



**Comment  
on the  
Canberra  
Social Plan  
Progress  
Report**

**December  
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**INTRODUCTION**

ACTCOSS acknowledges that modern day Canberra has been built on the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people. We pay our respects to their elders and recognise the displacement and disadvantage they have suffered since European settlement. ACTCOSS celebrates the Ngunnawal's living culture and valuable contribution to the ACT community.

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations, people living with disadvantage, and low-income citizens of the Territory. ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS network, made up of each of the state Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS's objectives are representation of people living with disadvantage, the promotion of equitable social policy, and the development of a professional, cohesive and effective community sector.

The membership of the Council includes the majority of community based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and interested individuals.

ACTCOSS receives funding from the Community Services Program (CSP) which is a program of the ACT Government.

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# Comment on the Social Plan Progress Report

## Introduction

The ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) maintains a keen interest in the continuation and implementation of the Canberra Social Plan. From this perspective, ACTCOSS welcomes the production of 'Getting on with the Job' – The Canberra Social Plan Progress Report. However, we would use this opportunity to highlight some of our concerns with the report, and encourage the ACT Government to take these into account when developing the formal biennial progress report, due in July 2006.

## The Progress Report is limited to reporting on Actions

ACTCOSS raises the concern that the Progress Report is limited in scope: it only reports against the 69 specific actions that the Government committed to undertake as part of the Canberra Social Plan. However, ACTCOSS would point out that the Social Plan also contains 50 Goals, 19 Key Progress Indicators and 5 specific Targets. In ACTCOSS' view, it would be extremely beneficial to report against these criteria in addition to the Actions.

ACTCOSS notes that 'Getting on with the Job' comes relatively quickly upon the heels of the launch of the Social Plan, and hence the progress towards the broader goals and targets of the Social Plan may not be well developed. However, the Progress Reports states that the formal biennial Progress Report, due in July next year will:

*"review progress on each of the Actions of Building Our Community, including an assessment of whether it has been or is being fully implemented, and whether that implementation is on schedule." (p.61)*

ACTCOSS hopes that the Report will go much further than that, and also report against the Goals, Key Progress Indicators, and Targets. That the biennial Progress Report would be limited to Actions alone is of concern, particularly as the Goals are presented to be achieved within a 5-10 year timeframe, and it would be a reasonable expectation that some discernable progress would have been made after 2 years.

Furthermore, simply listing progress against the Actions turns the Social Plan into a shopping list, with little or no effect once its initial commitments have been fulfilled. This goes against the stated aim for the Social Plan to be "a living and breathing operational document" (Progress Report, p.2).

## **The Progress Report should detail how the Social Plan is being used in decision-making**

In similar vein, it would be beneficial for the Progress Report to outline how the Social Plan is being used by government as a decision-making tool and a strategic document. While other Government documents occasionally reference the Canberra Social Plan, they rarely seek to extend or develop its principles explicitly. While the Social Plan was billed as a “comprehensive blueprint for the way we want the ACT to develop” (Social Plan, p.1), there has been little information given to the community as to how the document is used by government to achieve its vision.

As a document with a whole-of-government focus that necessarily addresses overlapping departmental responsibilities, the Social Plan can provide a focus for interagency co-operation and direction. It would be useful for the Progress Reports to identify the extent to which this opportunity has been realised.

## **The Progress Report should provide an opportunity for analysis**

The Social Plan provides a framework for identifying areas of need, and for strategically aligning different areas of Government service provision. In this vein, it would be useful for the Progress Report to not only list whether the Actions have been completed, but to link them back to the Social Plan goals and analyse their effectiveness.

Much of the content of the Progress Report, while providing an informative summary of each project, does little to link it to the priority areas or strategic goals. For instance, *Priority 3: A strong, safe and cohesive community* lists at 3.12 (p.31-34) the progress on the Sustainable Transport Plan. However, while the commentary is extensive, the report does not really explain how this initiative assists in making the community stronger, safer, or more cohesive, and focuses mainly on the environmental benefits.

Furthermore, the Progress Report does not really give the community much information in terms of the relative strength of and attention given to different areas of the Social Plan. This level of analysis would allow the Government and community to identify goals that are progressing well, as well as those that might need additional consideration.

## **Listing grant recipient data gives few insights into progress**

About a quarter of the Progress Report is devoted to providing long lists of recipients to various community grant programs. While ACTCOSS continues to support these worthy programs, it is of dubious usefulness to simply list the recipients and grant amounts as a meaningful indicator of progress on the Social Plan. This is particularly the case as ACTCOSS understands that many of the grants programs were in existence long before the Social Plan was produced, and that they may have sustained a cut in funding since their inception.