



Overview of 2004-2005 ACT Budget

Acknowledgements

ACTCOSS acknowledges that we are occupying the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge their living culture, their contribution to the Canberra community, and their ongoing participation in the stewardship of the Territory.

ACTCOSS would also like to thank the many volunteers and staff who helped compile this analysis.

This document provides a preliminary assessment of the ACT Government's 2003-04 Budget Initiatives. All due care has been taken, however errors may have occurred.

Should you have concerns, questions or would like to forward additional information, ACTCOSS would welcome your input. Please contact the ACTCOSS office on ph 6202 7200 or via e-mail to actcoss@actcoss.org.au.

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May 2004

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2004-05 ACT Budget at a glance

All figures are the amounts allocated to be spent in financial year 2004-05, unless otherwise noted. Not all areas of analysis are included in this brief overview. \$ m = \$ million throughout this analysis

Community Sector Viability

- Indexation passed on at the 2% rate – the community sector needs to address.
- \$2.8 m – Building Stronger Communities – small amount of money spread across five areas – little detail.
- \$1.549 m – Community Inclusion Fund.
- \$0.25 m - Capital works for ACT Therapy Centre at Holder –no Government asset management strategy that addresses the condition of buildings used by the community sector.
- No funds to grant pay rises in community sector - \$61 m for public sector anticipated pay increases.
- No signalling of intentions with regard to new sector funding formula to recognise the real costs of delivering human services.
- No specific funds for community sector IT – Digital Divide funds not matching the \$11 m for schools in this Budget and the \$20+ m in 2003-04 for public sector IT upgrades.
- Risk management and community education for emergencies has been funded, but there are no funds for a community sector emergency response initiative, or for individual organisations to develop emergency response plans.

Accommodation Security

- \$0.381 m – Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service - still a question about the ongoing funding to Lifeline to run the telephone service component of this service.
- \$5.0 m for social housing capital injection –actually a drop of \$0.9 m because of a reduction in GST compensation in relation to the CSHA.
- First home buyer concession scheme –re-entry provisions for people who have experienced family problems or domestic violence. Some concern this type of assistance may lead to an increase in housing costs.

Disability

- \$0.361 m to allow under-16 year olds access to the Taxi Subsidy Scheme and to meet the costs of the new scheme.
- \$0.662 m – special needs support for clients with complex behaviours.
- \$0.20 m – carer support including a proportion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities – this has been queried as an ATSI initiative.
- \$1.25 m – addressing unmet need for people with a disability.
- \$0.318 m - increased autism support services.
- \$1 m for “enhanced capacity” for children with a disability in the in schools.
- \$0.62 m – increased funds for relief disability support workers – recognition of the level of demand.
- No further housing options put forward for people with disabilities or plans for accessibility upgrades of existing stock.

Health – Acute, Primary and Community

- \$7 m for acute care services.
- \$4 m for community and primary care.
- \$100,000 ensuring the viability of Menslink.
- \$91,000 for a nurse practitioner for the Junction. Raises the concern about the number of other specialist health services that need Government support and may not yet know if they have it.
- \$0.846 m in HACC funding, an increase of \$0.146 m over 2003-04 estimates.
- \$0.145 m – home based oxygen equipment – should not have had to wait this long for abolition of the means test.
- \$0.14 m – dual diagnosis.
- Concerned that sub-acute facility now pushed out into 2005-06, was an election promise in 2001.

- Good to see ongoing commitment in the out years to some of the health initiatives announced in the second and third appropriations for 2003-04.
- No initiatives to overcome GP shortage – may be due to complexities of Commonwealth-state responsibilities.
- Emphasis on acute care again ignores the role that the community sector plays in providing after care.

Mental Health

- \$0.30 m – community based forensic mental health initiative – the community focus is welcome, but it is unclear how this service will be able to provide interventions required while relying on existing services.
- \$0.365 m – suicide prevention initiatives.
- \$0.140 m – dual diagnosis (also a health issue).
- \$0.150 m – expansion of Canberra Adolescent Mental Health Service to Gungahlin.
- \$0.060 m – adolescent mental health infrastructure plan.
- \$0.114 m – Recurrent funding for the Messengers adolescent resilience program.
- \$0.140 m feasibility study for new psychiatric secure facility, plus \$1 m to refurbish “the psychiatric secure facility” – there is confusion as to whether this refers to the existing Psychiatric Services Unit at Canberra hospital, the secure unit at Brian Hennessy House or some form of forensic facility. Clarification is needed.
- People at risk – provision of funding through DHCS from 2005-06 for secure accommodation for people with dual disabilities/complex behavioural problems – more information required.
- No commitment in the Budget papers to the Mental Health Community Coalition. Funds may be forthcoming through Departmental sources, but ACTCOSS was anticipating some recognition in the Budget for this important community sector initiative.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Issues

- \$0.145 m – indigenous employment initiative.
- \$0.352 m Aboriginal Justice Centre – more details of how this will be implemented are needed.
- \$0.295 m - Indigenous Student Support – leadership and mentoring programs for students yr 10-12, as well as literacy & numeracy support where necessary.
- \$75,000 - on-going funding for Jumby Mulla, an Indigenous managed family support service.
- \$0.214 m – provision of 5 Koori pre-school programs
- \$63,000 – establish an Indigenous Foster care service to assist and support families to prevent problems that result from contact with the welfare system.
- \$0.200 m – hearing health program for infants and children.
- \$0.140 m – funding for two dual diagnosis outreach workers (see also health and mental health).
- \$0.191 m – community-based antenatal and postnatal care to ATSI women and infants.
- \$100,000 for feasibility study into indigenous healing place. Two figures, \$150,000 and \$100,000 appear in the Budget papers. Need to clarify what the actual amount is, and where it will be funded from.
- \$0.200 m –this has been announced as a small project grants scheme to support Indigenous carers. That has since been repudiated.

Justice and Community Safety

- \$0.198 m - Corrections Health Service.
- \$10 m – ACT Corrections Facility – due for completion in 2006-07.
- Community Based forensic mental health team – see mental health.
- Implementation of Human Rights Act – see Disability.
- Aboriginal Justice Centre – see Indigenous issues.
- \$432,000 - Restorative Justice Unit. Juveniles only in first year.

- \$1.352m - Reduced property crime - mix of early intervention and support for offenders.
- Not enough detail on the reasons for providing staff to medicate people before their court appearances – except that it may be to allow people on remand to have their regular medication before attending court.
- \$0.3 m Community based forensic mental health team - Seems an insufficient amount to have an impact.
- Restorative Justice Unit – no details of the rest of the alternatives to sentencing review.
- AFP Increased police numbers – 20 new police by 2005-06, emphasis on policing over early intervention.
- No money at all for the implementation of the review of statutory oversight and community advocacy agencies.

Economic Development

- Indigenous and small business employment initiatives – no specific programs for addressing employment barriers in other areas.
- The ACT Government is still defining employment in terms of a lack of supply of suitably skilled labour.
- Large amounts of extra funding for business assistance, but no new mechanisms for ensuring that such assistance promotes an accessible and equitable labour market.

Poverty, rights and equity

- \$150,000 for emergency relief.
- \$0.631 m - Improved concessions for rates, electricity, water and gas.
- \$0.252 m – implementation of Human Rights Act – no forward funding for review of statutory oversight and community advocacy bodies.
- \$100,000 – Women's grants program.

Overview

In February this year the Government announced its Social Plan. ACTCOSS is a strong supporter of the Social Plan initiative. The framing of this Budget has been in part guided by the Social Plan.

The papers present new expenditures and revenue and other concessions that, in the Government's view, support the implementation of the Social Plan. It is not possible to determine which of these changes happened because of the Social Plan and which would have occurred anyway. In addition, there will be various opinions in the community on just what kinds of programs and capital investments go to giving all our citizens equality of opportunity and to making ours a truly more inclusive community. ACTCOSS believes that some of the expenditures that are listed as supportive of the Social Plan are much lower priority than others. In ACTCOSS' view the emphasis should be much more on expenditures that will change the circumstances of those in our community who are living with disadvantage.

ACTCOSS nevertheless strongly welcomes the efforts that have been made in this Budget to start the shift in priorities to the areas of greatest need. We can say that the Social Plan, as new as it is, has started to influence the Budget process and other areas of Government decision-making. On a continuing basis ACTCOSS will test Government decisions against the Social Plan and in particular the areas it sees as those of highest priority. The Budget provides for the Community Inclusion Board and attendant research and policy analysis. The work of the Board will be critical in the successful implementation of the Social Plan.

ACTCOSS believes that the 2004-05 ACT Budget has delivered some initiatives that respond to community needs, but these were known well in advance of the release of the Budget papers. There are, however, many areas remaining where the lack of services will continue to exacerbate hardship for some sectors of our community.

What has been revealed in the Budget documents is that a modest surplus of \$8 m is forecast for 2004-05, to be followed by a deficit of \$26 m in 2005-06, a surplus of \$7 m in 2006-07, and a surplus of \$53 m in 2006-07. At this same time last year, the community was being prepared for a Budget deficit and measures to pay for the damage caused by the 2003 fires. The turn around in the ACT's financial situation was, from a community sector point of view, amazing. Since then two additional appropriation bills have been introduced which account for much of the predicted surplus.

We congratulate the Government on the use of the surplus to fund a range of initiatives that enhance the sector in Appropriation Bill 2003-04 (No. 3) and the 2004-05 ACT Budget. We are also very pleased to see that recurrent funding is allocated to these projects.

Indexation and Community Sector Cost Pressures

ACTCOSS is very disappointed at the Government's decision to reduce indexation of community sector funding from 2.5% last year, to 2% in 2004-05.

This decision will aggravate the pressures already experienced by community organisations, and will further undermine the viability of the sector. This is contrary to the Government's undertaking, expressed as a commitment in its Community Sector Funding Policy, to "contribute to the long-term viability/sustainability of funded organisations in the community sector."

A CPI-based approach to indexation is unable to adequately reflect the costs of community service delivery. A new approach to indexation needs to be cooperatively developed by Government and the community sector.

Evidence for pressures on the community sector: Australians Living On The Edge (ALOTE)

The 2003 ACT report of the ALOTE study found that community services in the ACT are stretched to a level that is simply unsustainable.

The survey report shows that while demand by ACT residents for community services grew during 2002-2003 financial year, the community services sector has reached its capacity to provide service to the ACT community.

Despite a five percent (5%) increase in the number of people seeking services during the year, community service providers reported a one percent (1%) decrease in the actual number of people they were able to assist.

The ALOTE study also found that:

- Thirteen percent (13%) of the ACT agencies who responded to the survey reported that they continue to rely on unfunded labour to manage the pressures on their service;
- Fourteen percent (14%) met this pressure by using up their financial surpluses; and
- The creation and extension of waiting lists, increased referrals and closer targeting of services were strategies used by twenty-four percent (24%) of organisations surveyed to manage demand.

Problems with indexation

While the decision to reduce indexation for the community sector is apparently based on the Budget papers' projection that CPI will decrease to 2% in 2004-05, ACTCOSS believes there are fundamental problems with the Government's approach and the decision that has resulted from it:

- organisations have not experienced, and are not likely to experience a slowing in the increase of cost pressures (see above)
- the community sector has a different cost structure from other industries (costs are concentrated in wages) so cost shifts in the community sector are inadequately represented by CPI
- there is a historical shortfall in indexation to cover cost increases in the community sector, which is being compounded by this reduction in indexation
- Commonwealth Treasury estimates for CPI (on which this decision is based) do not accurately reflect the experience of cost shifts on the ground in the ACT, as they are forward-looking and include many items in the 'basket of goods' which are simply not relevant to the community sector.
- Government is indexing its rates-take by 2.7% (selecting a measurement of price shifts over one particular past quarter), but only indexing its funding by 2% - this seems to unreasonably disadvantage funded organisations.
- By indexing only at such a low rate, while spending large amounts of new money on business and tourism assistance, the Government is signalling that it fails to recognize the significant (and in many cases superior) employment and economic activity contribution of the community services sector (see ACTCOSS, The Contribution of Community Services to the ACT Economy, February 2003).

Summary

Last year we welcomed the decision to provide indexation of 2.5% for community sector funding. While we were pleased to see consistency of indexation across Government of at least CPI, we stand by our recommendation (made in our 2003-04 Budget submission):

That, working in the spirit of the Compact, a mutually agreed approach to indexation be used consistently. This mutually agreed approach should appropriately reflect the annual increases in the cost of delivering services, and would ensure all Government departments are meeting their contractual obligations on indexing under the standard contract. It is imperative that the community sector now engage with the Government to address this issue.

ACTCOSS also notes that \$61 m is allocated in the 2003-05 Budget periods for the outcome of wage negotiations for the public sector. This leaves us wondering about any chance of ever achieving wage parity for the community sector, an issue that is not new to this Government. Government wages are significantly higher than those of the community

sector, yet funding for award rate increases and any commitment to provide higher wages in the non-Government sector are both noticeably absent from this Budget. The fact that community sector pay rates have NOT being addressed in this Budget raises concerns about the human rights objective of equal pay for work of equal value.

ACTCOSS appreciates and values its partnership with the Government, and is keen to work to resolve funding issues within the community sector. This includes the need to address wage parity issues that are causing extreme stress within the human services sector.

Community Sector Viability

ACTCOSS counts community sector viability as crucial to the achievement of a socially just and sustainable ACT community, the first priority of the organisation's five year strategic plan. The community sector delivers a multitude of human services to all members of the ACT community. These services are particularly important in the lives of people who live with disadvantage and experience barriers to participation in day to day activities.

The ACT Government set out in its *Addressing Disadvantage* report that non-government providers of community services delivered 385 services, valued at \$65.28 million. These services cover a wide range of issues, including health, mental health, housing, disability, emergency relief, children and youth, drug and alcohol, gambling, and a wide range of support groups.

These groups and service providers are managing a range of contracts while trying to maintain a workforce that is relatively poorly paid. This problem has been compounded since the Australian Industrial Relations Commission introduced a wage freeze under the Social and Community Sector Award in 2002. In the past decade the sector has had to upgrade its administrative skills in contract management, bidding for funds and meeting an increasing array of standards, brought in by Government funding bodies, to ensure accountability. The sector has met, or is meeting, these new demands while also facing extraordinary increases in insurance and other costs that aren't reflected in funding increases.

The result is a community sector that is under strain, and looking for some security in funding. The ACT Government has recognised this set of issues, and has replaced the bidding process for community sector contracts with three year funding agreements. This is a welcome step forward.

ACTCOSS believes that more can be done, and particularly asked that specific pressures be relieved in its budget submission.

Recommendation 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 The Australian Labor Party in 2001.

Recommendation 2: ACTCOSS calls on the ACT 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.

Recommendation 3: That the ACT Government commit to providing automatic funding of safety net increases in community sector awards.

Recommendation 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.

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

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

Recommendation 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.

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

Recommendation 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 fires in 2003.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- Building Stronger Communities (\$2.85m) – this focuses on implementing Social Plan priorities and realising the Social Compact. Key activity areas funded under this initiative include:
 - Community events program
 - Community engagement initiative
 - Funding sector reform
 - Community networking grants
 - Renewal of community infrastructure and facilities
- Community Inclusion Fund (\$1.55m) - this includes funding for the Community Inclusion Board and additional human services staff including community development officers, social workers and youth workers.
- Grant Cameron Community Centre improved building amenity (\$0.25m) - one-off funding for minor new works.

Concerns/unresolved questions

- There is substantial funding for Government wage negotiations (\$61m), but no mention of community sector wages.
- Private sector companies providing maternity, primary care giver and adoption leave have been exempted from payroll tax. Whilst this initiative is welcomed, community sector employers do not pay payroll tax, so other incentives/support should be provided.
- Issues relating to community sector viability such as real costs and certified agreements have not been addressed.
- There is no new detail about how the inclusion fund will operate.
- Government has been asked to commit to fully and consistently passing on the Consumer Price Index to government funded programmes. This has been achieved to an extent, but it needs to be recognised that the Consumer Price Index is not likely to be an adequate increase for community services and that there should be provision for additional increases, or a different index base.

- Increased information technology funding for schools follows on from funding allocations in the 2003-04 ACT Budget for information technology upgrades for the public sector. The community sector is under increasing pressure to deliver data, reports and keep up to date but has not been given commensurate support for IT platforms. It is impossible to have efficiencies when the community sector lags so far behind the private, government and now education sectors in information technology support.

Accommodation Security

After the initiative was first announced in February, social housing in the ACT received a much-needed boost in the 2003-04 ACT Budget through Appropriation Bill No. 3. The Government has stated that it will also continue to implement the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force.

This may, to some, make ACTCOSS' recommendation to increase the supply of public housing to pre-1995 levels redundant. However, we are still seeking details of how this money will be applied to the current housing crisis in Canberra, and how it will compliment the efforts being made under the Government's \$13 million, four year homelessness strategy. With Currong Flats now being used as temporary student accommodation and work still to commence on the refurbishment of the Northbourne flat complexes, ACTCOSS is concerned that there may be a net loss of ACT housing stock over the next 12-18 months.

The need is not just for bricks and mortar, but for efficient accommodation in all Canberra suburbs where residents can be assured of tenure, can build communities and can access services that help support them through any difficulties that may threaten their tenancy. More services have been developed in recent years; including ACT Housing initiated financial counselling, increased support for ACT Housing tenants, the WEST scheme, and the introduction of a minimum rent for people who have to leave their accommodation because of health or other problems.

ACTCOSS was so concerned about housing while developing its five year strategic plan, it identified this particular service as one of its focus areas under strategic Objective 1 – A socially just and sustainable ACT community. It was, therefore, still an issue that needed to be addressed in the context of the 2004-05 Budget. The following are recommendations relating to accommodation security from the ACTCOSS 2004-05 Budget submission:

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 21: That in the short term, the ACT investigate temporary leasing of accommodation by ACT Housing as a way to increase the available stock.

Recommendation 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

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- \$0.381m for the continuation of the Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service.
- Social Housing - \$20 million over four years (\$5 million per year). this represents an injection of capital funding for ACT Housing to respond to issues of housing and rental affordability and the supply of social housing.
- Home buyer concession scheme – the income threshold for eligibility has been increased to \$100,000 for first home buyers and those re-entering the housing market under special circumstances.

- Reducing the residential land tax rates and increasing the AUV threshold. Lower land tax bracket for residential properties up to \$50,000. AUV thresholds in the higher tax brackets are raised.

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- Lifeline currently operates a telephone service to support the Canberra Emergency Accommodation Service. The budget does not allocate funding to continue this service. Is there an alternative in operation?
- The \$5m allocated to the increase of capital infrastructure is in effect a loss as there is \$0.9m missing from the GST compensation.
- The home buyer concession scheme may increase the purchase of homes, thus freeing up some rental properties, but home ownership is still not feasible for low income households. The impact of this scheme is as yet unknown.
- The initiative to reduce the residential land tax rates and increase AUV ratings is aimed at reducing the tax burden on lower value properties. Will this saving be passed on the tenant and thus have a practical impact upon housing costs? There is no guarantee that it will increase supply or stimulate investment. If not, is there a mechanism to get the concession back?
- The initiative to target land release of 500 blocks over 5 years for first home buyers and people on low to moderate incomes will not come into effect until 2005-06. Therefore, it cannot be counted as a gain in this budget.

Disability

As with so much of its work in 2003, ACTCOSS' discussion of its budget priorities for people with a disability started and ended with accommodation security. It is heartening that the ACT Government has taken the issue of disability seriously during its first term, but frustrating that there is yet another groups within our community for whom accommodation options are restricted and discriminatory.

Young people with a disability still have limited options when it comes to accommodation. They can live at home with parents or family, move into a group house with limited options, or (if they are relatively mobile and self managing) they can go on the list for an ACT Housing property. Young people with high level care needs are still being inappropriately housed.

There is also concern that, despite allocation of funds and studies, there is still much confusion over the Government's plans for respite care.

There is also a concern over access to information. Many people with a disability are still unable to access Government documents, even if they have computer and internet access. This is despite the fact that the ACT Government has quite a clear cut policy on accessibility. What concerns ACTCOSS is the variable uptake and understanding of that policy within Government Departments. Accessibility and other policies put in place to help people with a disability participate equally in community life need to be thoroughly understood, and acted upon. In the human rights context, it is critical that policies not only exist, but are actively implemented in procedure.

With these few issues in mind, ACTCOSS made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 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 are available across the ACT to ensure accessibility for all potential consumers.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- Enhanced capacity for students with disabilities covering an expected increase in demand. Additional funding for existing program.
- Addressing unmet need for people with disabilities (\$1.25m)
– Local Area Coordination service for people with high and complex needs.
- Autism assessment and support (\$0.318- expansion of an existing program.)
- Transport initiatives for people with disabilities (\$0.12m) - extends the taxi subsidy scheme to under 16s.
- Special needs support for clients with complex behaviours (\$0.662m)

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- Funding for the intensive care and treatment program for people at risk only commences in 2005/6. A feasibility study has been flagged (\$0.25m) for 2004-05.
- Addressing unmet need for people with disabilities (\$1.25m)
– Local Area Coordination service for people with high and complex needs. More information required.

Health – Acute, Primary and Community

Health care is subject to the vagaries of the current division of responsibilities, with Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments disagreeing on the quantum and direction of health funding to meet the diverse needs of all Australians.

In the ACT context, it appears straight forward: the Commonwealth funds the private health care system the Territory funds acute care. But like most things in life, complications abound. The health “system” depends on a number of working relationships. People need to be able to access health services when they are aware that their health is not optimal. Doctors need to be able to treat their patients using modern methods and pharmaceuticals. Patients needing admission to hospital need to be able to be accommodated and receive the highest standard of care. Their rehabilitation needs also need to be taken care of to avoid a return to hospital or a negative health outcome from early or inappropriate discharge. The whole system is complicated by the semi-privatisation of the health system and the high costs involved in purchasing health treatments.

Canberra’s health system fails on a number of counts. A lack of doctors and fall in bulk-billing is driving more people to attend the hospitals’ emergency departments for primary care. The lack of trained nurses, radiographers and other health professionals means a lack of beds to transfer those needing admission – a backlog occurs.

People can’t access post-discharge rehabilitation unless they are put in contact with those services and those services have the ability to meet their need – backlog occurs as these people are re-admitted if their condition does not improve. The lack of step-down facilities means patients with low medical needs are kept in hospital because they cannot be guaranteed of appropriate care outside the hospital - backlog. The lack of aged care beds at all levels of assistance means our older community members are kept in hospital beds for longer than necessary, and their forced admission into aged care high dependency beds also means a backlog in people moving through that system.

ACTCOSS does not have all the answers, particularly given the lack of national consensus on universal health care. However, we have made the following issues a priority for our submission to the 2004-05 ACT Budget.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- \$7 million of the \$11 million in “new initiatives” is for increased rates of surgery and increased intensive care beds – some of this will assist those who have been waiting for joint replacement and cataract surgery.
- Much of the “agency funded initiatives” is also going to the acute sector for staffing – with \$1 million going to in-hospital doctors, \$770,000 going to acute allied health, and \$180,000 for additional ward persons. Another significant amount is going to increased acute services in the renal area (\$765,000 rising to \$1.6 million annually over the 4 years) and cardiology interventions (\$232,000 to \$316,000 over the 4 years).

- Growth in funds for the emergency department services is welcomed. However, there has been a tendency for additional expenditure to go to TCH rather than Calvary, where the growth in usage has been greatest.
- Some additional Aboriginal Health Programs: (see Indigenous health and housing)
- \$0.70 million - pharmacy costs for patients in public hospitals. Should be directed at providing adequate post discharge pharmaceuticals, not more expensive drugs.
- \$0.10 million for Men's Link, but there are no funds for expansion, and it is unclear what other services are to be retained as well.
- \$0.102 million to provide for training preceptors in radiation therapy and pharmacy – to remove perceived barriers to attracting staff in these areas.
- 160,000 for additional specialist breast care nurses for women diagnosed with breast cancer and \$588,000 to \$712,000 for increased cancer treatment services.

Concerns/unresolved questions

- The significant additional immediate expenditure on surgery is still not apparently supported by sufficient support services either to avoid people needing to go to hospital or supporting them for early discharge. Some of the additional money (\$846,000 annually) for HACC might be able to be used in this manner, but there is still an enormous focus on hospital treatment. The sub-acute facility will not be operational until 2005-06, there is continued funding for one residential aged care liaison nurse. There is more than \$600,000 for community nursing and allied health staff, and some of the acute nursing and allied health may be used for post-discharge services. Overall however, the focus is NOT on support services in the community.
- \$207,000 rising to more than \$600,000 is provided for "childhood obesity" programs. The proposals do not seem to look at any of the broader social issues which are leading to people generally being less active or to the reasons why healthy food might be less available to some groups, but rather focuses on the children and their families – easy targets for guilt in a fat-phobic society.
- Information Access Projects funds (\$1.2 million per year) appears to be a replacement for the old Health Information

Networking projects – because this program was very ineffectively managed, progress was incredibly slow – this may well be a reallocation of the same funds.

- Significant resources are committed for capital works associated with the ANU Medical School - \$2 million in 2004-05 and \$4.4 million in 2005-06. This exceeds the capital works allocation for Child and Family Centres over the 4 years from 2003-04 to 2006-07 of \$6 million
- There is funding for a part-time practice nurse for the Junction Youth Health Service and capital works funding to incorporate the Junction into City Youth Health Service – clarification is needed on whether this will simply mean a transfer of this function from a community sector group to a Health Department entity.

Mental Health

The problems of mental health treatment and care in the ACT have been thrown into sharp focus in recent months with several high-profile court cases and inquiries into deaths in the Psychiatric Services Unit (PSU) of the Canberra Hospital. The sector, however, has known for many years that there are insufficient community based services to avert mental health crises and no secure facilities for the small number of people whose mental health problems or co-morbidity predispose them to violent or self-harming behaviour.

There have been milestones made in the past two years to assist consumers, their families, carers and friends. There has been the formation of the ACT mental health peak organisation, the Mental Health Community Coalition, and the development of the Mental Health Consumers Network. ACTCOSS is now supporting these groups to put forward their views to Government and they are increasingly calling for more services.

ACTCOSS has addressed a few issues covering mental health issues in recognition of our position as an auspicing organisation.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- Community Based Forensic Mental Health Team (\$0.3million) – providing specialist mental health clinical management to persons with forensic mental issues. Initiative will provide specialist support to mental health consumers within the justice system.

- \$0.365 million - Suicide Prevention Initiatives providing for full time suicide prevention project officer and support for a range of community organisations engaged in suicide prevention, education, and support.
- \$0.14 million - Dual Diagnosis outreach workers to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Supporting people experiencing issues with drug and alcohol, emotion or social well being problems.
- \$0.15 million - Expansion of CAMHS to provide an outreach service to the Gungahlin area - two Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Gungahlin Outreach clinicians stationed at the Northside CAMHS office.
- \$60,000 - Adolescent Mental Health Services Infrastructure Plan
- \$0.20 million - Calvary Mental Health Safety Features Upgrade
- \$0.114 million - Messengers Program an initiative with recurrent funding over 4 years that aims to build resilience in young people through arts based programs.
- \$0.14 million - New Psychiatric Secure Unit feasibility study - unclear where the Unit will be located – ie is this study to look at the feasibility of a secure unit as a part of the Prison complex?
- Future allocation - \$0.7 million - provision of funding through DHCS from 2005/6 for secure accommodation for people with dual disabilities/complex behavioural problems.

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- No specific commitment to funding the Mental Health Community Coalition
- Community Based Forensic Mental Health Team (\$0.3m) – funding is inadequate
- Extension of Psychiatric Secure Unit (\$1million) – confusion as to whether this refers to the Psychiatric Services Unit at Canberra Hospital or Brian Hennessy House. This is also an issue of confusion for the abovementioned feasibility study.

Indigenous Health, Housing and Community

ACTCOSS acknowledges that the ACT has been built within the tribal lands of the Ngunnawal. We acknowledge their living culture and their continued contribution to the life of the Canberra community.

Traditional culture was fractured in the ACT region by European settlement and the ensuing alienation from land. Despite this the traditional owners, the Ngunnawal, have maintained their ties to the area and sought reconciliation. Their claim on the community is great, given the well known and documented problems in indigenous health, substance abuse, domestic violence and mental health. ACTCOSS believes that the proper place for discussion of these issues is between the Government and the various representatives of indigenous groups in the Canberra region.

In our 2004-05 Budget submission, "Viable Sector, Viable Services", ACTCOSS instead supported the call from the indigenous community for land and facilities to allow Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders to celebrate their culture and to hold community activities. We also supported a bid by the Ngunnawal Elders to create a healing place, to allow indigenous communities to provide culturally appropriate programs for those who have been victims of the separation policies of previous governments. ACTCOSS unreservedly apologises and expresses its regret at those policies and the devastating impact they had on those removed from their families, and the effects those policies continue to have on their relatives and wider kinship circles.

To ensure that there is reconciliation and understanding, ACTCOSS also recommended that the ACT Government ensure that all public sector employees, MLAs and Assembly staff undertake indigenous cultural awareness training. ACTCOSS runs such training for its staff, and believes that it enriches the understanding of those who deal with policy issues that impact on Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- \$0.145 m - Indigenous traineeships with Environment ACT – Namadgi National Park
- \$0.352 m - Aboriginal Justice Centre – community-managed facility to provide coordinated approach to ATSI justice programs
- \$0.295 m – leadership and mentoring programs for students yr 10-12, as well as literacy & numeracy support
- \$75,000 m - on-going funding for Jumby Mulla, Indigenous managed family support service administered through Billabong
- \$0.214 m - provision of 5 Koori pre-school programs
- \$63,000 m - establish an Indigenous Foster care service to assist and support families to prevent problems that result from contact with the welfare system.
- \$0.20 m- hearing health program for infants and children managed by Winnunga Nimmityjah
- \$0.14 m - funding for two dual diagnosis outreach workers located with Winnunga Nimmityjah & Gugan Gulwan (also mentioned in Mental Health)
- \$0.191m - Aboriginal Midwifery Access Program – community-based antenatal and postnatal managed by Winnunga Nimmityjah

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- \$0.20 m -Carer Recognition and supporting ATSI carers – small project grants to support carers knowledge, skills and support networks. While this has been put forward as an ATSI initiative, ACTCOSS understands it is not actually a targeted program. More information is needed.
- \$0.15 m/ \$0.10 million? Bush Healing Farm– feasibility study into the development of a culturally appropriate prevention, education, rehab and outreach to address drug and alcohol abuse within Canberra’s Indigenous community. Two figures quoted in budget papers: need clarification.

Justice and Community Safety

ACTCOSS is very pleased that the ACT Government has committed itself to civil and political rights through the introduction of the Human Rights Act 2003 and the commitment to review the Act after a year to look at the inclusion of social, economic and cultural rights. While the rights included in the Act are minimal, and are limited in application, it is still a major move forward in the face of sometimes hostile opposition. ACTCOSS applauds the Government and cross benchers who supported the Bill.

As detailed elsewhere, ACTCOSS will be working in the future to develop tools to help it incorporate human rights instruments into its work, both internally and in its policy development. That will include our input into the processes that will inform the development of the ACT corrections complex.

As there is increasing awareness of the interrelationships between mental health problems, substance abuse, intellectual developmental delays and the corrections system, it is important that the Government's programs in the Justice and Community Safety portfolio recognise the need for inter-Departmental relationships to be developed to allow multidisciplinary programs to be developed that meet the needs of people involved in the corrections system.

ACTCOSS made the following recommendations relating to the Justice and Community Safety portfolio, recognising it has responsibility for advocating and disseminating information on the new Human Rights Act.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 18: That the Government allocate funds for potential legal challenges to the Human Rights Act.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- Corrections Health Service \$198,000 with funding continuing into the out years. Additional staff for pre-court dosing of medications at Quamby, Symondston, and Belconnen. Integrated service across the three existing correctional facilities.
- Act Corrections Facility. \$10 m in 2004-05, \$100 capital cost over life of construction.
- Community Based forensic mental health team - \$300,000 in 04-05. Good measure to divert people with mental health problems out of the corrections system.
- Implementation of Human Rights Act \$252,000 04-05 for new staff. Not enough detail.
- Aboriginal Justice Centre – see Indigenous issues
- Restorative Justice Unit - \$432,000 04-05. Juveniles only in first year, with adults able to access programs in second year.
- Reduced property crime. \$1.352million. Sounds like a good mix of early intervention and support for offenders. Good that causes of crime are being addressed.

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- Not enough detail on the reasons for medication before Court – except that it may be to allow people on remand to have their regular medication before attending court.
- Community based forensic mental health team - Seems an insufficient amount to have an impact. Will obviously be a small service. Other programs are needed.

- Restorative Justice Unit – no details of the rest of the alternatives to sentencing review. Good start, but needs more discussion.
- AFP Increased police numbers – 20 new police by 2005-06, but no commensurate increase in drug and alcohol support workers and places. Some new initiatives in youth drug and alcohol, but still an emphasis on policing over early intervention.
- No money at all for the implementation of the review of statutory oversight and community advocacy agencies. Government has shown in the past that it is forward thinking and can put money into a project awaiting a report – why not this one?

Women

ACTCOSS has collaborated with the Women's Electoral Lobby ACT to produce this analysis of the Budget.

Initiatives

After the disappointing results of the previous two budgets, the 2004-05 ACT Budget contains a number of useful initiatives for women. These include:

- the establishment of a Women's Grants Program (\$100,000 per year starting in 2004-05);
- exempting businesses that provide maternity, primary care giver and adoption leave from the payment of payroll tax for those employees (\$150,000 in foregone revenue per year, commencing 2005-06)
- increasing the number of specialist breast cancer nurses (\$160,000 per year starting in 2004-05)
- extending the Aboriginal Midwifery Access Program (\$191,000 per year starting in 2004-05); and
- funding scholarships for company directorship courses for women (\$10,000 per year starting in 2004-05).

Addressing systemic disadvantage

Despite these useful initiatives, the Budget does not do enough to address the systemic discrimination against women.

The Budget does not allocate funding for, or even mention, the Strategic Plan for Women, the key policy mechanism for addressing the systemic issues facing women in the ACT (e.g. the chronic and growing gender pay gap.)

As part of a systemic approach to women's disadvantage, pay and conditions in female-dominated industries such as the community sector must be supported and improved, for example by providing secure funding for Award and above-Award wage increases.

Reporting and the Women's Budget Statement

The 2004-05 Budget reinstates the practice of presenting a Women's Budget Statement. This change is very welcome, but the Statement itself is fundamentally flawed.

The Statement includes the ambiguous statement that "87.7% of all budget initiatives directly or indirectly benefit women." This figure is not defined or explained. The Statement provides a list many pages long of

initiatives ranging from anti-terrorism measures to recycling programs, all of which are said to indirectly benefit women.

While it is indisputable that these programs benefit women (as well as men) it is not clear, on this basis, what, if anything, could have been excluded from the figure of 87.7%. Such loose interpretation of "benefit to women" and the failure to incorporate any analysis of women's systemic disadvantage make the Statement weak, if not useless.

ACTCOSS supports the practice of including a Women's Budget Statement, but believes the Statement must present a much more rigorous and thoughtful gender analysis of the Budget.

The weakness of the Women's Budget Statement is also indicative of the under-resourcing of the Office for Women, a matter which needs to be addressed in future budgets.

Gaps in service provision and unmet need

The Budget does not provide extra funding for women's homelessness and outreach services, which were identified in the Status of Women report and the Homelessness Strategy.

In the Women's Budget Statement there is a commitment that "Facilities at the Women's Health Service will be upgraded in response to identified areas of need", but no funding amounts allocated to this upgrade can be found in the budget papers.

In its budget submission ACTCOSS recommended greater innovation, flexibility and consultation in the justice and corrections area, with particular regard to the needs of women (recommendations 14 and 19). The Budget does not address these needs.

Employment, economic development and budgetary Reporting

Employment and economic development

Long term unemployment

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 for that research to lead to 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.

ACTCOSS has called for both the Economic White Paper and the ACT Social Plan to implement strategies to work toward the goal of reducing long term unemployment (LTU) in the ACT. While the Social Plan includes targets for the reduction of LTU, the Economic White Paper lacked analysis of the social function of economic activity in the Territory.

In the 2004-05 Budget, ACTCOSS was looking for concrete initiatives to understand and reduce LTU as it occurs in the ACT.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- \$0.145 m - Indigenous Employment Opportunities:– provides for Indigenous Traineeships within Environment ACT (supports joint management of Namadgi National Park).
- \$0.285 m - Small Business Employment Ready Program provides for the continuation of the Program, which provides assistance to non-employing business operators to overcome the barriers to taking on their first and subsequent employees.
- \$0.30 m - Reduced Casual Teaching in CIT to support the conversion of casual teaching positions to contract and permanent teaching positions.
- \$0.30 m - Skills Development for Young People at Risk - enables brokers and mentors to assist long-term unemployed, students at high risk of dropping out of school, and persons

in custody in finding and completing appropriate training to enhance their life chances.

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- Forecast decrease in employment growth from 2.9% in 2002-03 (actual) to 1% in out years (projected).
- Interpretation of main challenge as lack of supply of labour (need to attract interstate workers): ignoring people who aren't able to access labour market.
- Small Business Employment ready Program - not necessarily a good way to promote employment; many sole operators do not aspire to employ others; what about those unemployed people this will not reach?
- Lack of dedicated measures to meet Social Plan target of reducing long term unemployment as a proportion of total unemployment.
- Neither Social Plan nor Economic White Paper is providing specific measures to promote employment/counter unemployment, despite professed intention of both plans to deal with this.

Business assistance

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.

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 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 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.

Recommendation 29: 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.

Major Initiatives

- \$3.396 m - Small and Micro Business Programs (including the Small Business Employment Ready Program listed above)
- \$2.06 m - Knowledge Fund
- \$0.515 m - Export Growth Program Business Acceleration Program (\$258,000)
- \$0.258 m - Small Business Employment Ready Program
- \$0.155 m - Mentoring Assistance
- \$0.15 m - Industry Capability Network

In addition, these related measures appeared in the budget:

- \$7.8 m - Tourism Marketing and Promotion
- \$0.30 m - Office of Film, Television and Digital Media
- \$0.34 m - Office of Small Business Commissioner

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- These grants total \$11, 836,000 – a very large sum for business assistance.
- It is unclear whether the \$10 m for venture Capital assistance is also in the 2004-05 Budget Papers, as it was not easily identified. This will be debated when Appropriation Bill 2003-04 (No 3) is debated in the Assembly.
- No extended accountability arrangements for business assistance, which is especially concerning in context of few other employment initiatives

Budgetary reporting

A 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.

ACTCOSS sees part of its responsibility as being an advocate for sound and transparent governance in the ACT and appropriate division of responsibilities within society. This includes analysing the ACT budget. In the past the criticism has been levelled that the community sector is keen to provide ways to spend money, but had no contribution to make with regard to revenue. ACTCOSS is now developing these skills within its policy team, and makes the following recommendation:

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Other relevant recommendations:

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Recommendation 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.

Major Initiatives

- The ACT Government has begun pre-budget briefings for the community and business sectors, which assist with understanding the Budget. There has also been some improvements in the presentation of material, including the financial outlook and forward estimates.
- The Government has produced a discussion paper on future budget presentation. The discussion paper covers triple bottom line reporting and financial statement presentation.
- ACTCOSS welcomes the circulation of this discussion paper and looks forward to actively engaging in consultation on the topic of budget presentation.

Transport

ACTCOSS recognises transport as fundamental not only to practical community operations but to the pursuit of social justice. In both respects, an effective public transport system is a core requirement. However, we have not directly addressed transport issues in our 2004-05 Budget submission.

ACTCOSS welcomes the work done over the past two years towards a Sustainable Transport Plan. The way ahead involves action on both the measures identified in that Plan and on the further steps required, in relation to public transport, over and above those already acknowledged by the government.

Improvement in public transport usage will be a product of many factors, but of three in particular. Each of the three receives some recognition in the current Budget, namely -

- shortening of journey times;
- improved frequency of service;
- improved provision of real-time information.

Nevertheless, evening and weekend intertown services, and most feeder services both peak and off-peak, need further attention if public transport is to be established as an effective transport mode.

Major Initiatives

- \$27.0 m - Continuation of Traffic Congestion and Road Safety Program
- Completion of Morshead Drive (from Pialligo to airport) and Fairbairn Ave upgrade during the budget year
- \$6.0 m over two years for a bus corridor between Belconnen and Civic as stage 1 of the Sustainable Transport Initiative – included in capital works program
- \$0.9 m for Gungahlin to Civic Corridor priority measures for High Occupancy Vehicles.
- Trials of bike racks on ACTION buses on intertown routes - this is a good idea if can be done safely eg. bike racks as a hazard to pedestrians, if at front of bus – or hazard to riders if loading and unloading bike from back of bus
- \$0.10 m - concept design of a real-time passenger information system for interchanges
- \$1.10 m - additional ten ACTION Express services from selected outlying suburbs at peak hours on weekdays - this has the risk of improving services to relatively well-off middle-class, existing ACTION users rather than drawing new

ACTION business. Social justice considerations require improved off-peak services

- Extra \$17m for Gungahlin Drive Extension (taking funds for stage 1 to a total of \$70 million)
- Continued govt funding of \$54m (most of this is not new funding) for ACTION Authority to cover the cost of fare subsidies, concessions etc.

Concerns/Unresolved questions

- Continuation of Traffic Congestion and Road Safety Program:
- How much of this will facilitate public transport operations or usage? How much of it will simply provide for greater private car-driver convenience?
- Real time information systems are a critical element in establishing respected, and used, public transport system, but is the funding allocation realistic?
- Real-time information MUST be available along route as well as at interchanges – including along feeder routes, not just intertown routes.
- Morshead Drive completion: should this expenditure have been by Australian government as national road / access to national capital road? There is also concern that this may be to foster further investment on office buildings etc at the airport – making it a subsidy for operations of airport owners
- Bus corridor between Belconnen and Civic: we note that it is being done for environmental reasons, not social justice or even transportation efficacy
- Gungahlin to Civic Corridor: How far it goes to meet needs? A small number of traffic light adjustments perhaps? Query also whether 'high occupancy vehicles' will include private cars with 3 or more occupants (but note that taxis should be included, even if with only one passenger).