



Overview of 2003-2004 ACT Budget

This document provides a preliminary assessment of the ACT Government's 2003-04 Budget Initiatives. In order to provide these promptly, haste was required. We apologise in advance for any inaccuracies either material or typographical.

Should you have 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.

If you require additional copies of this paper please contact the ACTCOSS office or access the ACTCOSS website at <http://www.actcoss.org.au> to obtain it in PDF and text format.

ACTCOSS would like to thank its many volunteers who helped analyse the Budget.

Overview

The ACT Government has produced what was anticipated to be one of the hardest budget in the history of ACT self-government. This has been done in an environment of acceptance where the community believes that harsh measures are necessary to overcome the effects of a devastating natural disaster.

The problems discussed in the lead up to the release of the Budget included poorly performing superannuation assets (\$77million loss), a lower than expected allocation from the Federal Government (\$15million) and the net cost of the 18 January fires (\$35million).

What has been revealed in the Budget documents is that a modest deficit of \$7.667million is forecast for 2003-04, to be followed by a return to surplus in the out years. This is, in fact, a better outcome than predicted in the 2002-03 Budget.

ACTCOSS believes that the effects of the January fires have been overstated in the lead up to the Budget to prepare the community for harsh measures. The introduction of the fire levy on general rates is yet to be tested in the court of public opinion, as details of how the scheme will apply to individual rate payers have not been released. The Budget papers detail only that the initiative will raise \$5million per year for the next two years.

ACTCOSS believes that the 2003-04 ACT Budget has delivered some good initiatives that respond to community needs. There are, however, many areas remaining where the lack of services will continue to exacerbate hardship for some sectors of our community.

BACKGROUND

The objective of this budget analysis is to provide:

1. a plain English, accessible summary of the highlights of the ACT Government Budget for ACTCOSS members and other stakeholders; and
2. an *initial* ACTCOSS response to the Budget to inform the Council's public statements, submissions to Assembly Estimates hearings and representations to Government.

ACTCOSS' role in the ACT Budget process is to put forward the views of the community sector. This is in keeping with the Council's responsibilities to represent and advocate on behalf of people living with disadvantage, including poverty, disability and discrimination.

The Council's work on its pre-Budget submission began in late 2002. Much of that work looked to be overtaken by the catastrophic fires that caused

so much devastation on January 18. However once the full effect of the fires on the community sector was understood this proved not to be the case. The issues were the same ones that ACTCOSS had been working towards: the need for a strong community sector to support the fabric of ACT society, the need to respond to a shortage of human and multi-disciplinary services and the need for Government to deliver on its promises. What had changed was the urgency of those needs.

The five themes that emerged from the Council's pre-Budget analysis were:

1. Responding to need after the ACT fires;
2. Community sector viability;
3. Shortages in human services across the Territory;
4. Responding to changes identified by Government inquiries, policies and reforms; and
5. Revenue measures to fund service increases.

ACTCOSS has taken great hope from the promises of the ACT Government to pursue evidence-based policies and to promote social inclusion. In the aftermath of the ACT fires ACTCOSS believes that the Government has an opportunity to renew and reinvigorate the ACT community by supporting the community sector in its important work.

PROCESS

ACTCOSS thanks the ACT Government for its initiative in 2003-04 of holding a budget lock up and briefing for peak organisations. This allowed ACTCOSS and some of its fellow community sector organisations to gain a working knowledge of the Budget before being asked to provide reaction by the press. ACTCOSS would like to see this initiative retained in future years, and would be happy to provide feedback on the lockup for future planning purposes.

The briefing did not, however, make the job of reviewing the budget documents any easier in terms of finding details of initiatives. ACTCOSS reiterates its call for the Government to review the presentation of the ACT Budget papers to ensure they are documents of accountability and transparency that fulfill the requirements of general purpose financial statements.

ACTCOSS also has concerns at the lack of commitment in the Budget to the social plan. The Government has made a commitment to some economic initiatives related to the Economic White Paper, and has committed funds to the implementation of the spatial plan, all in the absence of a social plan. While funding initiatives should not be help up until the completion of the Canberra Plan, it seems anomalous to ACTCOSS that the social plan is yet to be released.

RESPONSE TO THE BUDGET

ACTCOSS welcomes the Government's decision to provide \$1.5million to fund the wage increase for grades 1-4 under the Social and Community Services (SACS) Award in the 2003-04 Budget and to provide appropriate indexation for community sector funding.

The Council looks forward to working in partnership with the Government to resolve related funding issues such as pay rates for higher level workers, implementing yesterday's living wage decision and the specific timing for this \$1.5million yearly increase.

ACTCOSS has reviewed the following specific areas of the Budget:

Community Services –While ACTCOSS welcomes funding for community facilities capital works, maintenance and upgrades, we are concerned that there is no apparent basis for these figures and that the funds are not sufficient to ensure accessibility upgrades of all Government owned and community-leased premises. ACTCOSS also endorses the Government's response to homelessness following last year's review, initiatives for disability service reform, elder abuse prevention and response, as well as the implementation of the drug/alcohol taskforce recommendations. We are, however, disappointed not to see initiatives in the areas of child care and family support.

Disability – ACTCOSS welcomes the Government's commitment to implementing many of the recommendations of the Disability Reform Group including increased funding for individual support and home and community care services, as well as building a single therapy service for children with a disability. We also support the Government's funding of the uplift fee for wheelchair accessible taxis.

Health - Acute Care - ACTCOSS welcomes the increase in acute care funding as an initiative to reduce hospital waiting lists and improve access to a range of services. However, following widely expressed concerns about the increase in emergency department use and the decrease in bulk-billing in the ACT, ACTCOSS is concerned that there is no support for alternative, community based primary health care services. We are also concerned that there has been no obvious provision for the implementation of the new service funding arrangements to be introduced in the coming financial year or for a review of complaints mechanisms, neither of which are cost-neutral exercises.

Health – Community Care - ACTCOSS is pleased to note the additional funds that have been directed towards meeting dental health services. We also welcome the increased funding to the HACC sector to allow for an increase in community support services. While we support the provision of funding for the implementation of Drug Taskforce recommendations, we note that this funding has been set at a modest level. Critical areas still to

be addressed include health services for young people particularly those from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

Mental Health - ACTCOSS congratulates the ACT Government on the increased budget provisions for mental health services. In particular, ACTCOSS welcomes the provisions for a forensic mental health court liaison officer, an additional dual-diagnosis worker and an expansion of supported accommodation services for mental health consumers. ACTCOSS is concerned about the lack of funding directed to community based mental health services, however, with most funding initiatives targeting Government programs and no apparent provision for expanding community based programs.

Housing – ACTCOSS commends the Government for being serious about tackling the issue of homelessness and for committing \$2.4 million to providing more crisis and short-term accommodation. Nonetheless, we are concerned that the budget does not adequately address the long-term issue of affordable housing in the ACT, nor does it provide funding for increasing the ACT stock of public housing, nor for more resources to support public housing resources.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Issues - The initiative to provide an indigenous official visitor to prisons and detention centres has some support but ACTCOSS is concerned that the Government is already spending over \$4million annually on policing and detaining indigenous people, while funding for prevention strategies such as employment and education is currently inadequate. The official visitor program is the *only* new initiative in this budget aimed directly at meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, despite strong evidence of growing need in the areas of indigenous health, education and housing. ACTCOSS believes that the government must do more to acknowledge and support the role of indigenous service providers, both for the vital services they provide and the role they play as 'brokers' between indigenous clients and mainstream services.

Women – Although ACTCOSS recognises that increased funding for a range of new initiatives will benefit both women and men, we note with disappointment that there are no new initiatives specifically targeting the needs of women. We are also concerned that while the Strategic Plan for women is mentioned in the government's media release it is not listed as a new initiative and there does not appear to be any new funding for it.

Youth Services – ACTCOSS welcomes the funding of counselling services and career education support in government-funded schools. Nonetheless, we are concerned at the lack of youth-specific initiatives in many important areas including general health, mental health, drug and alcohol rehabilitation and employment. We are also disappointed to see no separate identified funds for the evaluation and continuation of the *First Stop Legal and Referral Service for Young People*, despite this service meeting a previously identified need.

Employment and Economic Development - While the Budget delivers a number of initiatives to promote economic growth, this alone will not create equitable outcomes. ACTCOSS is concerned that this Budget does not contain any new measures specifically designed to extend economic opportunities to low-income and unemployed ACT residents. The emphasis remains on industry and business support programs, and not on policies to promote employment and equity. A more comprehensive approach would include investment in community services as a key to social and economic development.

Justice and Corrections - The provision of \$310,000 for medical services to the medical unit at the temporary remand centre at Symonston is welcome. ACTCOSS is troubled, however, by the deferral of the \$50 million planning provision to 2004-05 for new permanent remand facility in the ACT despite previous indications that this was a priority issue for the Government. ACTCOSS is concerned that there is an apparent decline in legal aid funding which could impact negatively on the rights of disadvantaged people.

Older Persons - ACTCOSS is pleased that the budget has addressed some urgent needs including continued support for the community based aged psychiatry service as promised last year; funding for addressing the issue of elder abuse, and an injection of funding for a sub and non-acute aged care facility. However, there is concern that the issue of programs for older workers and a review of accommodation for older people has not been addressed.

Gambling - The only initiative relating to gambling outlined in the budget is a revenue measure, which involves increasing in top marginal rate of gaming tax on gross turnover of \$50,000 for clubs. ACTCOSS is concerned that this further entrenches gambling revenue as a fundamental source of income for the ACT. ACTCOSS is also concerned that the Gambling and Racing Commission's financial commitment to the Centre for Gambling Research is not spelled out.

Transport – ACTCOSS welcomes a range of new transport-related initiatives announced in this budget which will contribute to a more sustainable and liveable urban environment in Canberra. The Council endorses the government's commitment to the implementation of the Sustainable transport strategy and supports the extension of ACTION services in Gungahlin, as well as the introduction of on-street pay parking in Barton (given appropriate concessions).

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COMMUNITY SERVICES

Background

A supported, adequately funded and innovative welfare service sector is a great asset to its community. The Council has argued in the past for recognition of the sector as a crucial part of the ACT economy, providing services to the majority of residents at some time during their lives.

The January fires demonstrated the importance of the community sector in responding to a crisis. Many services met additional demand from within existing resources, despite the fact that data collected in the months before the fires showed that services were already suffering and unable to meet existing demand.

ACTCOSS addressed the issue of the post-fire demands on services in its pre-Budget submission. The following specific recommendations were made:

Recommendation 1: That organisations who occupy the Grant Cameron Centre be given a one month waiver of their rent to help compensate for the additional costs of providing services while unable to occupy their offices.

Recommendation 2: That community organisations applying for top-up funding be given assistance to help quantify, where possible, the added burden, and that there be provision of a general grant for organisations who are meeting additional demand from within current resources. The funds application process should also be simplified to ensure the application process itself does not cause further hardship for affected organisations.

Recommendation 3: That part of the ACT Community Fund fire emergency proceeds be made available to organisations directly and indirectly affected by the fires to allow critical incident debriefing and ongoing counselling support for an appropriate period of time.

Recommendation 4: That funding be provided to allow staff from agencies that responded to calls for assistance after the ACT fires to participate in processes leading to the development of an updated disaster management plan.

Recommendation 5: That a separate Budget document be prepared that provides an open and honest financial and qualitative explanation of the measures being taken to meet the cost of the fires. This should include reference to Appropriation Bill No. 2002-2003 (No 2) and the time frame within which the costs will be met.

As mentioned, even before the January fires many ACT services were struggling to meet complex and rising demand. ACTCOSS believes that the viability of the community service sector is an urgent issue that must be addressed. The following recommendations attempt to meet some of the outstanding issues within the sector:

Recommendation 6: That the ACT Government provide an injection of \$2.5million to allow for recurrent costs to the community sector of the SACS award decisions of the AIRC in 2001-02.

Recommendation 7: That the ACT Government provide funds to allow for growth in the wage and salary levels of people employed under the higher SACS Award grades.

Recommendation 8: That the funding formula for service providers in the community sector be changed to ensure the costs of training, compliance, data collection and volunteer management are reflected in the funding amount. Where necessary, the ACT Government should provide community organisations with assistance to adequately cost these imposts during contract negotiations.

Recommendation 9: That the ACT Government facilitate and fund an online training portal that would provide community organisations with free or low cost training in contract compliance, business regulation and other related topics.

Recommendation 10: That Government departments be provided with funds to allow them to compensate community organisations who received less than full indexation in their 2002-03 funding.

Recommendation 11: That, working in the spirit of the Compact, a mutually agreed approach to indexation be used consistently. This mutually agreed approach should appropriately reflect the annual increases in the cost of delivering services, and would ensure all Government departments are meeting their contractual obligations on indexing under the standard contract.

Recommendation 12: That the ACT Government go further in its efforts on behalf of the community sector to support the provision of affordable access to insurance by broadening the definition of organisations that are eligible for the ACT government-negotiated scheme and providing funding for risk-management and reduction services to the community services sector.

Recommendation 13: That the ACT Government provide for the costs of insurance when developing its funding guidelines for the community sector.

Recommendation 14: That the ACT Government set out clear policies and priorities for the maintenance and upgrading of its built assets, currently leased to community organisations to ensure that the buildings reach, and are maintained at, an appropriate standard.

Recommendation 15: That the ACT Government vest the administration and oversight of the leasing and maintenance of Government buildings that are leased to the community sector in a centralised agency.

Recommendation 18: That the Government recognise the contribution of individuals and community organisations that participate in its major consultation activities.

Recommendation 19: That the ACT Government substantially increase funding to consumer-based representative organisations with a view to obtaining high quality, direct input into Government policy from the wide range of groups representing people living with disadvantage.

Recommendation 23: That the ACT Government support the current wage case for childcare workers, and that the Government explore all possible avenues to expand child care services in the ACT.

Recommendation 32: That the Government provide funds to allow for accessibility upgrades of all Government owned and community-leased premises.

Recommendation 33: That the ACT Government ensure that funds are available to meet SACS Award increase.

Recommendation 38: That the ACT Government increase its investment in human services in the ACT, in recognition of the economic and community benefits of such investments.

Recommendation 39: That the Government provide funds to compensate community organisations and their members for their time and effort in participating in Government consultation processes. The quantum of such compensation and claimable items should be discussed with one of the more formal groups, such as the Disability Advisory Council, then adapted to cover other community sector organisations.

Recommendation 40: That the ACT Government provide commitments in the 2003-04 Budget for funding priorities for each of the numerous reviews, consultations, policy development exercises and regulatory reviews.

Recommendation 49: That the 18 month old concessions review be processed and finalised with the input of the Joint Community Sector Government Reference Group.

Major initiatives

- There are a number of financial initiatives relating to bushfire recovery that are clearly identified in the Budget
- Both the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services have allocated funds to assist community organisations to meet increased costs associated with Social and Community Services Award (SACS) increases including funding needed to provide 24-hour and extended hours services
- The Budget includes an allocated \$250,000 from 2004-05 (in addition to \$253,000 existing) for community facilities. This funding will be used for maintenance and repairs, enhanced safety and amenity standards of and ensuring compliance with various regulatory requirements. There is also an allocation of \$415, 000 during 2003-04 for minor new works including community building refurbishment, OH&S and equity upgrades
- The Budget includes an allocated \$2.4 million during 2003-04 increasing to just under \$4 million by 2006-07 for improved responses to homelessness including short term accommodation for families and single men in crisis, extended outreach services for homeless people, and capacity enhancement of existing SAAP services to more effectively respond to issues of homelessness in the ACT. The priorities identified are broadly consistent with the *Needs Analysis of Homelessness in the ACT*
- There are multiple initiatives in response to the disability reform agenda, including building a single therapy service, addressing individual support needs of people with a disability, and a lift fee for wheelchair accessible taxis
- Funds have been allocated to address elder abuse through a hotline, information and education resources for prevention, a communication strategy, training, and a benchmarking survey. These initiatives are consistent with the recommendations of the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Community Care's Inquiry into Elder Abuse
- Approximately \$250,000 per annum has been allocated for the Implementation of the Drug Taskforce recommendations through to 2006-07.

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- While there are many worthwhile initiatives relating to the fires, there are few that appear to support the community sector, which has been supporting the fire recovery processes
- Funding initiatives for the SACS Award fall short of the sector's needs. Specifically, they will not allow for growth in the wage and salary levels of people employed at SACS Award Grade 5 and above
- The Government has failed to address important areas of need in relation to viability of the community sector, including calls for funding to enable organisations to meet the costs of training, compliance, data collection and volunteer management, as well as initiatives to provide free or low cost training in areas such as contract compliance and business regulation
- Funding for community facilities, while welcome and much needed, is likely to be inadequate, and will not ensure that all facilities can be appropriately upgraded to provide accessibility and safety
- There appear to be no initiatives to support the struggling child care sector which is facing wage rises, new accreditation requirements, and changing arrangements for trainees, among other challenges.
- There appear to be no initiatives to increase funding to consumer-based representative organisations, which play a vital role in providing the Government with high quality, direct input into policy development.

Disability Services

Background

The ACT disability sector has shown in the past 2–3 years that it has the ability and expertise to provide Government with knowledge that is the basis of good policy development. Through the Gallop Inquiry, a number of Coroner's inquiries, Departmental re-organisation and numerous advisory boards, many people with disabilities, their supporters and carers have spent time and energy meeting the Government's requests for advice and input.

These processes have raised expectations within the community that the rights of people with a disability may now be matched with services that translate those rights into reality. Some changes have been made. However, some like the long-awaited changes to the Taxi Transport Scheme, continue to be delayed.

ACTCOSS noted in its pre-Budget submission that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found the ACT spends less on services in the disability sector than may be anticipated by other economic data.

"Expenditure on accommodation support services and community access services (expressed as dollars per potential population in need) was lower in the ACT than nationally" (AIHW/CMD, 2003, p.xii)

In line with the ACTCOSS position that consumer participation is crucial to good policy formulation and service development, the following recommendations were made in this important area.

Recommendation 18: That the Government recognise the contribution of individuals and community organisations who participate in its major consultation activities.

Recommendation 19: That the ACT Government substantially increase the funding to consumer-based representative organisations with a view to obtaining high quality, direct input into Government policy from the wide range of groups representing people living with disadvantage.

Recommendation 30: That sufficient additional funds be provided to ensure that the needs already identified in the disability reform process are met without disadvantaging other areas of service delivery.

Recommendation 31: That the Government expedite the announced reforms to the Taxi Transport Scheme.

Recommendation 32: That the Government provide funds to allow for accessibility upgrades of all Government owned and community-leased premises.

Recommendation 39: That the Government provide funds to compensate community organisations and their members for their time and effort in participating in Government consultation processes. The quantum of such compensation and claimable items should be discussed with one of the more formal groups, such as the Disability Advisory Council, then adapted to cover other community sector organisations.

Recommendation 40: That the ACT Government provide commitments in the 2003-04 Budget for funding priorities for each of its reviews, consultations, policy development exercises and regulatory reviews.

Major initiatives

- An additional \$600,000 in 2003-04 (rising to \$1.5 million by 2006-07) has been allocated for addressing the individual support needs of people with a disability. This will provide immediate and ongoing support for people with high, complex and unmet needs.
- \$460,000 in 2003-04 (increasing to \$615 per annum for the next three years) has been allocated to building a single therapy service targeting children with disabilities from 12 to school leaving. This is a response to recommendations of the Disability Reform Group
- An additional \$700,000 per annum for Home and Community Care (HACC) services, which will be matched by the Commonwealth Government – resulting in an overall increase of \$1.4 million per annum
- There will be minor new works including equity and access upgrades on community facilities (\$115,000 capital funding)
- An incentive will be provided to taxi operators in the form of a new lift fee to encourage the operation of wheelchair accessible taxis (funding will be \$148,000 in 2003-04)
- The mobile library service will also receive \$160,000 for the purchase of specialist vehicles to improve accessibility for older people and people with a disability

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- In-home respite care will have target hours reduced to 23,000, which diminishes this area of service to below actual service levels for the current year
- ACTCOSS seeks clarification with regard to a “new measure” identified in the Budget regarding the number of service contracts administered. This appears under both “accommodation support” & “quality/effectiveness” but lacks explanation
- Some concern has been raised in relation to the targeting of individual support funding to people in crisis. Clarification is required to ensure that the service provides ongoing support

Health – Acute Care

Background

The Reid Review of ACT Health provided a new structure and promised new ways of forming and maintaining relationships between the Government and service providers.

Unfortunately, acute health care in the ACT has become a proxy for all forms of health care, completely overshadowing community health services in terms of public debate.

The current Federal-State/Territory divide has created an unbalanced system where cost-shifting and conflict has taken the place of rational approaches to the provision of health care. The current argument between the Federal Government and the States and Territories over hospital funding exemplifies the problem. (ACTCOSS takes some heart from the Guardian's recent article on the improvements in the NHS in Britain following a serious injection of funds. See article: <http://www.observer.co.uk/comment/story/0,6903,935872,00.html>)

There is a direct link between the acute care system and the community based health services. Without adequate resources, the community based health care system cannot support people to keep them out of acute care, to assist them after treatment, or to assist them with rehabilitation and other services of an ongoing nature. ACTCOSS has not made any direct recommendations on acute health care, but has pointed out in the section its pre-Budget submission that relates to Government reviews that:

- The highest priority needs to be developing and consulting on a new funding policy. Current funding arrangements were rolled over in June 2002 for 12 months with a view to implementing the recommendations of the review of purchaser-provider contracts. This review was recommended by the Reid inquiry. This review is now overdue and the delay is causing considerable distress in the community sector
- The review of complaints mechanisms was also a recommendation of the Reid Review. Given the experience of the restructuring of the former Health Department was not a revenue neutral exercise, funds need to be allocated for the outcomes of the review of complaints mechanisms.

Major initiatives

- Acute care growth funding (\$7.96million) recurring

- Emergency Department growth funding (\$420,000)
- Health funding to reduce waiting lists (\$2million)

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- Questions still remain about the funding arrangements for health services (both acute and community health) following the review of the purchaser-provider model, and we are concerned that no funds seem to have been specifically allocated for this on-going process
- We are also concerned that there does not appear to be any funding specifically allocated to the promised review of complaints mechanisms, even though the Government has made a commitment to undertake this process. ACTCOSS also believes that any review of complaints mechanisms will result in a requirement for further expenditure in this area. This has not been catered for in this Budget
- We note that there is an increased demand and funding for acute emergency services because there has been increased fees for GP services (lack of bulk-billing) and a lack of support for alternative, community based primary health care services
- The inter-state transfers funding from new South Wales to the ACT for health services is reported to be reducing in 2003-04. ACTCOSS believes that in fact there ought to be an increase in this revenue transfer due to the increased regional role and service levels of the Canberra Hospital together with the introduction of new services and technologies

Health - Community Care (including harm minimisation)

Background

The community sector fulfils a vital role in maintaining the health of Canberrans. The range and breadth of services is inspiring.

The sector has a great capacity to deliver innovative, early intervention services that meet community needs. Along with needing support in terms laid out in the ACTCOSS pre-Budget submission addressing sector viability, services need to be able to access funds to implement new services to address need in particular cohorts. Government funding has not always been flexible enough to allow for responses to be timely. ACTCOSS is therefore hoping that the current review of service purchasing will respond to this flaw.

ACTCOSS also believes that service providers have the expertise and knowledge to devise new programs to meet the health needs of groups who suffer particular disadvantage, and made the following recommendation:

Recommendation 24: That the Government work with services providers in the community sector on providing targeted health services to address area of particular need, including young people, young people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, people with drug dependency and people in older age groups.

ACTCOSS also pointed out in its section on reviews and inquiries that:

- The highest priority needs to be developing and consulting on a new funding policy. Current funding arrangements were rolled over in June 2002 for 12 months with a view to implementing the recommendations of the review of purchaser-provider contracts. This review was recommended by the Reid inquiry. This review is now overdue and the delay is causing considerable distress in the community sector.
- The review of complaints mechanisms was also a recommendation of the Reid Review. Given the experience of the restructuring of the former Health Department was not a revenue neutral exercise, funds need to be allocated for the outcomes of the review of complaints mechanisms.

Major initiatives

- Dental Health \$500,000

- Implementation of future Drug Taskforce recommendations \$250,000. This is a welcome approach to funding an area of need where recommendations are imminent, but not yet finalised.
- Health services to Remand Centre \$310,000 (See Justice section)
- HACC increase \$700,000
- SACS Award increase \$660,000

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- Price pressures - only mentions public hospital services but what about OH&S and insurance for community services?
- No recognition of ACTCOSS' recommendation for funding targeting health services for young people, particularly those from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background

Health – Mental Health

Background

Mental health issues have come to the fore in many areas of ACTCOSS' work in the past year. In researching homelessness, breaching, drug policy and the justice system the Council has found that mental health polices have left many vulnerable people without services to match their need. It is acknowledged that improved diagnosis, some drug trends and an ageing population have raised awareness of, and the demand on, mental health services.

ACTCOSS is pleased that the ACT Government has been actively working towards a mental health strategy and action plan. These documents now need Government funding to ensure that those people in our community who are vulnerable because of mental illness receive the support they need.

In recognising the need, particularly in the areas of accommodation, holistic service provision and early intervention, ACTCOSS made the following recommendations in its pre-Budget submission:

Recommendation 25: That the recommendations of the Commissioner for Community and Health Service complaints regarding accommodation options for people with a mental illness be implemented as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 26: That the other recommendations of the Community and Health Service Complaints Commissioner that have been adopted be outlined in the Budget, with indications of how the recommendations will be met by the Mental Health Action Plan.

Recommendation 27: That sufficient funds be appropriated to ensure the Mental Health Action Plan can achieve its goals and to provide for better support for people living with mental illness.

Recommendation 28: That specific services be developed to ensure people with a dual diagnosis receive holistic services that meet their needs.

Recommendation 29: That forensic mental health services be established as a matter of priority in conjunction with the new ACT Remand Centre.

Major initiatives

- \$240,000 for supported accommodation outreach

- Discharge planner - \$80,000 in response to the Health and Community Care Complaints Commissioner's Report
- Calvary Link \$80,000 for early assessment
- Additional dual diagnosis worker
- Forensic – Court Liaison \$80,000 recurring
- Carers support training \$35,000
- Capital works @ PSU (refurbishment \$330,000) & Calvary (increased safety upgrade \$20,000)
- Promotion, prevention and early intervention initiatives in Education. Youth and Family Services portfolio - RecLink Program, Children at Risk program and counseling services in schools

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- Accommodation Options outreach program – how will this program be structured? Will it be implemented by Government or Community sector agencies, or both?
- Funding to implement the rest of recommendations from the Community & Health Service Complaints Commissioner's Report are not evident. This is inconsistent with the Government's in principle support for the Report.
- The dual-diagnosis worker – need to ensure strong links with the community sector to provide an holistic service approach
- Over half of the total funding increase is to expand Government services (Belconnen MH Services to Gungahlin \$400K and expanded hours for Community MH Teams in Tuggeranong and Woden \$400K)
- Some community based services require greater clarity about the security of their ongoing funding and this is not indicated in this Budget – Do these services continue with the same yearly funding?

HOUSING

Background

ACTCOSS has been actively campaigning for increased expenditure on the ACT's public housing stock for many years. The Government's own paper on homelessness has shown that there is an urgent problem with secure, affordable housing in Canberra. This adds to the national research database that shows that housing stress is implicated in other areas of social distress, such as employment, health, mental health, criminal justice and family violence.

In other areas, ACTCOSS has asked for the support services that assist people to maintain tenancy, including mental health services, employment support and community-based health services.

ACTCOSS has asked also for a commitment from the Government to increase the stock of public housing in the ACT and to increase the capacity of community groups to offer alternative housing models.

Recommendation 20: Notwithstanding the ACT Government's stance that the level of public housing is a disadvantage to the ACT economy, that it recognise the need for secure, affordably, flexible and appropriate housing for people living with disadvantage by expanding the public housing stock.

Recommendation 21: That community housing groups be encouraged to expand their activities to meet the need for particular cohorts within the ACT for alternative housing models.

Major initiatives

- \$3 million during 2003-04 has been allocated to community housing to increase the availability of affordable housing to households currently experiencing stress in the private rental market
- \$4.4 million during 2003-04 has been allocated for the replacement in urban areas of rural public housing properties destroyed by bushfire in January (this is in addition to insurance payments)
- There is also funding for improving responses to homelessness (\$2.4 million) which will include accommodation services for families and single men in crisis, extend outreach services and increase the capacity of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP)

- Also, approximately \$250 per annum for the next four years has been allocated to providing accommodation support for clients of health and community services

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- Community housing strategies to increase affordable housing will not increase public housing or assist home ownership. Therefore ACTCOSS is concerned that there has been a lack of effective implementation of the Affordable Housing Task Force Report
- The plans for the \$4.4million to cover under insurance in the 80 properties destroyed in the January fires are to build in urban areas, when rural settlement tenants want instead to return to rural communities
- The Budget fails to allocate extra funds for education officers or support workers to assist public housing tenants
- Although ACT Government has committed to a "Bonds scheme" from 1 July 2003 there is no new funding allocated for this initiative
- There is no provision of a housing information service

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Issues

Background

Disadvantage dominates as a theme in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs. In the ACT, people from an Indigenous background continue to be over-represented in statistics showing negative outcomes, such as poor health, incarceration, low literacy and numeracy, substance abuse, short life expectancy and violence.

Overcoming disadvantage is a major Government responsibility. ACTCOSS has been encouraged over recent years to see a level of commitment to ensuring programs are put in place to address problems specific to Canberra's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. This includes the commitment to an Indigenous housing program.

ACTCOSS now looks to the ACT Government to continue this work in the 2003-04 Budget. While ACTCOSS believes that many of its recommendations to the pre-Budget process are applicable to addressing Indigenous disadvantage, two in particular relate to Indigenous issues and reflect ACTCOSS' belief that addressing disadvantage must be done through developing partnerships with Indigenous service providers and consumers, and implementing the findings of the numerous existing reports on Indigenous issues.

Recommendation 24: That the Government work with service providers in the community sector on providing targeted health services to address area of particular need, including young people, young people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, people with drug dependency and people in older age groups.

Recommendation 34: That the ACT Government take note of, and implement, the recommendations of the various reports on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage in the ACT, and further consult with local service providers to identify and fund services to fill gaps in service.

Major initiatives

- Approximately \$35,000 per annum has been allocated to provide an Indigenous Official Visitor for remand centres and jails.
- The Government's media release mentions an allocated \$100,000 for a public work of art that will celebrate the prior Indigenous ownership of land, however we cannot find any reference to this in the Budget.

- Approximately \$250,000 has been allocated to support the implementation of the *Alcohol and other Drugs Strategy* and it is claimed that a significant proportion of this will be used to address the needs of Indigenous people, however it is not yet clear how this will occur.

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- New funding for mainstream services in the areas of homelessness, drug and alcohol, youth services etc is welcome, but there needs to be much more information and clear strategies about how this funding will directly benefit Indigenous people and support over-stretched Indigenous service providers.
- ACTCOSS believes that there are serious gaps in services that have not been addressed in this Budget, particularly in relation to the specific needs of Indigenous people in the areas of:
 - Employment and business support;
 - Education; and
 - Health
- It is particularly disappointing that the ACT government has again rejected calls to provide funding to local Indigenous health providers, despite increasing demand on these services from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous clients, many who have very complex needs.
- The Government has also failed to recognise the important role played by Indigenous service providers in being a 'broker' between Indigenous clients and mainstream service providers – without this, Indigenous clients are often unwilling or unable to access mainstream services. Indigenous providers need to be resourced to fulfill this role.

Women

Background

Services to women are an important lever to assist women escape poverty and disadvantage. The final report of the ACT Poverty Task Force found that single person and single parent households are two of the groups at highest risk of poverty, and that women made up a significant proportion of these groups.

ACTCOSS has not made any specific recommendations about services for women, but under its community services analysis calls for increased human services that not only meet the needs of women but assist in providing work opportunities, training and dignified wages for women who work in the field of human service provision.

Recommendation 6: That the ACT Government provide an injection of \$2.5million to allow for recurrent costs to the community sector of the SACS award decisions of the AIRC in 2001-02.

Recommendation 7: That the ACT Government provide funds to allow for growth in the wage and salary levels of people employed under the higher SACS Award grades.

Recommendation 8: That the funding formula for service providers in the community sector be changed to ensure the costs of training, compliance, data collection and volunteer management are reflected in the funding amount. Where necessary, the ACT Government should provide community organisations with assistance to adequately cost these imposts during contract negotiations.

Recommendation 9: That the ACT Government facilitate and fund an online training portal that would provide community organisations with free or low cost training in contract compliance, business regulation and other related topics.

Recommendation 18: That the Government recognise the contribution of individuals and community organisations who participate in its major consultation activities.

Recommendation 19: That the ACT Government substantially increase the funding to consumer-based representative organisations with a view to obtaining high quality, direct input into Government policy from the wide range of groups representing people living with disadvantage.

Recommendation 22: That the Government outline its long term plans to meet the needs of an ageing population in terms of accommodation, adaptable housing, transport, HACC and SAAP services, and issues of access to affordable health care.

Recommendation 23: That the ACT Government support the current wage case for childcare workers, and that the Government explore all possible avenues to expand child care services in the ACT.

Recommendation 38: That the ACT Government increase its investment in human services in the ACT, in recognition of the economic and community benefits of such investments.

Recommendation 40: That the ACT Government provide commitments in the 2003-04 Budget for funding priorities for each of the reviews, consultations, policy development exercises and regulatory reviews undertaken since it came to office.

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- No specific new initiatives targeted at women appear in the Budget
- No NGO funding program is listed, so women's advocacy services will remain unsupported
- The *Strategic Plan for Women* is identified as 'a major work of the Office for Women in the coming year' yet there is not funding allocated for this. ACTCOSS is therefore concerned that this will overwhelm the other work of the Office if it is to come from their operational funding
- ACTCOSS seeks to ensure that increased funding for emergency accommodation services for families and other initiatives identified in improved responses to homelessness (allocated \$2.4 million) provide increased services and supports for women and women with children

Young People

Background

The following analysis was provided to ACTCOSS by the Youth Coalition of the ACT. ACTCOSS is pleased to include this thorough analysis in its Budget response and supports the positions put by the Youth Coalition.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT lodged a submission to the ACT Budget process outlining 86 recommendations, 13 of which were listed as being identified as high priority by the youth sector. The majority of these recommendations remain unfunded.

Youth Services

New Initiatives (Youth specific)

- **RecLINK Program for at Risk Youth** – funding to allow the continuation of the RecLINK program, an early intervention initiatives aimed to engage 'at risk' young people in recreation and sporting activities- \$231,000

Issues/Concerns

- Despite the increasing demand on youth services only **one** new initiative was funded

YOUTH HOUSING

New Initiatives (Not youth specific)

Response to Homelessness

- Increased short-term supported accommodation for families (approx 30), single men in crisis (approx 30 in shared accommodation) and couples (approx 6) through meeting rental costs and the provision of support – \$2.4 million (1.6 for support workers, 0.7 for accommodation costs)
- Community Housing: Affordable Housing to expand the capacity of the community housing sector - \$3 million

Issues/concerns

- The Youth Coalition remains concerned in regard to the lack of exit points from YSAAP services

- The Youth Coalition is also disappointed that funds have not been identified to advance the development of a Youth Night Shelter, or to establish short-term accommodation services for young people in Belconnen and Gungahlin, a need highlighted in our Budget submission and related government reports

YOUTH HEALTH

New Initiatives

- No specific 'youth health' initiatives identified

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition continues to be concerned in regard to the lack of health promotion and prevention/early intervention programs funded to work specifically with young people

MENTAL HEALTH (NOT YOUTH SPECIFIC)

New Initiatives

- An additional \$1.45million has been allocated to fund mental health initiatives highlighted in previous government reports and the Health Action Plan, as listed below;
 - Provision of home-based outreach to 'clients' (\$240,000)
 - Calvary Link Staff Position (\$80,000)
 - Forensic Court Liaison (\$80, 000)
 - Discharge Planner for TCH Psychiatric Services Unit (\$80, 000)
 - Gungahlin Outreach Program to boost the capacity of the Belconnen Mental Health Service (\$400,000)
 - Increase in capacity for Community Mental Health Teams in Tuggeranong and Woden to provide evening and weekend services to consumers with 'high level' needs, particularly those discharged from in-patient units (\$400,000)
 - A Carer Support Package to provide a carer training and support package (\$35,000)

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition welcomes the funding to supporting people in the community with mental health issues, however notes the lack of 'youth' specific initiatives in this area
- It is also noted that the majority of initiatives appear to be targeted at the 'acute' end of service delivery, to people with

moderate to severe mental health issues. Despite this focus, no attention has been given to establishing an Adolescent In-Patient Unit despite this being a recommendation of the recent review of ACT CAMHS, and listed as a priority in our Budget submission

- The Youth Coalition also notes the lack of funding for providing preventative mental health programs for young people not engaged in the mainstream school system, and the lack of funding for accessible services for young people with mild to moderate mental health issues. The Youth Coalition highlighted these areas of need in its Budget submission and recommended a number of initiatives to begin to address these service gaps (such as the funding of counsellor positions at each youth centres)

Dual Diagnosis/Co-morbidity (Not youth specific)

New Initiatives

- Drug and Alcohol/Mental Health Worker: to provide integrated services management of 'consumers' with dual diagnosis disorders

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition welcomes this initiative in recognition of the increasing prevalence of dual diagnosis/co-morbidity and hopes that this initiative will target the specific needs of young people

Drug and Alcohol Services (Not youth specific)

New Initiatives

- Implementation of Drug Taskforce Recommendations: the initiative will address priority areas under the new Alcohol and Drug Strategy currently in development - \$250, 000

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition welcomes the commitment of funding to implement the Alcohol and Drug Strategy

Young Carers

New Initiatives

- No 'young carer' specific initiatives

Issues/Concerns

- Despite the fact that the needs of young carers have been highlighted in many reports and inquiries they have been overlooked in this Budget

Services for Young People with Disabilities

New Initiatives

- HACC-additional funding for the joint Commonwealth/ HACC Program to provide increased support to the frail aged and young people with a disability and their carers to assist their independence in the community and to remain in their homes (\$700,000)
- Building a Single Therapy Service – provides increased allied health services particularly for adolescent and adult client groups in support of the Disability Reform Agenda and in response to the Review of Therapy Services to School Students with a Disability (\$460,000)
- Addressing Individual Support Needs of People with a Disability – responds to critical funding requests for people with disabilities who have high and unmet support needs, with the provision for additional and ongoing support (\$600,000)

Issues/Concerns

- We welcome these initiatives recognise that a continued commitment needs to be made if the needs of young people with are disability are to be adequately addressed.

Care and Protection Services

New Initiatives

- Strengthening Statutory Response to Children and Young People at Risk of Abuse and Neglect – to improve assessment, intervention and case-management through the implementation of a centralised intake system, improved data collection standards and strengthened quality assurance - \$500,000

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition is concerned that resources have not been made available to advance the recommendations arising from the 'Review of Therapeutic Protection Orders' and the subsequent report, 'Future Directions Consultation Paper – delivering effective services to young people with intensive support needs', despite this being highlighted in our last two Budget submissions
- Furthermore, the Youth Coalition is disappointed with the lack of additional funding to family support programs delivering preventative and early intervention programs, and the lack of resourcing for an After Care Service to support young people who have been 'in care.'

- The Youth Coalition is particularly concerned in regard to the lack of identified funds targeted at strengthening Indigenous families in the community through culturally appropriate prevention and early intervention initiatives

EDUCATION

New Initiatives

- Counseling Services in ACT Government Schools – provides for a youth worker in every government high school to complement existing counseling and welfare services, following the review of school counseling undertaken this year (\$215, 000)
- Curriculum Renewal Project: this initiative will establish an integrated curriculum renewal program for ACT preschool to year 10, incorporating a review of current curriculum (\$538,000)
- Career Education Support Service: to assist in the provision of effective guidance to students in school to work transitions (\$384,000)
- Schools Equity Fund: doubles the level of resources in the Fund to support government schools with a high concentration of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and from 'at risk' families

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition welcomes a commitment to implementing the outcome of the Review of Counseling Services, and urges that there be a consultative approach including all stakeholders in the development of the funded initiative
- The Youth Coalition welcomes a funding commitment to advancing outcomes of the Review of Careers Advice, however is concerned that the details of the related initiative appear to be advanced despite the fact that the review has yet to be completed and consultation with schools and the community sector has not been undertaken
- The Youth Coalition is very disappointed in the lack of additional funding directed toward community based alternative education programs despite these proving successful for young people identified to be 'at risk'

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

New Initiatives

- No new initiatives

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition is very disappointed to see no new initiatives to address issues of underemployment and the increasing casualisation of the workforce faced by young people, nor the limited employment opportunities for early-school leavers, and young people leaving detention.

YOUTH JUSTICE

New Initiatives

- Indigenous Official Visitor: provides for an Indigenous Official Visitor to assist ACT Indigenous offenders detained in ACT facilities, including Quamby Juvenile Detention Centre, and NSW prisons - \$35,000
- Quamby Youth Detention Centre Upgrade: under Capital Works, this will support the development of a forward design proposal for an upgrade of Quamby to better meet the needs of young people in the Centre (including separate accommodation for females) - \$13.2million

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition is disappointed to see no separate identified funds for the evaluation and continuation of the *First Stop Legal and Referral Service for Young People*, despite this service meeting a previously identified need. The Youth Coalition will continue to advocate for ongoing resourcing for this service
- The Youth Coalition is also disappointed that funds have not been identified to advance the development of an ACT Commissioner for Children and Young People despite this being called for in a number of our previous Budget submissions

YOUTH SECTOR VIABILITY

SACS Award

- To assist the community sector to meet increased costs associated with the SACS Award increases (Grades 1 – 4) resulting from the decisions by the Australian Industrial Relations Commission - \$660,000 (H&CC), \$480,000 (DH&CS) and \$480,000 (DEY&FS)

Consumer Price Index (CPI)

- The Department of Treasury has committed to providing each ACT Department with funding to meet the CPI increase (2.5%)

Issues/Concerns

- The Youth Coalition is disappointed with the lack of investment in increasing the capacity of Indigenous services and services for young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds through the establishment of traineeships and identified positions across the community sector
- There has been no commitment for training funds for youth workers. An investment in the professional development of the youth sector is vital to support quality and innovation in youth service delivery.

Minor New Works

New Initiatives

- Youth Centres: Building refurbishment and grounds upgrade (\$45,000)
- Youth Centres: OH&S and access and equity (\$35,000)

Issues/Concerns

- These initiatives are welcomed however, the call for a central asset manager and the development of a strategic asset management plan to cover all community facilities in the ACT has not been responded to

Transport

New Initiatives

- Enhancement of the Student Transport Program (bushfire initiative) – provides free school bus travel to approximately 200 students of families required to relocate as a result of the January bushfires, to the end of Dec 2003 (\$22,000)

Issues/Comments

- The Youth Coalition welcomes this initiative as recognition of the importance of consistency in schooling for those children and young people required to relocate as a result of the bushfires. This initiative will allow these students to continue attendance at their 'usual' schools

Employment and Economic Policy

Background

The ACT has a particular problem with long-term unemployment, which indicates that locally-based solutions need to be found. While employment services are a Commonwealth responsibility, the long-term unemployment problems appear to be worsening and urgent ACT-level attention is needed.

ACTCOSS has made a major effort in the past 12 months to improve the perception of the community and welfare sectors as positive contributors to the ACT's economy, and not just areas of foregone expenditure. The Council formed its Employment Task Group in 2002 to provide an alternative view on employment and industry policy to that espoused by the commercial and for profit sectors.

ACTCOSS has developed a research paper on the issue of community sector employment, "The contribution of community services to the ACT economy", which was finalised in February. Much of this work was used to develop the ACTCOSS pre-Budget submission on revenue, finance and public administration.

One area that the Council believes shows promise as a way to assist people who have been long-term unemployed is the development of local human services. These can provide entry-level jobs with good prospects for skills development.

Recommendation 38: That the ACT Government increase its investment in human services in the ACT, in recognition of the economic and community benefits of such investments.

Increased funding in certain areas goes some way to implementing this recommendation, but funding for community services is still not treated as investment in an integrated approach to economic and social development.

Spending on human services is still seen as something separate from economic development, when in fact it is a crucial part of the kind of economic development we should be aiming for in the ACT.

Major initiatives

Fostering development of small and micro business (\$270,000). This includes: online interactive business advisory service, improved online business license information service, additional funding for the Business Acceleration Program which provides dollar for dollar grants for coaching/mentoring, and the development of business plans

- Council of Education Export: future peak body for promoting ACT as the preferred study location for international students (\$150,000 per year over next four years); membership to be drawn from heads of various educational institutions, industry and relevant Government agencies, including tourism

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- Partners Canberra: The way in which funding would be “matched” is not clear. We are concerned that this might turn out to be another case in which funding is allocated to business support with less accountability than would be applied in other areas (e.g. the community sector)
- Fostering development of small and micro business. While we support, in principle, the extension of support for small and micro-businesses, this initiative would be improved if it was explicitly focused on supporting sustainable self-employment for low-income and unemployed Canberrans.

Overall, the emphasis is on industry and business support and promotion, not on employment and equity (see below)

- Issues relating to employment and economic policy in this Budget
 - the emphasis remains on industry and business support programs, and not on policies to promote employment, which are especially important for Canberrans who are long-term unemployed
 - economic growth alone will not deliver equitable outcomes, but this Budget does not contain any measures specifically designed to extend economic opportunities to low-income and unemployed ACT residents
 - the possibility of establishing a Council of Education Export was raised for discussion in Building Canberra’s Economy (the Discussion Paper for the Economic White Paper) and its inclusion in the Budget pre-empts the finalisation of the Economic White Paper
 - The willingness to implement initiatives raised as part of the Economic White Paper process is at

odds with the slow progress in developing the Canberra Plan as an integrated plan which incorporates the Social Plan and the Spatial Plan, as well as the Economic White Paper.

Justice and Corrections

Background

At the time when the then ACT Government was formulating plans for a local prison, ACTCOSS convened the ACT Community Coalition on Corrections. The members come from a diverse range of groups involved with assisting prisoners and their families. The Coalition has become an important advisory group to ACTCOSS in its policies on corrections, incarceration and the ACT Remand System.

The incoming ALP Government made know fairly soon after its election in 2001 that the prison was no longer the top priority, and Labor made a commitment to providing a prison based on rehabilitation and treatment, not simply on locking people away as required by the courts. Accepting that the prison was going to take a long time to develop, the Coalition turned its attention to the urgent need for a new remand centre, the need for a wider acceptance of alternatives to prison, and the development of services to support prisoners on their return to the community.

While these are not the only areas of concern to be addressed in the corrections system, ACTCOSS focused on these areas in its Budget submission. As a principle, ACTCOSS and the Coalition believe that early interventions services, drug counseling, mental health services and all other assistance for overcoming substance abuse or mental health problems that are available to community members should be made available to people in custody or under the supervision of the Corrections ACT.

But the first priority, before any services can be delivered, is to provide adequate accommodation for people on remand, and people returning to the community. In our Budget submission, ACTCOSS made the following urgent recommendations:

Recommendation 35: That the ACT Government include funds for site location and design for the proposed new remand centre in the 2003-04 Budget.

Recommendation 35(a): That the ACT Government provide funds for the re-opening and full-time operation of the Gunya House.

Recommendation 35(b): That the ACT Government look at providing more supported accommodation services in various Canberra suburbs for people who are caught up in the criminal justice system, to assist them to either remain in, or re-enter the ACT community.

Major initiatives

- The provision of \$310,000 for medical services to the medical unit at the temporary remand centre at Symonston is most welcome
- Deferral for one year of \$50 million planning provision to 2004-05 for new permanent remand facility in the ACT
- The provision of \$35,000 for an Indigenous visitor for the remand system
- \$200,000 for implementing Human Rights Legislation

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- Legal Aid Funding: This Budget indicates a decrease in funding by 6% in 03/04. This is inconsistent with the predicted level of service provision remaining constant while the average cost of finalised cases is set to rise from \$2500 per case in 02/03 to \$2600 in 03/04. The government has indicated a commitment to human rights, a most welcome initiative, but could be compromising access to justice issues which have the inevitable flow-on effect of reducing the rights of disadvantaged people
- Remand facilities: The deferment of funding for a new remand centre for another year (to 2004-05) is of concern given the condition of the facilities at the Belconnen Remand Centre and the Government's own statements about the temporary nature of the Symonston facility. Continuing with temporary measures leave critical issues unaddressed and unresolved. The number of remandees for the year is expected to rise by approximately ten percent (from an average of 70 to 76). At times the ACT has had as many as 90 people in remand on one night

Older Persons

Background

The ACT Government's Economic White Paper Discussion document mentions in passing that the ACT's population is ageing at a rate higher than the national average. In the ACT this presents a number of challenges, given that Canberra is a relatively young city that does not have a long history of aged care provision. Past trends have been for Canberra to have a small local population, with many people coming to work here and then retiring interstate.

One of the trends emerging in aged care in Canberra is the large population outside the ACT's borders that are serviced by Canberra-based health-care providers. For example, many people from the South Coast/Bateman's Bay area access specialist services in Canberra. As the region's major hospital, The Canberra Hospital also caters for the needs of an ageing population.

Acute health care is not the only service that will be impacted by an ageing population. There will be higher demand for ancillary services, better and more flexible housing options, more social outlets for people who have limited social supports, and transport and other services tailored to meet the needs of a diverse aged population.

The Council on the Ageing is in the best position to identify the trends and needs of Canberra's retirees and older residents. ACTCOSS has, however, called on the Government to publicise its plans to deal with Canberra's future demographics, and to ensure that targeted services are available that meet the special needs of people as they grow older.

Recommendation 22: That the Government outline its long term plans to meet the needs of an ageing population in terms of accommodation, adaptable housing, transport, HACC and SAAP services, and issues of access to affordable health care.

Recommendation 24: That the Government work with service providers in the community sector on providing targeted health services to address area of particular need, including young people, young people from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, people with drug dependency and people in older age groups.

Major initiatives

- The ACT Government has allocated an additional \$700,000 per annum for Home and Community Care (HACC) services, which will be matched by the Commonwealth Government – resulting in an over all increase of \$1.4 million per annum

- Approximately \$100,000 per annum for the next 4 years has been allocated to address elder abuse through strategies including a hotline service for reporting abuse, as well as information, education and training resources
- Approximately \$245,000 per annum has been allocated for increased electricity rebates to offset the impact of price increases directly attributable to full retail contestability
- An incentive will be provided to taxi operators in the form of a new 'lift fee' to encourage the operation of wheelchair accessible taxis (funding will be \$148,000 in 2003-04)
- The mobile library service will also receive \$160,000 for the purchase of specialist vehicles to improve accessibility for older people and people with a disability
- Capital works funding of \$5.2 million has been allocated for a sub and non-acute aged care facility

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- There is an urgent need for a comprehensive review of accommodation for older people, current and future needs are not being adequately assessed and catered for
- The Budget fails to address the need for a more strategic approach to ensuring that older people have access to affordable health care and appropriately targeted health care services
- The ACT Government needs to be examining strategies for supporting older workers

Gambling

Background

Along with other areas of addictive behavior, gambling has the potential to put individuals and families at risk of poverty. ACTCOSS believes a community perspective on the problems associated with gambling is needed to counter the perception that gambling problems aren't a major concern in Canberra.

Through its Gambling Reference Group, ACTCOSS provides a forum for discussion of problem gambling issues, and coordinates community input into gambling policy to ensure that harm minimisation is retained as a key philosophy.

ACTCOSS and the Gambling Reference Group are concerned that the income stream for Government from gambling sometimes dominates debate on gambling issues. Two studies were commissioned in 2000 by the Gambling and Racing Commission on the extent of gambling problems in the ACT and the level of services available for people with such problems. To date there has been no public response to these two documents, although the ACT Government has joined with the ANU to establish a Centre for Gambling Studies. ACTCOSS believes that the first step to reasonable public debate on the issues around problem gambling is a Government response to the initial research, and an outline of the agenda for the new Centre.

Recommendation 36: That the Gambling and Racing Commission produce an analysis of the two Australian Institute of Gambling Research papers on ACT gambling, including policy and program responses to overcome problem gambling in Canberra.

Major initiatives

- Increase in top marginal rate of gaming tax on gross turnover of \$50,000 for clubs

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- The only initiative outlined is a revenue measure. ACTCOSS is concerned that this further entrenches gambling revenue as a fundamental source of income for the ACT
- ACTCOSS is also concerned that the Gambling and Racing Commission's commitment to the Centre for Gambling Research is not spelled out

- It is not clear whether the increase to the top marginal rate of gaming tax on gross turnover of \$50,000 for clubs is for individual venues or for whole clubs. This needs clarification before implementation given relevant regulations and legislation

Transport

Background

Transport in Canberra continues to be dominated by privately owned and operated vehicles. The dominant paradigm still sees public transport as having, in the first instance, a commuter function, followed by an ancillary social function.

ACTCOSS was pleased that one of the first acts of the incoming ALP Government was to reintroduce the single fare zone system, which has seen an estimated eight per cent increase in patronage. ACTCOSS also agrees with the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission that fares should remain stable for the coming fare review period.

ACTCOSS would like to see some creativity applied in the way that the ACT public sector and Canberra residents think about transport. At the present time the ACTION Accessible Transport policy is under review. ACTCOSS believes that this initiative, the Taxi Transport Scheme and community transport providers need to work together to explore an expansion of the options available for people living with disadvantage in the ACT.

ACTCOSS also believes that long-term sustainability is an issue for Canberra's car-dependent economy. It would be prudent to spend more time and effort on promoting and making accessible alternatives to single car use now, to ensure that a legacy of fossil fuel dependency does not rob future generations of the opportunity to enjoy low cost transport in a pollution free environment.

Major initiatives/Positive Outcomes

- Introduction of a lift fee for wheelchair accessible taxis \$148,000
- Extension of bus services in Gunghalin \$700,000
- Sustainable transport strategy implementation \$90,000
- National travel behavior change program \$200,000 from 2004-05
- Computer aided dispatch for ACT Ambulance Service \$2.1 million capital funding
- National travel behavior change program
- Parking Space Levy
- Reform of taxi and hire car licenses

- Introduction of on-street pay parking in Barton (See Revenue section)
- Increased parking and traffic penalties (see Revenue section)
- Parking space levy – proposal for 2004/05 onwards (see Revenue section)

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- With the exception of the Gunghalin provision, there has not been enhancement of ACTION's ability to provide off-peak services of the frequency needed to attract the traveling public

Revenue, Finance and Public Administration

Background

With the release of the ACT Government's Economic White Paper discussion document, there is an expectation that the financial ship of state has been set on its course.

ACTCOSS still asserts that until the social plan and spatial plan are developed to a similar stage, it is impossible to determine what the future economic mix should be. ACTCOSS notes that the discussion paper does not address the need for, existence of or economic impact of social welfare and community services. In our estimation this is a grave omission, as any economic blueprint that does not factor in this significant Government activity runs the risk of being redundant.

That being the case, there are still some areas of revenue, public accountability and process that will enhance the public's understanding and acceptance of, as well as support for Government revenue raising. There are also some measures that ACTCOSS believes are under-utilised in the revenue mix, mainly involving taxes on capital, such as land-use taxes and payroll tax.

The Council made the following recommendations on process and taxation measures aimed at increasing financial accountability.

Recommendation 41: That the ACT Government not use any deficit in the 2003-04 Budget as a rationale to introduce severe cuts in the 2004-05 Budget for the sake of going to an election with a paper surplus.

Recommendation 42: That all monies raised to ensure timely and efficient recovery from the ACT fires be separately accounted for in their own statement.

Recommendation 43: That once insurance compensation payouts begin to flow to the ACT, this money be applied to community capacity building in recognition of the long-term effects of the fires on the wider ACT population.

Recommendation 44: That all new programs and funding initiatives are explained in terms of their funding sources, including any programs that have been wound-back, suffered reduced funding or abolished to pay for Budget initiatives.

Recommendation 45: That the analysis begun in 2000 by the ACT Treasury on the equity of ACT revenue raising measures be continued and that such analysis be presented on the ACT Government website.

Recommendation 46: That the ACT Government explore the potential for sustainability taxation measures to be introduced in the ACT.

Recommendation 47: That the ACT Government investigate the phased introduction of parking space levies, along similar lines to the New South Wales levy.

Recommendation 48: That the ACT Government look at applying land tax to all ACT residential properties, using a multiple of the average AUV for the whole of the ACT as a base.

Recommendation 50: That a statement of the costs incurred through concessions and rebates be included as part of the ACT's Budget.

Recommendation 51: That the payroll tax exemption threshold be set at a lower level, matching that of New South Wales and that the Government investigate the use of a sliding scale of payroll tax rates.

Recommendation 52: That all business assistance measures be identified in the Budget, and that plain English explanations of the quantum and expected benefits be provided. Annual reports should also provide analysis and reporting of the outcomes of such assistance.

Recommendation 53: That the Government use business assistance funds for the development of a new, centrally located and multi-function convention centre that facilitates community as well as private sector use.

Major initiatives

- Fire Reconstruction Levy: to produce \$5m p.a. for two years (03/04 & 04/05 – no details of methodology)
- Water Abstraction Charges – increase 03/04 from 10c to 20c per kilolitre then 04/05 to 25c per kilolitre – this is an overall water management initiative
- General Rates – The proposal is current rate plus CPI with the new proposal to be introduced in 04/05 – out years taxation income calculated on this basis
- Parking space levy - ACTCOSS is delighted that one of its suggested revenue measures put forward in its pre-Budget submission has been adopted

- A number of the new taxation measures have been aimed at large transactions and corporate activity. Some fees and fines have also been increased

Concerns/Unresolved Questions

- Fire Reconstruction Levy: Methodology detail is required. For instance, is it to be a fixed sum per rateable property (say \$200) or a percentage (say 1.5% of AUV). Flat rate charges are also inequitable for low income home owners. Does this levy apply to people who lost their homes in the fires?
- Water abstraction charge: There is no information on the granting of concessions to pensioners or low income earners. ACTCOSS is also concerned that there is no information on any Government plans to carry out public education campaigns on water saving, or provide any incentives for the adoption of water saving measures apart from the existing rebate
- General Rates: The underlying assumption is that AUVs will continue to increase annually
- The proposed new rating methodology will penalise residents that currently reside in suburbs with higher AUVs who need to move for financial or other considerations to more appropriate accommodation
- Flat rate increases in fees for Registrar General services and increases in parking and traffic infringements fines are of concern for people on low and fixed incomes. ACTCOSS supports the exploration of income-based fees and fines
- ACTCOSS repeats its call for a review of land taxes, with a view to better capitalising on the ACT's unique position as both the local and territory government. The current division of land rates and general rates is artificial and inefficient
- The value of some Community Service Obligations were reported: ACTCOSS would like to see this expanded to include the value of concessions
- \$250,000 in 2003-04 for design work on the new convention centre – the community sector anticipates a wide-ranging consultation that will include accessibility issues and measures to accommodate community groups
- See health – acute service section for concerns over interstate transfers for health services

- Losses from overseas investment of superannuation funds is inappropriately reported as a drain on the ACT Budget. ACTCOSS believes that the reporting of superannuation needs to be permanently changed in the Budget documents to become a separate statement, along similar lines to the statements from the Territory Owned Corporations