabilities.

Funding sexual and reproductive health services for women* with disabilities

What: Provide a full funding package for the *Disability Health Strategy First Action Plan*^{vi}, in particular action item 2.4 *Women's Sexual Health*. Commit to implementing a clinical sexual health service for women* with disabilities, and a sexual health education and information program for women* with disabilities.

Rationale: Although there was some allocation of funds to the Disability Health Strategy in the mid-year budget review, the funding was primarily for information and scoping and does not seem to fund the implementation of important action items such as 2.4 *Women's Sexual Health*. We echo the ACT Disabled People's Organisations in calling for full funding of the *ACT Disability Health Strategy First Action Plan*. Intersectional actions must be prioritised and must not be left behind in the implementation of the strategy.

We urge the ACT government to consider recommendations made by Women with Disabilities ACT throughout consultations and submissions in the 2023-2024 budget cycle.

These recommendations are located here:

[2023 Budget Submission](#)

[Submission to the ACT Preventative Health Plan](#)

[Submission to the Changing the Children and Young Person Act](#)

[Submission to the ACT Women's Plan Third Action Plan](#)

[Submission to the Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation](#)

For further information please contact Kat Reed, Chief Executive Officer

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Endorsements

This submission is endorsed by Women's Health Matters and ACT Down Syndrome and Intellectual Disability.

women's
health
matters!



ⁱ [Assisted-Reproductive-Technology-Regulation-and-Access-ACT-Government-Response.pdf](#)

ⁱⁱ [Forced sterilization of young women with disabilities must end, UN rights expert says | OHCHR](#)

ⁱⁱⁱ [Factsheet: Forced Sterilisation of People with Disability and People with Intersex Variations - Disabled People's Organisations Australia \(DPO Australia\)](#)

^{iv} [Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities \(CRPD\) | Division for Inclusive Social Development \(DISD\) \(un.org\)](#)

^v [Factsheet: Forced Sterilisation of People with Disability and People with Intersex Variations - Disabled People's Organisations Australia \(DPO Australia\)](#)

^{vi} [Disability Health Strategy First Action Plan 2024-2026](#)