

Sex work in the ACT

Here is some information that you will find useful if you are currently or planning on working in the ACT.

In the ACT, sex work is a legal occupation. Sex work covers private (sole operator) work, studios and escort services. Street work is illegal. All people who work in the sex industry can choose who they accept as clients, as well as the services they wish to provide.

Private work/Sole operator

As a private worker you:

- Can only work by yourself – Register as a sole operator with the [Office of Regulatory Services \(Facts about Registering\)](#)
- Can work from either your home or a hotel
- Set your own hours
- Set your own rates
- [Pay your own taxes](#), superannuation and business costs (condoms, laundry, staff etc)
- Can legally arrange your own security, eg. a driver for escorts
- Answer all incoming calls and talk directly to clients
- Do you own advertising (most commonly in the Canberra Times Adult Services Section)

Working in a studio

Venues where sex work is legally practiced in the ACT have a range of names including brothels, shops, parlours and studios. These venues are found in prescribed locations of Fyshwick and Mitchell. You are not an employee of the studio, but are a contractor. You receive an agreed percentage of the cost of the service, the difference covers the cost of you using their facilities such as advertising, laundry, safe sex products, receptionists, etc.

As a worker in one of these venues you:

- Do not have to handle takings, laundry or bookings
- [Access to driver for escorts](#)
- Have a receptionist
- Can privately view a client before the 'Intro'
- Can have your condoms, lube and other safe sex materials supplied
- Have the studio organise advertising
- Don't have to register individually with the Office of Regulatory Services (the studio is required to be registered)
- [Require an ABN](#)
- Are required to manage your own tax ([Find a list of sex work deductions](#))
- Information and resources for sex workers in the workers lounge
- Easy access to other sex workers

Questions to ask when starting in a studio

- Is there work available?

- What percentage of each booking do I receive?
- When do I receive payment?
- What are the dress rules?
- Is there somewhere safe to store my belongings, ie. Can I have a locker?
- What am I expected to provide as a standard service?
- Does the studio supply all condoms, lubricant, dams, gloves etc? ([ACT Worksafe requires these to be provided free of charge](#))
- Is it possible to see the client before going in to an introduction?
- Do I get paid credit card money straight away or do I have to wait?
- How many workers on each shift and how many rooms are there?
- Am I expected to work when I have my period?
- Is it a women only studio, or are there Trans* and male workers too?

For more advice call 02 6247 3443 to speak with SWOP ACT or email swop@ aidsaction.org.au

In the ACT it is legal to work as a private sex worker

What's involved?

You must register before you start working. To do this, go to the Office of Regulatory Services, Registrar of Brothels and Escort Agencies, 255 Canberra Avenue, Fyshwick, or call 02 6205 3796. You will need to produce 100 points of ID to register. Contact the Office of Regulatory Services for the current cost to register. Renewals are all due by 30th September each year. Remember, legally there must be only one worker on the registered premises working at any one time. This means you cannot legally do doubles as they require two workers. However, you are allowed to employ a receptionist or security person for yourself.

What happens to your information?

The current Director of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) recently gave SWOP some assurances about the privacy of private workers' information once it is put on the Register of Brothels and Escort Agencies:

- The only person in the OFT who has access to the information is the Director. It is password protected.
- Access to this information is restricted to those public servants who have a legitimate reason for seeking information about a registered person. Public servants may include Centrelink, the police, or the Australian Taxation Office.

Advertising

The most common way of advertising sexual services in Canberra is in the Adult Services Section of the Canberra Times.

Booking the ad over the phone or online requires a credit card. If you haven't got a credit card you can go in to the Canberra Times Office at 9 Pirie St, Fyshwick or place the ad at a newsagency (eg. Dickson Newsagency is an agent of the Canberra Times Classifieds). Advertisements placed in the Adult Services Section must be worded in an "acceptable" fashion. Taxation and insurance A private worker is classified by the Australian Taxation Office as a Sole Proprietor and will need either an ABN (Australian Business Number) or TFN (Tax File Number).

You need an ABN if you want to claim your expenses, but you can use your TFN to declare income if you are not concerned about claiming anything. Working as a sex worker from home also raises public liability and insurance issues. If you want further information about your obligations in this respect SWOP ACT can put you in contact with someone in Worksafe ACT who will be happy to talk to you about it. Working privately – be smart:

- Keep the bulk of your money in a safe place, but don't put the current fee there until the client has gone. Keep a small amount of money somewhere separate so if you are robbed, you can claim you have just started work. You can also use this money for change.
- Make sure the client hears you phone a security person stating the time they arrive – even if the “security” is the SWOP office or the telephone time service.
- Use your common sense. If you think a client sounds creepy on the phone or when he turns up – get rid of them.
- Do not accept bookings involving more than one client.
- Do not tell clients that you're alone. If they ask – be suspicious.
- To reduce the number of 'no shows', try and get a contact number when they are making the booking (usually the ones who will not give you a number are the ones who are likely not to show up).
- Be as honest as possible with clients over the phone. That way they won't turn up and then decide you're not what they're after.
- See also Legal, registration and OH&S information