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**Viable Sector, Viable Services:  
ACTCOSS Submission to the  
2004-05 ACT Budget process.**

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**December 2003**

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## **Acknowledging Canberra's Traditional Owners**

ACTCOSS acknowledges that Canberra has been built on the lands of the Ngunnawal people. We pay our respects to their elders in recognition of the displacement and disadvantage they have suffered since European settlement and we celebrate their living culture and their valuable contribution to the ACT community. We believe that the ACT's 2004-05 Budget is an important tool in helping to achieve reconciliation and partnership with local Indigenous groups to ensure that a future Canberra does not continue or exacerbate disadvantage, but joins the celebration of Indigenous culture and contribution.

### ***Forward***

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for the ACT's not-for-profit community service organisations as well as consumers living with poverty and disadvantage. ACTCOSS this year celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> year since formation.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS network, made up of each of the State/Territory Councils and a national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS' principal objectives are the representation of people living with disadvantage (including poverty), the promotion of equitable social policy and the development of a well-resourced, cohesive and sustainable community sector.

Over the past few years it has become increasingly obvious that the community sector in the ACT is struggling to meet increasing demand for a range of services<sup>1</sup>. There is also increased recognition that people's needs are more complex than once thought, often requiring multi-disciplinary approaches and a variety of services.

Canberra also has distinct needs, as a city that has been populated by people from other places, where community and family networks are not always as strong as in other centres. This means that some services which could normally be provided by informal networks are provided by community service providers.

Feedback from the sector indicates that the long term viability and development of current capacity depends on adequate resourcing (including physical infrastructure), access to opportunities to expand or

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<sup>1</sup> The increased demand has been demonstrated in work done by the ACT Government, ACOSS and ACTCOSS, including the Addressing Disadvantage Reports and Australians Living on the Edge 4 & 5.

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deliver new services to meet diverse needs, and transparent Government policies that allow the community sector to plan for the long term.

Currently, it is understood that around 24,500 people are officially counted as living with poverty in Canberra<sup>2</sup>. There are approximately 70,000 people who are at risk of poverty because they are aged over 65<sup>3</sup> (27,456), are aged under 65 but have a disability<sup>4</sup> (39,000), or because they have a drug or alcohol problem that has required treatment<sup>5</sup> (2,743, not counting methadone maintenance patients). These figures do not include people with mental health problems that put them at risk of poverty. These figures possibly understate the amount of poverty in the community, given the high number of people whose problematic alcohol use puts them at risk of ill health and poverty<sup>6</sup> and the high costs of housing in the ACT which places a strain on low income households.

There are 12,200 public housing households, around 1,200 homeless people and about 7,500 households receiving Commonwealth rental assistance<sup>7</sup>. The number of single parent households has increased since the 1996 census to 12,494 single parent households and 25,516 single person households<sup>8</sup>. Both categories are classed as "at risk" by the Poverty Task Group's final report in December 2000<sup>9</sup>. Between August 2002 and January 2003, 4,541 people accessed emergency relief services in the ACT. Approximately 84% of these people (3,801) were on full Centrelink benefits.<sup>10</sup>

It is in the interests of these groups, and the services that work to meet their human service needs, that ACTCOSS presents its priorities for the 2004-05 Budget. Given that this process is happening five months before the Budget will be tabled in the Assembly, there may be additional points to be raised early in 2004. ACTCOSS will bring any changes in its priorities to the Government's attention as soon as practicable.

***All recommendations appear in the text bolded and sequentially numbered. Please note the numbering does not necessarily denote priority.***

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<sup>2</sup> Addressing Disadvantage in the ACT, Locating Poverty in the ACT; NATSEM, 2003, p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Addressing Disadvantage in the ACT, The Need for and Provision of Human Services in the ACT; AIHW, 2003, page ix.

<sup>4</sup> AIHW, op cit, page xii.

<sup>5</sup> AIHW, op cit, pp. xiii-ix.

<sup>6</sup> AIHW, op cit, page xiii.

<sup>7</sup> "Rent Assistance: Does it deliver affordability?", ACOSS-National Shelter, 2003, Figure 8, page 13.

<sup>8</sup>

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs%40census.nsf/4079a1bbd2a04b80ca256b9d00208f92/500602ae851edf97ca256bbf0001c9ed!OpenDocument>, section on Family Composition.

<sup>9</sup> "Building the Profile", ACT Poverty Task Group, NATSEM research paper, December 2000, pp 11-15.

<sup>10</sup> Commonwealth Emergency Relief Program ACT: Funds Distribution and Utilisation Report II, FACS May 2003, Page 9

## **Executive Summary**

The first term of the Stanhope Government in the ACT has been a busy time for the community sector. As outlined in this submission, there have been a number of extensive reviews to inform the Government's policy development processes.

ACTCOSS acknowledges this move to evidence-based policy. Part of the rationale for improving the community sector's IT capacity and skills base is to ensure that there is adequate and informative data collection to assist the sector in its dealings with Government.

The 2004-05 ACTCOSS Budget submission is, likewise, drawn from the evidence of the sector. Within the 44 recommendations are suggestions that cover:

- the way Government communicates with the sector,
- enhancements of existing Government processes and programs,
- new policies and
- unmet need.

All the recommendations have been informed by ACTCOSS' policy and sector development work over the past 18 months.

### **Housing**

The most pressing need within the Canberra community continues to be secure, affordable, appropriately located housing. ACTCOSS and the sector recognise that the Government has made a major commitment to addressing homelessness and housing disadvantage. But there is more to be done, given the extent of the affordable housing crisis in the ACT.

ACTCOSS is calling for a return to pre-1995 public housing stock levels, as well as supplementary programs to assist people living with disadvantage to maintain tenancies at risk. (Recs. 20 & 23) There is also community support for the implementation of some of the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force. (Rec. 21)

### **Community Sector Viability**

Of equal importance is the ability of the community services sector to continue to deliver high quality services to people experiencing poverty or disadvantage. ACTCOSS has therefore made community sector viability another high priority. While not involved with direct service delivery, ensuring a well-resourced, skilled and appropriately remunerated workforce ensures that quality standards can be maintained, and that services can meet the needs of people within the community. (Recs 1-3, as well as 4-10 and 38).

## **Mental Health**

Through its work in supporting the formation of a mental health peak organisation, the Mental Health Community Coalition, and its work with the Mental Health Consumer's Network, ACTCOSS continues to see shortcomings in the treatment and care of people with mental health problems. Research into mental health and emerging trends show that Australia has not devoted adequate resources to assisting people with mental health problems, either transient or chronic. While the ACT Government has provided increased resources in the 2003-04 Budget, there is continued concern that both community-based and acute services are still not meeting the current demand.

ACTCOSS believes the Government's sincerity in its stated aim of helping the most vulnerable in our society. The Council is looking to the 2004-05 ACT Budget to have this belief confirmed, recommending a renewed effort on behalf of people who experience mental health problems. (Recs. 15 & 16)

## **Reconciliation**

ACTCOSS urges the Government to commit itself to Reconciliation with our Indigenous communities and specific actions to address historical injustices and present day inequities affecting Indigenous people living in the ACT.

ACTCOSS acknowledges there is a growing need for a wide variety of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT in terms of health, drug and alcohol abuse or misuse, housing, mental health, violence and any number of remedial services, however the proper place for discussion of those services is between the Government and Indigenous service providers and community members.

ACTCOSS also draws attention to the pressing need for land and facilities for Indigenous groups to celebrate their culture and undertake social and community activities. We support the need for community-based services to meet Indigenous welfare and health needs, but underlying all requests by Indigenous groups for services over the years has been a call for recognition of culture and of land rights. In the ACT, this recognition should be backed by land grants and grants for development of facilities, within a framework which respects autonomy in Indigenous decision-making.

Recommendations 11, 12 and 13 address issues that ACTCOSS believes will place celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture at the centre of ACT community life. From that base of recognition of culture, we hope that reconciliation and healing will develop.

## **ACTCOSS submission to the 2004-05 ACT Budget**

ACTCOSS has had to look closely at its work to determine the priorities for its 2004-05 Budget submission. While some recommendations have been highlighted as needing the Government's most urgent attention and funding, ACTCOSS cannot ignore other needs within the sector.

ACTCOSS urges the Government to listen to, and adopt, the recommendations of the various organisations representing those groups that continue to suffer disadvantage because of gender, ethnicity, age, disability or other forms of discrimination. The Compact and the Consultation Protocol provide the basis for negotiations to bring about improved services.

ACTCOSS regards its annual budget submission as part of its partnership agreement with the ACT Government under the Compact. We appreciate the opportunity to put forward the issues which the sector has identified as important in its continuing efforts to assist those living with poverty and disadvantage.

## Recommendations.

The following recommendations address specific issues ACTCOSS wishes to see addressed in the 2004-05 ACT Budget.

1. That the ACT Government immediately enter into negotiations with community sector agencies to arrive at a funding policy that adequately pays community service providers for the real costs of providing their services, in line with the pre-election commitment made by Labor in 2001..... 18
  2. ACTCOSS calls on the Government to support a certified agreement for the sector, and to provide contingency funds within the 2004-05 Budget to allow for increases under such an agreement. .... 19
  3. That the Government commit to providing automatic funding of safety net increases in community sector awards. .... 19
  4. That the ACT Government allocate sufficient funds in the 2004-05 Budget to ensure that the restructuring of the ACT's statutory oversight and community advocacy services is achieved without disruption. ACTCOSS also recommends that there be an increase in funding for community-based advocacy services. .... 19
  5. That the Government establish a capacity building fund for the community sector, including specific funding for innovation, research and development. .... 20
  6. That the ACT Government investigate the opportunities for extending their software licences to allow community organisations to obtain access to cheaper software upgrades. .... 20
  7. That the ACT Government adopt a uniform asset management strategy for its built assets, including the appropriate industry standards for asset maintenance and upgrading. .... 20
  8. That the ACT Government established a Community Sector Small Capital Works Grants Program to assist community organisations to access funds for minor works. .... 20
  9. That the ACT Government continue to allocate funding for fire recovery services in the community sector to assist with the long term psychological, physical and emotional trauma caused by the firestorm.  
21
  10. That the ACT Government provide funds and expert assistance to community services to develop emergency plans for each service, and to allow the community sector to develop a coordinated, industry-wide emergency plan that links to the Government's Territory-wide plan. ... 21
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture..... 21*
11. That the ACT Government commence allocating land and facilities to Indigenous groups for the purpose of developing cultural and recreational centres across Canberra that meet the needs of the ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. .... 22

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12. That the ACT Government work with the Ngunnawal Elders to find an appropriate location in the ACT for a healing place, and provide funding to run the program. ....	22
13. That the ACT Government ensure all ACT public sector employees, Assembly staff and MLA's undertake Indigenous cultural awareness training as a way of informing decision making on Indigenous issues. .	22
<i>Corrections</i> .....	23
14. That the Government continue to fund innovation and flexibility in the justice system to allow the maximum use of alternatives to prison sentences in the ACT, particularly for women. ....	23
<i>Mental Health</i> .....	23
15. That the ACT Government provide a wider variety of mental health facilities and services to deal with the diversity of mental health concerns and treatment options. These issues have been canvassed in detail with the various mental health consumer and peak groups over the past few years and ACTCOSS calls on the Government to now carry through on those consultations and reviews. ....	24
16. That the ACT Government provide additional funding to the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT at a level that will allow adequate administrative, IT support and networking to ensure a viable peak body. ....	25
<i>Human Rights</i> .....	25
17. That the Government implement a wide-reaching, community-based education campaign to ensure that all Canberrans are aware of the new Human Rights Act, its uses and implications. ....	25
18. That the Government allocate funds for potential legal challenges to the Human Rights Act.....	25
19. That the Government recognise the need for specific services that address the different needs of: .....	27
Women; .....	27
people with disabilities; .....	27
young people; .....	27
older persons; .....	27
people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (DCALB); ..	27
people who are homosexual; bisexual; transgender or intersex; ...	27
survivors of torture and trauma; and .....	27
people returning from incarceration .....	27
and that these services be available across the ACT to ensure accessibility for all potential consumers. ....	27
<i>Alleviating homelessness and housing stress</i> .....	27

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20. That the ACT Government commit to invest in more social housing for the ACT, including using the budget surplus to increase the public housing stock to pre-1995 levels. ....	28
21. That in the short term, the ACT investigate temporary leasing of accommodation by ACT Housing as a way to increase the available stock.28	
22. That the ACT Government implement the key planning recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force in consultation with the relevant sector interest groups. The Compact provides the framework for such discussions. ....	28
<i>Homelessness and the justice system.....</i>	<i>28</i>
23. That the ACT Government provide funds to Corrections ACT to re-establish supported accommodation for people who have been involved in the justice system, and who would have to remain in a remand centre or jail because of a lack of accommodation support in the community. 29	
<i>Support for tenants with complex needs. ....</i>	<i>29</i>
24. That the ACT Government continue to build support for residential tenancies by investing in a wide range of accommodation models and increase the range and adequacy of services that assist more vulnerable tenants to access suitable accommodation, and to maintain tenancies through education and compassionate policies. ....	30
<i>Poverty and sustainability.....</i>	<i>30</i>
25. That the ACT Government provide additional financial resources to the partners in the WEST scheme to allow this program to be extended to more households. ....	31
26. That the Government provide additional funding to ACT Housing to conduct retrofitting of energy and water saving measures in all ACT housing properties, starting with the houses and apartments of tenants who are on rental rebate, or who are known to have a disability.....	31
<i>Concessions and Community Service Obligations (CSOs) .....</i>	<i>31</i>
27. That the Government finalise its review of concessions and CSOs as a matter of urgency, providing up to date information in one publication and via a single page on its website. Community education should be part of the implementation plan. ....	31
<i>Employment disadvantage.....</i>	<i>31</i>
28. ACTCOSS reiterates its call for the ACT Government to examine the local causes of long term unemployment and underemployment, and to implement programs that will assist people to make the transition to meaningful, adequately paid work.....	32
<i>Presentation of budget information .....</i>	<i>32</i>

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29. That the Government ensure that it provides useful, comparable information in its discussions on budget measures, including the provision of a service by service breakdown of the value of concessions and rebates within each portfolio area. ....	33
<i>Reviewing opportunities for increased efficiency in taxation</i> .....	33
30. That the ACT Government examine the opportunities and/or efficiencies presented by the hybrid state/local government model in collection of land based revenue. ....	34
<i>The use of windfall gains</i> .....	35
31. That the Government look to use windfall gains, such as the recent increases in stamp duties and other land based taxes, to support infrastructure development, including such things as improved community sector facilities, Indigenous land and facilities, public housing, and increased mental health facilities, in line with recommendations 7, 8, 11, 15 and 20. ....	35
<i>Gambling</i> .....	35
32. That the Government move away from imposing higher taxes on gambling and to ensure the mandatory code of conduct is enforced to minimise the harm done by gambling. ....	36
33. That the Government allocate a significant increase in funds for community-based programs addressing problem gambling and provide funding for research into the causes of problem gambling and its social, health and financial effects. ....	36
<i>Direct support for businesses in the ACT</i> .....	36
34. That the Government inform the community on the nature and extent of business support it proposes to distribute in the 2004-05 Budget, and to incorporate social reporting by recipients as a requirement of all Government grants to business.....	37
<i>Cross border costs and benefits</i> .....	37
35. That the Government and its agencies establish a forum for examining cross border issues in health, children's services, mental health, education, commercial trade and other services to allow for negotiation of cross border agreements to overcome problems in service delivery.....	37
<i>Funding more holistic service provision</i> .....	37
36. That the Government review the positive results of the Turnaround program and the Fires Recovery Centre to deliver more flexible, holistic services that capitalise on the advantages of Government-community sector partnerships. ....	38

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37. That the Government provide an outline in the Budget of how these reviews and inquiries have informed decision making processes, and how the recommendations of the various inquiries and reviews will be carried forward to implementation. ....	39
<i>Health</i> .....	39
38. That the Government actively pursue projects that will reduce the pressure on the acute care health system, by providing for adequate aged care, transitional and sub-acute/non-acute beds in appropriate locations across the ACT. ....	41
<i>Supporting aged care</i> .....	41
39. That the ACT Government enter into discussions with the aged care sector on the issue of retention of staff with the purpose of developing a plan to attract more workers into the sector.....	41
<i>Young people with a disability – accommodation options</i> .....	41
40. That more funds be allocated to providing younger people with severe disabilities with a range of accommodation options, enabling them to avoid being housed in inappropriate settings. ....	41
<i>Accessibility</i> .....	41
41. That the Government develop guidelines on improving communications and supports for people with disabilities to facilitate their equitable access to services and participation in community life. .	42
<i>Respite</i> .....	42
42. That the ACT Government announce its response to the consultant’s report on respite services, and that it allocate funding in the 2004-05 Budget to increase the capacity of respite services to meet the need. 42	
<i>Primary health care services</i> .....	43
43. That the Government continue to explore ways to ensure that provision of GP services in Canberra is adequate, for both daytime and after-hours services. ....	43
44. That the Government look at the provision of more services in public clinic settings, including services that meet the needs of groups that suffer particular disadvantage in accessing health services. These services need to be developed with the cooperation and support of the various special interest groups concerned. ....	44
45. That the Government commence consultations on the public health program early in the new year, to ensure that the wide range of consumers and service organisations can provide input to the program that will operate from July 2004. ....	44



## ***ACTCOSS' Objectives and their relationship to the 2004-05 ACT Budget submission.***

The ACT Council of Social Service reviewed its Strategic Plan in 2003, setting the agenda for the Council's work for the next two years. The first two principles of that Plan and their correlated actions are listed below<sup>11</sup>.

### **1. Socially Just and Sustainable ACT Community**

- 1.1. Extend community recognition of the rights, entitlements and needs of people living with disadvantage in the ACT;*
- 1.2. Advocate for resources for people living with disadvantage – in particular housing;*
- 1.3. Advocate for sound and transparent governance in the ACT and the appropriate division of responsibilities within society; and*
- 1.4. Promote the health and wellbeing of people and communities who are disadvantaged.*

### **2. Dynamic, Cohesive and Sustainable Community Sector**

- 2.1. Advocate for a well-resourced and respected community sector;*
- 2.2. Support learning, sharing and development in the community sector; and*
- 2.3. Support and strengthen the capacity of the community sector to provide high quality services.*

ACTCOSS is committed to the development and maintenance of a fair and equitable society. We see the creation of a more viable and sustainable ACT community sector as fundamental to this commitment. The ACT Government has made a similar commitment: to work for a community that is inclusive, cohesive, fair, tolerant, committed to protecting the vulnerable and supporting people in need, as well as resourcing children to reach their potential<sup>12</sup>. ACTCOSS wants to see the Government's commitment to a socially just and equitable Canberra expressed in its Budget statements, with recognition that those community members who experience poverty and disadvantage need the most support.

Community sector development activities that address the ACTCOSS Strategic Plan points 2.2 and 2.3 are core business for ACTCOSS, and are not the subject of this submission. We acknowledge that the Government provides ongoing funds and specific contracts for services that fall within these priorities.

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.actcoss.org.au/policyAdvocacy/documents/startplan\\_online03-05.PDF](http://www.actcoss.org.au/policyAdvocacy/documents/startplan_online03-05.PDF)

<sup>12</sup> "Towards the Canberra Social Plan", Chief Minister's Department, 2003. page v, the Government's vision.

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ACTCOSS, however, will advocate for community sector development resourcing by Government in the 2004-05 ACT Budget to ensure that there is adequate skills development, crisis response capability and capacity building within the sector.

It is of increasing concern within the human services sector that demand is outstripping the ability to supply services. As demonstrated by the "Addressing Disadvantage"<sup>13</sup> and "Australians Living on the Edge"<sup>14</sup> studies, there are unacceptable numbers of people unable to obtain a service that they need, and increasing strain on organisations in the sector. This increased strain has led to concerns about the viability of the sector.

As is evident in our Strategic Plan, ACTCOSS' first priority is people living with disadvantage and poverty. ACTCOSS' experience demonstrates, however, that to assist people living with disadvantage and poverty you need a viable and robust community services sector. ACTCOSS therefore believes that in terms of ACT Government budgetary priorities, it is essential that the relationship between the funding bodies (that is, government departments and agencies) and sector organisations is developed, and that the sector is adequately resourced to provide services that meet community need. ACTCOSS therefore believes that sector viability issues need to be addressed as a priority in the 2004-05 ACT Budget.

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<sup>13</sup> ACTCOSS consultations with non-Government organisations, pp. 4-7 and Summary Report, page 13.

<sup>14</sup> ACT data: Key findings, page 2.

## **Addressing Poverty and Disadvantage in the Budget**

ACTCOSS has structured its 2004-05 Budget submission in line with the organisation's strategic aims of working for a dynamic, cohesive and sustainable community sector and ensuring a socially just and sustainable ACT community.

### ***A Dynamic, Cohesive and Sustainable Community Sector***

*Advocate for a well-resourced and respected community sector.*

ACTCOSS has long argued for improved community services funding principles. These must be agreed, and include the adequate payment of staff, investment in training and equipment upgrades, increased skilling of staff (particularly in the areas of contracts), support for quality standards, volunteer management and training, data collection, financial reporting and insurance. There is also a need to recognise that reporting to Government, taking part in consultation processes, compliance and accreditation processes are time intensive, and that staff and volunteers need time and training to undertake these activities.

An additional stressor for community service providers is the need to internalise externally driven costs. The insurance crisis of the past 18 months has shown that costs can rise dramatically, despite the sector's good claims record and risk management strategies. Similarly, utilities, rent costs in the commercial sector, maintenance, emergencies and IT support price increases can all have an impact on an organisation's financial situation. The need to factor in such externally-driven rises must be factored into any future funding arrangements.

The corollary to adequate funding of service provision is to ensure that services are adequately staffed to carry out their roles in the community. Not providing adequate staff levels can lead to increased workplace stress and burnout. It also means that consumers may be unable to access an appropriate level of service.

Additionally, there needs to be more consistency across government departments in terms of the levels of payment for service provision. In the same way that indexation, before the last budget, was decided on a department by department basis, there is no agreed model of costing to allow for transparency in payments. ACTCOSS believes a good model for the agreed levels of payments is the approach taken to indexation in the 2003-04 Budget.

The sector wants to see more clarity and information on application

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processes for grant moneys. There are concerns within the sector on the range of grants and how they are divided up. The sector has identified with ACTCOSS a need for advice on making applications and better set out criteria, as often organisations put effort into making applications to find their requests may not be deemed to fit within guidelines. This affects the efficiency of organisations, particularly smaller volunteer-based groups.

Organisations that have been adversely affected by the Government's Charitable Collections Act must be supported to comply with the Act, or provision made to compensate them for their losses. ACTCOSS welcomes the ACT Government's first step in this direction by providing expert advice to community groups to understand their obligations under the new Act.

In the lead up to the 2001 ACT election the ALP made a promise to ensure that providers would be paid the full cost of delivering services<sup>15</sup>. The community sector is still waiting to find out how the Government will fulfil that promise.

All of these issues need to be addressed in terms of forming partnerships to help address disadvantage. Service providers deserve and command respect for the work they do and the management and leadership that they constantly display. ACTCOSS believes that the *Compact* must be more widely spread (or distributed) among funding bodies and service providers to ensure that the relationship develops more hallmarks of a partnership.

ACTCOSS has already raised these and other issues in its paper on sector viability<sup>16</sup> as well as in the ongoing review of service funding<sup>17</sup>.

- 1. That the ACT Government immediately enter into negotiations with community sector agencies to arrive at a funding policy that adequately pays community service providers for the real costs of providing their services, in line with the pre-election commitment made by Labor in 2001.**

ACTCOSS believes the community sector needs some form of certified agreement, to enable it to move to a more mature relationship with its funding bodies. This would hopefully remove the continuing uncertainty for government funded community services, putting them on a par with other contracted services, such as those covered by the Appropriation Bill No. 2 2003.

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<sup>15</sup> Bill Wood, "Poverty and Disadvantage: How Services Should be Delivered", April 2001. Speech.

<sup>16</sup> "Community Sector Viability in the ACT: an issues paper" ACTCOSS, September 2003.

<sup>17</sup> "Submission on the New ACT Service Funding Policy", ACTCOSS, May 2003.

- 2. ACTCOSS calls on the Government to support a certified agreement for the sector, and to provide contingency funds within the 2004-05 Budget to allow for increases under such an agreement.**

In the absence of a certified agreement, ACTCOSS is calling on the Government to guarantee an automatic flow-on of safety net increases in community sector awards.

- 3. That the Government commit to providing automatic funding of safety net increases in community sector awards.**

The past few years have highlighted the need within Government and the community services sector for a robust and accountable complaints mechanism. ACTCOSS understands that the FEMAG consultancy has now reported to the Government on the review of statutory oversight and community advocacy bodies, and that this report indicates a need for a consolidation and expansion of existing advocacy services. ACTCOSS would also like to see an increase in advocacy services within the sector. It is imperative that the costs of making changes to the complaints and advocacy processes are adequately funded, particularly during the transition period.

- 4. That the ACT Government allocate sufficient funds in the 2004-05 Budget to ensure that the restructuring of the ACT's statutory oversight and community advocacy services is achieved without disruption. ACTCOSS also recommends that there be an increase in funding for community-based advocacy services.**

Innovation and progress are hallmarks of the sector, but often only in terms of stretching resources to ensure consumers get a service when there are few or no resources left to provide that service. A research and development plan for community services, coupled with a development fund, would allow services to develop and trial innovative programs, and share that knowledge.

The community sector also needs a capacity development fund to facilitate the development of partnerships and networks that may allow some pooling or sharing of resources, particularly in the area of IT, bookkeeping and insurance. An IT audit of organisations funded by the former Department of Education and Community Services stated that, in regard to the community sector, "It is difficult to nominate any other industry sector that has demonstrated a comparable resourcefulness in adopting IT."<sup>18</sup> This capacity and potential should be supported.

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<sup>18</sup> Burkey, D.D. and Monaghan, T. "The use of information technology by DECS-funded organisations", CASE, ACT, December 2001.

- 5. That the Government establish a capacity building fund for the community sector, including specific funding for innovation, research and development.**

Despite this increased and resourceful use of technology and computers to improve efficiency, feedback suggests that many organisations are unable to afford upgrades when software developers do not support older versions of their products. One way to overcome this is for the Government to investigate extending its software licences to include community organisations.

- 6. That the ACT Government investigate the opportunities for extending their software licences to allow community organisations to obtain access to cheaper software upgrades.**

ACTCOSS will continue to advocate for a Government-wide consistent approach to built-assets management that will lead to improvements in the physical conditions in which many community sector services are delivered and their staff work. The condition of many community sector buildings is below acceptable Occupational Health and Safety standards. Some are purpose built and well maintained, but this should be the standard. ACTCOSS believes that a centralised asset management strategy, funded to provide industry-standard levels of maintenance and refurbishment, would greatly improve the situation.

- 7. That the ACT Government adopt a uniform asset management strategy for its built assets, including the appropriate industry standards for asset maintenance and upgrading.**

In addition to a centralised asset management strategy, ACTCOSS urges the Government to create a small capital works grants program, which would allow community organisations in all forms of accommodation to modify their premises to meet the needs of their consumers. Such works could cover ramps, handrails, appropriate lighting and security for services that need to be open at night or office fit outs when moving to new premises.

- 8. That the ACT Government established a Community Sector Small Capital Works Grants Program to assist community organisations to access funds for minor works.**

The community sector is also looking to the Government to remove some of the anomalies created by the varying treatment it received after the January fires. There are two emerging issues for the sector as the community resumes some normalcy. The first is the need to recognise the

ongoing trauma caused by the fires that may not manifest itself for some time yet. Community service providers need access to funds that recognise the longer term financial, mental health, and other related problems that emerge over the next few years. This will be particularly evident if Canberra remains in drought conditions and experiences another hot summer, heightening anxiety within the community in general.

The second point is crucial, not only for the sector but for future ACT emergency management plans. The community sector is wide and diverse, and has shown by its response to the fires crisis that it can be mobilised and effective, even when faced with loss of its accommodation. It is in the interests of the individual groups, the sector and the Government that emergency plans be developed by all community services. There should also be a sector-wide emergency coordination plan as well, to ensure an effective response.

ACTCOSS' experience after the fires has shown that the community has appreciated the recovery centre model, and will be looking for a similar model to coordinate the response to any future emergency. ACTCOSS prepared an issues paper on the community sector's experience in responding to the fires, which has been forwarded to Government<sup>19</sup>.

9. **That the ACT Government continue to allocate funding for fire recovery services in the community sector to assist with the long term psychological, physical and emotional trauma caused by the firestorm.**
10. **That the ACT Government provide funds and expert assistance to community services to develop emergency plans for each service, and to allow the community sector to develop a coordinated, industry-wide emergency plan that links to the Government's Territory-wide plan.**

### ***A Socially Just and Sustainable ACT Community***

*Extend community recognition of the rights, entitlements and needs of people living with disadvantage in the ACT.*

#### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture**

The ACT Government recognises the importance of local Indigenous culture in its dealings with the ACT community, particularly by its recognition that the Canberra stands on the lands of the Ngunnawal.

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<sup>19</sup> ACTCOSS. "Lessons learnt from the ACT fires: an issues paper", September 2003.

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ACTCOSS joins the Government in that recognition, and believes more needs to be done to recognise and promote Indigenous culture.

In the past successive Governments have allocated land and resources to cultural and religious groups to allow them to provide a cultural meeting place and recreational facilities. These groups have not been isolated or confined to one location, but often have presences across Canberra's suburbs. ACTCOSS believes it is time to recognise the unique cultural identity of local Indigenous groups by allocating land and facilities to provide community connection through the celebration of culture, social, recreational and sporting activities, as well as commercial ventures.

**11. That the ACT Government commence allocating land and facilities to Indigenous groups for the purpose of developing cultural and recreational centres across Canberra that meet the needs of the ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.**

There is also a need to find better ways to help overcome the centuries of disadvantage that is resulting in social isolation, violence, drug and alcohol abuse within Indigenous communities. Canberra is not immune from the social dislocation resulting from the policies of the past, nor can policy makers hope to develop programs to overcome health and social problems without adopting more holistic methods of healing past wounds.

Funding new and creative projects, such as the Ngunnawal Elder's proposal for an Indigenous "health farm", would provide an innovative health and social interaction program, strengthening the whole community. Such programs, where they have operated interstate, have shown direct, quantifiable benefits for the whole society, and ACTCOSS strongly supports the Ngunnawal Elders' proposal.

**12. That the ACT Government work with the Ngunnawal Elders to find an appropriate location in the ACT for a healing place, and provide funding to run the program.**

ACTCOSS also believes that understanding of Indigenous culture is the only way to progress reconciliation and meaningful discussion on policies that affect people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. Issues of culture, place and background must be understood by those in positions of authority to ensure that policy decisions are appropriate, and have a chance of working for the good of the community.

**13. That the ACT Government ensure all ACT public sector employees, Assembly staff and MLA's undertake Indigenous cultural**

**awareness training as a way of informing decision making on Indigenous issues.**

**Corrections**

ACTCOSS applauds the Government for taking a responsible position on the need to provide custodial services in the ACT. This does not mean that we want to see the jail quickly filled to capacity with convicted offenders and people on remand. ACTCOSS calls on the Government to ensure that rigorous application of diversionary programs and alternatives to custodial sentences will continue, and is heartened by the release of the restorative justice paper by the Government's sentencing review committee. Evidence is mounting that keeping people out of the jail system where possible has a better chance of preventing recidivism.<sup>20</sup>

ACTCOSS also believes that increased use of alternatives to prison for women will become more important as the ACT moves towards building and operating its own prison.

**Comment [A1]:** Are there any plans to establish appropriate spaces for women – as you know this is very complicated and there should be some commitment to government to fund appropriate correction facilities for women that are not within male facilities or treat women in the same way as male offenders

- 14. That the Government continue to fund innovation and flexibility in the justice system to allow the maximum use of alternatives to prison sentences in the ACT, particularly for women.**

**Mental Health**

It is clear from figures on the mental and general health of people in custody that people with mental health problems, drug dependency or co-morbidity make up a large percentage of offenders<sup>21</sup>. ACTCOSS is calling for improvement and expansion of mental health facilities, therefore, to ensure that people with mental health, drug dependency or co-morbidity problems that come before the courts are able to be assisted outside the prison system. ACTCOSS is encouraged by the commitment of the Government and ACT Corrections to tackling these issues, and will provide further comment during the public consultation phase of the prison project.

There are concerns within the community sector that the Government believes that the historical under funding of mental health services has

<sup>20</sup> Work by Professor John Braithwaite and the ANU, along with several publications by the Australian Institute of Criminology support this general view. See, for example, Braithwaite, John Bradford, "In Search of Restorative Jurisprudence" (September 2002), at "<http://ssrn.com/abstract=330989>" and Braithwaite, John Bradford, "What's Wrong with the Sociology of Punishment" at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=319602>, as well as several papers on the Institute of Criminology website: <http://www.aic.gov.au/>

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.mhcc.org.au/factsheets/factsheet1\\_Criminal\\_justice.htm](http://www.mhcc.org.au/factsheets/factsheet1_Criminal_justice.htm) and [www.crcjs.org.au/stats.htm](http://www.crcjs.org.au/stats.htm), 2001 Prison Statistics for New South Wales

been remedied. While the ACT has moved to increase funding, research shows that Australia is behind world averages in providing mental health services. It would be completely inappropriate to consider recent gains in the ACT as meeting all outstanding needs<sup>22</sup>.

ACTCOSS welcomes the \$180,000 provided to Innana to provide increased outreach services and additional respite and supported accommodation beds for women experiencing distress. However, there needs to be an evaluation of community-based mental health services to ensure that funding is adequate to deliver the required services. There is an urgent need for youth-specific services that recognise the vulnerable position of young people with mental health problems. There is a particular need to ensure that young people experiencing a mental health crisis have a secure, appropriate facility that can meet their needs without exposing them to trauma.

The Mental Health Tribunal has echoed the concerns of ACTCOSS on the lack of a secure forensic mental health facility<sup>23</sup>. There is also concern among the members of the Mental Health Provider Network (facilitated by ACTCOSS) that the proposed refurbishment of the Psychiatric Services Unit (PSU) at Canberra Hospital may not resolve the problems experienced at the PSU. The Government needs to consult with these and other bodies to ensure the best outcomes for people suffering mental health crises and ongoing chronic mental illness. Recent consultations in the development of the Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan (2003) indicate that the lack of available beds may be placing additional strain on the system and leading to poor outcomes for mental health consumers by encouraging short, cyclical visits to the PSU. A number of reviews of the PSU have failed to improve outcomes for ACT residents who experience severe mental illness and distress.

ACTCOSS also notes the Mental Health Tribunal's reporting of an increase in calls for psychiatric reports by the Children's Court, which supports the Youth Coalition of the ACT's call for a psychiatric facility that caters for young people experiencing mental health problems.

**15. That the ACT Government provide a wider variety of mental health facilities and services to deal with the diversity of mental health concerns and treatment options. These issues have been canvassed in detail with the various mental health consumer and peak groups over the past few years and ACTCOSS calls on the**

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<sup>22</sup> ACTCOSS recognizes that the ACT has increased its spending in the area of mental health. But the Council believes that such an increase, and the information included in the AIHW report for the Addressing Disadvantage project, neglects the fact that overall Australia is not providing mental health services at an appropriate level. See "Out of Hospital, Out of Mind", Mental Health Council of Australia, April 2003.

<sup>23</sup> Mental Health Tribunal Annual Report, 2002-03. page 318-9.

**Government to now carry through on those consultations and reviews.**

ACTCOSS would also like to see the Government extend its commitment to the new Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT. The initial year's funding of \$20,000 will not allow this new group to fully establish itself or develop appropriate networks. Particularly in the early days of establishment, there is a need for a high level of activity that is currently under funded.

- 16. That the ACT Government provide additional funding to the Mental Health Community Coalition of the ACT at a level that will allow adequate administrative, IT support and networking to ensure a viable peak body.**

### **Human Rights**

ACTCOSS would like to see the Government commit funding to education during the introduction phase of the proposed Human Rights Act. This organisation believes one of the important systemic ways to combat poverty is the introduction and resourcing of a bill of rights. ACTCOSS also believes the social plan cannot succeed if it is not based on social justice and articulated rights. Funding for the education campaign needs to include the non-government sector, to allow for community engagement with, and support for, the Human Rights Act.

- 17. That the Government implement a wide-reaching, community-based education campaign to ensure that all Canberrans are aware of the new Human Rights Act, its uses and implications.**

Given that the ACT Government has now decided to implement a restricted Human Rights Act, it is important that court-based tests of that legislation's validity are anticipated and funded. While ACTCOSS does not believe that the proposed Act goes far enough, in that it will not protect social, economic and cultural rights, the gains made by the proposed Bill must not be lost because of challenges, including potential challenges at the Federal level.

- 18. That the Government allocate funds for potential legal challenges to the Human Rights Act.**

### ***Discussion: Meeting specific needs.***

ACTCOSS has had many discussions with organisations representing those groups within the community that are recognised as having particular

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needs that cannot be met by mainstream services alone. These groups include women, people with disabilities, young people, older persons, people from diverse cultural and linguistically background (DCALB), and people who are homosexual, bisexual, transgender or intersex. ACTCOSS would also like to add men (specifically in terms of health and homelessness), survivors of torture and trauma, and people returning from incarceration to this list.

Many of these groups have organisations that will make budget submissions on behalf of their communities. ACTCOSS believes that the disadvantage that all of these groups experience in accessing services, maintaining adequate health, and participating and contributing to their communities must be addressed to achieve the Government's goal of a fair and inclusive society. There is also a need to ensure that these groups can access all basic services accepted by everyone as required for a healthy and fulfilling life. Neglecting these groups' needs results in higher costs due to alienation, poor health outcomes, and the loss of their contribution to a fair and just society.

The "Addressing Disadvantage in the ACT" report on Locating Poverty in the ACT<sup>24</sup>, NATSEM found that poverty is experienced across the ACT and is not concentrated in any particular suburbs. Similarly, people from particular groups that suffer disadvantage will be found throughout the Territory.

ACTCOSS welcomes the Government's commitments to these groups in its various pronouncements. This organisation urges the Government to go further and to genuinely consult with services representing these groups, including the Council on the Aging and the Youth Coalition of the ACT to mention two, to ensure that the Government is resourcing specific and innovative services that meet the needs of the people they seek to assist. The Government must also resource the implementation of these services, not simply providing a small, token gesture that is not supported to produce longer term results.

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<sup>24</sup> ACT Government, NATSEM report for the Project: page 15.

**19. That the Government recognise the need for specific services that address the different needs of:**

- **Women;**
- **people with disabilities;**
- **young people;**
- **older persons;**
- **people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (DCALB);**
- **people who are homosexual; bisexual; transgender or intersex;**
- **survivors of torture and trauma; and**
- **people returning from incarceration**

**and that these services be available across the ACT to ensure accessibility for all potential consumers.**

***Advocate for resources for people living with disadvantage – in particular housing.***

***Alleviating homelessness and housing stress***

The Government has committed \$13 million dollars over 4 years to a homelessness strategy. The commitment of \$2.7 million in 2003-04 with a further \$10 million over the next three years is very welcome. ACTCOSS sets out below its priorities for the coming budget which will build on these initiatives.

The release of the ACT Housing Asset Management Strategy has caused disquiet in the sector, as it is seen as justification for disposal of assets and placing of needed services in more remote suburbs. The sector points to the example of Burnie Court as demonstrating that redevelopment and disposal policies can see a loss of important and accessible sites to the public housing sector. The more recent announcement regarding the disposal of Currong Apartments provides greater weight to the need for ACT Housing to act in partnership with ACT Treasury to maintain or increase the number of social housing properties, while working toward the objective of improving the location, spread and quality of properties. While the ACT Government refuses to substantially increase funding to ACT Housing there will be a continual decline in the number of properties and housing affordability generally. Other departments have a strong partnership role to play in this process, particularly ACTPLA.

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This lack of strategy and partnership has also been demonstrated at the Kingston Foreshore, where the Government has recently advised it will not be purchasing units due to the high cost of accommodation in that development.

ACTCOSS strongly urges the Government to address the under-supply of social housing by looking at increased capital investment in public housing. The announced \$66 million budget surplus has provided funds with which to increase the asset base. To manage demand in the immediate short term, the Government should look at securing private rental accommodation in areas of high demand for inclusion as public housing stock.

- 20. That the ACT Government commit to invest in more social housing for the ACT, including using the budget surplus to increase the public housing stock to pre-1995 levels.**
- 21. That in the short term, the ACT investigate temporary leasing of accommodation by ACT Housing as a way to increase the available stock.**

In the longer term, planning and supply issues need to be addressed in line with recommendations 12, 33, 37, 38 and 39 of the Affordable Housing Task Force Report<sup>25</sup>. Such measures could be implemented in a short space of time, and at little additional cost.

- 22. That the ACT Government implement the key planning recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force in consultation with the relevant sector interest groups. The Compact provides the framework for such discussions.**

### **Homelessness and the justice system**

ACTCOSS is pleased that the Government has recognised the needs of homeless men and people returning from incarceration as groups in need of particular assistance.<sup>26</sup> It appears, however, that the particular model of supported accommodation for people under supervision of Corrections ACT that operated until early 2003 has not been replicated. ACTCOSS is keen to see provision of both supported accommodation for people who have been sentenced by the courts and hostel accommodation for people returning from incarceration, to allow them to regain some community connections to assist with their reintegration into the Canberra community.

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<sup>25</sup>“Affordable Housing in the Australian Capital Territory”, Ministerial Taskforce on Affordable Housing, December 2002.

<sup>26</sup> “\$2.7 million boost for homelessness Services”, Minister for Housing, Bill Wood. 20 November 2003.

- 23. That the ACT Government provide funds to Corrections ACT to re-establish supported accommodation for people who have been involved in the justice system, and who would have to remain in a remand centre or jail because of a lack of accommodation support in the community.**

**Support for tenants with complex needs.**

There are several examples of the need to ensure that housing support involves more than signing a lease on a vacant property. For example, there is a need for transitional accommodation for young people with disabilities moving out of home for the first time. There are also concerns that the service and support needs of young people with disabilities in the community are not being met. They are therefore not getting the flexibility and empowerment that they need to develop to participate in community life.

There is a demonstrated need to provide more services to public housing tenants. The Government has provided some programs over the past two budgets to improve housing tenancy maintenance, and ACTCOSS would urge the Government to expand such programs through the development of better linkages between housing welfare officers and community service providers. The Community Linkages Program could be used as a vehicle to provide such a program.

While ACTCOSS represents its members, it recognises the specific expertise of groups that address particular areas of disadvantage. In this instance ACTCOSS would urge the Government to respond positively to the recommendations coming from ACT Shelter, which has a broad and comprehensive understanding of low-income households and their housing needs.

ACTCOSS welcomes the initiatives in the homelessness strategy aimed at addressing the issues that arise out of the lack of exit points from transitional accommodation, such as SAAP services. Many SAAP clients cannot access private rental accommodation, and independent living is not appropriate for some at the time they leave a SAAP service.

There is a need for longer term accommodation using a variety of models. The Government's plans for a hostel in Gungahlin and an older women's hostel may assist in addressing some of these problems, and ACTCOSS urges the establishment of a variety of similar medium term options for all types of household groupings, from single people through to parents and children.

Innovation in housing models needs to be resourced. This could include outreach services to people in existing housing to prevent that tenancy breaking down. Caution does need to be exercised that the outreach is holistic, and not fragmented.

There is also potential to help people in unstable accommodation straight into stable accommodation without having to go to a refuge.

- 24. That the ACT Government continue to build support for residential tenancies by investing in a wide range of accommodation models and increase the range and adequacy of services that assist more vulnerable tenants to access suitable accommodation, and to maintain tenancies through education and compassionate policies.**

### **Poverty and sustainability**

ACTCOSS has been active in the past 18 months addressing issues of social sustainability through collaboration with the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra. On Friday 17 October we jointly released a joint paper on water conservation that addresses both environmental and social sustainability<sup>27</sup>.

Out of those processes have come some concerns that people living with poverty, or even those on low incomes who are not officially below the poverty line, are unable to participate in environmental activities, such as saving water or reducing energy consumption, because of their financial circumstances. ACTCOSS and the Conservation Council believe that it will be impossible to achieve stated sustainability aims if there is no support for people to improve their consumption patterns.

ACTCOSS is again calling on the Government to provide a holistic range of services that can help people in rental accommodation, people on low incomes, and people living with other forms of disadvantage to participate equally in energy and water saving programs. The trial of the Water and Energy Savings Trial (WEST), a joint project by the Essential Services Consumer Council, the Consumer Law Centre, ACTEW AGL and ACT Housing provides a good model of a low-cost intervention that assists those most in need<sup>28</sup>. It is ACTCOSS' understanding that participation in that scheme was offered to people who were coming before the ESCC with problems meeting their utility bills. ACTCOSS applauds this type of targeting in the short term and notes that many of the participants were in Government housing. ACTCOSS therefore recommends that the trial be evaluated, and distinct funding be set aside to support an extension of this

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<sup>27</sup> ACTCOSS-CCSERAC Report – Final – Joint Water Policy –October 2003. Available from ACTCOSS.

<sup>28</sup> Essential Services Consumer Council Annual Report, 2002-03.

trial as a short to medium term solution to ACT Housing tenants' energy and water efficiency. In the longer term ACTCOSS believes the Government needs to invest in a long term process of retrofitting all Government owned properties, independent of refurbishment and building programs, to ensure the maximum energy and water efficiency.

The Conservation Council has developed detailed costing on retrofitting, which will form part of that organisation's budget submission. ACTCOSS calls on the Government to give serious consideration to funding the program of retrofitting as outlined in the Conservation Council submission.

25. **That the ACT Government provide additional financial resources to the partners in the WEST scheme to allow this program to be extended to more households.**
26. **That the Government provide additional funding to ACT Housing to conduct retrofitting of energy and water saving measures in all ACT housing properties, starting with the houses and apartments of tenants who are on rental rebate, or who are known to have a disability.**

### **Concessions and Community Service Obligations (CSOs)**

ACTCOSS urges the Government to complete its review of concessions and Community Service Obligations, and to ensure that all rebates and concessions are well publicised through shopfronts and Canberra Connect. ACTCOSS firmly believes rebates and concessions should be available according to the circumstances of the applicant and not be restricted to those who have proven eligibility for Commonwealth benefits.

The current review was started nearly two years ago, at a time when it was recognised that the variability of concessions and rebates was exacerbating hardship. It is unconscionable that people living with disadvantage and poverty have been left with inadequate concession support for such an extended time.

27. **That the Government finalise its review of concessions and CSOs as a matter of urgency, providing up to date information in one publication and via a single page on its website. Community education should be part of the implementation plan.**

### **Employment disadvantage**

There is an urgent need for more assistance for the long term unemployed in Canberra. ACTCOSS has called for ACT Government employment research to determine the underlying factors in Canberra's persistent unemployment problem, and the development of programs that will assist people to make the transition to work. This is particularly important for people who have been out of work for a long time, or who have been unable to keep a job for any length of time. While it may suit many people to change jobs every few years many people still find retrenchment and unemployment traumatic and need specialised assistance to regain lost confidence. ACTCOSS calls for both the Economic White paper and the ACT Social Plan to implement strategies to work toward the goal of reducing long-term unemployment in the ACT.

- 28. ACTCOSS reiterates its call for the ACT Government to examine the local causes of long term unemployment and underemployment, and to implement programs that will assist people to make the transition to meaningful, adequately paid work.**

***Advocate for sound and transparent governance in the ACT and the appropriate division of responsibilities within society.***

#### **Presentation of budget information**

The Government has put on the record that it spends 57 per cent of the annual budget on social services<sup>29</sup>. ACTCOSS believes a social progress report added to the budget documents outlining the spending of Government funds on these programs would increase accountability. ACTCOSS believes, however, that the figure of 57 per cent can be misleading as this figure appears to include public services such as schools, hospitals and public transport. While these public goods can contribute and foster social welfare they are more usually seen as investments in human capital and traditionally play a larger role in economic and spatial goals.

While the figure of 57 per cent indicates a large commitment, there is a much smaller percentage of revenue spent on poverty alleviation and prevention. The extent of human service provision was outlined in the Government's "Addressing Disadvantage" project Summary Report<sup>30</sup>. The Government spends \$228.73 million delivering 77 services, while the community sector, on behalf of the Government, delivered 385 services at

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<sup>29</sup> Jon Stanhope, address to the "Social Plan Forum", Manuka, 14 October 2003.

<sup>30</sup> Summary Report of the Project, pages 19 and 21.

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a cost of \$65.28 million. Out of a budget of roughly \$2.3 billion, that equates to about 12.8% of the annual budget. This sits curiously beside the Government's own claim in its 2004-05 Budget consultation document that it spends 7% of budget revenues on community services<sup>31</sup>. Interestingly the 2004-05 paper does not outline the application of the \$33m million allocated in the 2003-04 Budget for economic development.

The priority issue for ACTCOSS in this context is the transparency of Government documents. While the Council believes that all these figures may be correct, it is not clear how they are derived, with the Budget consultation document including the cost of concessions and rebates as part of the community services spending.

- 29. That the Government ensure that it provides useful, comparable information in its discussions on budget measures, including the provision of a service by service breakdown of the value of concessions and rebates within each portfolio area.**

### Reviewing opportunities for increased efficiency in taxation

**Table 1: Funding by Grouping**

Grouping	Number of services	Funding (\$million)		
		Government	Non government	Total
Housing	16	\$89.9	\$2.0	\$91.9
Education Support	8	\$44.2	\$0.6	\$44.8
Disability	74	\$20.7	\$14.5	\$35.2
Mental Health	40	\$22.9	\$2.3	\$25.2
Health	6	\$17.3	\$0.5	\$17.8
Home and Community Care	104	\$2.2	\$11.5	\$13.7
Youth at risk	52	\$18.2	\$3.5	\$21.7
Homelessness	34	\$0.0	\$10.5	\$10.5
Alcohol and other drug treatment	7	\$5.9	\$4.0	\$9.9
Family	39	\$0.6	\$8.7	\$9.3
Legal Services	2	\$5.1	\$0.1	\$5.2
Community	26	\$0.2	\$2.4	\$2.6
Indigenous	13	\$1.0	\$1.0	\$2.0
Older Persons	5	\$0.6	\$1.4	\$2.0
Financial/Welfare	8	\$0.0	\$1.3	\$1.3
Vocational Education and Training	28	\$0.0	\$0.8	\$0.8

*Table comes from the Addressing Disadvantage in the ACT: Summary Report on the Project. Page 21*

<sup>31</sup> "An overview of the Territory's Budget", p.16.

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Looking at the revenue side, the following table sets out some of the areas of taxation and grants that fund Government programs.

**Table 2: ACT Revenue**

Revenue Source	Amount collected (2002-03)	Comments
Rates	\$119m	Based on Unimproved Value of properties – UV's have increased in past two years.
Land tax	\$47.5m	Rental, trust and commercial properties
Duties	\$188m	Includes stamp duties
Gambling taxes	\$49m	2003-04 saw an increase in the top marginal rate for gaming machine taxes
Fees and Fines	\$129m	Motor vehicle registration, fines, and regulatory fees.
Federal Grants	\$1.02 billion	GST, special purpose grants etc.
User Charges	\$188m	Parking fees, patient fees, cross border health receipts, sales and venue hire, etc.
"Other Revenue"	\$428m	Returns on investments, dividends from Territory Owned Corporations, land sales, and joint ventures.

*The above table is indicative only, not absolute. All data from "ACT Budget at a Glance 2003-04".*

ACTCOSS developed a significant submission on revenue which has been used to inform submissions to Government consultation processes, including last year's budget submission. We reiterate our recommendation that the ACT should examine the natural advantages it has in the calculation and charging of land-based taxes to consolidate land tax and rates into one seamless system.

- 30. That the ACT Government examine the opportunities and/or efficiencies presented by the hybrid state/local government model in collection of land based revenue.**

### **The use of windfall gains**

The Council also repeats its call for the Government to report windfall gains in the budget cycle and to use those funds to support the development and upgrading of community sector infrastructure, so that those gains are not lost over time.

While not a windfall gain, ACT Treasury still holds some \$40 million from the home loans portfolio that is not being used productively. ACTCOSS and its Peaks Forum believe that the proper use of that money should be to deliver more public housing in the ACT. This could be reported on in the Budget papers, and used in accordance with recommendations supporting one-off capital injections.

- 31. That the Government look to use windfall gains, such as the recent increases in stamp duties and other land based taxes, to support infrastructure development, including such things as improved community sector facilities, Indigenous land and facilities, public housing, and increased mental health facilities, in line with recommendations 7, 8, 11, 15 and 20.**

### **Gambling**

ACTCOSS is concerned that there is a growing problem with increased reliance on gambling taxation. While figures for the increase of gambling taxation in 2003-04 will not be available for some time, ACTCOSS believes that the growing importance of this stream of revenue limits any serious attempt to attack problem gambling. Unfortunately, the amount of taxation paid by gambling establishments has no deterrent effect on problem gamblers.

The recently released gambling code of conduct aims for a high level of harm minimisation through the banning of inducements to gamble. ACTCOSS is concerned that a recent example reported in the Canberra Times<sup>32</sup> shows that at least one club may still be trying to entice people to gamble more than they would normally do, in direct contravention of the code. This is allegedly done by providing regular gamblers with tickets in a prize draw on the condition they are in the club and playing the poker machines at the time of the draw. ACTCOSS believes that, in light of the code's restrictions on inducements, this is unconscionable.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Letters to the Editor, November 24 2003. Letter from A. Quinn of Ngunnawal.

<sup>33</sup> Letters to the Editor, Canberra Times, Sunday November 30, 2003.

- 32. That the Government move away from imposing higher taxes on gambling and to ensure the mandatory code of conduct is enforced to minimise the harm done by gambling.**

Given the expansion in gaming machine access, with the announcement that pubs and taverns will be allowed two class B machines, ACTCOSS is concerned that the level of knowledge in the community about problem gambling remains low and that the majority of gaming revenue is derived from gamblers on low incomes<sup>34</sup>. More research is needed to ensure that harm minimisation is pursued vigorously.

- 33. That the Government allocate a significant increase in funds for community-based programs addressing problem gambling and provide funding for research into the causes of problem gambling and its social, health and financial effects.**

### **Direct support for businesses in the ACT**

ACTCOSS believes that accountability and transparency in Government requires that there be some analysis of business support to ensure that it produces what it promises. There are a range of factors that draw businesses to Canberra, such as the proximity to Federal Government, working and living environment, quality of the human resources, education system, and others<sup>35</sup>.

ACTCOSS welcomes the continued inclusion of a synopsis of business incentive grants over the past eight years in the Chief Minister's Department annual report. Reviewing the table<sup>36</sup> it appears that there is a gross inflation of the jobs potential of each project, with expired agreements delivering less than half the jobs promised. The Council is pleased that employment reporting is now included in all business support arrangements.

ACTCOSS would like to see even more emphasis on assisting and promoting employment opportunities, particularly for people who experience employment disadvantage. Business programs that are receiving funds need to report to the community as well as the Government on their social responsiveness, such as the creation of real and long term jobs, philanthropy (as ACTCOSS believes that the corporate

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<sup>34</sup> The Productivity Commission, in December 2002 (The Productivity Commission's Gambling Study: 3 years on – accessible via <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/speeches/cs20021121/index.html>), estimated that problem gamblers, while only around 2% of all gamblers, contributed nearly a third of all gambling revenue. Other studies has shown similar results, while a study of ACT Gambling by the University of Western Sydney found that ACT regular gamblers are usually on lower incomes than the general population (AIGR, available via the Gambling and Racing Commission web page)

<sup>35</sup> These issues are outlined in ACTCOSS' submission in response to the Government's Economic White Paper – available via: <http://www.actcoss.org.au/policyAdvocacy/publications/index.html>, July 2002.

<sup>36</sup> ACT Chief Minister's Annual Report 2003-04, pages 210-211.

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sector in Canberra has a good record of generosity to the community), networking and links to the region.

ACTCOSS believes that there is a role for a business support intentions statement in the budget papers that outlines the areas of support, including concessions, waivers and other assistance.

- 34. That the Government inform the community on the nature and extent of business support it proposes to distribute in the 2004-05 Budget, and to incorporate social reporting by recipients as a requirement of all Government grants to business.**

### **Cross border costs and benefits**

ACTCOSS also calls for a better relationship with the New South Wales state and local government authorities in this region to ensure that cross-border services are accountable, and access to these services is equitable. The recent problems at Lyneham High School, where students from the surrounding region were told they could not secure a place for 2004, have shown that there is increasing need for some of these ad hoc arrangements to be discussed and the impact of being a regional hub better understood and planned. These issues also surfaced in the Government's Addressing Disadvantage Reports.

- 35. That the Government and its agencies establish a forum for examining cross border issues in health, children's services, mental health, education, commercial trade and other services to allow for negotiation of cross border agreements to overcome problems in service delivery.**

### **Funding more holistic service provision**

The Government has introduced a program in youth affairs, Turnaround, which aims to provide flexible, holistic services to young people. ACTCOSS and the community sector believe that similar models could and should be developed and resourced to assure seamless service delivery. This will assist where consumers must be referred to a variety of agencies for different aspects of their needs. There is a need for increased resourcing of such models as well as improved definitions and work descriptions to support models of "joined up ways of working". ACTCOSS believes that such a change will provide long-run gains, although extra resources are necessary during the transition period.

The Fires Recovery Centre provided a good model for the type of

integrated service delivery that could be adopted in many areas of service delivery.

- 36. That the Government review the positive results of the Turnaround program and the Fires Recovery Centre to deliver more flexible, holistic services that capitalise on the advantages of Government-community sector partnerships.**

***Discussion: Raised expectations.***

ACTCOSS and many of its individual and organisational members have made contributions to many of the Government inquiries and reviews that have taken place since the Stanhope Government came into office in 2001. This work has been done by ACTCOSS with the objective of achieving better social, health and housing outcomes for people living with poverty and disadvantage. These reviews include:

- Sustainability policy – submission and participation in consultation forums
- Homelessness report – ACTCOSS consultancy with other consultants
- Addressing Disadvantage Study: Survey of community sector, including an unmet needs analysis
- Economic and employment policy: submissions and contract work for the Economic White Paper; a policy paper on community sector employment, and an ACTCOSS publication on the value of the community sector to the ACT economy.
- Social determinants of health research – literature review, research report and further pilot study contract
- Spatial Plan – attendance at forums
- Future of the ACT Forests – no contribution – but seen as important for future of rural settlements and urban edge development – service implications
- McLeod Report – Director on fires recovery advisory group
- Bill of Rights – submission, hosted forums
- Community IT – ACTCOSS has previously carried out major work on the digital divide
- Social Plan – attendance at forums, submission to be made
- Schools funding – submission
- Children's Plan – assisted consultants with community consultation
- Counsellors in schools - submission
- Statutory oversight and community advocacy (complaints) – agitated for and hosted two forums – considerable follow up work and written submission
- Review of service funding: attended all consultations, discussion paper developed, liaison with sector over issues of concern and development of a final submission

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- Legal aid - submission
- Concessions and community service obligations – submission
- Sentencing – submission – and now restorative justice issues paper
- Long service leave – attended forums and developing policy stance
- Full retail contestability – submissions and ongoing correspondence
- ACT Health Review –ACTCOSS was part of the Government group assisting – submissions and forums
- Review of therapy services for children with a disability – Youth Coalition major contributor
- Youth Services Grants Program review – Youth Coalition
- Future Directions – delivering effective services to young people with intensive support needs – Youth Coalition
- Review of sexual assault services for children and young people – Youth Coalition
- Patterson and Mann/Laroche reports on Mental Health services

There are also reports from the committees of the assembly that have made recommendations that ACTCOSS believes should also have weight:

- Select Committee into the Status of Women in the ACT
- Inquiry into the Rights, Interests and Wellbeing of Children and Young People.
- Select Committee on Estimates 2003 – Appropriation bill (2) 2003.

The expectations of the community and health professionals have been raised by these extensive inquiries.

- 37. That the Government provide an outline in the Budget of how these reviews and inquiries have informed decision making processes, and how the recommendations of the various inquiries and reviews will be carried forward to implementation.**

***Promote the health and wellbeing of people and communities who are disadvantaged.***

### **Health**

ACTCOSS believes that the Government's work on the social determinants of health is a welcome return to a holistic approach to community health. The long-run benefits of such an approach will provide Canberra with better health outcomes in the future. ACTCOSS is particularly interested in the Government's approach to the three major health issues identified by

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the World Health Organisation (WHO): tobacco consumption, obesity and malnutrition. ACTCOSS is aware of some of the Government's efforts in regard to these problems, including the proposition that smoking be banned in clubs and educational programs on nutrition. ACTCOSS anticipates that as the Government develops further programs in community health, more details will emerge of its efforts to combat these problems.

Currently, however, some shortfalls in health services are causing undue hardship in the community.

The lack of acute care facilities for elderly people is causing strain in other areas of the health system. The ACT Government is well aware that the inadequacies in this area of need are creating adverse outcomes in other areas of the acute health care service, such as elective surgery waiting lists. The Addressing Disadvantage report on "The Need for and Provision of Human Services in the ACT"<sup>37</sup> also commented on the low number of places per capita for people aged over 70, the historical low supply of high-care places in the ACT, and the fact that some 15% of people in aged care places come from outside the ACT. While some small steps have been taken to alleviate the problem, there needs to be urgent short and medium term action, as well as longer term planning for new facilities.

The recent announcement of the release of land in Garran to allow for the construction of more units is welcome. However, there is generally a lag in the provision of services that are dependent on capital works. For example, the funds allocated in 2003-04 for the sub-acute/non-acute facility have yet to produce a Government commitment on location, type of facility, or how it will operate. While there has been some fulfilment of the Government election promise to provide a step-down facility by allocating beds within Calvary Hospital, that model does not recognise that it is desirable for such transitional accommodation to be outside the clinical setting.

ACTCOSS believes that Government planning processes need to identify suitable areas for a range of aged care and transitional health care facilities, including in infill areas, to allow for long planning timeframes that can delay the construction and operation of these facilities by years. The ACT Government also needs to ensure that agency to agency relationships between Federal and ACT Government departments facilitates the quick resolution of any hurdles to the relevant aged care development processes and that planning approval is not bound up in unnecessary red tape.

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<sup>37</sup> AIHW, op cit, page 16.

- 38. That the Government actively pursue projects that will reduce the pressure on the acute care health system, by providing for adequate aged care, transitional and sub-acute/non-acute beds in appropriate locations across the ACT.**

**Supporting aged care**

The aged care health sector has identified problems with the training and retention of staff in aged care services, which reflect the sector-wide issues ACTCOSS raised in its discussion on viability of the community services sector. The combination of low pay<sup>38</sup>, shift work and lack of recognition has led to a high turnover and shortages of staff in the critical care area. As in so many other areas of health care at this time, there is a need for improved training, better remuneration and support for workers in this sector.

- 39. That the ACT Government enter into discussions with the aged care sector on the issue of retention of staff with the purpose of developing a plan to attract more workers into the sector.**

**Young people with a disability – accommodation options**

There is a continuing dilemma with younger people with disabilities being accommodated in aged care settings because of a lack of appropriate facilities. ACTCOSS understands that moves are underway to improve the situation, with some emphasis on independent living. These moves should be supported and programs expanded to ensure that a range of accommodation services for people with a disability are developed to enable them to live in a setting that allows them to engage with their peers in the community.

- 40. That more funds be allocated to providing younger people with severe disabilities with a range of accommodation options, enabling them to avoid being housed in inappropriate settings.**

**Accessibility**

The ACT Government has made a large commitment over the past two years to the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities. There remain, however, many accessibility issues that have not been resolved in

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<sup>38</sup> Aged care workers (in training) working for an agency as a casual can earn around \$15.50 an hour for night shift (11pm – 7am). To provide a comparison, the ALDI group of stores recently advertised for checkout operators, paying \$19 per hour.

mainstream services. These include such things as physical access and facilities that cater for the wide range of disabilities that people can live with.

ACTCOSS welcomes the Government's commitment to accessibility, as outlined in the Minister's announcement in July 2003<sup>39</sup>; however the physical accessibility needs to be matched with communication ability. For example, there are also concerns that the needs of people with disabilities are not always met in clinical settings. There is a need to ensure that support services are available, particularly for people with mobility and communications restrictions, who may be unaccompanied.

There are additional concerns that many services for people who are frail, aged, disabled or chronically ill are delivered in their homes. Without proper planning and service provision, such a model can risk placing the person in isolation. There is a need to resource people they are in contact with, eg. GPs and regional community services, to alleviate isolation and support their continued involvement in their community.

- 41. That the Government develop guidelines on improving communications and supports for people with disabilities to facilitate their equitable access to services and participation in community life.**

### **Respite**

ACTCOSS is also eager to see the Government's implementation plan for improved respite services. The Respite Care Review that was given to the Government mid year has been referred to in the Carer's Policy review, but ACTCOSS is not aware of any Government response to the consultant's report. It is anticipated that the 2004-05 ACT Budget will provide significant funding for initiatives in the area of carers and respite services.

- 42. That the ACT Government announce its response to the consultant's report on respite services, and that it allocate funding in the 2004-05 Budget to increase the capacity of respite services to meet the need.**

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<sup>39</sup> Improving Access to Government Services for People with Disabilities, Ministerial Press Release, Bill Wood, July 28, 2003.

***Primary health care services***

ACTCOSS and its various committees concerned with health matters are keen to see more effort put into providing primary health care services, particularly after-hours GP visits. The ACT Division of General Practice found in its report in May 2002 that a considerable proportion of clients attending Emergency Departments in hospitals would use a GP service if there was one available, accessible, appropriate and affordable<sup>40</sup>. While much of the demand is driven by Federal Government issues, there are some areas where the ACT Government has attempted to increase service levels, by providing security guards for GPs working after normal hours, for example. In pursuing other ways to boost services, the ACT is urged to look at the Hunter Urban Division of General Practice model for the provision of after-hours GP services. It appears to have overcome some of the problems identified by the ACT Government in providing GP services from a hospital setting<sup>41</sup>.

The ACT Government has also negotiated with the Federal Government to allow Canberra non-metropolitan status for recruitment of doctors. ACTCOSS hopes the current recruitment drive provides more GPs to make up for the current shortfall.

**43. That the Government continue to explore ways to ensure that provision of GP services in Canberra is adequate, for both daytime and after-hours services.**

These measures, however, do not tackle the need for both public and private medical clinics, offering a range of services. As outlined in the discussion on groups with particular characteristics earlier in this submission, there are many needs for services that address cultural, language, religious, financial or other issues which deter people from using private practices. ACTCOSS reiterates that the Government needs to continue discussions with groups representing consumers outside the mainstream to ensure their needs are catered for in service provision.

For example, the need for drug and alcohol services for women, and detox programs for women with children, continues to outstrip supply. ACTCOSS urges the Government investigate ways to expand existing programs where appropriate, and to implement new programs where needed, in consultation with current service providers.

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<sup>40</sup> ACT Division of General Practice, "I wouldn't be here if I could see a GP", May 2002, Executive summary, page iv.

<sup>41</sup> The outline of the trial is available on the Hunter Urban Division of General Practitioners web site: <http://www.hudgp.org.au/afterhours.asp>

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There are also concerns that the attention given within Government to specific men's health policy is not enough ensure adequate programs are in place. As an area of increasing health focus, it is appropriate that the Government discuss with men's health groups their needs, and how to best accommodate them.

- 44. That the Government look at the provision of more services in public clinic settings, including services that meet the needs of groups that suffer particular disadvantage in accessing health services. These services need to be developed with the cooperation and support of the various special interest groups concerned.**

There is also concern within the sector that nothing has been yet circulated about the expiry of the agreement on the public health program. Groups who are working in the areas of child health and communicable diseases, to mention two, are concerned that they are not being provided with any information on the Government's thinking on how the program will be funded past June 2004. Given the problem experienced with service funding agreements and other processes with late consultation, ACTCOSS urges the Government to start its consultation processes early in the new year, to allow for a wide-ranging discussion of the relevant issues.

- 45. That the Government commence consultations on the public health program early in the new year, to ensure that the wide range of consumers and service organisations can provide input to the program that will operate from July 2004.**

## **Conclusion**

ACTCOSS welcomes this opportunity to put its priorities forward at this time. It has been heartening through this year to hear the Chief Minister talk about the Government's vision for Canberra, a community that is inclusive, cohesive, fair, tolerant, committed to protecting the vulnerable and supporting people in need, as well as resourcing children to reach their potential.

ACTCOSS believes that the development of this vision is important to the future of Canberra in terms of its social and economic goals. We urge the Government, and its Departments, to ensure that in fulfilling this vision, emphasis is placed on eradication of entrenched disadvantage.

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