Safe.

Everywhere.

Always.

Insights from a Canberra Community Survey on Women's Public Safety



"As a female runner I take a lot of precautions to stay safe - I have headphones that don't cover my ears so I can hear my surroundings, I will tell someone where I am going and have my location shared for some family + friends, I will only run in daylight, and I will often have my dog with me. Conversely, my male partner doesn't even consider these things when he goes out for a run."

"I should be able to move through this world without having to adjust my behaviour (sometimes with costs attached such as taxis) or devote as much mental energy to planning my route/attire, just so that I feel safe getting from A to B. I still feel Canberra is safer than many other cities, but I do feel less safe here than I used to."

"This is a men's problem - their behaviour is making women feel unsafe. It is a small number of them but it is still men who make us unsafe. The solution needs to involve men advocating and calling out other men."

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal People, and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

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Help and Support

Any type of violence against women can be hard to discuss and reading this document may cause distress.

Help is available.

If you or someone close to you is in distress or immediate danger, please call 000.

For information, support and counselling, you can contact:

ACT Police Assistance: 131 444

1800RESPECT National Helpline:

1800 737 732 or <u>www.1800respect.org.au</u> National sexual assault, domestic and family violence counselling service.

This service is free and confidential.

Available 24/7.

Full Stop Australia:

1800 385 578 or www.fullstop.org.au
National trauma counselling and recovery service for people of all ages and genders experiencing sexual, domestic and family violence.

This service is free and confidential.

Available 24/7.

Victim Support ACT:

1800 822 272 or (02) 6205 2222 www.hrc.act.gov.au/victim-support

Victims of Crime Team – ACT Policing:

(02) 5126 9113 or www.police.act.gov.au

Canberra Rape Crisis Centre (CRCC):

(02) 6247 2525 or www.crcc.org.au

Domestic Violence Crisis Service:

(02) 6280 0900 or www.dvcs.org.au

Lifeline (24-hour crisis line):

131 114 or www.lifeline.org.au

Foreword

Women should be safe, everywhere, always.

This survey shows that this is not yet the lived reality of every woman in the Australian Capital Territory.

As Senator for the ACT, I launched the Safe. Everywhere. Always. survey in June to give women and girls in our city an avenue to share their experiences directly with government – to tell us about the vigilance and constraint that shapes how they move through our city, and what changes they think would make the most meaningful difference to their public safety.

Within this report are the responses, ideas and recommendations shared by more than 2,500 women and girls from across our city.

What is plainly clear in the results of this survey is that we have to do better. When women avoid public transport after dark, abandon exercise routines, or spend money they cannot afford on alternative transport because they fear for their safety, we are failing as a community.

When 43% of young women aged 15-24 take safety precautions every single time they leave home, we are denying an entire generation the freedom to fully participate in city life.

The findings in this survey are both confronting and actionable. Women have identified specific locations where they feel unsafe, pointed to infrastructure issues that leave them vulnerable, and outlined practical solutions that could make an immediate difference. They have provided us with a roadmap for change.

This report does not and never was intended to provide all the answers to the complex, multi-layered crisis of men's violence against women.

However, it does address a critical component: ensuring our public spaces, transport systems and infrastructure support women's safety rather than compromising it. While these practical reforms will help address immediate safety concerns raised by Canberra women, I also support the consistent message from the survey that women's safety is not, and should not be, a women's issue. I will continue to work in Canberra and across the country on efforts to change men's attitudes and behaviours so that there is no longer a risk of violence for women to fear.

The Albanese Government's commitment to ending violence against women and children within a generation requires action at every level – from challenging attitudes that drive violence to creating environments where women can live without fear. This survey is just one part of that broader mission. It also builds on the work we are doing at every level of Government to address domestic and family violence, as we know that in addition to the issues raised in this survey about public spaces, many more women are unsafe in their own homes.

I am grateful to every woman and girl who participated in this survey. These are not easy stories to tell. Thank you for believing and caring enough to push for change and improvements. Your voices matter, your safety matters and your demands for change will drive meaningful action.

As your local Senator and Federal Minister for Women, I am committed to ensuring these findings translate into concrete improvements — because every woman should be safe, everywhere, always.

Katy Gallagher
Senator for the ACT
Minister for Women

Methodology

The survey asked seven key questions designed to understand women's experiences of safety in public spaces:

- 1 Do you feel safe living in Canberra?
- 2 Do you avoid/change plans or behaviours based on concerns for your safety?
- 3 How often do you take safety precautions when going out in Canberra?
- 4 Do you and your friends talk about safety when planning to go out?
- How confident are you that if you reported a safety concern or incident you would receive an appropriate response?
- 6 Are there any public spaces or areas in Canberra that causes the most concern for you?
- 7 What would make you feel safer?

The message from Canberra women was confronting:

While 76% of women feel safe most or all of the time, this masks a more complex reality — women are constantly negotiating their safety.

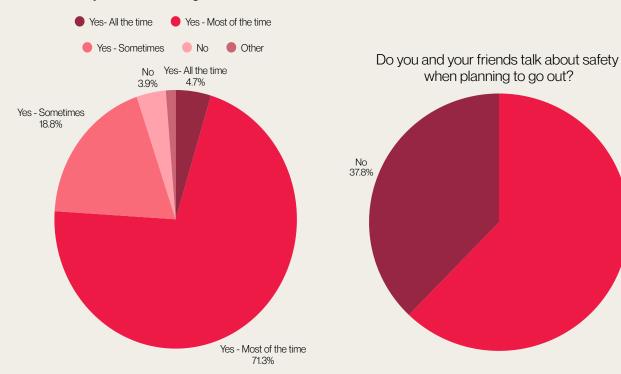
86.6% of Canberra women are changing their plans due to safety concerns.

62.2% discuss safety considerations with friends before going out.

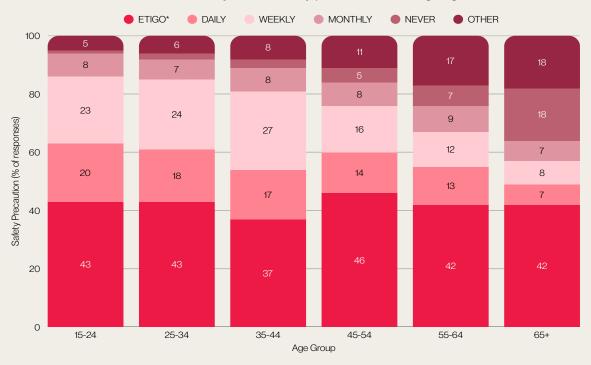
The burden weighs heaviest on our young women, with 43% of 15-24-year-olds taking precautions every single time they leave home.

Data Snapshot

Do you feel safe living in Canberra?



How often do you take safety precautions when going out?

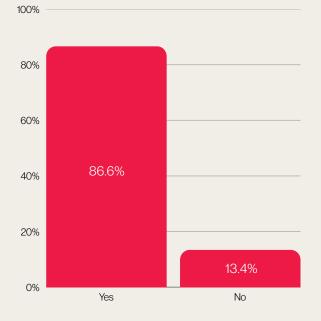


*ETIGO = Every time I go out

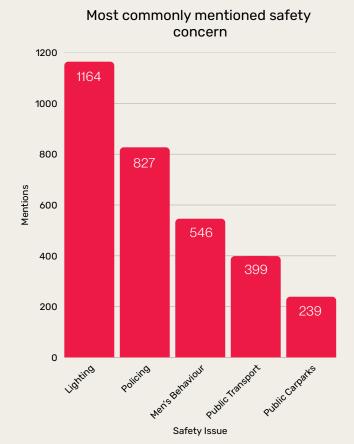
Yes 62.2%

Data Snapshot

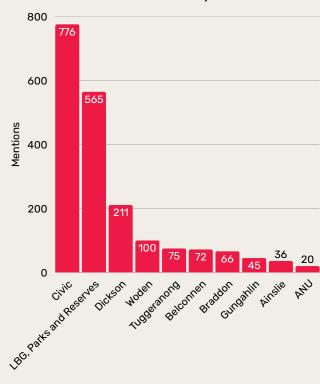
Do you avoid/change plans or behaviours based on concerns for your safety?



"After recent events I have become increasingly nervous and have been limited to the same places (where it is well lit and trafficked), or have to wait for my partner to be available. It's extremely frustrating and sad that I have to give up or miss out on the things I love for my safety."



Areas With Most Concern About Safety



Insights from Results

Women's experience of safety in Canberra

76% of women feel safe most or all of the time

While 76% of women reported feeling safe most or all of the time, this headline figure conceals a more complex reality. The subsequent responses reveal that women are living fundamentally different lives depending on whether it is day or night and constantly modifying their behaviour to maintain their safety.

"How often do you take safety precautions when going out in Canberra?" is an interesting question because a lot of what I do to be safe is just so heavily built into my routine and my sense of what's normal that I struggle to tell the difference sometimes. It's only when I speak to my male friends that I realise that what my female friends and I do automatically has never even crossed their minds. It's got to the point that I'm not even sure that I know what it is to feel safe in a city?"

Analysis of specific locations revealed clear patterns in where women feel most vulnerable.

Inner North

- Civic and Braddon (842 mentions)
- Dickson (211 mentions)

Key Infrastructure

- Public Transport and Public Carparks (638 mentions)
- Nature reserves, Parks, and Lake Burley Griffin (565 mentions)

"Civic at night is a 'no go' zone for me due to previous experiences of harassment and risk of violence."

"Bus interchanges, especially the temporary interchange in Woden. Although it's relatively close to a police station, it's surrounded by two car parks and a construction site and can feel quite unsafe late at night, especially when the buses start coming less frequently. There have been times where I have had to arrange alternative ways home as I felt unsafe waiting for the bus after being verbally or sexually harassed or threatened while at the interchange."

Impact on Women's Daily Lives

The survey revealed the significant compromises women make to maintain their safety, often at considerable personal and financial cost.

Exercise and Recreation

- Abandoning outdoor exercise routines in favour of expensive gym memberships
- Modifying running times and routes
- Exercising only in groups or with male companions
- Avoiding social settings that perceived to be higher risk, usually at night

"I'm a busy mum and once I get the kids into bed, I would love to go for a run at night, around a lake or on bike paths through reserves. Nowhere feels safe, so I've had to join a 24/7 gym. It's expensive when it should be free."

"As a trail runner, it would be nice to feel safe listening to music or running alone at dawn or dusk. but I don't."

"The length of the workday and public transport commute means it's often a choice between safety and outdoor exercise or activities, particularly during winter."

Transport and mobility

- > Avoiding public transport after dark
- Limiting social work activities based on transport safety
- Using expensive ride-sharing services instead of public transport

"I don't go out much at night but avoid travelling on public transport alone when I do."

"...our feelings of safety dictate and influence every decision we make, place we go, our transport etc. I am fortunate that I have the resources to take an uber if I need to or for my husband to pick me up but other women aren't all that fortunate."

"If traveling on public transport at night, I choose a seat near the driver and wait until the final moment to make towards the door."

Infrastructure Concerns

Lighting

Inadequate lighting emerged as the primary infrastructure concern, with 1,164 specific mentions. The analysis revealed:

- 33% of lighting concerns focused on bus stops, transport interchanges, and public parking
- 30% highlighted darkness around parks, reserves, and Lake Burley Griffin

"I recognise there is a desire to limit light pollution levels, but not at the cost of women's safety. Last year when travelling to the USA I genuinely felt safer walking the streets of NYC at 2am on my way home from a night out than I do in Canberra at 7pm in winter."

Communication Blackspots

Women exercising in nature reserves identified mobile phone reception failures as a critical safety risk, leaving them unable to call for help in emergency situations.

What would make you feel more safe?

"Phone coverage in the beautiful reserves that ring Canberra."

"...(need) access to public phones on walking tracks."

"I love Narrabundah hill but it is very isolated with patches of no phone coverage. If I'd needed to scream, I would not have been heard."

Systemic Issues

Police Response and Confidence

49% of women lack confidence in current reporting structures.

This response shows that many women believe the system continues to fail victimsurvivors, or doesn't take women's safety seriously. Responses often cited:

- Insufficient police visibility in highconcern areas
- Inadequate response to reports of harassment and threatening behaviour
- Communication approaches that place responsibility on women rather than addressing perpetrator behaviour

"The police's response to be vigilant and carry a phone is pathetic and puts the sole responsibility of safety on women, which further perpetuates the victim blaming culture and avoid men taking responsibility for their actions."

"There is no longer visual policing in the ACT which is critical to reducing anti-social behaviour."

Men's behaviour

More than 500 of the survey's responses identified men's behaviour as a key factor that needs to change.

There was a strong response for better education with a particular focus on ensuring boys are being taught about safe and respectful relationships from a young age, and ensuring the onus is on men and boys to change their behaviour rather than on women.

"Educating young boys and men early on about the importance of respecting women. I think this type of education needs to be implemented in schools and introduced to boys from an early age. It needs to be taught to them consistently each year as they grow and progress through school."

"I would also love to see men held up as models of behaviour, like regular dudes talking about when they have acted to help keep others safe."

"It's not the physical environment itself that makes me feel unsafe. It's the possibility of threat from other's behaviour. A more social/cultural non blaming approach to identifying and working on behaviours with support would be helpful. Early education for all not just boys."

Areas for Action

Lighting Infrastructure Upgrade

This data represents the lived experience of thousands of Canberra women who deserve better. They've given us a roadmap — specific locations, clear problems, and the impact on their daily lives. They've done their part by sharing their experiences and ideas for change.

This survey has identified three priority areas that I will work with the ACT Government to progress:

Priority locations:

Lighting and safety in the Parliamentary Triangle, including public transport zones

"I recently was walking after dark in Tathra and they have these amazing lights beside the path on the beach front with sensors that light up as you get near which also lets you see if anyone is walking towards you or behind as the lights light up (not sure if they are solar powered or not, but that would be really smart and save on installation costs). This lighting system made me feel safe walking in the dark."

Actions

Seek immediate update from the National Capital Authority

The NCA's review of lighting around Lake Burley Griffin has taken on new urgency with these survey results. I will request an immediate update on the review's progress and timeline for implementation.

- Work with the ACT Government to improve safety for women in Canberra
- Work with the Federal Minister for Communications to ensure that outdoor mobile coverage is improved for ACT reserves and nature trails including through the implementation of the Federal Governments Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligations that will require telcos to use new and innovative technology to:
 - expand Triple Zero access across the nation;
 - expand outdoor voice and SMS coverage into existing mobile black spots; and
 - improve the availability of mobile signals during disasters and power outages.

Areas for Action

Police presence and improved responses to reporting

The 827 mentions of either insufficient police presence or insufficient response from the police send a clear message — women need to see that their safety is taken seriously.

Strategic deployment of police in areas was a common suggestion, particularly the Inner North including Civic, Braddon and Dickson. This would provide visible reassurance to women in areas where they feel most unsafe, and ensure it is quick and easy to access help and support if needed. It would also assist with deterring unlawful and inappropriate behaviour that makes women feel unsafe.

Concerns were also about ensuring accountability for unacceptable behaviour when it occurs — particularly for the women who seek assistance from law enforcement. Women raised concerns that complaints are not taken seriously or acted upon.

The Commonwealth Government has already invested in training for law enforcement on women's safety, including in relation to sexual assault, and has released a report by the Australian Law Reform Commission into justice responses to sexual violence. There are opportunities for continued improvement, so police responses best respond to the needs of women seeking help.

Actions

- ➤ Work with the ACT Government and AFP on opportunities to increase the presence of police in areas where women feel most unsafe.
- Work with the ACT Government and AFP on opportunities to further ensure law enforcement are trained and supported to respond to gender-based violence.
- Continue to work across the
 Commonwealth and with all states and
 territories to respond to recommendations
 from the Australian Law Reform Council's
 report into justice responses to sexual
 violence, so that women who choose to report
 and seek justice receive an appropriate and
 trauma-informed response.

Areas for Action

3 Education and public awareness campaigns

Many respondents supported early and ongoing education for young boys and men, as well as general education campaign messaging in public spaces. Women expressed frustration at the lengths they go to in order to change their behaviour, when the onus should be on preventing men and boys from using violence or causing this fear and discomfort. This is a complex issue that requires a whole of community response.

"Obviously this is a somewhat optimistic goal. But I really think knowing there were grassroots education, rehabilitation & support groups for men would put me slightly more at ease."

"Public awareness campaigns, explaining to men how even if they don't mean to be threatening it can come across that way. I think it would be great to spend more money on educational programs in schools to teach young men about their role in community safety and that it isn't just on women to take precautions men should also be playing their part."

Actions

At the Commonwealth level, there are a range of policies underway to support men and boys to develop and hold healthy attitudes towards women and prevent gender-based violence.

For example, we are trialling activities that focus on influencing and changing attitudes and behaviours that may lead to genderbased violence by encouraging healthy, respectful relationships among school-aged boys, as well as funding resources by organisations like Teach Us Consent to support development of healthy and safe relationships. Legislative change in the ACT means affirmative consent is now law, and implementation of this is supported by both ACT Government and Commonwealth campaigns on consent.

Continue to work with the ACT
Government and across the
Commonwealth Government to address
attitudes and behaviours held by boys and
men, and support positive, healthy attitudes
towards gender-based violence, including in
relation to consent and sexual violence.

Conclusion

The experiences of the more than 2,500 Canberra women and girls who completed this survey reveal that while Canberra may be thought of as a statistically safe city, women's daily lives are still being shaped by the threat of violence and harassment, particularly in public spaces.

The commitment to ensuring women are safe requires sustained effort across multiple levels of government and community action. This survey has provided a foundation for that work, offering clear direction on where to focus immediate efforts to build longer-term cultural change.

I am committed to working with the ACT Government and stakeholders to turn the experiences that have been generously shared with me into action so that women can be safe, everywhere, always.

Safe. Everywhere.

Always.

A Canberra community survey on women's safety

