



# OVERVIEW OF 2002-2003 ACT Budget

This document provides a preliminary assessment of the ACT Government's 2002-03 Budget Initiatives. In order to provide these promptly, haste was required. We apologise in advance for any inaccuracies either material or typographical.

The objective of this budget analysis is to provide:

- An accessible summary of the highlights of the ACT Government Budget for ACTCOSS members and other stakeholders; and
- An initial ACTCOSS response to the Budget to inform public statements, Assembly Estimates hearings and representation to Government.

Should you have additional thoughts, concerns, questions or would like to forward additional information, ACTCOSS would welcome your input. Please contact the ACTCOSS office on ph 6248 7566 ext 221 or via e-mail to [actcoss@actcoss.org.au](mailto:actcoss@actcoss.org.au).

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# OVERVIEW

The role of the ACT Council of Social Service Inc (ACTCOSS) in the ACT Budget process is to put forward the views of the community sector. This is in keeping with the Council's responsibilities of representation and advocacy on behalf of people living with disadvantage, including poverty, disability and discrimination.

The ACTCOSS pre-budget submission, *Attacking Poverty*, drew on the work that was done in 1999-2000 by the ACT Poverty Task Group in identifying systemic approaches that would alleviate poverty and assist people facing disadvantage to improve their situation. The five "sub-themes" of the submission were:

- Accessing Rights and Entitlements
- Reducing Financial Inequality
- Assuring Essential Services
- Prioritisation of Preventative Health
- Policy interventions for Improving Community Health

The themes support the recommendations of the Task Group, which were to:

- Address issues of structural disadvantage and enhance accessibility
- Acknowledge that all members of the community have rights and entitlements to a minimum level of resources and services
- Embody self-determination principles to ensure affected communities are empowered to respond to issues linked to poverty and have control over their futures
- Encourage community participation and ownership by all sectors of the community.

## Budget Highlights

With its 2002-2003 Budget, the ACT Government has made a welcome start on its policy promise of equity. ACTCOSS welcomes the following initiatives that recognise the need for improved community services:

- \$4.1million to fund the Social and Community Services (SACS) Award increase
- \$3.0million to implement the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force
- \$2.5million for disability services, including autism specific services, and the recommendations of the Disability Reform Group
- \$1.4million for mental health services
- \$1.1million for respite care
- \$0.966million for adolescent mental health

- \$0.616million for psycho-social supports for people with cancer and their families
- \$0.3million psycho-geriatric care
- \$0.103million for a Consumer Legal Centre

ACTCOSS also welcomes a number of new initiatives that have been put in place to meet needs in the indigenous community, including a new program for indigenous young people with drug and alcohol problems (\$0.107m), a family violence program (\$0.060m) and an Indigenous housing program (\$0.350m).

The Government has implemented its election promise to re-introduce single zone fares across Canberra, making access to transport more affordable for people on low incomes who live in the outlying suburbs. This goes hand in hand with the introduction of paid parking in Government controlled parking lots in Belconnen and Tuggeranong town centres.

While ACTCOSS appreciates the Government's initiatives in putting public transport on a more sustainable footing, the parking fees will have a disproportionate impact on people on low incomes, and the measure therefore is somewhat regressive.

ACTCOSS will be pursuing with the ACT Government the idea of a review of ACT taxation measures, with a view to overhauling the taxes, fees and fines regime to ensure that the redistributive function of taxation is made the focus, not solely the user pays principle.

## **Issues for Consideration and Concern**

The recurrent theme of the Budget from ACTCOSS' point of view is half-measures. While the Government has listened to the community, it has not gone far enough to meet need. One example of this is the convalescent facility for which \$2.4m over four years has been allocated to provide ten beds.

The ALP made much of their promise to provide a step down facility in the months before the ACT election. Community expectation was raised that the ALP was talking about a new facility that would meet demand, but what has been funded is the equivalent of a demonstration model.

Again, the initiatives in housing and indigenous affairs are welcome, but the quantum does not match the rhetoric, nor does it meet need. Employment is once more left to the market with no targeted programs to ensure long term unemployed are helped into meaningful, full time jobs.

What seems to be happening is that old established areas of budget spending are again attracting large amounts, while the community sector that delivers services to the most disadvantaged in Canberra attracts amounts in the thousands.

For example, there is an emphasis on law enforcement over preventative measures. There will be 20 new police on the beat in Canberra as a result of this budget. While this is welcomed as a law and order measure, there are not 20 new positions for drug and alcohol treatment and counselling workers to help address one of the known causes of criminal behaviour.

There are funds for the Affordable Housing Task Force to implement some of its findings, but the quantum will not meet the urgent need for housing that has been identified by the Government's own research into homelessness.

ACTCOSS is also disappointed that the Budget contains no allocated funds for upgrading community service accommodation. It seems false economy for the Government as landlord to allow its built assets to deteriorate, producing occupational health and safety concerns for the people who work in these buildings. At a time when the Government is spending almost \$20million on IT upgrades for the public sector, community services are still housed in leaky buildings. Again, it is the inequity, not the actual budget item, that is cause for concern.

## **Conclusion**

Although ACTCOSS has identified several shortcomings in the 2002-2003 ACT Government Budget, ACTCOSS also believes that this Budget can be seen as a positive step in the right direction. The current Government has stated that it puts a high priority on meeting, at least in part, some of the more urgent demands in the community, and should be supported in this effort.

Nonetheless, ACTCOSS believes there is a need for fundamental shift in thinking to ensure that reducing disadvantage and inequity is demonstrably at the top of the priority list in future budgets. In its Budget submissions, ACTCOSS put forward a series of recommendations aimed at removing the systemic factors that perpetuate and or create poverty in Canberra. It is frustrating that many of these measures have not been addressed in this budget.

ACTCOSS will continue to lobby for a whole of Government response to the issues of disadvantage in the ACT, and will now turn its attention to the Estimates process in a bid to ensure that expenditure is focussed on meeting the needs of Canberrans living with disadvantage and poverty.

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# COMMUNITY SERVICES

## Background

A vibrant community services sector has direct benefits for people living with disadvantage and the broader community. ACTCOSS continues to seek increased investment in these services to build on their existing strengths, fully recognise their value and enhance the services provided.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to community services, including:

- Services are able to provide information in a wide range of formats and languages (Rec 1.2)
- Development of new, and improvements of existing, accommodation for community services across the ACT (Rec 1.3)
- ACT Council of Cultural and Community Organisations is fully involved in the Griffin Centre reconstruction (Rec 1.5)
- Development of a Community Services Industry Development Plan (Rec 1.6)
- Funding for co-operative policy development and service planning processes. (Rec 1.7)
- Joint project between advocacy groups and the Government to develop quality service standards for advocacy work, (Rec 3.7)

In addition, ACTCOSS made the following points in a submission to the Treasurer:

- There needs to be adequate funding of services aimed at supporting frail aged and people with a disability to remain in their homes; eg transport, home-help and the ACT Equipment scheme.
- The Breaches inquiry showed that emergency relief funds are inadequate
- There is a need for new and innovative advocacy services, and their existence should be publicised.
- ACTCOSS will be making a submission to the review of the Purchaser-Provider model, and is awaiting the Government's announcement on that election commitment.
- Election promise to collect data on the extent and causes of poverty in the ACT.
- There is a need to bolster the links between community services and schools if we are going to truly take advantage of the synergies – this has begun, but only in a small way.

## Major Budget initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- ATSI Family violence prevention for alternative approaches to intervention and incarceration \$0.06m 2002-03 up to \$0.12m 2003-04 (see families)
- \$0.103m for ACT Consumer Law Centre

- \$0.5m for Ainslie Village repairs maintenance and transition to mixed housing development, for independent housing options for SAAP clients
- PALM received \$1.83m funding for planning and consultative mechanisms but nothing for community services
- SACS Award increases, for DECS \$1.2m, DUS \$0.098m and \$2.8M DHCC (total \$4.1M)
- Increases to HACC – disability & older people (see relevant sections)
- Insurance Policy development and coordination in Treasury \$0.2m 2002-02 or \$0.8m over 4 years
- Increases to some youth centres (\$0.13m), community centres (\$0.21m) & child care services\* (\$0.41m), pre-school (\$0.48m), bureau facilities, for access & equity, OH&S, building refurbishment
- Additional 140 places coming into smaller services
- One per cent indexation for all DECS funded community organisations (\$0.3m).

## **Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions**

Whilst ACTCOSS welcomes the above initiatives, concerns are raised regarding the following:

- Funding for planning and consultative mechanisms to PALM contain no focus on community services.
- The Government is spending almost \$20million on IT infrastructure in the public service, however notes there is little in the Budget for community sector infrastructure.
- No additional funding for SAAP, despite a recent ACT Government funded study into homelessness that identifies needs and ways forward. ACTCOSS also notes funds previously earmarked for these new initiatives in emergency accommodation no longer exist.
- The inadequate one per cent indexation to cover an expected 3-4 per cent CPI increase over 2002-03 compares poorly with indexation in health of 2.5 per cent and last year's 2.25 percent. This real reduction in funding for this sector required significant re-thinking by government if it wishes to promote a sustainable community sector. Furthermore, given the recent moves to a new Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services it is unclear what the indexation for community organisations contracted under this department will be.

# DISABILITY SERVICES

## Background

Providing funding for timely, appropriate and accessible services for people with disabilities is a mark of the Government's commitment to an inclusive society. The ACT Government's announcement of a restructuring of the way disability services are administered is a positive sign that it is taking the issue of service delivery seriously.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to disability services, including:

- Increased taxi subsidies (Rec 3.8)
- Timetable and of plans to provide an extra \$1 million for respite care (Rec 5.8)
- Implement reform in the areas of disability and mental health (Rec 5.9)

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$2.5m for disability services and reform
- \$1 m for more community based respite care services for clients, families, and carers.
- \$0.4m ACTION Bus replacement program-replacement of aging fleet with low floor, wheelchair accessible buses

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

The Government has provided resources to improve accessibility of ACTION buses. There is still however no increase in resources to create interstate parity on taxi subsidies for frail aged or people with disabilities.

Given that there is no detail on the timeframe for expenditure in respite care, nor specific details on what will be funded, this will need to be pursued through the Assembly Estimates process and directly with Government.

There is no mention of funding Individual Service packages (ISPs) for people with disabilities. This information is expected to be provided in the ACT Government's response to the Gallop Report in October 2002, which will draw on at least some of the \$2.5m allocated to disability services.

# EMPLOYMENT

## Background

ACTCOSS has recently formed the ACT Employment Task Group, to provide a community voice in consultations and debates on employment issues. ACTCOSS believes that industry assistance is not a substitute for targeted, funded employment programs that assist people experiencing employment disadvantage.

ACTCOSS has questioned the idea of business support as a substitute for employment policy in its submission to the Treasurer. "ACTCOSS believes the government has a role to play in providing facilities and attracting corporate activity to the national capital. However this needs to be widely discussed, and the benefits clearly articulated before funds are committed to interstate operators. There should be a clear cost-benefit analysis done to show the benefits, and the flow of cash should be outlined to ensure that Canberra-based businesses that are in need of assistance are being supported by any business incentive schemes.

Historically the ACT Government has taken a view that employment creation is done through business development. There is urgently needed:

- An employment development program to sit with the business development program;
- Education investment to complement the sort of businesses the ACT is trying to develop;
- Development of businesses which will employ people with lower/entry level skills.

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$0.25m for Economic White Paper
- \$0.25m for Small Business Employment Ready
- \$10.3m ICT Centre of Excellence
- \$1.5m Knowledge Fund
- \$0.05m Knowledge Based Economy
- \$0.2m National Capital Education Tourism Project

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

ACTCOSS supports the re-focus of business support for example, "Business Employment Ready". However, no initiatives have been introduced which will directly assist people who are long-term unemployed or those people who face employment disadvantage.

The Chief Minister's Department has a lot of scope to re-allocate within the existing \$44million business assistance program which could further assist disadvantaged unemployed people. This opportunity needs to be taken up.

# FAMILIES AND CHILDREN

## Background

Families are an extremely important focus of Social Capital so government support of families and children can only benefit the community. The ACT Poverty Task Group Report identified sole parents as one of the key groups at risk of poverty; therefore they are an important focus for allocation of funding. The primary focus of ACTCOSS' budget submission for assisting families has been in the area of community services.

In the ACTCOSS pre-budget submission to the Treasurer, the Council stated:

“ACOSS' Living on the Edge survey found that 15,000 requests for assistance had to be turned down by ACT service providers in the first half of 2001. Increased operating costs, increased client numbers and complexity of need were identified as the major causes of the pressure. Staff members are providing unfunded work, or using volunteers to do what should be paid work.

The biggest service gaps are in the individual and family support, health and community support services. Aged care, disability services and housing assistance are also areas of growing need.”

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$.1m recurrent funding for Parentlink
- \$1.54m for substitute care
- 10 Emergency Childcare Places - \$0.103m recurrent funding (in line with review)
- \$0.1m for extension of the midwifery program equivalent to additional services for 60 women)
- ATSI Family violence prevention for alternative approaches to intervention and incarceration \$0.6m 2002-03 up to \$0.12m 2003-04
- Disability services funding – early intervention & education programs
- \$0.85m for CAMHS (Child and Adolescent mental health services) mental health education and literacy
- \$0.5m for CALCAM Adolescent Mental Health Day Program

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

There is no increase in the capacity of services to support families and in particular, to address poverty or the needs of sole parents, with the exception of a small increase in emergency occasional child care places and initiatives for children with mental health issues or disability. We are concerned that there is continued lack of government action to address the serious unmet demand for social supports for families living with disadvantage,

demonstrated by the 'Australian Living on the Edge Survey', various local projects exploring need and repeated calls from service providers.

The \$1.54m increase to substitute care to meet increasing demand, indicates the increasing needs of families and the urgency of these needs, yet there is nothing in the budget for earlier intervention, family support and only one small initiatives to support the continuation of Parentlink (\$0.1m).

One of the few encouraging initiatives is the ATSI Family violence prevention (\$0.6m 2002-03 up to \$0.12m 2003-04).

# GAMBLING

## Background

Gambling and its associated problems are of grave concern for the local community. At present, taxes and charges on gambling activity boost ACT Government revenue. ACTCOSS believes that assisting people with gambling problems is a corollary of accepting this form of taxation, and has lobbied Government for reform on gambling regulation.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission and in other forums, a number of recommendations were made in relation to gambling, including:

- Increased availability of low cost financial advice for people on low and fixed incomes
- The need to follow up on the research carried out for the GRC on problem gamblers and needs analysis

Great concern centres around the tax taken from gambling in the ACT, and the amount spent on harm minimisation

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$43.2million collected in taxes

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

No new initiatives were mentioned in the budget regarding harm prevention strategies. Therefore there is a need for the Government and/or the Gambling and Racing Commission to more explicitly state what (if any) initiatives are planned particularly given the high level of information available in research purchased by and provided to the Commission in 2000.

The \$43.2m collected from taxes on Gambling in the ACT represents approximately 8% of the total ACT own sourced tax revenue. This is slightly down on 2000-01, but still raises concerns about the appropriateness of relying on this sort of activity as a major source of revenue.

# HEALTH

## Background

The ACT Government has just released its plans for a reorganisation of its portfolios. Health was a major election issue, and the ALP made a lot of promises about consulting with the community and ensuring the health system met the needs of consumers.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to health services, including:

- Health promotion programs for people living in poverty (Rec 4.1) independent action research into this largely uninformed area of policy for the ACT. (Rec 4.2)
- The Government continue to collect data which shows the nature and extent of poverty in the ACT (Rec 5.4)
- That policy making be supported by adequate data collection, for example in the area of early discharge policy (Rec 5.5)

In addition, ACTCOSS commented in its submission to the Treasurer that there was a need for Government assistance in the areas of primary health care:

“In the health sector there is a lack of after hours primary care which, anecdotally, is exacerbating problems in the ACT's hospitals. The only after hours service, CALMS, charges \$150 for call out, although the costs is less for a visit to its central clinic. Credit cards can be used to pay for this service, but this does not help people on low incomes.

“There is also a need to move swiftly on the promised step down facility for people making the transition from acute care back into the community. In addition, there is a need to ensure that when people are returned to the community the necessary supports are there, including psycho-social supports.”

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$5.7m in outyears for new medical school building – over 2 years
- \$0.5m rising to \$3.55m recurrent to staff medical school
- \$11.8m recurrent for nursing service pay rises
- \$6m recurrent (\$8.7m first year) TCH overload
- \$1.26m recurrent for hospital throughput growth
- \$0.3m recurrent demand growth Calvary emergency
- \$0.33m recurrent funding for radiation therapists
- \$0.25m extra for hematology services at TCH and \$0.4m for improved, safer blood product provision

- \$0.155m for psychosocial support for people living with cancer and their families.
- \$0.076m recurrent to extend hospice services
- \$0.6m recurrent for Convalescent Care (step down beds)
- \$0.1m recurrent to extend midwifery program
- \$0.17m for indigenous youth alcohol & drug project
- \$0.13m recurrent for pharmacotherapy subsidies
- \$2.5m recurrent for increased disability services
- \$1m recurrent to extend respite care services
- \$0.629m recurrent to match Commonwealth HACC funding increases

## **Issues, Concerns and Unresolved questions**

The Substance Abuse Advisory Group has been established without any funding identified for its support. It is not an independent group and therefore there are questions around its capacity to respond.

There is a concern about the adequacy of the allocated recurrent medical school funding to attract and retain quality staff. There is also a need for the Government to demonstrate the medical school's direct benefit to Canberra community (including appropriate name and location for medical school).

The increases for nurses' and additional capacity at The Canberra Hospital are supported and should lessen crisis type reactions to demand for acute care services in the coming year. Nonetheless it may remain difficult to attract additional nursing staff because of national shortages.

The provision for convalescent care is a welcome initiative but probably inadequate. There are no matching funds for capital expenditure, implying the service will attempt to utilise beds in existing acute care facilities with the attendant problems. The step down facility needs to be integrated into a Territory wide plan for discharge planning services and post acute care service provision.

The announced increases for cancer related services (haematology, radiotherapy, psychosocial support and extra palliative care beds) are all priority needs, but just allocating increased recurrent funding doesn't necessarily solve the problems in this area. It remains difficult to attract staff, and there is possible erosion of Commonwealth funding to be compensated for.

The potential extension of midwifery services to support home birthing is to noted, but it is questionable as to whether this new allocation will meet the likely increased demand for public services, given possible impact of medical insurance crisis in private obstetric service provision.

ACTCOSS is concerned that there is little provision for affordable primary health care – a little extra resourcing for Calvary emergency does not meet the identified needs

There is also a need for the Government to clearly articulate how it intends to deal with the current medical insurance crisis, as the effect on private sector provision may swamp public services

The ACT Government may need to fund services currently provided with Commonwealth funding, as this source of funding is not assured beyond current Commonwealth/State Health Care Agreement.

The reorganisation of the Health and disability portfolios has not been spelt out in this budget. There is concern that there is a need for additional funding to transfer functions within the new departmental structure. The funding arrangements for the revised service delivery arrangements from 1 July announced as response to Reid and Gallop reports need to also be spelt out.

ACTCOSS is disappointed that there is no provision for more innovative and progressive drug treatment options for people with substance abuse problems.

# HOUSING

## Background

Housing has emerged as a major issue for Canberra over the past five years. Increasing housing costs and a low turnover in the private rental market have put additional strain on people living on low incomes.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to housing, including:

- Increased funding and support of non-profit accommodation providers (Rec 3.1)
- Independent funding to support the AHTF, to ensure that essential CSHA funds are used to address the most urgent need (Rec 3.1)
- Immediate creation of an independent central housing referral service. (Rec 3.2)
- Expansion of the community development worker program within ACT Housing (Rec 3.3)
- Exclude the income of residents under the age of 25 who are in full or part-time study, when calculating eligibility for rental rebates. (Rec 3.5)

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$1.2m over 4 years to promote community housing
- \$16m for improvements to fire safety in public housing: \$10m from 2001-02 Housing Program, balance from future Housing operations.
- \$3m for progressing the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Taskforce
- Expansion of Community Housing (\$0.150m) – identifying new initiatives to expand the number and range of affordable housing options within the ACT.
- Ainslie Village (\$0.500m) for repairs and maintenance and for the implementation of the review of the facility which will make it a mixed-use housing development.
- Solar Water Rebate (\$0.373m) – encouraging household owners to convert to environmentally friendly solar hot water heaters
- Indigenous Housing (\$0.350m) developing better access and wider housing options
- Target for rebated tenants increased from 80%-85%
- \$0.125m for an emergency placements and relief fund
- Re-introduction of rental bond scheme

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

Despite a commitment to social benefits for Kingston foreshore there is no initiative for affordable housing to be included as part of the foreshore development. Further, in general there is no commitment to include affordable housing in the planning or land release processes currently underway.

Increased targeting of people on rental rebate will result in greater costs for ACT Housing, however there is no budget allocation to cover this.

There is no new money allocated to ACT Housing to expand its housing stock. It is expected that the \$3m allocated to progress recommendations of the AHTF will contribute to meeting this need.

There is no increase in resources to increase housing policy's capacity to collect data. It is expected that this need will be reiterated by the AHTF.

There is no indication of a revision process to the way rebates are calculated (eg income earned by children of housing tenants).

# INDIGENOUS ISSUES

## Background

Local Indigenous communities continue to be one of the most disadvantaged groups in our community, facing structural disadvantage caused by racism, poverty and a range of other issues. In the ACT, this translates to poorer health outcomes including an average age of death for ACT Aboriginal people of 40.6 years in comparison to an average age for all ACT deaths of 68.4 (1995 figures). Access to good health care is a fundamental human right, and approaches that improve the outcomes and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are essential.

Indigenous issues locally evolve in the context of increasing tensions regarding Reconciliation and implementation and dialogue surrounding the *Stolen Generation Report*.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to services provided to people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds, including:

- Funding for the recommendations from the Committee's report 'Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT', particularly with respect to housing (Rec 3.4)
- Data collection on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Rec 5.3)

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- Indigenous Youth Alcohol and Drug Project (\$0.170m) providing targeted culturally sensitive detoxification support services for Indigenous youth.
- ATSI Family Violence Prevention (\$0.060m) developing and implementing alternative intervention strategies for ATSI families experiencing family violence.
- ATSI Cultural Centre (\$0.120m) – ongoing support to assist the Centre in their efforts to help ACT's ATSI communities celebrate their unique and vibrant cultures.
- Enhanced Indigenous Support Program (\$0.190m) – initiative to increase the skill level of staff working with indigenous young people to improve the home-school liaison for indigenous students – on-going (DECS)
- Indigenous Housing – Access and Choices (\$0.350m) – initiative to facilitate the development of an Indigenous community housing sector in the ACT to provide better access and wider housing choices for Indigenous peoples.

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

The new initiatives are strategically focused and address some of the underlying causes of disadvantage, including housing, family violence, drug & alcohol and education – we welcome this.

Nonetheless, the success of these programs will depend on effective coordination of these programs – and it is crucial that Indigenous people are involved in all aspects of planning, managing and evaluating the initiatives – otherwise they will fail. The programs also need to support and complement each other if they are to provide real and lasting benefits and outcomes for Indigenous people. Unless the programs are strategically linked, services for Indigenous people will continue to suffer from a fragmented and piece-meal approach.

It is also a question of how far the limited funds allocated to these initiatives will stretch – and how much of this money will go towards actual programs – not just administration, consultants etc. The devil will be in the detail – and we will keenly monitor the implementation of these programs. The government can't rely on volunteers or under-resourced organisations to fill the gaps in services that the government should be providing.

For example, while \$350,000 for indigenous housing is welcome, it is clearly not adequate to meet the critical need in this area.

The budget does not go far enough in meeting the specific needs of indigenous people and organisations. The emphasis that this government has put on Indigenous issues must be translated into more substantial funding for specific programs and services targeting indigenous people and managed by indigenous people. There is concern that the ACT government should not buy into the Commonwealth approach of trying to 'mainstream' services for indigenous people (at the expense of indigenous-specific services) – as there is ample evidence that this approach does not address real needs of Indigenous people, nor does it support the principle of self-determination.

A major gap in this budget seems to be in the area of indigenous employment – which is crucial for family income. There are no new initiatives in this area – and it is not clear what's happening with the Indigenous Employment Mentoring program or the Indigenous Business Support Program (funded in last year's budget). There may be a need for an employment subsidy program to get more Indigenous young people into the workforce. There also needs to be financial and other support to develop and sustain innovative business initiatives implemented by Indigenous individuals and organisations.

Finally, there is a need for more information and clarification about the situation regarding a number of initiatives launched by the previous government in 2001/2 budget? Did these initiatives get off the ground, and are they receiving the continued funding projected in the 2001/2 budget? In particular;

- Indigenous Employment Mentoring Program (\$0.06m)
- Indigenous Business Support Program (\$0.075)
- Indigenous Mental Health Workers (\$0.190)
- Enhanced Indigenous Health Services (\$0.256)
- Indigenous Youth Centre (\$0.102)

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT) AND INFORMATION SERVICES

## Background

Information Technology (IT) is fast becoming a primary channel of communication throughout Australia and internationally. The Government, business, health, education, employment and community sectors are increasingly using information technology and the Internet as a means of information sharing and service delivery within the community.

The inability to access appropriate IT and online services poses significant disadvantage to many citizens of the ACT. Due to the high rate of Internet usage in the ACT, those people who do not have access to IT face further disadvantage. This is because of the promotion of IT as a low-cost service delivery mechanism for business and government.

It is essential that community, government and business sectors work together to develop and implement effective IT access policy and strategies specific to the needs of the ACT community.

## Major initiatives

### Public Service

- Server Replacement program (\$0.367m)
- Other applications specific and stand alone servers (\$0.348m)
- Conversion of the ACT Government Business Gateway (\$0.461m)
- Canberra Connect-Base Funding (\$0.819m)
- Information Security (\$0.180m)
- Implementation of data communications strategy (0.148m)
- Voice technology upgrade review (\$0.300m)
- Strategic Partnership Agreement Review (\$0.6m)
- Upgrade of common operating environment (\$0.4m)
- Upgrade of Emergency Services Communication System (\$0.750m)
- LAN Equipment replacement (0.635m)

### Education

- Laptops for Teachers Program (\$0.420m each year for four years)
- Schools IT Capacity Upgrade (\$0.355m)
- IT Grant to Catholic systematic schools (\$0.25m)

- Upgrade to general IT capacity across government schools (\$1.06m)

Canberra Hospital

- The Canberra Hospital LAN Equipment Replacement (\$0.245m)

## **Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions**

ACTCOSS recognises the need to upgrade and maintain a strong public sector IT infrastructure. The Council notes however that it is also essential that the community sector also have a strong and viable IT infrastructure to ensure organisations are able to operate effectively and efficiently, and within required governmental reporting guidelines.

It is noted that funding has been allocated to convert the ACT Government Business Gateway. ACTCOSS considers it also essential to provide resources to address the need to upgrade, update and maintain the ACT Community Sector site on the government web site, as well as continue to support community organisations get online.

Apart from funding previously allocated to the Digital Divide program, there is no new initiatives directed towards assisting community organisations or individuals to gain IT access or training.

ACTCOSS is also concerned that there is no resources allocated to support the work of the newly established Community IT Advisory Panel.

# JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY

## Background

The development of an effective justice and community safety strategic framework is critical to a healthy community. Adequate resources must be directed towards policy development and effective crime prevention, with an acknowledgment that these issues are often the symptom of broader issues of social disadvantage.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations, issues and needs were identified including:

- Peoples Charter (Rec 1.1)
- Consumer legal centre (Rec 2.5)
- Low cost financial (Rec 2.5)
- Research into and use of alternatives to prison sentences (Rec 5.1)
- New remand facility in the ACT (Rec 5.11)
- "Step down" facility or half way house (Rec 5.12)
- Detention of women prisoners as a separate issue (Rec 5.14)

ACTCOSS also raised with the Government the issue of its Corrections Policy, which states it will review post-release support programs to test the efficacy of existing programs and identify successful restoration and opportunities to combat recidivism.

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- Consumer Law Centre : (\$0.103m)
- Ongoing design and construction of new ACT Remand Centre (\$1.25m in each of the next 2 years)
- Upgrade of Symonston Periodic Detention Centre for use as Remand Centre - 30 new detainees (\$2.7m)
- Listing of 91,000 hearings in Magistrates and Supreme Courts' – an increase of 80 sitting days in the Supreme Court, from 820 to 900 – temporary Magistrate.

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

While Grants of Aid to the Legal Aid Commission remain the same at 2,400 Legal Aid Services – there appears to have been a forecasted decrease in service provision:

- Reduction of 200 free court appearances from 2,400 to 2,200;
- Reduction of 100 'advice and minor assistance' services, from 4,500 to 4,400; and

- Reduction of 500 'telephone advice and information' services, from 12,000 to 11,500.

Clarification of this information is required.

Will the upgrade of Symonston take into consideration the recommendations of the Royal Commission Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in custody?

There is no budget allocation to provide a "step down" facility or half way house to support Canberra community members returning from incarceration interstate.

Despite the continual consultative work being done by the Department of Justice there is no budget allocation to provide for the future incarceration of female prisoners separately from male prisoners.

There is nothing in this budget to indicate what money the Government has allocated for initiatives under the Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee (AJAC) Strategic Plan.

Despite preliminary work currently underway there is no funding for the new Supported Accommodation Services for prisoners and remandees on 'Live as Directed' orders.

# MENTAL HEALTH

## Background

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to mental health services, including:

- An increased focus on life skills in schools and adult learning centres, including units aimed at increasing self esteem and raising awareness of mental health issues; and (Rec 4.3)
- Development of programs specifically aimed at raising awareness of self care and preventative health strategies among groups identified at being at risk of falling into poverty (eg those suffering from different forms of addiction). (Rec 4.3)
- Address the over-representation of people with mental health problems in the corrections system as a priority.(Rec 5.13)

In addition, ACTCOSS made the following comments to the Treasurer:

- There are still many problems in the delivery of mental health services. The ACT Government needs to provide resources in the Budget to fund recommendations from current coroner's inquiries and look at innovative ways to assist people affected by mental health problems. Counselling (free or low costs, evidence based and flexible), respite care (in home or out of home), long term supported housing arrangements, quality improvement and best practice initiatives all need additional resources."
- There is a need to provide some services in a less stigmatised setting: some potential consumers shy away from using specific mental health services because of stigma in family and community groupings.
- There is growing need for community-based services that can respond to the needs of consumers who are involved in the ACT justice system.
- Support services for people with borderline personality disorders need to be increased.
- Dual diagnosis is being identified as a growing problem: rehabilitative programs, particularly residential based programs are required that takes account of the special needs of this group.
- There is a need to extend the provision of successful programs that are available in one region in the ACT to the whole Territory.

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$1.4 million for mental health services
- \$1.0m respite care expansion including carers of people who are mentally ill
- \$0.5m CALCAM Adolescent Mental Health Day Program

- \$0.3m growth money for psycho-geriatric services
- \$0.17m for Indigenous Youth Drug Project – for indigenous specific detox beds in mainstream service support
- \$0.466m Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services Enhancement Package
- \$0.085m Mental Illness Education ACT : mental health education and literacy program
- \$0.322 Expansion of Older Persons' Mental Health Services
- \$0.5m for maintenance and upgrade for Ainslie Village
- \$0.1m review of counselling services in schools
- \$0.13m increased funding to pharmacists to support methadone and other drug treatment programs

## **Issues, Concerns and Unresolved Questions**

The allocations to mental health are welcome. But with total Budget initiatives of \$115.614m in Health and Community Care, the commitment of only 1.2% of funds to new initiatives in the mental health field is a disappointment, particularly since the ACT is significantly behind the national per capita average spending on mental health services.

There are no new funds for counselling, services for mental health consumers who end up in the justice system, vocational rehabilitation for people with mental illness, or services for people with borderline personality disorders.

There is also no identified funding for dual diagnosis, even though this is recognised as a high priority across the sector

The funds for the expansion of community housing do not outline what new and innovative services may be offered. Could this provide an option for trialling new mental health housing options?

# MULTICULTURAL ISSUES

## Background

Canberra has one of the most diverse communities, with people from many countries calling the ACT home. This has implications for Government, as the ability to capitalise on the talents and strengths of these people means providing services they can access, are culturally appropriate and provide information in a variety of community languages.

The ACT Government has recently announced the membership of its Multicultural Advisory Council, and it is expected that this move will be backed with budget commitments.

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$0.05m - Community Language Schools
- \$0.1m – Multicultural Community Radio

## Issues, Concerns and Unresolved questions

The Government has also funded some initiatives in indigenous health, housing and social welfare, but has not recognised the need to support community service delivery in culturally appropriate ways.

The lack of specific programs leads to conclusion the ACT Government feels that the needs of the multicultural community have been met. Is the new Government waiting until 2003-2004 to look at issues raised by its new Multicultural Council?

# OLDER PERSONS

## Background

Canberra is experiencing rapid growth in the number of its citizens approaching retirement age, and there is a significant population of people who are elderly. Services for people as they age should recognise the wide spectrum of fitness, health, activities and interests this group encompasses.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to services for people in their retirement years, including:

- The Report into Elder Abuse be used as a blueprint for the provision of services to Canberra's residents who find themselves in need of care due to frailty and age. (Rec 5.6)
- The Government spell out in the budget its timetable for implementation and the process that will be used to determine spending priorities for transitional care promises (Rec 5.7)

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$0.6m for respite care
- \$0.30m for psychogeriatric care
- \$0.322m for convalescent care facility at Calvary
- \$0.629m HACC Matching Funds
- \$0.76m for expansion of Hospice Service
- \$0.322m expansion for Older Persons' Mental Health Service
- \$0.155k expansion of Community Housing (1.2m over 4 years)

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

ACTCOSS welcomes the initiative regarding Convalescent Care. However, the Council shares concerns with COTA regarding the size of the facility given its limited funding.

There are also some concerns regarding the impact of the increases to taxes and charges for older people.

# REVENUE, FINANCE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

## Background

The sound management of the Territory's finances is essential to maintaining the wellbeing of all Canberra's citizens. The Government's revenue and spending decisions have a major impact on all Canberrans, and particularly those on low incomes. In this regard, it is essential that all spending and tax decisions are rigorously assessed to ensure they benefit the citizens of the Territory, and do not have a negative impact on those most in need.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, a number of recommendations were made in relation to revenue measures, including:

- Review and over haul of concessions and Community Service Obligations (Rec 2.1 & 2.2.)
- Community based review of tax revenue raising, focussing on progressiveness, equality and increased revenue (Rec 2.3)
- Stamp duty windfall gains be used specifically to attack poverty and disadvantage in the ACT in the 2002-03 budget (Rec 2.4)
- That all reviews and inquiries promised by the ALP be fully resourced and not draw resources from programs and services within portfolios (Rec 5.1)

ACTCOSS also put forward the following in its submission to the Treasurer:

Facilities, which are owned by the Territory, need to be centrally managed and maintained to allow for a strategic and appropriate approach to operation and maintenance of this infrastructure. Without which the Government is setting itself up for an unsustainable operation and maintenance burden.

ACTCOSS believes the government has a role to play in providing facilities and attracting corporate activity to the national capital. However this needs to be widely discussed, and the benefits clearly articulated before funds are committed to interstate operators. There should be a clear cost-benefit analysis done to show the benefits, and the flow of cash should be outlined and reported against to ensure that Canberra-based businesses that are in need of assistance are being supported by any business incentive schemes.

In addition ACTCOSS stated that using deficit budgeting to produce long run gains is in the interest of the ACT community. However the gains should be measurable and demonstrable. In this vein, ACTCOSS supported the government's plans to borrow in order to construct a prison for the ACT.

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- Pay parking to be introduced at Tuggeranong and Belconnen (net \$160m to increase to \$2.97m in 2005-06)

- An average increase in car registration of \$26.00 (\$3.9m)
- 10 cent per fare increase in ACTION fares (complementary measure after introduction of single zone fares)
- \$9m increase in Commonwealth Grants - GST revenue, hospital funding & non-government schools
- Expected decrease in property turnover related taxes off set by new taxes and charges.
- \$2.8m decrease in user charges
- \$8.3m increase in other revenue – dividends, joint ventures and land sales
- \$7.3m increase in rates for conveyancing - progressively higher rates for higher valued properties
- Broader application of land tax to trusts and company (\$0.525m increasing to \$0.767m in 2005-06)
- Land tax on rented properties (\$1.565m)
- \$0.2m decrease in stamp duty - Exemption from duty on public indemnity insurance for non-profit and sporting organisations
- Red light and speed camera operations (net \$0.8m)
- Waste pricing strategy (\$1.56m)

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

Some new revenue measures appear to have been introduced with an eye to progressivity (eg land taxes, conveyancing and reduction in user chargers), but others (eg parking fees) have not. Therefore, existing and new revenue measures urgently need to be reviewed and overhauled with a view to ensuring that the Territories own sourced revenue is adequate and equitable. Without such a process the ACT remains in the unsustainable situation of a too high proportion of the tax burden being born by people on lower incomes.

It is not clear what “strengthen resources within ACT Treasury to develop and implement proposals to improve accessibility and affordability of insurance” is. Further initiatives to ease the pressure of rising insurance costs for community organisations are urgently needed. The Governments withdrawal of stamp duty in this area was always only a first step and much more work is needed.

Increased land tax income would be best placed in augmenting revenue for affordable housing in the ACT. Future opportunities for such an allocation need to be explored.

See Community Services Section for indexation questions.

The budget papers saw some improvement in their presentation over last year, yet major concerns remain including:

- There is no reporting of the full (current year) estimated and budget expenditure in many program areas thus rendering it very difficult to identify whether initiatives are truly new or paid for through savings, growth monies or other mechanisms.
- There is no reporting on where savings or under spends are made to provide for new expenditure; and

The budget consultation process requires a complete overhaul, as it has become a political process rather than one to genuinely shape the ACT budget.

The review of concessions and Community Service obligations recommended by the Poverty Task Group has not progressed since September last year. When will it be completed and will there be budget allocations to respond to its recommendations?

# SUBSTANCE ABUSE

## Background

Misuse and abuse of drugs, alcohol, tobacco and other chemical substances have become major social problems in Canberra. While a harm minimisation strategy has been adopted by successive ACT Governments, the fact remains that many people caught up in the justice system have substance abuse problems. Substance abuse and misuse must be tackled both at an agency level, and at a systemic level.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission and through direct representation, ACTCOSS has advocated for the establishment of a Substance Abuse and Misuse Task Group, and for innovative programs to assist people with addictive behaviours including:

- Health education initiatives (Rec 4.3)
- Substance Abuse Task Force
- ACT injecting room trial (Rec 4.7)

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- \$0.170m recurrent funding for Indigenous youth alcohol and drug project
- \$0.130m recurrent funding for increased payments to pharmacists who participate in the methadone program
- Establishment of a Substance Abuse Advisory Council

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

Very few unmet needs identified by ACTCOSS in conjunction with the community sector have been addressed in budget initiatives. It is also disappointing that there appears to be a lack of innovation in this area and no firm commitment to initiatives made mention to by this government prior to the budget (including the supervised injection facility). The budget raises serious questions regarding the independence and role of the ACT Substance Abuse Advisory Council, which has received no funds to support its work in prevention and educational programs around substance abuse.

The Indigenous youth alcohol and drug project (\$0.170m recurrent) is a welcome initiative, however, the benefits of increased payments to pharmacists who participate in the methadone program (\$0.130m recurrent) is less clear.

Of greatest concern is the range of needs that have not been addressed in this budget, including:

- Adult learning centres, including units aimed at increasing self esteem and raising awareness of mental health issues

- Development of programs specifically aimed at raising awareness of self care and preventative health strategies among groups identified at being at risk of falling into poverty
- The implementation of the recommendations of the Inquiry into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the ACT (with appropriate discussion with indigenous communities)
- Preventative and primary health care services, including access to drug and alcohol related services for people on remand, and
- No funds attached to resource the Substance Abuse Advisory Council, thus raising concerns regarding its independence and potential effectiveness.

# TRANSPORT

## Background

Transport issues in the ACT continue to focus on the provision of infrastructure such as roads and the provision of public transport for ACT residents. However so much of transport policy appears oriented towards providing rapid access to work for commuters. ACTCOSS feels a transport system must be all inclusive, and meet the reasonable needs of all possible users, 'reasonableness' being measured by ability to lead a fulfilling life.

In ACTCOSS' pre-budget submission, and other advocacy work, a number of recommendations were made in relation to transport services, including:

- Increased taxi subsidies for people with disabilities and frail older people (Rec 3.8)
- Increased frequency of buses on weekends; (Rec 3.8)

In addition, in its submission to the Treasurer, ACTCOSS pointed out that:

"Transport has also been raised as an issue by the Unmet Needs Analysis of the Department of Health and Community Care."

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- Transport package: single zone fares
- Funding to upgrade bus fleet to make more accessible for people in wheelchairs (44 new buses)
- \$45.317m for communications system upgrade
- \$1m for first stage of Woden-Downer on road cycle path upgrade
- Introduction of paid parking at Belconnen and Tuggeranong.

## Issues/Concerns and Unresolved Questions

The ACT Government has delivered commendably on their promise to introduce single-zone bus fares. A particularly positive aspect of this is that single-zone fares are being achieved with only very minor increases on present single-zone fares. We also welcome the purchase of 44 new buses for the Canberra region. However, we note that initiative was required under national legislation.

We have concerns about the effectiveness of the one-hour transfer tickets on weekends and weekday evenings and early mornings. Many people utilise two or more buses to get to and from destinations thus requiring longer time periods than the one-hour transfer ticket permits given the present bus schedules on weekends and evenings. ACTCOSS suggests the introduction of two grades of transfer tickets – one-hour tickets for weekdays from 7.00am until 6.00pm, and two-hour transfer tickets for weekends and weekday evenings and early mornings.

The introduction of paid parking in the Belconnen and Tuggeranong town areas is welcome as it reflects the need to recognise cost of land-use involved. While ACTCOSS appreciates the Government's initiatives in putting public transport on a more sustainable footing, the parking fees will have a disproportionate impact on people on low incomes, and the measure therefore is somewhat regressive.

There are also concerns surrounding whether there will be negotiations around introducing paid parking in, and adjacent to, central national locations such as between the Parliamentary Triangle and Barton areas. Until such negotiations are had, there will be inequality of treatment between the central national area and Civic, Belconnen, Woden and Tuggeranong regions.

Given past approaches taken regarding public transport, ACTCOSS has concerns as to whether the focus on, and support for, public transport will be maintained in future years. ACTCOSS will continue to advocate for continual and consistent improvements to the ACT public transport system.

# WOMEN

## Background

The ACT Government and the ALP have placed their Agenda for Women at the front of all their policies in the Labor Platform. The rhetoric of the ALP platform gives hope that the ACT Government will work towards real support for women in their various roles in ACT society. ACTCOSS seeks an undertaking from the ACT Government that it will consult widely, using the resources available through its own Women's Advisory Group to ensure the needs of women are addressed.

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- Extension of the midwifery program \$0.1m (equivalent to additional services for 60 women) (see also Families)
- 10 Emergency Childcare Places \$0.103m Recurrent (in line with review) (see also Families)
- Wage rises for nurses

## Issues/ Concerns and Unresolved Questions

Despite the government's rhetoric about supporting women in various roles in the community, there are no specific support initiatives for women. The only initiatives are those that may lend hand to assisting women through providing support in their role of parents or carers in the family.

Other initiatives identified in the ACT Budget 2002-03 that may impact upon women include pay rises for nurses and the Social and Community Services (SACS) Award increases for people employed in community services. Increased funding in these areas will benefit many women in the ACT community, given it is primarily a female dominated workforce.

ACTCOSS is disappointed that there is a failure in the budget to address urgent needs in the following areas:

- Housing and emergency accommodation for women
- Support for women with dual diagnosis
- Mental health services for women
- Drug and alcohol services
- Victims of violence
- Services to address problem gambling.

ACTCOSS is also concerned that there is no resources allocated to support the ongoing work of the Women's Consultative Council.

# YOUNG PEOPLE

## Background

Young people make up approximately one quarter of the ACT population. While a large part of the population, young people are often overlooked as they are expected to fit into mainstream service delivery while they may require service delivery in ways that are inclusive, responsive and recognise the 'culture' of young people. Through their participation in the school system, through part time employment and the social life of the city, young people's contribution to the ACT community should be encouraged and enhanced.

## Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- Indigenous Youth Detox program- \$0.17m (poss. 4 beds)
- CAMHS – Enhancement package \$0.466 – additional health professionals, increased capacity, early intervention.
- CALCAM – Adolescent Day Program - \$0.5m, 12 to 18 year olds, intensive case management.
- Mental Health Education ACT - \$0.085m – Consumer and Carers provide Education in Schools.
- Review of counselling services in schools - \$0.1m.
- Review of career counselling in schools - \$0.1m.
- Indigenous Accommodation Service for Young People
- Health and Community Care - \$0.2m – For the Junction Youth Health Service to purchase floor space in the new Youth Centre.
- Youth Centres - \$0.025m for Occupational Health and Safety, Access and Equity.
- Youth in the City – \$0.06m –fit-out of new premises.
- Youth centres – \$0.03m - building renovations and upgrade.
- Youth Centre - \$0.015m – grounds upgrade.
- Substitute care – increase in funding of \$1.5 million.

## Issues, Concerns and Unresolved questions

ACTCOSS agrees with the Youth Coalition of the ACT that the Government has missed an opportunity in this Budget to provide services that meet the demonstrated need in the youth sector.

The issues and concerns fall into three broad groupings: initiatives, reviews and community accommodation.

In terms of initiatives, there was a lack of community-based counselling services and employment programs and inadequate provision of community-based health promotion activities in the Budget. For those programs that did receive funding, such as the Substitute Care Program, the Government needs to ensure there is clear, cross-sector collaboration to provide responsive and flexible services to young people.

There are also some questions raised by initiatives in the Budget. For example, the indigenous accommodation service is welcomed and it is understood that DUS and DECS have made a \$98,000 contribution.

Another area of interest for the youth sector is Crime Prevention and while it appears this initiative has been funded (\$0.825m) there is no detail as to how community organisations can put forward proposals.

The Government has initiated several reviews, but these will not provide sustainable outcomes for young people if the review teams do not consult with community based service providers, consumers of these services and their families/carers/guardians.

In addition, the Government needs to ensure the outcomes of the career counselling review are carefully linked to the Schools Pathway Initiative. Resources also need to be made available to follow up on recommendations of the intensive support needs review of young people.

Finally, the youth sector also finds itself affected by the lack of coherent Government policy and funding for community service accommodation.

