



# *Uncharted Territory: Steering Canberra through the Reform Storm*

Submission to the  
2006-07 ACT Government Budget



November 2005

## **About ACTCOSS**

ACTCOSS acknowledges 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 traditional owners 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' 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 funded by the ACT Government.

ACTCOSS advises that this document may be publicly distributed, including by placing a copy on our website.

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24 March 2006

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## Summary of Recommendations

### Housing and Homelessness

1. That the ACT Government develop an integrated housing strategy and action plan and provides the necessary resources for implementation.
2. That the ACT Government provide the \$10million per annum promised in the 2004 election campaign for public housing.
3. That the ACT Government continue to invest funds in the development of new and innovative SAAP services in relation to identified unmet demand.
4. That the ACT Government retain security of tenure for public housing tenants.
5. That community housing tenants receive access to personal support services similar to the services available to public housing tenants.
6. That the ACT Government ensure that the implementation of "Breaking the Cycle: The ACT Homelessness Strategy" is adequately resourced.

### Mental Health

7. That the ACT Government provide significant additional community-based prevention and early intervention programs for mental health consumers.
8. That the ACT Government ensure that mental health consumers enjoy equal access to care and support, including those diagnosed with co-morbidity, a personality disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder.
9. That the ACT Government allocate more funding to increase appropriate transitional accommodation for people at risk of, or returning from, admission to an acute mental health facility.
10. That the ACT Government provide, at the earliest opportunity, detailed plans for the development of the new mental health precinct, including design, management and staffing issues, which involve consumers and carers in the planning process.
11. That the ACT Government provide detailed information on its proposals for assisting older people experiencing mental health difficulties and resource these appropriately.

### Community Sector Viability

12. That the ACT Government implement the Funding Indexation Model as promised, and in addition, retrospectively applies the funding indexation with an additional 2% for indexation creep and lack of full compensation for past funding decisions.
13. That the ACT Government assists in ensuring community sector workers have wage parity with the public sector, and access to similar conditions and entitlements.
14. That the ACT Government establish and provide initial start-up costs for a mandatory, legislated, portable long service leave scheme for the community sector.

15. That funding levels for community peak bodies reflect the commitments of the Compact by realising the funding levels needed for peak organisations to participate in Government processes.
16. That the ACT Government reinstate the Renew Community Facilities Program with minimum funding at real 2004-05 levels and not 'broaden' the program to finance projects outside the community sector.
17. That the ACT Government provide for purpose-built community facilities and for early and comprehensive consultation on the design and refurbishment of community space.
18. That the ACT Government provide additional resources to expand the scope of the IT helpdesk pilot to a broader range of community services, ensure that there are resources to respond to the outcomes of the pilot project, and further resource organisations to sustain their communications capacity to meet the demands of a contemporary working environment.

### **Health Inequality**

19. That the ACT Government fund additional community-based health services that respond to health needs in a social context.
20. That ACT Health appoint a liaison officer to support participating communities experiencing disadvantage as they discuss and experiment with a range of health support options.
21. That the ACT Government fund community organisations to co-ordinate, share information and raise awareness about how social support services can promote good health.
22. That the ACT Government provide resources to:
  - examine strategies to improve the food choices of people experiencing disadvantage;
  - review procurement options to reduce the costs of providing food aid;
  - examine the value of decentralised distribution services or access to government storage options; and
  - resource the coordination of alternative food services for periods of the year, such as Christmas/New Year, when providers are closed for public holidays.
23. That the ACT Government work to address the issues raised in the HCCA report on after-hours medical services and ensure that all areas of Canberra can participate in planning for improved primary health care.
24. That the ACT Government increase the location and number of step-down facilities to assist people leaving acute care.
25. That the ACT Government fund improvements in basic dental health services and that better promotion of the hardship policies and access arrangements for public dental services is undertaken.

### **Services for Disadvantaged Groups**

26. That the ACT Government increase its efforts to provide culturally appropriate services in partnership with Indigenous communities and expand Indigenous cultural awareness training to ACT teachers and policy makers.

27. That the ACT Government expand the provision of disability ISPs to match the demonstrated need.
28. That the ACT Government increase resources to upgrade public housing stock to meet the needs of tenants with a disability.
29. That the ACT Government provide additional resources for community sector consultation and service augmentation in preparation for the opening of the Alexander Maconachie Centre in 2007.
30. That the ACT Government renew its efforts in:
  - identifying gaps in service provision and supports for people entering drug and alcohol programs; and
  - supporting innovative program development.
31. That the ACT Government consider the Tasmanian "Partnerships to Jobs" project as a model for adaptation for the ACT.
32. That the ACT Government increase problem gambling support programs.
33. That the ACT Government expand the range of interpreter services for languages other than English, including Auslan.

### **Revenue, Concessions and Structural Issues**

34. That the ACT Government clearly identify in the Budget Papers the areas of activity that will be the target of any reduction in expenditure.
35. That the ACT Government complete and publish a system review of concessions and CSOs and their impact in alleviating disadvantage.
36. That the ACT Government publish the full range of concessions and CSOs as part of the ACT Budget documentation.
37. That the ACT Government establish a community-based position of utilities officer to provide education and advice to consumer and other groups on utilities and fuel poverty.
38. That the ACT Government conduct a wide-ranging inquiry into sources of ACT Government revenue, including innovative land-based taxation schemes.
39. That the ACT Government establish an internal Social Policy Research Unit.

## Foreword

In a recent media release<sup>1</sup> the ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope MLA, stated that the Australian Government's 'welfare-to-work' proposals "would leave many of Canberra's poorest and most vulnerable residents financially worse off". ACTCOSS believes that both the misnamed 'welfare-to-work' package and the controversial industrial relations changes will potentially create further social exclusion, poverty and inequality in Canberra if they are not counterbalanced by additional community support to circumvent their worst effects.

While it is unfair that community organisations and the ACT Government are left to pick up the pieces after the havoc wreaked by the structural and policy reforms of the Commonwealth Government, we are nonetheless left to bear that responsibility if the social goals that the ACT Government has articulated are to be met, and to prevent people experiencing disadvantage in Canberra from being further marginalised.

The ACT has the highest average household disposable income in Australia at over \$43,000 in 2004-05, compared to the Australian average of less than \$28,000.<sup>2</sup> The ACT economy expanded at 2.7% percent of Gross State Product per Capita in 2004-05, the second highest rate of all Australian States and Territories after Tasmania.<sup>3</sup>

Economically, the ACT is travelling extremely well and ACTCOSS believes the ACT Government has demonstrated its commitment to improving the quality of life of all Canberrans. However, given the Australian Governments regressive reform agenda in welfare and industrial relations, Canberra's social progress is unlikely to advance in step with our economic achievements without the provision of significant additional resources.

Canberra is the wealthiest community in one of the richest countries in the world. Yet there continues to be a significant part of the population that does not share in the city's affluence, who struggle to access the basic necessities of life and who can't fully participate in the life of the community. This contradiction at the heart of our society needs to be addressed assiduously, so that every Canberran has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

## Housing and Homelessness

The ACT continues to face a lack of affordable and appropriate housing for people living on low incomes and those experiencing disadvantage. A recent national survey conducted by the Tenants Union of Victoria showed that regardless of how housing affordability was defined, no affordable properties could be located in Canberra, making the city the worst in Australia for housing affordability.<sup>4</sup>

The situation is not helped by many of the Commonwealth's housing policies and its withdrawal as a significant participant in providing national leadership to progress housing affordability. Numerous taxation policies, the diminution of real funding towards Commonwealth-State Housing Agreements and some Commonwealth programs such as the First Home-Owners Grant may actually serve to increase housing prices. Added to this, changes to government benefits under the 'welfare-to-work' package and increased employment instability under proposed Industrial Relations (IR) reforms will serve to increase housing stress and insecurity and further worsen the affordable housing problem.

The ACT Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services has announced that he will convene a Housing Summit for Canberra in February 2006. While ACTCOSS applauds any attempt to broaden the policy debate on Canberra's housing outcomes, at the time of writing there is as yet no consultation on the agenda of the summit, no detail on how outcomes of the summit will be progressed by the ACT Government, and certainly no commitment to provide resources to ensure that the resultant goals are achieved.

We are interested in hearing more about the Government's view of:

- calls being made following the National Affordable Housing Summit for a new National Affordable Housing Agreement between the Commonwealth and State and Territory governments;
- the potential for innovation in the delivery of housing services as exemplified by the Brisbane Housing Company which provided mixed housing to people on low incomes; and
- The feasibility that the ACT Government might follow the lead of the South Australia Government and commit to a target of reducing housing stress by 50 percent over the next 10 years.

ACTCOSS looks forward to participating in the ACT Housing Summit. However, ACTCOSS would appreciate an assurance from the ACT Government that the summit will not be simply a 'talkfest', but a major step toward developing an integrated housing strategy and action plan for Canberra that is properly resourced. The summit should take a broad view of the ACT Housing market and include analysis of a variety of tenure types as well as potential affordability tools in the planning, development and taxation areas.

**Recommendation 1**

That the ACT Government develop an integrated housing strategy and action plan and provides the necessary resources for implementation.

Furthermore, the summit should not prevent immediate expenditure on housing initiatives where the need is already demonstrable, particularly when the Government has already made funding commitments that have not yet been financed.

First among these is the Government's 2004 election promise to inject an additional \$30 million (\$10 million per annum over three years) into the ACT public housing system. Public housing provides an essential housing product for the ACT housing market. In particular it provides a stable, affordable and long-term housing option for people leaving homelessness services in the SAAP sector. The lack of growth in ACT public housing, coupled with the corresponding slowdown in community housing sector expansion, has helped create a bottleneck for people exiting SAAP services, resulting in the ACT having the longest average support periods in SAAP services in the country.<sup>5</sup>

**Recommendation 2**

That the ACT Government provide the \$10million per annum promised in the 2004 election campaign for public housing.

Whilst ACTCOSS applauds the development of the Homelessness Strategy and the injection of new funds for SAAP services in the ACT in 2003-04, there is a concern that there will be no growth in funding for SAAP services until such time as the ACT level of funding is matched by Commonwealth funding.

The current lack of exit points in SAAP and the long waiting list for ACT Housing means that services are providing support to less people for longer periods and are unable to accept new referrals. The latest data available from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) regarding unmet demand relates to the 2002/03 period<sup>6</sup>, and 2003/04 figures are not available until December 2005. However, the ACOSS 2005 Community Sector Survey shows that unmet demand in the ACT for housing assistance has risen from 4,914 in 2002-03 to 5,019 in 2003-04<sup>7</sup>, while the number of services provided decline by 26 occasions of service<sup>8</sup>.

Anecdotal data received from three women's services and one family support service in September 2005, shows that they turned away 21 women, 43 children and 17 families (makeup unknown) because there was no room or capacity for the SAAP services to assist<sup>9</sup>.

ACTCOSS is concerned that the ACT Government may cease to invest new funds to the continuing development of SAAP services because the increase provided in 2003-04 means the Territory's contribution exceeds the required 50% of matched funds to the Commonwealth.

**Recommendation 3**

That the ACT Government continue to invest funds in the development of new and innovative SAAP services in relation to identified unmet demand.

ACTCOSS also remains concerned about the sustainability of the ACT public housing system, particularly in light of data that suggests that ACT Housing has been running a real operating deficit for some years.<sup>10</sup> In this environment, ACTCOSS reiterates its opposition to removing security of tenure for public housing tenants. Removing security of tenure may further undermine the financial viability of ACT Housing, both by requiring an additional administrative burden and by reducing the number of households paying full market rent, which are essential to maintaining some level of cross-subsidy in the system.

Furthermore, there is evidence that a proportion of households paying full market rental are households that experience other forms of disadvantage. For example, people with disabilities whose financial circumstances mean they pay full market rental may not be able to secure appropriate accommodation in the private market<sup>11</sup>. There is also the issue of single parents whose adult children may be currently living with them, but whose long-term housing outlook is insecure.

There are also concerns that removing security of tenure for households paying market rent will encourage some households to forego opportunities to improve their financial situation in order to maintain housing stability. This could include people not taking up opportunities for increased labour force participation or people receiving disability pensions only taking up part time work to guarantee their continued pension eligibility under proposed welfare reforms.

ACTCOSS questions whether evicting the potentially small number of high income households in the public housing system will have much effect on reducing waiting lists.

**Recommendation 4**

That the ACT Government retain security of tenure for public housing tenants.

ACTCOSS recognises that community housing is an important element of Canberra's social housing system and welcomes moves to assist the community housing sector to operate on a more sustainable basis, as well as pursue endogenous growth that is not at the detriment of public housing. However, ACTCOSS remains concerned that the sector has experienced a long period of paralysis due to uncertainty over head leasing and funding arrangements, as well as not receiving funding indexation at comparable levels to the other community services.

ACTCOSS also notes that community housing associations have restricted access to personal support services, particularly for tenants with more complex needs. This fact limits the Community Housing sector's capacity to provide accommodation for this group and places additional strain on

the sector's resource base. People should have access to the same standard of personal support regardless of whether they reside in public or community housing.

**Recommendation 5**

That community housing tenants receive access to personal support services similar to the services available to public housing tenants.

While ACTCOSS commends the Governments efforts in producing 'Breaking the Cycle: the ACT Homelessness Strategy', we are concerned that progress towards the aspirations of the document is not proceeding at the desired pace due to resource constraints. More effort is required to match the resource base for implementation with the desired outcome

**Recommendation 6**

That the ACT Government ensure that the implementation of "Breaking the Cycle: The ACT Homelessness Strategy" is adequately resourced.

## Mental Health

The apparent increase in demand for mental health services is an ongoing concern across the human services sector. Agencies throughout the community sector report an increase in the number of clients presenting with mental health difficulties, and this is having a significant impact on the delivery of services by requiring additional attention to clients with more complex needs.

ACTCOSS echoes the concerns of its affiliates in the COSS network that the Federal Coalition Government's 'welfare-to-work' package will adversely impact on the people in the community who most need support<sup>12</sup>. While many people who identify as having mental health problems are currently in the workplace, many more have found that identifying themselves in the workplace as having that problem has led to stigmatisation, discrimination and isolation.<sup>13</sup>

Current projections indicate that 81,000 people on disability pensions will be put on lower income support payments as a result of the changes proposed. This, coupled with increased reporting requirements that will be placed on these former pensioners, coupled with the possibility of suspension of payment should they not fulfil their obligations to look for work, could exacerbate some people's mental health problems. It also could produce symptoms of mental health problems, such as depression and anxiety in other people affected by the changes, such as single parents and carers.

ACTCOSS applauds the increases in mental health funding achieved since the current ACT Government came into office, but believes that this area remains chronically under-resourced. Both the progress and shortcomings of the ACT Government's response to mental health issues are comprehensively documented in the recent publication of the Mental Health Council of Australia: "Not For Service"<sup>14</sup>.

The ACT Health Minister has recently announced plans for a new mental health precinct at the Canberra hospital. While this expansion of acute care facilities is a meaningful and timely commitment, ACTCOSS believes it needs to be accompanied by an immediate expansion of community-based services that provide ongoing support. These must consist of a broad range of services including psycho-social support and living skills to provide early intervention, community support during illness and relapse prevention.

### **Recommendation 7**

That the ACT Government provide significant additional community-based prevention and early intervention programs for mental health consumers.

Furthermore, ACTCOSS understands that some mental health consumers are prevented from accessing certain mental health services, particularly those with a dual diagnosis (co-morbid substance dependency), or those receiving a diagnosis of a personality disorder or post-traumatic stress

disorder. ACTCOSS does not agree that mental health consumers should be granted differential access to mental health support based on a diagnosis hierarchy, and believes that greater effort is required to ensure equal access to treatment.

**Recommendation 8**

That the ACT Government ensure that mental health consumers enjoy equal access to care and support, including those diagnosed with co-morbidity, a personality disorder or post-traumatic stress disorder.

There is also an urgent need for increased supported accommodation options for people with mental health problems. As the MHCA report states repeatedly, a lack of secure, appropriate, affordable, stable housing can cause immense trauma and complicate and/or exacerbate mental illness. ACTCOSS has previously addressed these issues in greater detail in its submission to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Disability Inquiry into Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing for People with a Mental Illness.<sup>15</sup>

This fact was also highlighted in comments by the Mental Health Official Visitors in their 2003 Annual Report<sup>16</sup>. The report commented on the fact that some patients in the three mental health facilities in Canberra often have multiple admissions within short time frames.

ACTCOSS notes the high proportion of people with mental health conditions who rely on social housing for stable accommodation. Havelock House recently allocated one of the complexes units to the Richmond Fellowship to establish a long term accommodation option for people with high-level mental health support needs. This appears to be a direct response to a violent incident at Havelock House earlier this year which highlighted, again, the issues associated with premature release from mental health facilities such as the Psychiatric Services Unit (PSU) at Canberra Hospital into unsupported accommodation. ACTCOSS believes the ACT Government needs to actively pursue accommodation solutions that address mental health problems in a community setting. Two models that provide some indications of what can be achieved are the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative<sup>17</sup> (HASI) project in New South Wales and the Support, Time and Recovery (STR)<sup>18</sup> workers in the United Kingdom.

The Official Visitors' report also commented on 'bed blockage' in the system, due to a lack of suitable discharge accommodation, and in addition, the report quotes occupancy figures in two of the three facilities (Brian Hennessy Rehabilitation Centre, The Psychiatric Services Unit and Ward 2N at Calvary Hospital) at over 100% of capacity.

**Recommendation 9**

That the ACT Government allocate more funding to increase appropriate transitional accommodation for people at risk of, or returning from, admission to an acute mental health facility.

ACTCOSS welcomes the recent announcement of a mental health precinct in the Canberra Hospital campus. However this facility will now be available until 2008 at the earliest and does not discuss the facility's links with community options for dealing with mental health issues. Nor is there any clear plan in the public domain addressing the need to recruit more mental health workers.

**Recommendation 10**

That the ACT Government provide, at the earliest opportunity, detailed plans for the development of the new mental health precinct, including design, management and staffing issues, which involve consumers and carers in the planning process.

A further aspect of mental health often overlooked in the mental health debate is the effects of ageing on mental health, and in particular the issues associated with the care and support of older people suffering dementia or from stroke-related injury. ACTCOSS understands that the ACT Government has made a number of commitments with regard to expanding the range of both acute and transitional care services for these consumers, although precise details of the plans seem elusive and appear to have 'evolved' from their original intentions.

**Recommendation 11**

That the ACT Government provide detailed information on its proposals for assisting older people experiencing mental health difficulties and resource these appropriately.

## Community Sector Viability

In 2004 a new Social Compact was developed that re-stated the working relationship between the community sector and Government agencies. The ACT Government has made a number of commitments in the Compact, including respecting, understanding and acknowledging the importance of the ACT community sector and its role in service provision and advocacy.

ACTCOSS believes that the ACT Government has been living up to the spirit of the agreement in many ways, and has recognised the issues impacting on the long term viability of the sector through such initiatives as the new service funding agreements, the work on grant indexation, and the efforts to include community and consumer consultation in all aspects of decision making affecting the sector.

However, there are areas that are in need of considerable improvement, including the working conditions and remuneration of community sector workers. In the ACT Social Compact, the ACT Government has committed to:

*“recognise the importance of and support the sustainability and long-term capacity of the community sector”<sup>19</sup>*

This commitment has resource implications, particularly for the areas of workforce viability, community facilities and information and communications technologies.

**Workforce Viability:** ACTCOSS has been involved over recent months in a community sector working conditions campaign. This project highlights the wide disparity between the wages and conditions of workers in the public sector and those of their colleagues, working in similar jobs in the community sector. It has called on the sector to support appropriate wages, including parity with equivalent positions in the public sector; improved employee entitlements, including maternity leave and portable long service leave, and improved working environments and safety for community sector workers.

As the ACT Government is the major funding body for most community sector organisations, none of this can be achieved without recognition in funding allocations of the need for reasonable wages, good conditions and portability of entitlements.

The impact of the Australian Government’s proposed Industrial Relations reforms will also impact heavily on community sector workers. It is unlikely that the Social and Community Services (SACS) award will be increased sufficiently to provide parity with the remuneration and conditions of public sector workers under the proposed new Fair Pay Commission. This will force community workers to seek these benefits through enterprise bargaining or Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs), unless some other mechanism can be put in place.

Community sectors workers frequently have little bargaining power with their employers, as their jobs are often considered low-skilled and their organisations have resource constraints. Community sector workers tend to develop a strong commitment and belief in the work of their organisations and will rarely seek to disrupt service delivery by, for example, taking industrial action.

ACTCOSS is a participant in the Community Sector Taskforce, which is currently working on these issues. ACTCOSS welcomes the ACT Government's commitment to resolving these difficult matters, but hopes that progress can be achieved quickly, and is accompanied by adequate resourcing. ACTCOSS has identified three core areas where improvement is essential to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the community sector.

Firstly, community sector organisations need the certainty provided by proper indexation of their resource base, including 'catch-up' for previously inadequate indexation. Over the past four years there have been several instances where community sector funding has been allowed to "slide" backwards through a lack of recognition of increased costs. These include only partial compensation for SACS award increases in 2003, the ad hoc treatment of indexation increases in 2004 and delaying the implementation of the promised funding indexation model until 2006-07. These cost pressures should also be viewed in conjunction with the increased administrative load faced by organisations over the past ten years, including increased reporting, training, risk management and record-keeping requirements which have increased the administrative costs of all organisations.

These cost pressures and slide also mean that the community sector cannot offer any form of passed-on "efficiency dividend", should these be required of funding agencies. Community sector funding must remain quarantined from Departmental funding reductions.

**Recommendation 12**

That the ACT Government implement the Funding Indexation Model as promised and in addition, retrospectively apply the funding indexation with an additional 2% for indexation creep and lack of full compensation for past funding decisions.

Secondly, the ACT Government needs to continue to work with community organisations to find solutions to ensuring community sector workers have wages parity and improved working conditions. Many community services employ workers to carry out work that is the same as, or similar to, that carried out by Government employees. However, the wage rates and working conditions are widely disparate, leaving the community sector with recruitment and retention problems. In addition, the community sector has an almost 31% per annum employee turnover rate<sup>20</sup>, which means that the sector is spending scarce resources in training and establishing new staff who often leave to join Government agencies. ACTCOSS therefore requests that the 2006-07 ACT Budget provide for

wage parity of community sector workers with Government employees in same or similar occupations.

**Recommendation 13**

That the ACT Government assist in ensuring community sector workers have wage parity with the public sector, and access to similar conditions and entitlements.

The high turnover of staff also means that, while many workers remain in the sector but change employers or job classifications, most never get to accumulate long service leave because of their mobility. ACTCOSS also asks that portability of long service leave be adopted for the sector.

**Recommendation 14**

That the ACT Government establish and provide initial start-up costs for a mandatory, legislated, portable long service leave scheme for the community sector.

Thirdly, ACTCOSS would posit the Government receives a net benefit from its funding of peak community service organisations. ACTCOSS' consultations with other community peak bodies find that all have been faced with increasing demands for consultation and participation in Government processes. They also provide valuable services to the community sector in training, advice and consultancies to assist community sector member and non-member organisations comply with Government regulations and funding agreements. Frequently, these services are funded as discrete projects which can be administratively inefficient. As stated in the Compact, the Government is committed to recognising the role that peak bodies play in achieving joint goals for community services. This needs commitment in terms of the quantum of funding peak bodies receive, as well as continuity and long-term security of funding for these groups.

**Recommendation 15**

That funding levels for community peak bodies reflect the commitments of the Compact by realising the funding levels needed for peak organisations to participate in Government processes.

**Community facilities:** Community sector organisations frequently continue to be housed in inadequate, inappropriate or poorly maintained premises. ACTCOSS was exasperated by the funding cuts to the Renew Community Infrastructure and Facilities Grants Program in the previous budget, and is further dismayed to hear the Chief Minister report that the scheme:

“will not continue in its current or existing form and some of the funds that initially had been identified have been sacrificed as departmental savings”<sup>21</sup>

Community organisations, for the most part, do not have large capital reserves or access to commercial finance in order to engage in major capital refurbishment or extension projects necessary to improve service

standards and improve service efficiency. Public financing schemes, such as the Renew Grants Program, allow community organisations to undertake these projects, which ultimately result in improved service delivery and efficiency which extends the effectiveness of ongoing program funding. Removing this access to capital is a short-term saving, but will subsequently lead to higher cost services and reduced service capacity.

**Recommendation 16**

That the ACT Government reinstate the Renew Community Facilities Program with minimum funding at real 2004-05 levels and not 'broaden' the program to finance projects outside the community sector.

In addition, ACTCOSS encourages the government to continue to invest in purpose-built community space that is designed to meet the specific needs of community organisations, which are often not catered to by existing commercially available space. ACTCOSS has previously raised our disquiet over the planning and construction of the new Griffin Centre, and believe it would be fruitful to carefully examine possible flaws in that process to ensure they are not repeated elsewhere, such as in the development of community facilities as part of the City West redevelopment.

ACTCOSS understands that the model used to develop purpose-built facilities in the new Civic youth centre, known as Club 25, was successful and would warrant further investigation.

**Recommendation 17**

That the ACT Government provide for purpose-built community facilities and for early and comprehensive consultation on the design and refurbishment of community space.

**Information Technology Support:** For several years, ACTCOSS has called on Government to acknowledge and respond to the information technology needs of the community sector. Community sector organisations need access to reliable and compatible computer hardware and appropriate software including current anti-virus software. They also need reliable communications servers that can support the information exchange needs of the sector. Moreover, they need access to affordable IT support services whose operators understand the diverse needs of a sector staffed by community workers and volunteers and who can anticipate a diverse range of applications used in running community services, including data collection, community and Government reporting and internal planning.

ACTCOSS is aware that the ACT Government has agreed in the past to provide funding to community organisations needing to upgrade their hardware or who want to benefit from broadband communications capabilities. We are also aware that the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services is piloting an IT helpdesk service in the ACT as a way of gauging and assessing IT support needs for the services funded by

that department. ACTCOSS has commented on those other options in other forums, but believes both fall short of the need demonstrated in the sector.

ACTCOSS also takes this opportunity to remind the government of the growing sophistication of the sector's IT needs. We anticipate growing future need for web-coordination expertise and specialist training and support for the sector. We recognise the potential of web-based tools to achieve efficiencies in the delivery of services and are aware that such potential is being widely discussed. This is already envisaged under the ACT's Homelessness Strategy for web-based referral<sup>22</sup>.

**Recommendation 18**

That the ACT Government provide additional resources to expand the scope of the IT helpdesk pilot to a broader range of community services, ensure that there are resources to respond to the outcomes of the pilot project, and further resource organisations to sustain their communications capacity to meet the demands of a contemporary working environment.

## Health Inequality

Part of the Government's plan for a healthy community has been addressing the causes of ill health with a systemic, whole of community approach. The ACT Government has committed itself to address a range of population health issues, such as the causes of obesity, as a way to constrain future growth in demand for more complex health services.

Evidence from many affluent societies suggests that the health gap is growing within our communities and that we need to address the socio-economic causes and consequences of health as a matter of urgency. International research indicates that no matter how socio-economic status is measured, affluent people have lower mortality and morbidity rates. If we are to take pressure off our already strained health system, we need to develop health policies and services that respond to the social context of health. We have to move beyond the simplistic idea that health outcomes can only be addressed by influencing the behaviour of individuals.

Over the past two years, ACTCOSS has been working on a Healthpact initiative to respond to the social determinants of health for those people experiencing disadvantage and who are at higher risk of health inequalities, called the Health Inequalities Action Model (HIAM) Project. It is clear from this work that people experiencing disadvantage understand health messages but will not always respond to these messages because of their sociological experience. That is, they do not always have the resources, enthusiasm or knowledge to act on these messages.

ACTCOSS' work in this area demonstrates the need for specialist support services and programs that understand and appreciate the social context of health. One example of this from our project work has been the development of a modest "natural therapies" clinic at one residential site where a massage therapist provides affordable treatments to residents who would otherwise be excluded from holistic health treatments. Another example of this type of context specific response to health needs has been the establishment of the Health Partner's Program in the ACT where people with chronic health conditions learn strategies to deal with their day to day health. Such services work well if they can be adapted to suit the social and economic experiences of the groups that use them.

A broader policy framework has been suggested by the World Health Organisation, based on the report prepared by Sir Michael Marmot *et al*, "*The Social Determinants of Health: The solid facts*"<sup>23</sup>. This report advocated a simple ten-point blue-print to inspire policy makers who can positively influence the health of a population. The blue-print included policies that:

- prevent people from falling into long-term disadvantage
- acknowledge the way the social and psychological environment affects health;

- ensure a good environment in early childhood;
- regulate the impact of work on health;
- address the problems of unemployment<sup>24</sup> and job insecurity;
- support the role of friendship and social cohesion;
- recognise the dangers of social exclusion;
- acknowledge the effects of alcohol and other drugs;
- ensure access to supplies of healthy food for everyone; and
- deliver healthier transport systems.

Strategic implementation of programs in these policy areas can effectively begin to reduce health inequalities associated with people's experience of poverty and social isolation.

**Recommendation 19**

That the ACT Government fund additional community-based health services that respond to health needs in a social context.

**Recommendation 20**

That ACT Health appoint a liaison officer to support participating communities experiencing disadvantage as they discuss and experiment with a range of health support options.

**Recommendation 21**

That the ACT Government fund community organisations to co-ordinate, share information and raise awareness about how social support services can promote good health.

**Food and Nutrition:** An example of a response to the social determinants of health is the work done by ACTCOSS as part of the HIAM project that has focused on nutrition as a determinant of health. It is apparent from this work that poverty and social disadvantage impose structural constraints on food consumption behaviour in three ways. Firstly, the affordability of food is a significant constraint for those on low incomes to purchase a healthy and nutritious diet. Secondly, gaining access to quality food can be impeded by barriers such as financial capacity, transport, time and physical ability. Finally, psycho-social factors play a role and may be determined by personal skills and knowledge, social pressure and cultural norms.

The HIAM project has introduced a new dynamic into the way food security issues are understood within the community. The Community Food Forum, a direct outcome of the HIAM project, has representatives drawn from a broad cross-section of the ACT government, community and academic sectors. Subsequently, this forum has taken the view that a broad approach to food insecurity is required. Access to nutritious food must be understood as a continuum where the ideal should be market choice for each resident with reliance on free food at the other end of the spectrum.

**Recommendation 22**

That the ACT Government provide resources to:

- examine strategies to improve the food choices of people experiencing disadvantage;
- review procurement options to reduce the costs of providing food aid;
- examine the value of decentralised distribution services or access to government storage options; and
- resource the coordination of alternative food services for periods of the year, such as Christmas/New Year, when providers are closed for public holidays.

**Primary Health Care:** Access to primary health care services in Canberra remains constricted with problems of affordability, availability and accessibility. While some progress has been made in delivering out-of-hours General Practice (GP) services, cost is still a prohibitive factor, with a visit to the GP priced at between \$20 and \$50, depending on the Medicare rebate and time of appointment. Once the visit to the GP is finished, the cost of medications can exacerbate the anguish many low income households experience because of ill health.

ACTCOSS understands that the ACT Government and ACT Health are addressing some of these problems, with after hours clinics at the Calvary and Canberra hospital. These go some way to ensuring that people who have the resources can access primary health care. However, the fact remains that many GP surgeries have closed their books to new patients.

There are also reports of unevenness in the willingness of doctors to bulk-bill: that is, GP practices sometimes promote the fact that they bulk bill but charge a gap at the time of service provision, or individual doctors make ad hoc determinations about a person's capacity to pay up front. The implication for people experiencing poverty is that they are reluctant to make appointments if they are uncertain about billing. This uncertainty then acts as a systemic disincentive to use primary health services.

In addition, some locations (especially newer suburbs) are not serviced by a local GP practice. For example, the West Belconnen Community Health Committee has been established by concerned locals to find a solution to this situation in the West Belconnen area. They have adopted a pro-active strategy on behalf of their community to seek a remedy to the lack of all types of primary medical service in the area. As a consequence, they have recently been funded to conduct a feasibility study for a primary health clinic in the area with salaried doctors and nurse practitioners. While this community has used its resources to achieve some promise of service, there are other communities in similar circumstances which are not being studied. Given the persistent drought of doctors in the ACT and continued decline in bulk-billing, clever innovative responses need to be supported and funded so that primary health care can be achieved by all.

This course is preferable to simple "land for surgeries" approach being put forward in the Lanyon area, where a private medical practice is pressuring

the Government to provide land for a clinic, with no discussion of the approach to bulk-billing or access issues. ACTCOSS believes the all communities experiencing a shortage of primary health services deserve support to investigate community-appropriate services, as is happening in West Belconnen.

The issues of GP service provision were addressed comprehensively in the report: 'It's Easier to see a Vet! ACT health care consumers' experiences and needs for after-hours medical services" by the Health Care Consumers' Association of the ACT (HCCA) for the ACT Division of General Practice. ACTCOSS asks that the ACT Government will renew and reinvigorate its efforts to ensure that all Canberrans have access to affordable primary health services, as outlined by the HCCA.

**Recommendation 23**

That the ACT Government work to address the issues raised in the HCCA report on after-hours medical services and ensure that all areas of Canberra can participate in planning for improved primary health care.

An additional issue is that of transitional care for people exiting acute care in the hospital system. This issue has been raised with ACTCOSS at a number of community consultations, highlighting the need for an immediate allocation of funding to provide step-down facilities that can cater for older people who may not have sufficient personal support to enable them to feel comfortable about returning to their home after an acute care episode. As mentioned earlier, there is also a need for other facilities that can assist people with mental health problems who need a secure, but a non-medical environment to stabilise their health before returning to their usual accommodation.

There are a wide variety of reasons why a person may not feel well enough to return to home after a hospital admission, even with in-home assistance. Whatever the rationale, the current scarcity of facilities means that acute care beds are being occupied in some cases by people who need rest and recuperation, not intense medical attention. The corollary to this bed-lock is that other people are returning home from acute care episodes too early, jeopardising their optimum recovery and long term health.

**Recommendation 24**

That the ACT Government increase the location and number of step-down facilities to assist people leaving acute care.

**Dental Health:** There is an urgent need for increased services to improve dental health in adults, particularly in light of the ACT's projected demography. As the Australian Research Centre for Oral Health points out in its latest study into dental health in older people:

*"One in every two adults aged 55 years and over is a government concession cardholder who is eligible for publicly funded care. As the population ages and a greater proportion of older adults retain their teeth,*

*the demand for dental services will increase, putting further pressure on public dental care facilities.”<sup>25</sup>*

It is also worth noting that there is increasing evidence for demonstrable links between oral health and long-term health physical health. For example, research shows that low level infections (gum disease) have a long term impact on internal organs increasing the risk of heart disease and other chronic health problems<sup>26</sup>. There is also a strong correlation between tooth and gum disease and nutrition, as people without teeth can experience weight loss and its consequences, such as anaemia<sup>27</sup>. While much of the blame for such decline in public dental health services can be attributed to the withdrawal of federal funding, it is the ACT Health system that ultimately bears the cost of this area of neglect, and improvements will ultimately benefit that same system.

At present the ACT Dental Health Program has a range of restrictions which would deter some potential users of the service from optimising their dental health. For example, having to present at 8:30 in the morning for an emergency appointment and paying a charge of at least \$25 for that treatment. There is no policy statement on the ACT Health site that explains the ACT Government’s hardship policies, an omission ACTCOSS finds concerning. (<http://health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=sp&pid=1059631864>)

The emphasis on prevention in tooth and gum problems must be reinforced across all age groups; however access to cost-free services is essential for people who would otherwise neglect dental problems. Such services must have reasonable waiting times which do not exacerbate pain and suffering. This would be complemented by programs that utilise social determinants of health understandings to assist consumers and service providers address the causes of tooth and gum problems.

**Recommendation 25**

That the ACT Government fund improvements in basic dental health services and that better promotion of the hardship policies and access arrangements for public dental services is undertaken.

## Services for Other Groups Experiencing Disadvantage

**Indigenous People:** Indigenous health and welfare has been the subject of numerous inquiries and reports over the past decade. The health outcomes disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians continues to show a neglect of this important area. Even in the ACT, which is an affluent community, Indigenous health continues to be a problem both in the narrow sense of individual health status, as well as in terms of the broader supports for health, such as adequate housing, nutrition, income and education.

ACTCOSS agrees with the definition of Indigenous Health provided by the National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party, and expanded by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation<sup>28</sup>:

*'health is not just the physical wellbeing of an individual, but the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their community'*

In recognising this holistic definition of health<sup>\*</sup>, ACTCOSS believes that programs addressing Indigenous disadvantage need to have a focus on partnership with local Indigenous service providers, early intervention and recognition of culture. Programs also need to build on the involvement of, and direction from, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in service delivery.

There is also the need to put more effort into providing specific programs that address issues of family violence, homelessness, access to services, education and employment, including support services. We note with dismay that the family violence initiative has seemingly stalled, and urge the Government to renew and redouble its efforts to ensure this important initiative moves forward. It is also of concern that there is still no announcement on the successful tender for the promised Indigenous SAAP service.

ACTCOSS acknowledges the effort that the ACT Government has made in providing Indigenous cultural awareness training to staff of services with Indigenous clients. This needs to be augmented and continued, including Indigenous awareness training for teachers, which would then inform curriculum development and delivery in ACT schools and colleges. The development of the programs should include collaboration with local Indigenous groups and draw on the local Indigenous culture and landscape.

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<sup>\*</sup> Which resonates with the ACT Government Social Plan and its commitments to human rights.

**Recommendation 26**

That the ACT Government increase its efforts to provide culturally appropriate services in partnership with Indigenous communities and expand Indigenous cultural awareness training to ACT teachers and policy makers.

**People with a Disability:** In May this year, ACTCOSS acknowledged that the ACT Government had gone some way in its 2005-06 Budget to address some of the needs of people with a disability<sup>29</sup>.

*“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.”*

However, it was noted in balancing this that:

*“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.”*

With almost one in six residents of Canberra identifying as living with a disability<sup>30</sup>, there is a need to provide support for people with disabilities to participate in community life.

**Recommendation 27**

That the ACT Government expand the provision of disability ISPs to match the demonstrated need.

As the housing provider for people unable to utilise or access private sector housing, the ACT Government needs to address the issue of affordability, accessibility and stability of housing for people with disabilities. This also meshes with the previously discussed need for increased supported care for people who cannot live independently in the community.

The corollary to providing appropriate accommodation options is the supply of infrastructure and equipment that assists with independent living. While the ACT Government has made a point of applauding adaptable housing providers, it is necessary that ACT Housing also upgrade and adapt existing accommodation that is currently occupied by people with disabilities, to ensure that they also obtain full benefit from their tenure in ACT Housing accommodation.

Such adaptation includes the retrofitting of homes to improve their energy efficiency. With the Water and Energy Savings Trial (WEST) showing good

energy savings and increased comfort levels, it is important that ACT Housing recognise fuel poverty as an issue for its tenants, but especially those living with disability.

**Recommendation 28**

That the ACT Government increase resources to upgrade public housing stock to meet the needs of tenants with a disability.

ACTCOSS also welcomes the Wheelchair Accessible Taxis initiatives, which discuss moving to a “smart card” type transaction card for journeys. This is an innovation ACTCOSS has supported over the past two reviews of accessible transport.

**Prisoners and their families:** Canberra has always had prisoners – they’re just not usually housed within the borders of the jurisdiction that sentenced them. That lack of a facility has provided some benefits, and some drawbacks. On the benefits side, the ACT has traditionally had a low rate of incarceration as courts were reluctant to impose a sentence that involved transportation across borders and out of the control of the ACT’s corrections system. However, this has changed in recent years, and custodial options are becoming more commonplace.

One of the drawbacks has been that the issue of crime and how best to address criminogenic behaviour has been ignored in major community debates on law and order. Within the corrections and community services sectors, it is understood that early life experiences, mental health problems, disadvantage and substance misuse can all predispose a person to become an offender. In the broader community, people are becoming more fearful and looking to the courts to “fix the problem”. What is being missed in this debate is the fact that these offenders come from our community, they return to it after serving their sentence, and it is well known that prison does not improve the behaviour of inmates or their general health and wellbeing.

ACTCOSS supports the view of the Prison Project team that the ACT must develop a correctional facility that addresses offending behaviours, provides rehabilitation, and works towards an integration of that person back into the community once their term of imprisonment is complete. This organisation would go further to say that the community sector would like to work with ACT Corrections to ensure that early intervention, diversion and treatment programs are used extensively to minimise the number of people who are sentenced to terms in gaol. This commitment is demonstrated by the continued support for the Canberra Community Coalition on Corrections, which was formed by ACTCOSS in 2000, and the recently formed Women and Prisons Group, an independent group representing a significant number of women’s service providers across the ACT.

Such partnerships will need wider community understanding of the prison, better education on the issues affecting the lives of people who end up in corrections facilities, and a cooperative approach to service provision that

ensures continuity of support for the person from pre-sentence, through the period of incarceration and back into the community.

This will also require an improvement in the ways that we support the family and support networks of people in jail. As was found in the inquiry into services for families of people in custody<sup>31</sup>, the current system does not recognise the people who support the offender as a resource that helps in offender rehabilitation. In fact, the corrections system has often treated them as offenders-by-association, neglecting basic needs such as adequate assistance with transport and accommodation when visiting interstate prisons.

ACTCOSS is calling on the ACT Government to ensure that community sector partners in delivering human services to inmates are identified well before the prison is completed. ACTCOSS is also calling for recognition in the Budget of the need for strategic planning, augmentation of services and establishment of new services to meet the needs of a corrections system within a human rights framework that aims to address the socio-economic and other factors that are acknowledged as bringing some people into conflict with the legal system.

**Recommendation 29**

That the ACT Government provide additional resources for community sector consultation and service augmentation in preparation for the opening of the Alexander Maconachie Centre in 2007.

**Alcohol and drug services:** The delay in the building of the new Karralika facility is regrettable, and has impacted on the capacity of the ACT's drug and alcohol services to meet the expanding need for rehabilitation places. ACTCOSS hopes that sufficient funds are still in place to ensure that the same number of beds envisaged in the original development application will be provided, albeit in different locations.

Canberra has lost much of its revolutionary impetus in drug and alcohol treatment, with radical programs like the proposed heroin trial now seemingly no longer being explored. It is important, as we move towards the opening of the jail, that there be a range of robust, innovative and evidence-based programs that can address a wide range of drug and alcohol problems in a range of socio-economic and cultural groupings

**Recommendation 30**

That the ACT Government renew its efforts in:

- identifying gaps in service provision and supports for people entering drug and alcohol programs; and
- supporting innovative program development.

**Unemployment Services:** The ACT has particular and significant pockets of employment disadvantage. However all references to employment programs on the ACT Government website are to Federal Government programs that are generic and cannot assist in pockets of disadvantage. Other state Governments around Australia have recognised this shortfall,

and have implemented programs that assist the long-term unemployed while addressing skills shortages in their jurisdictions.

The ACT Government has set a series of goals in its Social and Economic Plans for Canberra to reduce long term unemployment, but to date there have been no new projects in the public arena. As part of the economic development of the ACT, it is imperative that the Government take the lead in providing long term solutions to entrenched unemployment. An example of the type of projects that ACTCOSS believes would be appropriate in the context of the ACT is the Tasmanian “Partnerships to Jobs” project.<sup>32</sup>

**Recommendation 31**

That the ACT Government consider the Tasmanian “Partnerships to Jobs” project as a model for adaptation for the ACT.

**Problem Gamblers:** The contraction of the ClubCare service in 2005 is of concern at a time when there is growing recognition of the harm caused by problem gambling. The de-funding of some of the functions of the ClubCare service has shown that the gambling industry in Canberra does not take harm minimization seriously, as it would rather de-fund this holistic service than add a few cents to the cost of a drink in clubs.

ACTCOSS would like to see the ACT Government specifically commit part of the revenue it collects from gambling each year to provide holistic programs that provide timely, compassionate and appropriate problem gambling counselling, with the networking, education and harm minimisation approaches that have been successful in the ClubCare program.

**Recommendation 32**

That the ACT Government increase problem gambling support programs.

**People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds:** In its 2005-06 Budget Submission, ACTCOSS made the point that there is inequity in providing interpreter services across the ACT. While interpreters are available for many Government services, there is a lack of interpreters who can provide assistance in such activities as seeking medical treatment or dealing with service providers in the private sector.

**Recommendation 33**

That the ACT Government expand the range of interpreter services for languages other than English, including Auslan.

## **Revenue, Concessions and Structural Issues**

The ACT Treasurer has already announced a large number of tax reductions to be phased in over the next few years, resulting from agreements with the Australian Government as part of continuing negotiations about the use of 'windfall' gains from GST revenues. ACTCOSS shares the ACT Government's concerns about the interference of the Commonwealth in determining the revenue streams of the Territory and believes that these agreements do not leave room for any significant tax reductions measures in the forthcoming budget. Indeed, there may need to be additional revenue streams established to finance urgent social spending.

ACTCOSS would further point out that much of this social spending will be a direct consequence of Australian Government changes and their impacts on the people of the Territory. For instance, both the Welfare to Work package and the Industrial Relations reforms are likely to put additional strain on Territory-funded social services, such as emergency relief programs, homelessness and housing services. The potential social dislocation resulting from these Australian Government reforms will impact most heavily on the community sector, which is likely to see significant increases in demand for services. At a time when services are increasingly turning consumers away<sup>33</sup>, the ACT Government should continue to object to the actions of the Federal Government. The ACT nonetheless continues to have a responsibility to ensure that services are able to cope with demand and have adequate resources to do so.

ACTCOSS is pleased to observe that the ACT Government has moved away from its previous objections to hypothecated taxes in its announcement of the Canberra Central Business Levy: a hypothecated tax designed to assist in funding improvements to the character of the central business district. The ACT Government should consider whether the use of hypothecated taxes is also appropriate for other social services, for example, public transport or public housing.

ACTCOSS wishes to voice its concern at the continuing practice of requiring 'efficiency dividends' from ACT Government Departments in order to cut spending. ACTCOSS believes this is a non-transparent and scatter-gun approach to seeking cost-savings, particularly as it is done with no assessment of the relative capacity of different departments to control spending or the differential impacts that this might cause to consumers. As already mentioned in the Sector Viability section, ACTCOSS opposes any flow-through of such measures to community sector organisations.

ACTCOSS has observed that the Departments seem to be having increasing difficulty in fulfilling their functions due to understaffing and lack of sufficient resources. While sparing frontline expenditure has been important to community agencies, it is also clear that Departments need the resources to effectively understand, research and evaluate the programs they fund. The ACT Government needs to be both more

transparent and more judicious in selecting expenditure cuts, and any spending cuts applied to Departmental budgets need to be accompanied by a concomitant reduction in workloads. Such policies must also be articulated in the budget context, providing an increased transparency of decision making. At present, information on the policies of individual Departments in managing internal reductions are not enunciated in the public arena and are therefore, in ACTCOSS' estimation, unaccountable.

**Recommendation 34**

That the ACT Government clearly identify in the Budget Papers the areas of activity that will be the target of any reduction in expenditure.

ACTCOSS also revisits its call on the ACT Government to complete and publish its review of its various concessions policies and Community Service Obligation (CSOO agreements, including those in the areas of taxation, utilities, transport, and healthcare. In particular, the government should examine closely the horizontal and vertical equity, the benefits of improved targeting and the possibility of delivering concessions and Community Service Obligation benefits via alternative mechanisms. The community needs to be confident that concessions programs are maximising the social benefits, and the long-promised review of concessions would assist in achieving this outcome. ACTCOSS also recommends that the ACT Government review and evaluate the work of The Australia Institute on income-based fines and fees.<sup>34</sup>

**Recommendation 35**

That the ACT Government complete and publish a system review of concessions and CSOs and their impact in alleviating disadvantage.

ACTCOSS also renews its call for a concessions/CSO report to be included as part of the budget documentation. The information must be disaggregated and should be displayed as part of the "budget at a glance" information package.

**Recommendation 36**

That the ACT Government publish the full range of concessions and CSOs as part of the ACT Budget documentation.

ACTCOSS would also like to see an augmented consumer affairs role that could include utilities pricing and advocacy in the lead up to national utilities regulation. As has happened in Victoria, South Australia and Western Australia, ACTCOSS would like to see a position established in the community sector to provide education and advice to the sector on fuel poverty and utilities hardship measures.

**Recommendation 37**

That the ACT Government establish a community-based position of utilities officer to provide education and advice to consumer and other groups on utilities and fuel poverty.

ACTCOSS repeats previous calls for a review of the adequacy of the taxation base, and whether the effective incidence of taxation is falling equitably along the socio-economic continuum. In particular, ACTCOSS would again question whether the current range of property and development taxes is falling equitably among different groups, and suggest that in light of the proposed Housing Summit and the Affordable Housing Strategy that these taxes be given a closer inspection.

**Recommendation 38**

That the ACT Government conduct a wide-ranging inquiry into sources of ACT Government revenue, including innovative land-based taxation schemes.

Finally, ACTCOSS draws the Government's attention to the paucity of social research conducted specifically for the ACT population, and believes the government has a role in ensuring that greater research and data is made available. An ACT Government social research unit could supply data and research, as well as act as a clearing house for research from other jurisdictions, on good practice in social policy.

**Recommendation 39**

That the ACT Government establish an internal Social Policy Research Unit.

Uncharted Territory: Steering Canberra through the Reform Storm  
 ACOSS Community Sector Survey 2005 – ACT Data

**TABLE 4: NUMBER OF TIMES SERVICES PROVIDED 2002-3 AND 2003-4  
 (ACT)**

SERVICE TYPE	NUMBER OF SERVICES	NUMBER OF TIMES SERVICE WAS PROVIDED (2002 - 2003)	NUMBER OF TIMES SERVICE WAS PROVIDED (2003 - 2004)
Community Care	6	62,650	63,946
Residential Aged Care	0	0	0
Disability Supported Accommodation	0	0	0
Child Care	1	120	120
Child Welfare Service	1	32	67
Relationship/counselling/support	11	11,712	12,951
Financial and Material Support	4	1,397	1,100
Housing Assistance	8	1,451	1,425
Employment Service	3	640	742
Community Legal Centre	1	3,000	3,000
Community activities, info & referral	9	9,140	11,095
Health Service	4	3,262	3,336
Individual Advocacy	10	2,691	3,229
Other	15	27,880	29,958
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>123,975</b>	<b>130,969</b>

**Table 5: Number of times people turned away 2002-3 and 2003-4 (ACT)**

SERVICE TYPE	NUMBER OF SERVICE PROVIDERS	NUMBER OF TIMES PEOPLE TURNED AWAY (2002 - 2003)	NUMBER OF TIMES PEOPLE TURNED AWAY (2003 - 2004)
Community Care	1	20	15
Residential Aged Care	0	0	0
Disability Supported Accommodation	0	0	0
Child Care	0	0	0
Child Welfare Service	0	0	0
Relationship/counselling/support	2	17	510
Financial and Material Support	1	35	35
Housing Assistance	4	4,914	5,019
Employment Service	1	30	60
Community Legal Centre	0	0	0
Community activities, info & referral	0	0	0
Health Service	1	358	358
Individual Advocacy	4	143	228
Other	4	158	248
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>5,675</b>	<b>6,473</b>

When the number of times people are turned away is compared to the number of services provided by service type, housing services are experiencing particularly severe difficulties.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Stanhope, Jon (2005), Welfare to Work Changes: Tweaking the Indefensible, Media Release 457/05, Canberra: ACT Government.
- <sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2005), Australian National Accounts: State Accounts. Cat No. 5220.0 Canberra: ABS.
- <sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.3
- <sup>4</sup> Tenants Union of Victoria (2005), Rental Housing Affordability Bulletin: A National Perspective  
[http://www.tuv.org.au/Affordability%20Bulletin%2005\\_05%20National.pdf](http://www.tuv.org.au/Affordability%20Bulletin%2005_05%20National.pdf)
- <sup>5</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2005), Homeless People in SAAP: SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report 2003-04, Canberra: AIHW
- <sup>6</sup> AIHW: "Demand for SAAP Assistance by Homeless People 2002-03", viewed at :  
<http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/index.cfm/title/10050>
- <sup>7</sup> ACOSS, "Australian Community Sector Survey 2005" ISSN: 1326 7124. ACT Data: Tables 4 & 5. Copy of tables attached.
- <sup>8</sup> ACTCOSS understands that this is not a report solely of SAAP services, but includes other housing assistance providers. It stands only as a proxy for the continued increase in demand for all housing services, reflecting the problems encountered by the SAAP sector.
- <sup>9</sup> Information provided to ACTCOSS SAAP RaDS in response to Government comments that no woman experiencing domestic violence had been turned away from a SAAP service. Unpublished.
- <sup>10</sup> Hall, J. and Berry, M. (2004), Operating Deficits and Public Housing: Policy Options for Reversing the Trend, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute  
<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/global/docs/doc593.pdf>
- <sup>11</sup> Some of the issues facing women with disabilities can be found at the Women With Disabilities Australia website where there is a section on housing issues:  
<http://www.wwda.org.au/housing04.htm>  
See also: "There's No Justice, There's Just Us", ISBN: 0 9585 269 4 X, published 2002.
- <sup>12</sup> Details of the COSS campaign on welfare to work issues can be seen at :  
<http://www.acoss.org.au/Action.aspx>
- <sup>13</sup> Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Inquiry into Employment and Disability. See Section 3.4.3 "Other risks of participating in employment – impact on self-esteem and mental health" at  
[http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability\\_rights/employment\\_inquiry/interim/ch3.htm#\\_Toc111979355](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/disability_rights/employment_inquiry/interim/ch3.htm#_Toc111979355)
- <sup>14</sup> Report by the Mental Health Council of Australia, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and the Mind and Brain Institute. Accessible via:  
<http://www.mhca.org.au/notforservice/>
- <sup>15</sup> ACT Council of Social Service (2005), Submission to the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health and Disability Inquiry into Safe, Secure and Affordable Housing for People with a Mental Illness, Canberra: ACTCOSS
- <sup>16</sup> ACT Mental Health Official Visitors Annual Report 2003. Available at:  
<http://www.health.act.gov.au/c/health?a=sendfile&ft=p&fid=1098251060&sid=>
- <sup>17</sup> More information can be obtained on this project from the website:  
[http://members.mentalhealth.asn.au/nswcag/Projects/Projects\\_Hasi.htm](http://members.mentalhealth.asn.au/nswcag/Projects/Projects_Hasi.htm)
- <sup>18</sup> Some information on this program can be obtained from:  
<http://www.londondevelopmentcentre.org/index.php?topic=48>
- <sup>19</sup> Australian Capital Territory Government (2004), The Social Compact, Canberra: ACT Government, p.13
- <sup>20</sup> The Community Sector Survey 2005, ACOSS. ACT Data: "Staff turnover is a function of the number of staff leaving over the number of staff employed. In 2003-4, respondent agencies employed 560 FTE staff and lost 172 FTE staff. Average staff turnover across respondent agencies is therefore equivalent to 30.7% which is higher than the national average for this survey (16.3%) and higher than the all Australian industry average of between 10% and 12%"
- <sup>21</sup> Legislative Assembly Hansard 2005, p.3556
- <sup>22</sup> ACT Homelessness Strategy, Operational framework 1.1.1
- <sup>23</sup> Wilkinson RG and Marmot MG (editors). The Social Determinants of Health: the solid facts. Copenhagen: World Health Organization Centre for Urban Health, 1998.

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<sup>24</sup> ACTCOSS would also classify underemployment as a functional sub-set of unemployment.

<sup>25</sup> AIHW Dental Statistics and Research Unit Research Report No. 18: Oral health and access to dental care: older adults in Australia". Published 2005. Accessed via: [http://www.arcpoh.adelaide.edu.au/whatsnew\\_frame.html](http://www.arcpoh.adelaide.edu.au/whatsnew_frame.html)

<sup>26</sup> An example of this research can be found at the University of Queensland website at: <http://www.uq.edu.au/health/?page=18839&pid=4531>

<sup>27</sup> The issue was highlighted in the Weekend Australian on 29 October 2006. Referenced on November 3 at:

[http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story\\_page/0,5744,17058812%255E23289,00.html](http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/common/story_page/0,5744,17058812%255E23289,00.html)

<sup>28</sup> Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet. Home page, <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au> then click on home page.

<sup>29</sup> ACTCOSS analysis of the 2005-06 ACT Budget: "Treading Water: Missed opportunities for the community sector" ACTCOSS website (p.19).

<sup>30</sup> ACT Government, "The Social Plan Progress Report", 2005. p. 13, Social Plan point 2.4: Disability Support. Accessed via:

<http://www.communityinclusion.act.gov.au/papers/index.htm>

<sup>31</sup> Report No. 6 of the Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity, "The forgotten victims of crime: families of offenders and their silent sentence", J u n e 2 0 0 4 .

<http://www.parliament.act.gov.au/committees/reports/cs06supportservices1.pdf>

<sup>32</sup> This can be found at the Tasmanian Government's Department of Economic Development website: <http://www.development.tas.gov.au/index.html>

<sup>33</sup> ACOSS Community Sector Survey:

[http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/publications/papers/138\\_Community%20Sector%20Survey%202005.pdf](http://www.acoss.org.au/upload/publications/papers/138_Community%20Sector%20Survey%202005.pdf) – Key findings.

<sup>34</sup> Clive Hamilton, "Making Fines Fairer". The Australia Institute, January 2005.