



# Treading water:

## Missed opportunities for the Community Sector

ACTCOSS' Analysis of the  
2005-2006 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 following people who volunteered their time to compile this analysis; From our General Committee - Robin Brown, Rebecca Vassarotti, Peter Sutherland, Ed Duyvan, Fiona May and Chris Johnson. From the community sector - Paul Bartholomew (Respite Care), Kerrie Tucker (ACT Shelter), Linda Rosie (Mental Health Coalition of the ACT), Colynne Gates (Health Care Consumers Association), Faye Brockelsby (CCHOACT), former staff members Merri Andrew and Amanda Raward, and to all current ACTCOSS staff members.

This document provides a preliminary assessment of the ACT Government's 2005-06 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](mailto:actcoss@actcoss.org.au).

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

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## Overview

ACTCOSS has been supportive of the *ACT Social Plan* as a framework outlining the Government's commitments to improving the quality of life for all the people of Canberra. We formulated our budget submission accordingly. ACTCOSS believes that the Government's obligations in the *Social Plan* need to be prominent in its spending decisions and we are disappointed to see that this Budget has not delivered on these obligations. Last year ACTCOSS noted (in the *Budget Overview 2004-05*) that:

*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.*

What is clear this year is that spending on *Social Plan* initiatives are effectively marking time. ACTCOSS has already called on the Government to be more ambitious in achieving the *Social Plan* goals, but it appears that those benchmarks will be stretched right out to 2013.

ACTCOSS *is* extremely pleased to see that the ACT Government has committed to changing the basis of indexation for funding community services. It has become abundantly clear that annual cost price index (CPI) increases are underestimating the real increases in costs for community services and so this commitment is very important to ensure that human services will be maintained into the future. However, we are disappointed that the Government has delayed the introduction of this initiative until the 2006-07 financial year. In this year's Budget, the CPI is set at 2.25%.

We were also very pleased to see the additional funding for:

- Individual Disability support packages;
- A Family Violence Intervention Program initiative;
- Measures to reduce hospital waiting lists;
- Programs to support children with high and complex needs;
- Growth in the allocation to concessions;
- An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Unit in the Office of Children Youth and Family Support; and
- Energy efficiency funding for public housing.

These are all areas that ACTCOSS supports as being essential for some of Canberra's most vulnerable people.

Again, however, there has been a delay in implementing another major promise in the lead up to the 2004 election. The Government has not provided the first installment of a \$10 million per year election commitment to social housing. In fact, the Government has forecast a reduction in the number social housing units, even though public waiting lists continue to get longer. Access to affordable housing continues to be a number one priority in the delivery of social welfare in the ACT and the absence of additional funding in this budget will compound the stress on families, individuals and community services.

ACTCOSS is also concerned at the level of additional funding proposed for the new ACT Human Rights Commission. This Government has said repeatedly that they are committed to building a human rights culture, but this needs to be demonstrated by ensuring that on-the-ground services have the ability to put these ideals into practice. We had hoped to see a greater commitment to education and training for the community sector to make sure that human rights are respected in service delivery and to support individuals to take action when this standard is not met.

In the weeks leading up to the 2005 Budget, all of Canberra anticipated bad news. The Budget forecasts an operating deficit of \$90 million for 2005-06, to be followed by a break-even budget in 2006-07 and a surplus of \$39 million in 2007-08. The ACT is one of the wealthiest jurisdictions in one of the wealthiest countries in the world. Perhaps getting back into surplus over two financial years could have been considered? ACTCOSS believes that, despite the dramatic increase in the forecast deficit, delaying spending on community sector services threatens the viability of the human services sector and the rationale that underpinned the development of the Canberra Plan.

Many of the revenue pressures affecting the bottom line have been explained in this Budget and in addition the Government has identified a several social areas that have been inadequately resourced over the years (Ministerial Media Release: Quinlan, 4 May 2005). There have been a number of substantial reports that have addressed the consequences of under-resourcing human services – the Gallop Report on disability services, the McLeod Report into the 2003 fires and the Vardon Report into child protection.

ACTCOSS recognises the need to address priorities in these areas of service delivery and welcomes the commitment shown in this Budget to achieving this end. However, ACTCOSS is disappointed that the whole of community focus, that is the hall-mark of the Social Plan, has been a casualty in this process. Without providing for those who deliver general human services in the community and without providing for basic housing and support services there are many who once again will miss out in this year's allocations.

ACTCOSS is concerned that those with unmet needs will become our pressing priorities in the future. We are concerned that these are the people who will be contributing their stories to the reports of the future.

Overall the ACT community sector will be disappointed by the stalling in what we believe is a genuine commitment to social justice in the agenda set out by this Government. The first job of government is to look after the needs of its most vulnerable citizens and, despite some good initiatives in past budgets and promises for this upcoming financial year, we can only see very small steps towards the goal of a sustainable community where all can reach their potential.

# Community Sector Viability

## Initiatives

### Reform of community sector funding indexation

- The budget makes provision from 2006-07 for \$3.3 m over 3 years to provide more appropriate indexation of community sector funding across all funding agencies.
  - As costs in the community sector are concentrated in wages, ACTCOSS is disappointed at the delay in implementing this measure as it will mean that the community sector will continue to struggle to meet wage cost increases and other cost pressures.

## Concerns

- There is no increase in funding for organisations that are block grant funded by Disability ACT to provide basic support services to people with disabilities living in the community. The indexation increase does not meet the increased cost of service provision arising from wage increases and increased personal care needs of clients. The only option for these organisations, if they are to manage within the funding available and remain financially viable, is to provide less hours of support to fewer people with disabilities.
- Comparisons between the Government's Supplementary Appropriation of almost \$53.9million for public sector wage negotiations in 2005-06 and the lack of appropriate indexation for the community sector will be inevitable. (BP3, p. 207)
- The Budget contains no significant increases to deal with key concerns such as increasingly complex client needs and staff turnover. The Government acknowledges that much community input to the budget process sought increased funding for services, "particularly for disadvantaged groups" (BP 3, p. 269), yet the viability of organisations providing exactly those services has been largely neglected.
- There has been no community sector ICT (Information and Communications Technology) support, despite the growing demand for the sector to do more with no increase in funding. It is impossible to realise the efficiency gains from ICT without help

desk support, software and hardware upgrades and training for staff in ICT skills.

- ACTCOSS is concerned by the funding cut to the Renew Community Infrastructure Grant scheme. Current discussions within the sector suggest that many community organisations endure poor quality office space which does not meet basic access and OH&S standards.
- It is disappointing that there has been no allocation to fund recommendations flowing from the Community Sector Viability Taskforce's deliberations.
- ACTCOSS is also disappointed that there is no consideration evident of any further carers' initiatives, recognition of peak organisations in the community, provision to support the Community Development Network or funds for the development of coordinated emergency management plans for the human services sector.

## **Background**

The Community Sector is an ongoing area of need for additional Government expenditure. ACTCOSS has identified a strong and sustainable community sector as central to achieving an equitable society. The community sector provides a vast array of social support and access services to the people of the ACT, which are particularly targeting at people living with disadvantage and from low-income households.

The ACTCOSS Community Sector Survey for 2003-04 demonstrated that community service providers are facing more complex service provision than previously, with the number of services per client increasing by 18% over the previous year. In addition, the survey revealed that staff turnover was alarmingly high. The ACT figure for staff turnover was 30.7%, which was nearly double the national average for community organisations (16.3%) and about 3 times higher than the Australian all-industry average of between 10% and 12%. This was also reflected in 65% of respondents reporting that they had difficulty attracting appropriate staff, compared to 46% nationally. For the ACT, the main difficulties in attracting staff were levels of pay (41%) and shortages in the availability of paid hours per week (24%)

Applications for the Community Inclusion Fund (CIF) demonstrated the high level of demand for additional service funding. The CIF received 122 applications, of which only 15 received funding.

The Community Sector needs continuing support and assistance in order to maximise its effectiveness, build its capacity, pay staff competitive wages and extend its level of service provision to fill gaps in human services. ACTCOSS notes and applauds the Chief Minister's commitment to implement

changes to the indexation of community sector funding to assist with raising the remuneration of staff.

ACTCOSS believes the Government can do more to ensure the people of Canberra have access to community services of the highest standard. In its budget submission, ACTCOSS made the following specific recommendations:

**Recommendation 1:** ACTCOSS is asking that all the proposals submitted to the Community Inclusion Fund be assessed in the context of the 2005-06 ACT Budget

**Recommendation 9:** ACTCOSS recommends that the ACT Government consider opportunities to further fund the Community Development Network and allow it to extend its work.

**Recommendation 10:** That the ACT Government recognise, through appropriate funding, the role of peak organisations in the community sector.

**Recommendation 11:** That the ACT Government review its funding for emergency plans to ensure that small organisations and community groups can develop an emergency response plan that complements the Government's strategies.

**Recommendation 12:** ACTCOSS urges the ACT Government to recognise the economic and communications benefits of supporting community sector IT and factor the need for updated computing capability and ongoing IT support and consumables budgets in its sector funding.

In addition, ACTCOSS made the following comments:

"ACTCOSS is particularly eager to see progress on the establishment of a Community Sector Taskforce with community representation and a funded project officer in the 2005-06 ACT Budget."

"ACTCOSS is also aware of the discussion paper on possible carer's legislation, and will be looking to the 2005-06 Budget to scrutinise it for measures that directly assist carers and the people they provide care to."

# Accommodation Security

## Initiatives

- **Energy & Water Efficiencies in Public Housing:** The Budget allocates \$1 million in new works funding for energy and water improvements for ACT public housing. ACTCOSS welcomes this as an important initiative to support public housing tenants in reducing consumption of basic resources. We are concerned that this allocation should be clearly targeted and not absorbed into the general maintenance requirements of current public housing stock. We would also welcome a commitment to extending this approach to social housing stock in the ACT.
- **Rates Rebates for concession card holders and pensioners:** An increase in the level of funding to \$1.954 million reflects growing need for concessions. New initiatives to meet concessions need are welcome, but ACTCOSS awaits a comprehensive public review of concessions to ensure they are being targeted effectively. Limits to concession card holders does not alleviate burden carried by other low income households.
- **Feasibility Study for a Homelessness Drop-In Centre:** An allocation of \$100,000 of new works funding has been provide for a study into the feasibility of a centrally based drop in centre for homeless people. This allocation addresses objective 2.3.3 of the ACT Homelessness Strategy. ACTCOSS looks forward to the outcomes of the study.

## Concerns

ACTCOSS is particularly concerned that the Government has not provided the first installment of a \$10 million election commitment to social housing. In fact, according to projections made in the Accountability Indicators for Social Housing Services (BP4: 320), Government anticipates a net reduction of 98 in the number of social housing dwellings, even though waiting lists continue to grow. Access to affordable housing remains a priority issue in the ACT and the absence of funding will simply compound the stress on community services. The lack of capital funding for public or social housing compounds the impact of other social and economic stressors on disadvantaged people in the community.

ACTCOSS queries the effectiveness of the strategic indicators (1 & 2) indicated in the Budget papers (BP4: 319) to provide incentives for Housing ACT to maintain a broad policy focus and the ambition to deliver high quality services to the community.

## Background

Accommodation security is a term that ACTCOSS has adopted to demonstrate that housing is a complex issue, with a range of services required to meet the basic human need for shelter. It is not just public housing, but encompasses all forms of social housing, crisis and outreach services, community supports to sustain tenancies, and the official structures that control the supply of housing services.

The Community Sector Survey, conducted by the Australian Council of Social Service in conjunction with the state and Territory COSSes, reports that:

- In the 2003-04 financial year, the number of people turned away from housing services in Canberra grew by 2.6% over the year before;
- Nearly 40% more people sought housing services than were able to be catered for; and
- 550 people were turned away due to inadequate funding.

Even more dramatically, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare publication "Homeless People in SAAP" (March 2005) shows that the level of unmet need for Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) services increased by 86% in the 2003-04 financial year.

In 2003-04 there were 1950 requests for services that were turned down from SAAP providers, compared to 1050 in 2002-03.

The biggest increase in unmet need was for single women, with 1000 requests for help from single women being refused – more than double the previous year.

Such figures show the crisis end of the ACT's housing squeeze. The ACT Government has made an excellent start with its homeless strategy "*Breaking the Cycle*" and last year's announcement of an additional \$33 million to increase social housing stocks. We need to ensure that, at a time when the Government is cutting back because of reduced revenues over the short term, we do not cause long term damage by cutting these important programs.

In its 2005-06 ACT Budget submission, ACTCOSS expressed interest in the following areas relating to accommodation security:

**Recommendation 22:** That the Government ensure that tenants of social housing are accessing the full range of concessions and CSOs that they are entitled to claim.

- ⇒ (With regard to the goal of implementing an Asset Management Strategy) ACTCOSS has yet to see a properly articulated translation of the Property Management Strategy into an action plan. As this is a major statement on asset management, perhaps this can be included in the Budget papers?
- ⇒ We look forward to an indication of the Government's continued commitment and extension of these valuable initiatives (The Linkages Program and other ACT Housing support programs) in the 2005-06 ACT Budget.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS looks forward to seeing how this program (increased use of Boarding Houses) has been implemented, and the proposed budget allocation for operating the increased support model outlined in the Social Plan.

# Human Rights

## Initiatives

- Additional funding to set up the new Human Rights Commission as a single statutory authority (\$100,000 in 2005-06), which is in addition to existing funding for the Human Rights Office and the Health Services Commissioner.
- A commitment to evaluate the new Human Rights Act including service delivery compliance, although this evaluation is required by legislation.

## Concerns

- There is no commitment to support the community with human rights training or initiatives, other than the existing small budget of the Human Rights Office transferred to the new Commission.
- The Budget proposes audits of service delivery compliance, which ACTCOSS believes are acceptable if it is the government being audited. It would not be acceptable for community organisations to have this expectation placed upon them, particularly in the absence of any support for training of community sector workers and consumers.

## Background

ACTCOSS has been an enthusiastic supporter of the ACT Government's adoption of a Human Rights Act, and looks forward to the time when we can again progress the case for the inclusion of social, economic and cultural rights into that framework. We are also actively pursuing human rights training and opportunities to assist the community sector to adopt a human rights approach to their own work.

Given the commitment of ACTCOSS to this Government initiative, this organisation was looking for measurable progress in the 2005-06 ACT Budget on the task of creating a human rights culture in Canberra. This organisation believes the milestone that was the Human Rights Act 2004 will be negated if the community at large does not engage in the discussion and pursuit of human rights.

In keeping with this pursuit of a rights-based culture for the ACT, ACTCOSS made the following comments and recommendations in its 2005-06 budget submission:

**Recommendation 5:** ACTCOSS believes more resources need to be directed to promoting a human rights culture within Government, coupled with resources to promote an understanding and acceptance of human rights in the wider population.

- ⇒ ACTCOSS hopes expects that the Government will provide enough information in the 2005-06 Budget to allow for analysis of how the budget will contribute to the development of a human rights culture in the ACT, including the public sector.
- ⇒ We expect that a fuller picture of the Government's plans to address the human rights of people with a disability will be outlined in the 2005-06 Budget papers.

# Indigenous Health, Housing and Community

## Initiatives

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Unit to be established in the Office for Children, Youth and Family Support: ACTCOSS supports this initiative (\$700,000 in 2005-06) and calls upon the Government to ensure that it is staffed with Indigenous employees.
- Circle Sentencing: we are pleased to see the continuation of the circle sentencing program and the allocation of \$100,000 per annum for the employment of an Indigenous Liaison officer, although we note with concern that this funding is not indexed for the out years.
- ATSI Dental Health Program: We welcome the continued commitment to the provision of regular funding for the Indigenous dental health program, although this was provided by the 2004-05 second appropriation.
- Evaluation of Dyiramal Migay: ACTCOSS would like to be reassured that the Indigenous community are fully included in this review and that the insights gained are translated into improved service provision.
- ATSI Youth Supported Accommodation: This program was announced in the 2004-05 second appropriation and ACTCOSS again welcomes this initiative.

## Concerns

- ACTCOSS notes that there is no specific funding for cultural awareness training for employees of government services dealing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. If Departments are providing such training, ACTCOSS would like to see this reported in terms of the government's commitment to reconciliation.

## Background

ACTCOSS acknowledges that we are on the land of the traditional owners, the Ngunnawal people. We pay our respects to their elders, their living culture and their traditions. We acknowledge the disadvantage and hurt that has been inflicted upon Indigenous peoples across this country by white settlement.

The practical outcome of that hurt and disadvantage for many Indigenous people has been adverse health outcomes, shortened life expectancy, problems with education for young people, violence, alcohol and drug misuse

as well as community and family destruction. The demands of culture and the strength of family ties mean that these problems affect all Indigenous people, and are not individualised.

ACTCOSS is not an Indigenous organisation and we recognise the rights of Indigenous Australians to determine matters affecting them. We actively encourage Governments to form partnerships with Indigenous communities in determining local needs and are pleased that the ACT Government supports self-determination for Indigenous communities.

ACTCOSS, however, maintains its commitment to reconciliation, as outlined in the Sorry Day Pledge in 2002\*, and as the peak social services sector representative in the ACT. We included the following comments and recommendation in our budget submission:

**Recommendation 8:** Cultural awareness training should be provided to all employees in those mainstream services with Indigenous clients, to ensure these services are welcoming and accessible.

- ⇒ In line with the Government's commitment to work to overcome Indigenous disadvantage and dislocation, ACTCOSS will be watching for co-commitment to celebration of indigenous culture that goes beyond individual performances at Canberra events.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS is anticipating that there will be sufficient funding allocated in the 2005-06 ACT Budget to evaluate the (circle sentencing) pilot program. We would also expect an ongoing commitment to appropriate circle sentencing options.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS would be disturbed if this commitment (to improve the capability of mainstream health services to assist people from ATSI backgrounds) was led to a reduction the funding of Indigenous service providers or any slow-down in the development of more Indigenous-specific services.

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\* Available on the ACTCOSS website, or a copy can be sent by phoning 6202 7200.

# Disability

## Initiatives

- Additional funding of \$792,000 for community support and crisis intervention (Individual Support Packages): approximately 17 people to be provided with packages at costs ranging between \$7000 and \$125,000.
- Introduction of audits of service delivery for human rights compliance with the ACT Government's "Access to Government" strategy.
- Children with high and complex needs: \$610,000 for equipment and therapy support including children with autism.
- North side community-based service for young adults with a disability: \$415,000.

## Concerns

- There is no new funding to expand interpreter or translation services: this means people who need these services, including the deaf community and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, will still struggle to access basic services.
- 94 people were assessed last year as needing ISPs, however, many did not receive funding. This budget provides for some of those people. This does not cover those with less than high and complex needs, or people who have emerged since the last funding round or assessments. The budget papers do not clearly outline the number of ISPs being allocated.
- All other disability service funding is for the same levels of service provision as were provided in 04/05. There is a small increase to cover the increased cost of service provision, but the level of services remains the same despite unmet demand.
- North side community service for young adults with disabilities is a needed and welcome service, but the commitment is less than was made prior to the last election.

## Background

People with a disability have become a central focus of Federal Government social policy in recent months, with the forthcoming Commonwealth Budget expected to introduce new conditions for access to the Disability Support Pension (DSP) for entrants to the scheme from next financial year.

ACTCOSS has made submissions to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) Inquiry into work and disability issues, which can be viewed on the ACTCOSS website.\* Our concern is that people with a disability can have difficulty obtaining and affording services such as home care, accessibility aids, appropriate information technology, transport and a host of other supports that allow them to engage with their community and, where possible, undertake paid employment. Simply making it more difficult to obtain the DSP without addressing service provision issues will create more disadvantage and poverty.

In the ACT, services need to be accessible, affordable and appropriate. The ACT Government provides disability services and that commitment must be supported with adequate funding and real partnership with consumers. In our 2005-06 Budget submission, ACTCOSS made the following specific recommendations and comments:

**Recommendation 6:** The guarantee of free interpreter services needs to be expanded to ensure that Translation and Interpreter Services (TIS) are available for people who need translators for their everyday communication with service providers, whether Government operated or private.

- ⇒ We expect that a fuller picture of the Government's plans to address the human rights of people with a disability will be outlined in the 2005-06 Budget papers
- ⇒ ACTCOSS anticipates that the method of payment for interpreter services in community sector contracts can be remedied with the development of the Core Pricing Principles program.

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\* Copies can be obtained by ringing the ACTCOSS office on 6202 7200.

# Economic Development and Employment

## Initiatives

- **Increase in General Property Rates:** The Government will increase general property rates by 2.4% above the normal adjustment for CPI. This amounts to approximately \$104 per household on average. The rise is accompanied by an increase in the rates rebate for pensioners to offset the rise for this group.
- **Reduced Land Taxes:** The marginal rates of Land Tax have been reduced to limit tax increases due to CPI. While these changes may have a positive impact on the private rental market, the changes could have been implemented more progressively to target assistance at the lower end of the housing market. Cost: \$8.1 million.
- **City Heart Levy:** The detail of this levy on commercial businesses has not yet been provided. ACTCOSS will be watching the development of this initiative with interest. The Levy is expected to raise \$2.5 million in 2006-07.
- **Parking Fees:** There will an increase in the cost of paid parking of 10% and an increase in parking fines. Pay parking will also be introduced at hospitals. ACTCOSS again expresses its ongoing concern that flat rates taxes such as these are disproportionately punitive for people on low and fixed incomes.
- **Concessions:** There will an increase in funding for concession payments of \$4.8 million over 4 years. However, this is simply to meet growth in the number of people qualifying for concessions, and does not improve the level of concessions. ACTCOSS continues to call for a comprehensive public review of concessions to ensure they are being targeted effectively.
- **Vocational Education and Training:** There is \$3 million allocated over 2 years to vocational education and training to meet a sharp increase in demand for traineeship and apprenticeship places in the ACT.

## Concerns

- **General Savings:** The Government has budgeted for "General Savings" across all ACT Departments. We have been informed that this will include around 260 job losses over 2 years. However, it is unclear what effect this will have on the ability for Government to maintain service delivery levels, and whether cuts may be passed on to community organisations.

- **Lack of Employment Programs:** The Government has allocated no additional resources to addressing long-term unemployment or assisting the marginalised work force.
- **Digital Divide and Information and Communications Technology:** The Government has removed funds from the Digital Divide program in 2008-09, and ACTCOSS continues to be concerned at the lack of commitment to addressing Digital Divide issues, as well as the provision of ICT resources for the community sector.
- **Emergency Relief:** ACTCOSS remains concerned that there is no provision in the Budget for additional capacity for the community sector to delivery emergency relief for those in crisis.

## **Background**

The ACT Economy continues to be the largest per capita in the nation. Gross State Product (GSP) was more than \$15 billion in 2003-04, and GSP per capita was \$50,539 compared to the Australian average of 40,647. The difference is even more pronounced in disposable household incomes, with ACT Gross Household Disposable Income per Head equal to \$38,173 compared to the Australian average of \$25,926. The ACT is the wealthiest jurisdiction in one of the wealthiest countries in the world, and can most afford increased social spending.

While unemployment is at relatively low levels in the ACT at 3.4% for the March quarter, long term unemployment and under employment continue to be major concerns. In addition, people who are unemployed have increasingly complex needs and require more intensive support to achieve secure employment.

The highest proportion of people living with poverty in the ACT are reliant on income support. \* The ACT Government can provide support and assistance to people on low and fixed incomes, including Federal Government-provided benefits, through its social welfare programs.

To this end, ACTCOSS made the following recommendations and comments in its budget submission:

**Recommendation 2:** ACTCOSS is asking that the concessions review be made public, including the breadth of concessions that were considered.

**Recommendation 3:** ACTCOSS urges the Government to do all it can to reopen debate on the quantum of the social wage.

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\* ACT Poverty Task Group, Report No. 4, 2000.

**Recommendation 4:** ACTCOSS asks that the Government provide increased emergency relief support for people on low incomes.

**Recommendation 20:** ACTCOSS also repeats its request that the Government commit funds to study trends in ACT long term unemployment to ensure that programs are designed and implemented that help people gain employment in jobs that suit their talents and improve their long term employment prospects.

**Recommendation 21:** ACTCOSS urges the Government to work with low income consumers and schools to ensure that inclusive IT practices and policies are implemented that do not disadvantage households without IT access.

**Recommendation 23:** The ACT Government should allocated dedicated funds to the research and development of programs to target long-term unemployment to ensure that this important indicator is met.

⇒ ACTCOSS is looking to the 2005-06 ACT Budget for a commitment to the ongoing viability of vocational education and training.

# Health – Community and Primary Care

## Initiatives

### *Additional elective surgery capacity:*

- \$2 million allocated to provide an additional 300 elective surgery episodes in 2005/2006.
  - ACTCOSS welcomes this initiative to clear some of the waiting lists but more specific performance indicators would be welcome.

### *HACC Growth funds:*

- \$800,000 in growth funding for Health and Community Care services.
  - ACTCOSS welcomes the growth in funds to this sector, but is concerned that this allocation does not meet the known need for expansion in the HACC sector.

### *Falls Prevention:*

- \$300,000 to develop and deliver fall prevention programs in Residential Aged Care Facilities.
  - This prevention strategy highlights the need for the health portfolio to identify and respond to early intervention and promotion opportunities within the community generally.

### *Nurse Practitioners:*

- An allocation of \$250,000 has been made for 2005/2006 and for the following two years.
  - This is an innovative response to increasing demand for and costs of health services and provides an opportunity for the health system to be more responsive to the needs of, and more accessible to, specific populations. ACTCOSS would welcome a further expansion of the program.

*High Needs Children:* \$465,000 will enable children with a disability to return home with additional support rather than stay in hospital.

*Additional hospital beds:* \$2.3 million to provide an additional 20 beds at Calvary (12) and the Canberra Hospital (8).

*Intermittent Care Program:* \$650,000 to support older people in the community.

*After hours GP Service:* \$350,000 to extend access

*Quality Infrastructure:* \$500,000 to improve the quality of health services and patient outcomes.

### **Initiatives funded under the 2<sup>nd</sup> Appropriation Bill:**

#### *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dental Health Program*

- \$222,000 has been allocated for this service to be provided at Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service at Narrabundah.
  - ACTCOSS welcomes the extension of Indigenous specific health services and credits the Government for recognising the limitations of mainstream health service delivery models for this community.

*Child at Risk Assessment Unit:* \$638,000 to increase staff levels

### **Concerns**

The small amount of real growth is welcome, but many important initiatives are funded from redistribution of existing funds and the impact on existing service delivery is uncertain.

Apart from some minor funding (Budget Paper 4 – page 187) to look at expansion options for Karralika, there is no development of the ACT's drug and alcohol programs. This is despite the continued growth in demand for such services and the negative health and social outcomes from not addressing drug and alcohol misuse. We note that the capital funding for the expansion of Karralika has been returned to consolidated revenue (Budget Paper 3 – page 213) and we will be watching carefully to ensure that an appropriate amount is allocated to the project when these plans are finalised.

ACTCOSS would welcome more initiatives that provide early intervention and health promotion support for people within the community and initiatives that allow more people with high support needs to have a choice about their health treatment and residential options.

## Background

The health care allocation of the ACT Budget is the major single item in the ACT Budget, with around \$640 million spent to service the health care needs of the ACT. Two-thirds of this amount goes to acute, hospital-based care.

As the peak body for the community sector, ACTCOSS' interest in the Health Budget is in the areas of prevention and early intervention. This organisation has developed its expertise over the past few years in the social determinants of health and nutrition, through the Health Inequalities Action Model (HIAM) project. This program provides nutritional advice and support for agencies delivering food aid in the community, as well as resources and skills for consumers on low incomes to help improve their diet and overall health.

While ACTCOSS understands the emphasis on acute health care in the public arena, there is a need to develop more community-based early interventions. With depression, obesity, heart disease and diabetes becoming major community health problems, a holistic approach to health funding is essential.

The ACT Government has gone some way to providing leadership in this area, including the development of early childhood centres to assist parents and carers. There is also an increased level of funding for mental health services, however ACTCOSS maintains that there is still a long way to go before adequate services are provided for people experiencing mental health problems.

ACTCOSS believes that the community sector is a major partner in delivering health-related services at the local level, so our major focus is on the way the Government supports the sector to deliver those outputs.

In its budget submission, ACTCOSS made the following specific recommendations:

**Recommendation 15:** That the ACT Government commit additional funds to provide holistic services based on a social determinants of health model, that meet the complex health needs of people living with disadvantage and poverty.

**Recommendation 18:** That the ACT Government fund the expansion of health support and peer support for service providers that cater for high use groups.

**Recommendation 19:** ACTCOSS wants to see the ACT Corrections system make available to people in its charge all holistic health interventions and harm minimisation services available to the broader community.

We made the following comments in the budget submission specific to the Health Budget:

- ⇒ We will be looking to the 2005-06 ACT Budget to ensure that these (Family) centres are appropriately reviewed and evaluated. There is also a need to ensure that these centres are linked into other community services to ensure that the Family Centres are aware of the range and capacity of services they may feel can complement their role.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS believes the Government's initiatives in providing early childhood centres will help address part of this issue (promoting good health in children and young people, particularly childhood obesity), but there is a need to address the specific issues that influence the health of young people and adolescents including access to resources, such as food, housing and utilities.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS looks to the Government to improve the relevance and accessibility of health services for Indigenous residents while also ensuring that Indigenous specific services are further developed.

# Mental Health

## Initiatives

- Care Package for returning forensic mental health clients: This provides a care and treatment package for forensic mental health offenders returning to the ACT from NSW correctional centres. While ACTCOSS supports provision of care packages for this group similar support also needs to be provided to other mental health clients. It is not clear whether this is a short term initiative until the new forensic facility is built.
- Reconfiguration of accommodation for 2 clients of Long Gully: This initiative provides transitional alternative accommodation and support arrangements for 2 at-risk clients currently residing in ACT government provided disability residential services (Long Gully). ACTCOSS supports the assistance being provided to these clients and calls on the Government to develop a program to enable alternative accommodation options to be available to other clients.
- Master planning of Mental and Community Health Facilities: Providing funding for final planning and design work. ACTCOSS welcomes funding to allow planning of Mental and Community Health Facilities to move to the final planning stage prior to approval for tender.

## Concerns

- Funding for mental health services is inadequate to meet the existing unmet needs of the mental health sector to ensure that all people who encounter mental health problems are able to access adequate, appropriate and timely assistance.
- New outputs for Mental Health services indicate that the target for admitted patient separations for 2005-06 will decrease to 1300 from an anticipated outcome in 2004-05 of 1420. In addition children and youth services will decrease by 4360 to 24 300. There is no indication why these reductions will occur or what impact they will have on client services.

## Background

Given the crisis that has affected mental health services over the past few years, ACTCOSS believes that particular budgetary focus should have been provided to this important area of health care.

Increased reporting of depression, the recognition of drug-related mental health issues and co-morbidity have all increased the burden on the mental health system. Despite the ACT Government's increases in mental health funding over the past three years, more needs to be done to help the estimated 12.6% of ACT and region residents who experience high to very high levels of psychological distress, including anxiety, depression and mental illness.\* There is also a need to continue the expansion of services providing early intervention.

In 2003, the ACT Government released the ACT Government Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan. There have also been further reviews and plans in the area of mental health, including the ACT Mental Health Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention Plan 2004-08, the Patterson Report into Risk of Harm to Clients of Mental Health Services and the Mann-LaRoche Report into the Design and Operation Practice of the Psychiatric Unit at TCH. ACTCOSS supports the implementation of these reviews in full at the earliest opportunity.

In our Budget submission, ACTCOSS made the following recommendations:

**Recommendation 16:** There is a need to continue to increase funding to the mental health sector to ensure that all people who encounter mental health problems are able to access adequate, appropriate and timely assistance.

**Recommendation 17:** To allocate sufficient funding to fully implement the ACT Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2003-08.

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\* Australian Institute of Health and Welfare "National Report on Health Sector Performance Indicators", 2003, page 48.

# Transport

## Initiatives

- Additional funding for cycle paths of \$0.5 million for new capital works.
- New funding for footpath maintenance consisting of \$0.665 million per year for 3 years.
- \$4.84 million for 11 new buses as part of the ACTION Bus Replacement Program.
- There is new funding from Roads to Recovery (a Commonwealth initiative) including upgrades for Booboyan Road, Sutton Road and Tharwa Drive.
- \$6.76 million for construction in the capital works budget for the provision of a real time information system at bus interchanges. This initiative is designed to give passengers better information about when their bus will arrive at an interchange.

## Concerns

- There have been problems and cost issues with the introduction of Flexi-bus services, in particular that people have to pay the additional cost of a phone call to get a bus, that buses only travel to and from interchanges, and problems with punctuality of buses booked in the system.
- There is no new funding for weekend or evening bus services.
- There is no funding for improving accessible taxi services. In fact, from the analysis of Community Service Obligations (Budget Paper 3, page 133) it appears there will be a reduction in the level of support for taxi transport for people with a disability. This requires clarification.

ACTCOSS continues to be concerned that transport cost is a major issue for people on low and fixed incomes. Transport for people with a disability continues to be plagued with problems, despite the Governments adoption of the lift fee for wheelchair accessible taxis and uptake of accessible buses.

Public Transport and cycling has seen increased funding in the last few years, particularly with the introduction of the Sustainable Transport Plan. However, ACTCOSS continues to remain concerned that initiatives for buses tend to concentrate on commuters rather than ensuring an accessible and convenient transport system for people who do not have cars, particularly at off peak times.

# Justice and Community Safety

## Initiative

- There are new funds for reducing property crime, beginning with approximately \$0.5 million per year to “address the causes of offending”. ACTCOSS is concerned that these programs are not clearly defined and will seek additional information on how this money will be expended.
- Increased Patrol Strength: there is extra funding for more police officers but not will not be available until the 2006-07 financial year.
- The newly developed Child Protection Register has been allocated \$100,000 per year.
- Family Violence Intervention Program \$144,000 for first year
- Increased payment to legal aid of approx. \$50,000 per year.
- There is new funding of \$0.5 million for Woden police station from the capital works budget, to be co-ordinated with the redevelopment of the Woden Bus Interchange.
- Security Co-ordination Unit: this unit with the Department of Justice and Community Safety is tasked with co-ordinating counter-terrorism arrangements

## Concerns

- ACTCOSS notes that funding for the ACT Prison has been pushed back until 2006-07. This appears to indicate a delay in the proposed construction of the new prison.
- We are also dismayed that there are no new funds for diversionary programs.

## Background

On 30 June 2004, the ACT had 278 prisoners either in remand on under sentence. This was an 11% increase on the previous year: the largest increase of any Australian jurisdiction. In contrast, the number of hours of community service work dropped by over two-thirds in 2003-04 over the previous year.

ACTCOSS sees the prison system as a last resort for dealing with anti-social behaviours. ACTCOSS believes that the ACT Government should exhaust other mechanisms of justice, such as restorative justice, other diversionary programs, and community service orders before resorting to imprisonment, particularly for non-violent and drug-related crimes.

Funding for these alternatives must also be met with resources that allow adequate access to justice, in the form of legal representation and advocacy where necessary.

ACTCOSS made the following recommendations in its Budget Submission:

**Recommendation 13:** That more funding be directed to early intervention and diversionary programs for people coming before the courts.

**Recommendation 14:** ACTCOSS recommends that the Chief Minister and the Government ensure that adequate resources are made available to the community sector to undertake a review of services that will be required to complement the comprehensive, modern corrections system that is envisaged in both legislation and the Prison Project.

**Recommendation 15:** That the ACT Government commit additional funds to provide holistic services based on a social determinants of health model, that meet the complex health needs of people living with disadvantage and poverty.

**Recommendation 18:** That the ACT Government fund the expansion of health support and peer support for service providers that cater for high use groups.

**Recommendation 19:** ACTCOSS wants to see the ACT Corrections system make available to people in its charge all holistic health interventions and harm minimisation services available to the broader community.

# Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities

## Initiative

ACTCOSS could not find any new initiatives for the multicultural community, only the transfer of the unit from the Chief Ministers Department to the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services.

## Concerns

- ACTCOSS is disappointed that there is no specific programs to address the problems identified in providing interpreter services to people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse groups. (ACTCOSS recommendation no.6)
- \$649,000 (previously budgeted) to establish the Multicultural Centre. Not a new initiative and no money for the out years.

## Background

ACTCOSS views the delivery of services to people whose first language is not English as a human right. While there are other representative voices for the multicultural community in Canberra, ACTCOSS felt strongly enough to make a specific recommendation that interpreter services be made more widely available.

**Recommendation 6:** The guarantee of free interpreter services needs to be expanded to ensure that TIS are available for people who need translators for their everyday communication with service providers, whether Government operated or private.

# Women

ACTCOSS made only one recommendation on the issue of gender equity in its budget submission. That was:

**Recommendation 7:** ACTCOSS believes that the Strategic Plan for Women requires the reintroduction of gender analysis in the Budget process, and a return to Budget documentation reporting on the progress towards the Government's goals for women, as articulated in the Strategic Plan.

ACTCOSS was dismayed in 2004 at the Government's ambitious, but unsubstantiated, claim that more than 87% of funded programs in the 2004-05 ACT Budget benefited women.

While we appreciate the Government has attempted to improve its gender analysis in 2005-06, the failure to introduce a comprehensive and dollar specific gender analysis of any part of the budget renders the Women's Budget statement useless and tokenistic.

The promise to improve data analysis into the ACT Government Human Resource Management Information System (p280-Budget paper 3) to enable some gender analysis is welcome. If this does not include the development of processes for feeding data into budget documentation with clear accounting against the government's articulated goals for women, it is insufficient.

The Women's Budget Statement recognises that there are significant issues facing women in the ACT, such as:

- an increasing population of older women;
- significant wage disparity between ACT women and ACT men;
- higher levels of stress than women across Australia in general; and
- the significant proportion of ACT women with disabilities.

Unfortunately, the lack of transparent and accountable gender analysis across portfolios would indicate that there is very little of substance being done to address the issues identified in the Women's Action Plan.

A breast screening program, a single violence prevention program and a falls prevention program, while welcome, do not make a significant contribution toward resolving the issues facing women in the ACT.

