



**Social Justice on the ACT
Agenda – delivering on the
Canberra Social Plan.**



February 2005

INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

ACTCOSS receives funding from the Community Services Program (CSP) which is funded by the ACT Government.

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ACTCOSS' objectives and their relationship to the 2005-06 ACT Budget submission.

The first two objectives of ACTCOSS' 2003-05 Strategic Plan are to work towards a:

1. Socially just and sustainable ACT community and a;
2. Dynamic, cohesive and sustainable community sector

These goals are to be achieved by primarily committing our resources to:

- ⇒ *Extend community recognition of the rights, entitlements and needs of people living with disadvantage in the ACT;*
- ⇒ *Advocate for resources for people living with disadvantage – in particular housing;*
- ⇒ *Advocate for sound and transparent governance in the ACT and the appropriate division of responsibilities within society;*
- ⇒ *Promote the health and wellbeing of people and communities who are disadvantaged.*
- ⇒ *Advocate for a well-resourced and respected community sector;*
- ⇒ *Support learning, sharing and development in the community sector; and*
- ⇒ *Support and strengthen the capacity of the community sector to provide high quality services.*

This work includes providing comment to Government on ACT Budget priorities, ensuring that alleviation of poverty and disadvantage are kept at the core of Government thinking at Budget time. The ACTCOSS Strategic Plan development process has also provided this organisation with a mandate from its membership to comment on and contribute to Government inquiries and projects. This has included, in the term of the first Stanhope Government, the development of the Social Plan.

ACTCOSS has determined that its goals can best be achieved by ensuring that the Government's Social Plan goals are pursued vigorously. It is in this context that we offer the following comments on the emphasis that should be taken in the 2005-06 ACT Budget.

Before we touch on those issues identified by the Social Plan, we offer a few observations about the broad budget context for the ACT.

Economic Position

ACTCOSS notes from previous budget forecasting processes that the ACT Government has adopted conservative estimates in allocating funding. We note also that the Government has enjoyed significant surpluses as a consequence of strong real estate market over recent years and acknowledge that this boom has likely reached a plateau. We would welcome greater clarity about the use of the surpluses that have arisen and

would request that the ACT Government ensure that the community sector receives a fair share of such surplus in recognition of the contribution this sector makes to helping achieve the social policy objectives of the ACT Government.

ACTCOSS also notes, that like many context setting reviews focussing on aspects of ACT life, descriptive factors such as a low unemployment rate can mask acute need. We note the target identified by the Social Plan to reduce long-term unemployment and highlight this as an issue that ACTCOSS is keen to see adequately addressed in this year's budget allocations. We note that this area of social policy requires coordination for an all of Government response.

CPI

We note the CPI measures noted for the purpose of Budget allocations and would like to remind ACT Treasury of the inadequacies of this measure for determining funding increases for community services. We have submitted to the Chief Minister's Department an alternative indexation formula based on a review undertaken in Western Australia, and were very pleased that the Chief Minister made this issue the subject of an election promise. ACTCOSS is participating in all relevant forums and is looking forward to the announcement in the 2005-06 ACT Budget of how this promise will be implemented.

Population

In late 2004 ACTCOSS participated in a forum hosted by the ACT Government regarding the changing demographic of the ACT. We have some concerns about the growth focus that dominated much of the public debate that followed. ACTCOSS understands the economic implications of a changing demographic but would also seek to influence the balance of the debate towards one that takes account of the social and environmental cost that might also follow on from a population growth strategy.

Housing

ACTCOSS concurs with the Treasury assessment of the ACT housing market and consider that it has eased over recent months. While we note the potential to dampen the owner-occupier market, ACTCOSS is mindful of the complex flow on effects that can arise for the rental sector. As Professor Judy Yates from the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) observed at the Seminar on the Future of Affordable Housing in June 2004, variations in housing prices do not have a comparable effect on rental properties with capital gains expectations and negative gearing opportunities equally effecting investor decisions as interest rates. This is an important consideration in anticipating the supply of affordable rental properties for all residents of the ACT.

The ACT Social Plan

The development of the Canberra Social Plan (*Building our Community*) by the ACT Government has provided the social justice framework for the ACT over the next ten years. The Government makes some significant promises and ACTCOSS will take the opportunities provided (such as the 2005-06 Budget Consultation process) to make comment on the Government's progress towards the priorities identified in the Social Plan. Likewise we will consider the Government's success in implementing other plans and strategies including:

- Homelessness Strategy
- Children's Plan
- Carers' Plan
- Health Action Plan
- Strategic Plan for Women
- Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan

We look forward to working with the Government during the sixth Legislative Assembly as these goals are realised. We will, during the period of this Government, use available consultation processes to provide comment to the ACT Government on opportunities that ACTCOSS identifies to improve implementation and achieve good social justice outcomes.

We appreciate the opportunity provided to have input into the 2005-06 Budget preparation process. This submission reflects the shortened period available for consultation with the community sector, and so has been structured to maximise our opportunity to comment on the community sector's capacity to support the priorities set out by the Social Plan. The Canberra Social Plan outlines the following seven priorities:

1. Economic Opportunities for all Canberrans
2. Respect, diversity and human rights
3. A strong, safe and cohesive community
4. Improve health and well being
5. Lead Australia in education, lifelong learning and training
6. Housing for a Future Canberra
7. Respect and protect the environment

ACTCOSS stated at the time of the release of the ACT Social Plan (CSP), "Building Our Community" that:

"Building Our Community.... recognise(s) that poverty and disadvantage exist in the ACT, and that for those people without adequate income or access to services life can be very tough."

"ACTCOSS is impressed that the Government has set itself a series of goals, provided measures against which it will judge the success of the Plan, and outlined an accountability mechanism that will provide valuable feedback to the community on the progress of the Plan."

While the pillars of the social plan are being put into place, ACTCOSS would like to re-issue its challenge to the Government to “achieve outcomes above its stated social justice targets” and to achieve these goals before the target of 2013.

In the context of the 2005-06 Budget this can be achieved by resetting the stated targets in several broad areas, including:

- The provision of funds to support programs that tackle the causes of unemployment and employment disadvantage (*CSP: Priority 1 – Reduce long term unemployment: ACTCOSS Recommendation 23*);
- Making sure that the target of assisting “the most vulnerable members of our community, as part of a concerted attack on the causes of poverty and exclusion” is uppermost in the deliberations of ALL Government Departments, boards and statutory authorities (*CSP :Priority 1: Action 1.1: Not an ACTCOSS Budget recommendation*);
- Finalising the review of concessions and Community Service Orders (CSOs) to ensure that all Canberrans can access Government services at an affordable cost (*CSP: Priority 1, Action 1.2: ACTCOSS Recommendation 2*);
- *Increasing* emergency relief funding to ensure that households on low or restricted incomes feel they are supported when they face financial crises. This should be reinforced with research on the real cost of living increases facing households on low incomes, and ACT Government lobbying for increases in income support for households. (*CSP: Priority 1, Action item 1.3: ACTCOSS Recommendations 3 & 4*)

In addition to these overarching comments, detailed recommendations appear throughout our submission and in summary form at Appendix 1.

Recommendations are numbered consecutively in the document and collated in Appendix 1. Comments on areas where ACTCOSS will be taking an interest, but which are not specific recommendations, are listed in Appendix 2.

While this submission uses the Social Plan as a framework for our budget suggestions, there are some sections of the Social Plan on which ACTCOSS offers no comment in this context. Not all sections of the Social Plan are reproduced in the format for this submission.

Priority One: Economic Opportunities for all Canberrans

1.1 Community Inclusion fund

The ACT Community Inclusion Fund has been a success, from all publicly available indicators. It has also been oversubscribed with grants outnumbering applications 8-1. Such a result is to be expected when a source of funding becomes available for community sector projects.

As stated previously, ACTCOSS is keen to see that, into the future, this fund is allocated in accordance with the role spelt out for it by the Chief Minister of assisting:

"the most vulnerable members of our community, as part of a concerted attack on the causes of poverty and exclusion"

What the oversubscription shows, however, is that there is a larger need for programs that meet community need.

The response to the call for proposals shows that there is clearly unmet need in the community, and that the community itself has the creativity, ingenuity and skills to find solutions to social problems. It is also important as a show of faith with the community that the submission they spent a lot of effort on are taken seriously and given due consideration.

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.

1.2 Concession payments

The ACT Government increased the amount allocated for concessions and Community Service Orders (CSOs) in the 2004-05 Budget. This was a welcome gesture, but falls short of what has been sought over the past four years.

In 2001 a review of concessions and CSOs was commenced within ACT Government. In July 2002, ACTCOSS made a submission to this inquiry, premised on the following criteria:

- There is a clear identification and understanding of the target group
- The government's social objectives and desired outcomes from the concession arrangements must be clearly defined
- The operation of the concession produces the same outcome for people in similar circumstances (horizontal equity, i.e. people in similar financial circumstances are treated in the same way)
- The concession produces vertical equity (i.e. people on different incomes are treated differently so that the relative financial burdens for people on high and low incomes is the same)
- The concession's entitlements are clear to intended recipients, non-

- discretionary in their application, and the concession system is easy to use by the total number of people it is targeted at
- People receiving the concession should receive the same goods and services on the same terms and conditions as apply to other customers
 - The concession must be flexible enough in its design to respond to the changing circumstances of eligible groups
 - The level of the concession must improve affordability in access to the service with which it is linked
 - The concession must be effectively managed in order to achieve its stated objectives and intended outcomes
 - The concession must be broadly consistent with other government policies
 - The concession must be supplemented by a small program of safety-nets to provide one off assistance

There has been no reported outcomes from that review, other than the increase to water, sewerage and gas concessions outlined in the last budget.

RECOMMENDATION 2: ACTCOSS IS ASKING THAT THE CONCESSIONS REVIEW BE MADE PUBLIC, INCLUDING THE BREADTH OF CONCESSIONS THAT WERE CONSIDERED.

This organisation believes that clearly articulated and targeted concessions are important in helping to alleviate poverty and ensuring social equity. This view was also expressed by the Poverty Task Force. The Government, in its Social Plan, has stated that concessions are an important way to “ease the financial pressures facing individuals and families on low incomes”. While power and water costs can pose a significant impost, these concessions are not part of a clearly articulated policy and are not necessarily accessible to all low income households.

ACTCOSS would like to see the full range of issues raised in its submission addressed, but stresses that the Government’s concessions policies, as well as details of all available concessions, need to be outlined clearly and in accessible format on the web and in printed form, available from shopfronts.

1.3 *Emergency relief*

ACTCOSS is pleased that the ACT Government has placed emergency relief funding on the table as a priority. ACTCOSS has argued, and reached agreement with the Government, that community organisations experience higher than CPI increases in their costs each year, due to the restricted nature of CPI indexing. Similarly, people on low incomes have a different price of living index, with many of the goods that influence the CPI not impacting on their spending patterns. For example, in the December Quarter Consumer Price Index figures, released by the ABS on 25 January this year, alcohol and tobacco, housing, health, transportation, education and “miscellaneous” all recorded increases above the weighted average figure of 2.6%.

These feature as much higher percentage items in the budgets of low income households. Income support has not kept pace with the true cost of living for recipients, with a resulting increased pressure on emergency relief providers to help meet everyday costs, such as food, utilities and education.

RECOMMENDATION 3: ACTCOSS URGES THE GOVERNMENT TO DO ALL IT CAN TO REOPEN DEBATE ON THE QUANTUM OF THE SOCIAL WAGE.

At the same time, governments have been recipients of windfalls gains through the application of GST to services. On the 14 October, 2004, the Adelaide Advertiser pointed out that households in that state had paid \$250 million in tax on electricity bills since the introduction of the GST four years ago.

While understanding there are differences between the South Australian and ACT energy pricing regimes, the issue is still central. Low income households are paying increasing amounts of tax on an essential service. This has implications for the Essential Services Consumer Council if more people get into utilities debt, and for emergency relief agencies trying to help households make ends meet.

As well, there has been research in Victoria detailing the increase in the number of families approaching emergency relief agencies to help cope with the costs of schooling. Again, the ACT situation is slightly different, yet education continues to be a major cost burden for families in the ACT.

The trend is for increasing reliance on emergency relief to “top up” inadequate income support. ACTCOSS argues that households put under financial stress are unfairly disadvantaged in a user-pays community and this leads to increase in other costs. These are usually translated into poor health, increased stress, violence, and social isolation.

RECOMMENDATION 4: ACTCOSS ASKS THAT THE GOVERNMENT PROVIDE INCREASED EMERGENCY RELIEF SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES.

This recommendation goes hand in hand with the previous comments on expanding the availability and level of concessions and CSOs for households on low incomes.

1.5 Vocational education

Vocational education has always had an important role to play in providing skills-based training and life-long learning opportunities for Canberrans. This role is important, particularly as the ACT develops specific human services to deal with social disadvantage, disability and ageing.

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

Priority Two: Respect, diversity and human rights

2.1 Human Rights Act & build a human rights culture

Earlier this year, ACTCOSS made a tentative step toward a human rights analysis of the ACT Budget. Unfortunately this is not a step that the ACT Government has committed itself to, despite being the first Australian Government to pass a Human Rights Act.

ACTCOSS 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.

ACTCOSS is hoping that the Government will take heed of the New Zealand experience and commit significant resources towards achieving the human rights culture that has been uppermost in so much of the debate about the Human Rights Act. Such education is essential if we are to change community attitudes and ensure that the Act is not constantly contravened.

The adoption of a human rights culture must be led by the Government, and in this regard, ACTCOSS is very critical of the abolition of the Community Services and Social Equity Committee of the Assembly. This was the only committee with a wide-ranging brief to investigate issues around human rights and social justice which are broader than simply issues for the legal system.

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.

This includes development of human rights analysis tools to enable both the public sector and the community to understand the progress we are making as a community.

This organisation holds that a human rights analysis is a robust and defensible way of measuring the success or otherwise of programs aimed at implementing the goals of the Canberra Social Plan.

2.2 Use the ACT Human Rights Act to scrutinise all Bills

As mentioned above, ACTCOSS believes the loss of the ACTLA Community Services and Social Equity Committee may diminish processes of review of social policy and practice in Canberra.

2.4 Community and ACT agency support for the Vision and Values statement for people with a disability

ACTCOSS believes that support for people with disability is a core Government activity. Building community and agency support for Vision and Values will require not only education about discrimination issues, but commitment to systemic change. This includes awareness training for policy makers and public sector managers to ensure that decisions are inclusive. It also requires resources to allow human service providers to change their physical environments and organisational practices to welcome people with disabilities.

During the election the ALP announced that, if returned to Government, it would commit an additional \$1 million per year for children with high and complex needs, particularly autism. There was also a package to "reduce the long waiting lists" by replicating Sharing Places, reviewing alternative housing models and providing more support for young carers. These commitments were perhaps not as comprehensive as ACTCOSS would like, and there were no details on the further development of the Access to Government Strategy. 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.

2.5 Build on inclusiveness

ACTCOSS welcomes the Government's commitment to multiculturalism, encapsulated in the "Facing up to Racism" strategy. However, it appears that some of the basic tenets of the strategy will be undermined unless some immediate problems are addressed.

One that has come to ACTCOSS' attention through its work in the community sector is the issue of interpreters. Of course, part of the Government's strategy to achieve the goals set out in "Facing Up to Racism" relies on the availability of interpreters. ACTCOSS believes that there are structural issues that will undermine the strategy if not addressed in the 2005-06 Budget.

At the present time, individual users of translator and interpreter services (TIS) are charged for the service, the bulk of that fee going to the service provider. The only other way to access these services is through a community organisation and that organisation may then have to pay for the service. ACTCOSS does not have precise details about how different organisations access this service and the charges that they incur. We do submit that in numerous cases this represents a significant cost burden to community organisations and affects their capacity to provide adequate services to people from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Clients will often use family members to provide translation and interpretation to avoid the high cost of using an independent service. Some professionals also do not provide any translation facilities, leaving their clients to meet these costs, or again, rely on family. This situation in turn

has its own set of complications especially around issues of privacy, patient-doctor confidentiality, power of attorney etc. Currently, the government policy is:

"The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that all Canberra residents, regardless of their background, have equal access to its programs and services. It is ACT Government policy to use professional interpreters when speaking with people who have difficulty communicating in English.

You are entitled to an interpreter free of charge when dealing with an ACT Government department or agency (such as schools, hospitals and Shopfronts)." (From <http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/community/multicultural/Interpreters.htm>)

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.

ACTCOSS understands that the amount paid for the interpreter services to community service providers by the Government is specified in current contracts, not negotiated according to level of need. ACTCOSS suggests this can be remedied with the development of the Core Pricing Principles for service funding.

2.6 Strategic Plan for Women

The release of the ACT Women's Plan in August 2004 provides a welcome opportunity to refocus attention on specific women's policy issues. ACTCOSS looks forward to seeing details of the Government's commitment to improving the context in which ACT women are able to work and contribute to the ACT community. ACTCOSS believes that one of the most effective ways of addressing equity for women is by a thorough gender analysis of all budget initiatives

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 PLAN.

2.7 ACT Indigenous Partnership Plan

Canberra's European settlement history has resulted in a fragmented and dispersed Indigenous population in the region. Because of this fragmentation, it is doubly important for government to listen to Indigenous voices, yet this is not always facilitated by the formal processes of the Assembly and ACT Government.

ACTCOSS has observed that better ACT Government processes have been developed over the past few years, including the pledge to establish a democratically elected Indigenous body to provide advice and input to the

ACT Government on issues affecting Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in Canberra, in conjunction with the ACT Indigenous Partnership Plan 2004-2013.

The Chief Minister has rightly criticised the Commonwealth Government's approach to Indigenous welfare. Given the potential impact of these national policy changes at the local level, it is imperative that the ACT Government make provision for meeting increased need in the Indigenous communities of the ACT. ACTCOSS is sure that the ACT Government is raising these issues through its Indigenous advisory bodies, but this organisation feels that mainstream services may also need to improve their skills in responding to Aborigines and Torres Strait Islander people.

RECOMMENDATION 8: CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING SHOULD BE PROVIDED TO ALL EMPLOYEES IN THOSE MAINSTREAM SERVICES TO ENSURE THESE SERVICES ARE WELCOMING AND ACCESSIBLE.

ACTCOSS also reiterates its position from previous submissions that cultural awareness training would assist Government employees in delivering on the promise of the Plan. This organisation has found that providing cultural awareness training for staff and Board members enables ACTCOSS to develop more appropriate policies around Indigenous issues.

2.8 Remove restrictions to Temporary Protection Visa holders who are homeless to access public housing

ACTCOSS applauds the Government's continued commitment to a fair and just ACT through recognition of visa holders as having basic requirements for housing and other services. However, this highlights the need to ensure that ACT Housing's stock is increased to meet the demand for short, medium and long term accommodation across Canberra.

ACTCOSS also feels that there are opportunities to further develop Canberra as the nation's multicultural capital. Many people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds have followed refugee patterns of settlement. Those that weren't political refugees were mostly economic refugees, welcomed with open arms at a time when Australia needed skilled workers. Like any other cohort in Canberra, CALD groups need resources to provide appropriate welfare and support services.

RECOMMENDATION 9: ACTCOSS RECOMMENDS THAT THE GOVERNMENT CONTINUES DIALOGUE WITH ALL CANBERRA'S MIGRANT REPRESENTATIVES TO ENSURE THAT THEIR CHANGING DEMOGRAPHICS AND NEEDS ARE BEING CATERED FOR.

2.9 Establishment of Multicultural Centre

ACTCOSS is pleased that the ACT Government has achieved its goal of funding a multicultural centre, and anticipate participating in the public processes leading to its development.

Priority Three: A strong, safe and cohesive community

3.1 Building a stronger community - Community Engagement Strategy

3.1.1 ACTCOSS congratulates the Government for its commitment, made at our Conference in August and re-announced during the election campaign, to:

- provide additional resources to the sector for training in governance;
- consider ways of assisting the portability of entitlements within the sector;
- iron out the teething problems encountered in implementing the new Standard Funding Agreement;
- provide recognised community organisations with information technology upgrades to the value of \$1,000;
- resolve the question of how we index community sector funding; and
- establish a new Community Sector Taskforce, with community representation and a funded project officer, to work towards community sector enterprise bargaining.

We also note work is underway on the review of the ACT Government consultation protocol.

ACTCOSS believes it is a matter of urgency that a new model of community sector indexation be adopted before the 2005-06 ACT Budget comes into force. As the Chief Minister pointed out in his address to the ACTCOSS conference, community organisations need financial certainty. Amending the model of indexation is a relatively simple way that government can support the viability of community organisations. This organisation believes that this change needs to be pursued in a straightforward, swift manner.

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

This is an essential step in developing a cross-sector approach to improving pay and conditions through enterprise agreements. Given the importance of workforce attraction and retention for the community services industry, ACTCOSS believes this work needs to commence as soon as possible.

3.1.2 The Community Development Network of the ACT and Region was established in 2003 to improve information flows and coordination between people working in the area of community development and to provide opportunities to extend awareness about the value of community development initiative and practices. The network is coordinated by a working group drawn from the community and from supportive units within the ACT Government. Currently the network receives support for its work through the Health Promotion Unit in ACT Health and from the Department of Community Services (DDHCS), the regional community services and ACTCOSS. Since its inception this Network has demonstrated significant coordination capacity by hosting of the first national Community

Development Conference (Wrestling Wicked Problems) and a series of well attended forums. The Network is exploring options for extending its work. In terms of achieving the objectives of the Social Plan, ACTCOSS draws attention to the existing infrastructure and notes that the Community Development Network will require resources to achieve this objective.

RECOMMENDATION 9: ACTCOSS RECOMMENDS THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT CONSIDER OPPORTUNITIES TO FURTHER FUND THE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT NETWORK AND ALLOW IT TO EXTEND ITS WORK.

3.1.3 In addition there is a need to recognise the role of peak organisations in the sector, and their role in the processes of government. It is important that peak bodies be recognised as having an essential and on-going role in the community and be funded accordingly. For many years now, ACTCOSS and other peak groups have been provided with inadequate base funding and expected to access project funding to make up the difference between the core grant and the amount necessary to retain and support staff. There has also been an increased call for partnerships between government and the community sector, sometimes with the business sector also thrown in, without recognition that such partnerships require appropriate resources. As part of the Government's assessment of improved pay and conditions it is appropriate that the Government also live up to its 2001 election promise that providers would be paid the full cost of delivering services. This is no less a requirement for peak groups who represent the interests of service providers and consumers.

RECOMMENDATION 10: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT RECOGNISE THROUGH APPROPRIATE FUNDING THE ROLE OF PEAK ORGANISATIONS IN THE COMMUNITY SECTOR.

3.1.4 It is also unfortunate that there still appears to be no recognition of the need for a community sector emergency response plan, and funding to allow that plan to be developed. ACTCOSS made major submissions on this issue in 2003 and 2004, but there has been no offer of assistance to make it possible for individual organisations to develop policies and procedures that would allow them to support emergency relief efforts in a coordinated fashion. ACTCOSS believes that too much faith has been placed in structures embedded in government bodies, forgetting that the community sector plays an important role in emergencies.

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.

3.1.5 ACTCOSS is pleased that the Government made a commitment to the upgrading of community infrastructure in the Social Plan. As accrual accounting will make this funding invisible within Departmental budgets, ACTCOSS would like to see a dis-aggregation of funding to departments to

allow analysis of what funds are being allocated to refurbishment, and whether this is new funding or a redirection away from service support.

The other area where ACTCOSS is hoping to see some improvement in the 2005-06 ACT Budget is the allocation of funds for IT support. The human services sector has asked for, and received, some assistance with upgrading and networking community computer equipment in recent years. However, these grants and access arrangements do not provide for future recurrent expenditure on software and capital injections to maintain the hardware components.

There is also the issue of help desk and IT hardware support. The community sector struggles to keep up with the enormous volume of digital information from government agencies. While upgraded computers will assist with some processing problems, the sector is repeatedly finding that the cost of consultants and help desk support are outside their budgets. So these become neglected and the IT infrastructure is no longer an efficient tool for communications, but a black hole that absorbs time and money.

There are also additional costs in terms of printing. For example, it can be difficult to get printed versions of Government documents. Organisations and individuals are expected to print them from a web page using their own resources, where previously they may have more easily accessed a copy of a publication for free.

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.

3.2 Veteran's memorial

In symbolically recognising the contribution of veterans ACTCOSS would request that the ACT Government also recognises that military service can impact quite profoundly on the health and well-being of returned service personnel and their families. These personnel and families access support services that include specialist mental health services, many of which are provided by the ACT community sector.

3.3 Events – support community celebration

In 2003, ACTCOSS submitted that there should be more opportunities for the celebration of Indigenous culture, alongside remedies for social disadvantage. In the budget context, the Government should now ensure that maximum resources are provided to Canberra's Indigenous groups and service providers to ensure that reconciliation is a multi-faceted goal, with improved cultural understanding, better health, housing and education achieved alongside the celebration of culture.

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.

3.1 *Schools as communities program expanded*

ACTCOSS believes that the community service partnerships embodied in programs such as “Schools as Communities” and “Parents as Partners” are exemplars of good practice. We look forward to the development of more innovative use of school infrastructure to help build resilience and skills in children and their communities.

An example of one of the many worthwhile programs developed under “Schools as Communities” is the school breakfast program at Narrabundah Primary School. Unlike other efforts to ensure children start the day off well fed, this program seeks to build a culture of community without stigma. At Narrabundah the whole school community (students and teachers) are encouraged to share breakfast as the most valuable meal of the day.

3.7 *Adopt Caring for Carers policy*

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

3.9 *Child protection*

In general, ACTCOSS supports the comments of the Youth Coalition of the ACT on the issue of child protection, and would ask that the Government continue to provide sufficient funding to ensure that the community sector can contribute to the improvements arising from the recent changes to child protection.

3.12 *Sustainable transport plan for the ACT*

ACTCOSS would like to remind the Government that accessible, low cost public transport is essential to meet the needs of Canberrans who are on low incomes. For many people who are homeless or unemployed, their health suffers when they are unable to access transport to get to health services. We will be assessing Budget allocations to ensure transport remains affordable for this group. This includes recognition that transport is an important part of health management for all people on low incomes, regardless of age.

3.13 *Reduce incidents of property crime*

ACTCOSS has concerns that the focus of the reduction in property crime is on repeat offenders, without recognising that these people have been failed by systems set up to stop recidivism. This organisation has targeted most of its comments on law and order in its comments on the proposed prison. However, the best way to reduce recidivism is to have good programs that provide early intervention and recognise the value of social interventions.

RECOMMENDATION 13: THAT MORE FUNDING BE DIRECTED TO EARLY INTERVENTION AND DIVERSIONARY PROGRAMS FOR PEOPLE COMING BEFORE THE COURTS.

3.14 Trial of circle sentencing for Indigenous offenders

ACTCOSS is anticipating that there will be sufficient funding allocated in the 2005-06 ACT Budget to evaluate the pilot program. We would also expect an ongoing commitment to appropriate circle sentencing options.

3.15 Build a best practice prison

ACTCOSS is very encouraged by the promise held out by the Chief Minister in his address to the fifth ACT Legislative Assembly on plans for the proposed prison. This organisation fully supports the goals of rehabilitation, reintegration and reducing recidivism that the model holds out as a promise.

In support of these goals, ACTCOSS organised a forum in December to discuss the filters that can be applied in various areas of community life that might help keep many offenders from ever reaching prison. That information will be used as part of ACTCOSS' dialogue with the Government in the important development and commissioning phases of the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

However there is already a need to recognise the implications of the building of the prison on local services. Some services currently delivered to prisoners and their families in the New South Wales system will have to be repatriated into the ACT. Existing services will need to be augmented to cover drug and alcohol treatment, skills development and education, and well as HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis C support programs, just to name a few.

ACTCOSS in particular would like to see evidence that the Prison Project is taking note of developments interstate in terms of best practice for managing Hepatitis C and HIV/AIDS in prison populations. This would include the July 2004 report by the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre at the University of New South Wales found that there was a need for proper evaluation of all supply, demand and harm reduction programs in prisons, and proposed that it was an appropriate time to consider the trial of a needle and syringe program in prisons.

ACTCOSS believes that the ACT has the appropriate infrastructure and resources to lead the country in this approach. However our main goal continues to be keeping people out of gaol and in the community.

This organisation is aware that planning is well advanced within ACT Corrections for an innovative prison complex and corrections programs. However, this information is not yet in the public arena. ACTCOSS would like to see the Government provide resources to scope the community sector's ability and willingness to provide services to people involved in corrections, both before the prison is completed and after it's commissioning.

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.

This review should include the services outlined in the “Forgotten Victims of Crime” report of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Community Services and Social Equity.

Priority Four: Improve health and well being

Over recent years, ACTCOSS has undertaken considerable action research in the area of the social determinants of health which highlights the increased burden on the health system and the community in general of social isolation and socio-economic stress. Without adequate resources to nutritious food, clothing and housing as well as rewarding employment and social interaction, it is widely acknowledged that the health of groups within a population will suffer. Given the burden this places on the community as a whole, the overall wellbeing of the population suffers particularly where safety and security are compromised. The burden on the health system trying to respond to illness arising from prolonged stress and health neglect is clear.

ACTCOSS supports health initiatives designed to achieve early interventions, promotion and prevention within the population as a whole but we note through our research work the complexity of supporting and empowering disadvantaged residents to take greater control over their own health status. Our work (with support from Health Promotions Unit, ACT Health and Healthpact) has emphasised the need to support specific strategies for disadvantaged residents and to maximise the value of existing support mechanisms such as the community service sector in providing health supporting services.

The Dental Program run through Directions ACT is an excellent example of an adaptive community sector response to an identified health need of a specific service user group. Directions ACT supports residents of the ACT who are chronic drug and other substance users. The principle underlying all services is harm minimisation and Directions acts as the primary outlet for the ACT Needle and Syringe Program. The drop-in centre provides additional support for service users including free food (lunch and breakfast), tea and coffee, and other basic personal and health care services. Through the Dental Program, Directions has extended its capacity to support the general health of service users. Working in partnership with the Public Dental Service, Directions offers service users a number of designated appointment times and provides practical support to help improve dental health. In most cases the need is acute and service users often require extensive treatment. Demand for this service has outstripped the capacity of the organisation and they maintain a waiting list for this service.

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.

4.1 Establish two child & family centres

ACTCOSS is pleased with the development of family-friendly services that provide holistic responses to the often multi-faceted concerns of parents. We will be looking to the 2005-06 ACT Budget to ensure that these 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.

4.2 Package of initiatives to promote good health in children & young people

ACTCOSS believes the focus on childhood obesity in the Social Plan is of concern in its current form. There needs to be a more comprehensive social determinants of health approach which recognises access to resources, such as food, housing and utilities, can have determining and long term health implications.

ACTCOSS believes the Government's initiatives in providing early childhood centres will help address part of this issue, but there is a need to address the specific social context experienced by young people and adolescents.

4.7 Improve capacity of ACT health services to meet need of A&TSI people

This objective is in line with ACTCOSS' earlier comments on Indigenous cultural awareness training. Given the ACT Government's commitment to reconciliation we do not believe this to be a form of mainstreaming. ACTCOSS would be disturbed, however, if this commitment led to a reduction the funding of Indigenous service providers or any slow-down in the development of more Indigenous-specific services.

4.8 Implement National Mental Health Plan through ACT Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2003-2005

ACTCOSS will be looking for evidence of the Government's stated commitment to a population health approach to be reflected in mental health funding in the 2005-06 ACT Budget. In 2004-05 the Government favoured clinical services over community-based services, despite the innovative promotion, prevention and early intervention strategies used among the community providers.

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.

ACTCOSS notes the emphasis given to promotion, prevention and early intervention in the ACT Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan 2003-08 and we urge the government to allocate adequate funding to ensure that the strategy is fully implemented.

RECOMMENDATION 17: TO ALLOCATE SUFFICIENT FUNDING TO FULLY IMPLEMENT THE ACT MENTAL HEALTH STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2003-08.

4.9 Implement Alcohol and other Drug Strategy

ACTCOSS is keen to see needle dispensing machines piloted and expansion of peer based support services. There is a need to extend funding to community sector services that provide health support services to high use communities , for example homeless groups, drug using groups, people experiencing mental health problems, as well as other people experiencing social exclusion and isolation.

RECOMMENDATION 18: THAT THE ACT GOVERNMENT FUND THE EXPANSION OF HEALTH SUPPORT AND PEER SUPPORT FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS THAT CATER FOR HIGH USE GROUPS.

As previously mentioned, ACTCOSS believes that the Andrew Maconochie Centre should reflect best practice in drug and alcohol programs, including needle and syringe programs.

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.

Priority 5: Lead Australia in education, lifelong learning and training

ACTCOSS' comments on the Education goals of the Social Plan focus on issues not specifically covered by the Government's goals and outlines. Firstly we ask that the 2005-06 ACT Budget recognise the importance of tying educational programs to employment programs that attack the causes of long-term unemployment.

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.

There is also a concern in this organisation that education costs are proving a major impost on families. A recent report on education costs for Victorian families revealed that many schools now expect homework to be completed on computers, even at junior level. Parents of children who do not have home access to this technology believe their child will be "marked down" for submitting handwritten material¹.

In the ACT home computer use is among the highest in the country, as is local uptake of home internet usage and cable television, which provides educational content on some channels. ACTCOSS has experience from its work with the Poverty Task Group and the Digital Divide inquiry that assumptions about computer access are commonplace.

Even if the schools accept handwritten work from children without computer access at home, high computer acceptance can set unfairly high benchmarks in terms of access to information, graphics and pictorial material. There is also an increasing expectation in the wider community that "everyone" has access to IT communications and research tools. For households on low incomes it cannot always be assumed that they can access computers and internet services outside the home for these purposes, particularly if a trip to the library involves travel after business hours. Nor can it be assumed that all children have the literacy and IT skills to independently access the technology.

The ACT Government has made progress in providing community-based infrastructure to support IT use, but more needs to be done for consumers.

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.

¹ "The cost of school costs: A Survey of Emergency Relief Clients Presenting at Victorian Community Information Centres, January 2004 – February 2004" - Emergency Relief Victoria Network, November 2004. Copy available on request from ACTCOSS.

Priority 6: Housing for a Future Canberra

6.1 Significant additional funding for the supply of public and community housing

ACTCOSS welcomed the announcement of \$33million for additional social housing stock in 2004. There has more recently been an election promise of an additional \$30 million over three years to boost public housing stock, while retrofitting of ACT Housing properties has been provided with \$4 million funding. ACTCOSS hopes that the funding source for these new amounts is clarified in the Budget papers.

These are significant additional resources allocated to public and community housing. ACTCOSS was pleased that some of the already budgeted expenditure was outlined in the report, "Housing People, Building Communities". However this would be more usable in a spreadsheet formula, as it was difficult to work out what has been allocated, what has been spent, and the split between capital works, refurbishment (maintenance) and new services.

RECOMMENDATION 22: ACTCOSS IS ASKING THAT A CLEARER OUTLINE OF THE RESOURCES AVAILABLE AND THEIR ALLOCATION BE PROVIDED IN THE 2005-06 BUDGET STATEMENTS.

6.2 Continue to implement recommendations from the Affordable Housing Taskforce

ACTCOSS will be looking to the 2005-06 Budget papers for innovative programs that will take a very wide view of the factors contributing to housing affordability, including those measures targeting low income households.

6.3 Review responses to needs of tenants

ACTCOSS congratulates the Government on the significant reform of evictions processes that has taken place over the past three years. We also believe that it was appropriate that the roles of housing managers and support programs have been expanded in recent years and funds have been allocated to assist public housing tenants manage their finances.

ACTCOSS has articulated its belief that housing is a human right in many forums this year. We submit to the ACT Government that improving access to concessions, Community Service Obligations programs and rebates for tenants is essential in supporting tenancies.

RECOMMENDATION 23: THAT THE GOVERNMENT ENSURE THAT TENANTS OF SOCIAL HOUSING ARE ACCESSING THE FULL RANGE OF CONCESSIONS AND CSOs THAT THEY ARE ENTITLED TO CLAIM.

6.4 Support public housing tenants eg Linkages Program

ACTCOSS was pleased that this program was evaluation and provided with recurrent funding in the 2004-05 ACT Budget. It is of concern, however,

that the process of calling for tenders has taken until this month (February 2005), creating uncertainty for those service providers who operate programs with public housing tenants.

As demonstrated by the review of the Community Linkages Program demonstrates, the tenant support and community development work required to achieve successful outcomes with public housing communities can be time and resource intensive. The development of relevant, tailored programs and initiatives that are able to build capacity within each site can not be achieved within short timeframes. ACTCOSS believes that funding for these support services needs to be secure, adequate and flexible when determining the outputs that are to be achieved.

We are also convinced that any passing of responsibility for the activities under the program should pass to tenant communities as they feel confident to take on this role. As shown in the review report, not all tenants communities feel capable of taking on the role of financial controllers. These groups should be able to access support where, and in whatever form, they need.

We note the important work that has been achieved in the prevention of evictions over the past three years which has been an important component of this program. We look forward to an indication of the Government's continued commitment and extension of these valuable initiatives in the 2005-06 ACT Budget.

6.5 *Implement a public housing 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?

6.6 *Continue to assist A&TSI people, older women, people with disability, young people and single people to find accommodation through boarding house program*

ACTCOSS looks forward to seeing how this program has been implemented, and the proposed budget allocation for operating the increased support model outlined in the Social Plan.

6.9 *Implement the homelessness strategy*

ACTCOSS is aware that the ACT Government is being very vigilant and supportive of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) in its current negotiations with the Federal Government on the next iteration of SAAP. We urge the Government to continue that effort to obtain an equitable agreement, and to ensure that the 2005-06 ACT Budget adequately caters for meeting the Social Plan goal of reducing homelessness.

Priority 7: Respect and protect the environment

ACTCOSS believes that the social welfare implications of environmental programs are manifold. ACTCOSS is a stakeholder participant in the Essential Service Consumer Council, has spoken in favour of the Water and Energy Savings Trial, and is currently working on a joint position paper with the Conservation Council of the South East Region and Canberra on reducing greenhouse gas emissions in the residential sector.

The two peak organisations have previously worked on a joint water strategy paper. ACTCOSS will be looking to see how the Government provides resources to achieve these environmental goals without penalising low income households.

Implementation strategies

8.1 Community Inclusion Board

As stated earlier in this submission, ACTCOSS believes that the success of the CIB should prompt the Government to analyse the submissions for funding in terms of the Budget. Refer to Recommendation 1.

8.2 Trial of poverty proofing

We note the Government's commitment to assess policy & programs for their impact on poverty, but urge a more proactive approach to poverty proofing by providing ongoing concessions to people returning to the workforce after periods on income support, or whose wages cannot purchase a reasonable standard of living. Refer to Recommendation 2.

8.3 Report on Social Plan due July 2006

ACTCOSS looks forward to reading the details of how this will be funded and what resources will be provided for the wider community to participate in the review process.

Targets

Reduce long-term unemployment

ACTCOSS takes a particular interest in this target. Through our Employment Task Group we have been developing a community response to long-term unemployment issues. However, there is a need for the ACT Government to address long term unemployment in a systemic way.

Unfortunately, during the election campaign employment was noted in terms of its use as an economic indicator, with no analysis of the underlying trends. There is no explanation of the jobs growth noted, or whether there was any Government planning that targeted specific industries that could fill employment gaps – such as for low skilled workers.

RECOMMENDATION 23: THE ACT GOVERNMENT SHOULD ALLOCATE DEDICATED FUNDS TO THE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROGRAMS TO TARGET LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT TO ENSURE THAT THIS IMPORTANT INDICATOR IS MET.

Decrease income inequality

This issue has been discussed in previous sections in terms of concessions and Community Service Obligations (CSO). We look forward to the release of the report and the concomitant Budgetary measures to ensure that people on low incomes do not face discrimination and hardship. See Recommendation 1 and Implementation Strategy 8.2.

Reduce homelessness

ACTCOSS has welcomed and participated in the development of the ACT Homelessness Strategy. We have welcomed the innovative approach to addressing this “hidden” social experience. ACTCOSS has always maintained that the complex solution to homelessness must include a significant resource commitment from Government to housing affordability. We have called for a return to mid-1990s levels of public housing. We look forward to clarification of the impact that resources that this Government has directed towards public and community housing have achieved over the past year and an indication in the 2005-2006 budget papers of the level of resources that will be committed to this need into the future.

We also note the important work that has been achieved by the Linkages Program, as previously discussed. Prevention of homelessness is an important strategy in addressing poverty. We look forward to seeing the Government’s commitment to this goal further enunciated in the 2005-06 Budget.

Increase the proportion of adults with post-school qualifications

In ACTCOSS' experience, workers, volunteers and many consumers in the community and human services sector are keen adult learners who often participate in all available opportunities to share knowledge and experience. ACTCOSS has experienced high quality results and positive feedback in using this approach in the delivery of our seminars. However, the value of this type of learning is not always recognised. We believe that the community sector should be recognised as a leader in having a continuous learning culture and supported in developing these learning techniques at a programmatic level.

Analysis: Triple Bottom Line financial reporting.

The introduction of accrual accounting was proffered as the solution to many of the problems presented by program and line budgeting. These included such things as the lack of understanding of the “bottom line” and an inability to see how Government resources were contributing to the greater prosperity of the nation, state or local government area. That remedy has presented its own problems, including some novel interpretations of outputs and outcomes that have dubious capacity to be measured. Or alternately, can be measured, but don’t demonstrate improvement or slippage.

ACTCOSS agrees that the introduction of triple bottom line general financial reports will need a long period of development and testing before it will develop into a robust measure of Government spending. That is, of course, where the danger lies. Future governments may not be as keen on transparency or forensic measurement, particularly in times of economic slowdown.

ACTCOSS believes that there is some truth in the comments of Canberra University economics lecturer, Ian McAuley in an address in 2001 where he cautioned that we are at risk of confusing bookkeeping with sound economic management (McAuley: November 2001). What Mr McAuley argues is that social and environmental costs and benefits have always been part of the public policy discourse, and it is only possible to have a functioning economy where there is a functioning environment and a functioning society. ACTCOSS made a similar point in its submission to the ACT Government’s sustainability paper in 2002.

ACTCOSS believes these three elements are interdependent. It is, therefore, heartening to see the Government looking to introduce triple bottom line reporting.

ACTCOSS endorses the work of the Australian Collaboration in its report “Where are we going: Comprehensive social, cultural, environmental and economic reporting”. (Yenken: 2001) Accepting that report as our premise, the following comments are made with regard to specific issues raised in the “Framework for future budget presentation” discussion paper.

- ACTCOSS has a concern that the data to support triple bottom line accounting may be piecemeal, and suites of data may need to be developed to ensure that measurement is robust and reliable. There is an imperative to ensure that the things we wish to measure have capacity to be measured. As outlined by the Australian Collaboration, the current measure of unemployment causes problems, as it doesn’t measure the things we need to know about the labour market. For example, how many people have economically productive work that contributes to their household’s well being? That cannot be determined from a measure of how many people have had one hour’s work in the past fortnight, particularly in a casualised workforce. Other statistics are available, but have not been brought into the public discourse.

Another example of wellbeing measures could be the number of students under college age who have to work to assist with household costs. Or the number of university students who have to take longer to pass their degrees in order to work enough hours in their part time job(s) to support themselves. This is of particular concern in Canberra where many students are from outside the ACT.

- ACTCOSS has concerns with the term “achieving economic prosperity”. This is used at page 6 of the paper when talking about “integrated planning and operations”. As one of the countries most affluent communities, it is not prosperity that is lacking in the ACT, but balance. ACTCOSS believes that a move to triple bottom line accounting in the ACT could provide an opportunity to provide a measure of balance by looking at the equity of resource distribution and access. This means we don’t only look at the cost of running a human service, but at the costs of NOT running a service. Quite often the only economic analysis done is an accounting analysis of the cost to existing allocations, not the economic costs and benefits. Understanding such distinctions often takes training and access to economic resources.
- ACTCOSS is concerned that there are signs that the public sector is becoming “change averse”. It is important that the momentum for the social plan or sustainability initiatives is not undermined because the public sector does not feel these reflect long term policy shifts.
- This change exhaustion has ramifications for performance statements (page 14). Long term planning needs a stable workforce with purpose and commitment. There has been quite a few years now of constant change in departments and statutory authorities, including major departmental reorganisation. There will need to be central authority on the way the triple bottom line budget statements are collated and produced to ensure that it does not become simple “departmental product”, but provides true comparability and transparency for whole-of-government analysis – an integrated part of the whole
- The paper discusses in some detail the measures that could be put in place to gauge improvement. However, there are no measures included for the Community Inclusion Fund.
- ACTCOSS has some other general concerns about the availability and readability of reports. We have made submissions on this issue before, particularly to the 2002 ACTLA inquiry into annual reports.
- Another concern is that of the “reporting entity principle”. This implies that organisational boundaries are easily understood or followed. In recent years ACTCOSS has devoted a lot of time and energy to breaking down silos that became a barrier to service delivery, and makes more suggestions in this budget submission on issues of holistic service delivery.
- There is still a tendency in this discussion paper to talk in accounting

terms. There is discussion of the environmental imperative for efficient use of infrastructure. But there is no comparable discussion of the social use. One example which demonstrates that the provision of human services is not just a mathematical equation about demographics and buildings is the preschool closure policy. To close a preschool is a serious step, and after many discussions and debates, the Government agreed that the social importance of a preschool may outweigh the environmental gains and accounting benefits to be had from closure when preschool enrolments fall. The result is a process that allows the human and social dimensions to be considered alongside the financial and environmental.

- It is also worrying that human capital is only recognised as a function of economic activity – that is, in education and workforce participation. Considerable community sector activity can be classified as investment in human capital, providing services that allow people to participate in their community and therefore the economy. Some of these economic activities, such as entertainment and community arts, also create jobs and provide training.

Overall, ACTCOSS would like to see triple bottom line reporting developed further. But we feel that the right tools for measuring social justice outcomes needs refining before embarking on the wholesale change. These measures may come out of human rights accounting, as mentioned above, or social auditing processes. We remain committed to continuing this conversation knowing that it is economically, socially and environmentally advantageous to reintegrate the social and environmental into the budget process.

Appendix 1 – 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 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.

RECOMMENDATION 4: ACTCOSS ASKS THAT THE GOVERNMENT PROVIDE INCREASED EMERGENCY RELIEF SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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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.

Appendix 2: Other issues for ACTCOSS in the 2005-06 ACT Budget.

- ⇒ ACTCOSS is looking to the 2005-06 ACT Budget for a commitment to the ongoing viability of vocational education and training.
- ⇒ 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
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS is 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
- ⇒ 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.
- ⇒ We look forward to the development of more innovative use of school infrastructure to help build resilience and skills in children and their communities.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS will review the allocation provided in the Budget and the criteria established for implementation of this policy.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS is 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.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS would like to remind the Government that accessible, low cost public transport is essential to meet the needs of Canberrans who are on low incomes. We will be examining this aspect of Budget allocations.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS is anticipating that there will be sufficient funding allocated in the 2005-06 ACT Budget to evaluate the pilot program. We would also expect an ongoing commitment to appropriate circle sentencing options.
- ⇒ We will be looking to the 2005-06 ACT Budget to ensure that these 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, but there is a need to address the specific problems associated with young people and adolescents.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS would be disturbed, however, if this commitment led to a reduction the funding of Indigenous service providers or any slow-down in the development of more Indigenous-specific services.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS will be looking for the funding that reflects evidence of the Government's stated commitment to a population health approach to be reflected in mental health funding in the 2005-06 ACT Budget.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS is reading these announcements as more new money into these programs, but hopes that this is clarified in the Budget papers.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS will be looking to the 2005-06 Budget papers for innovative programs that will take a very wide view of the factors contributing to housing affordability, including those measures targeting low income households.
- ⇒ We look forward to an indication of the Government's continued commitment and extension of these valuable initiatives in the 2005-06 ACT Budget.
- ⇒ 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?
- ⇒ ACTCOSS looks forward to seeing how this program has been implemented, and the proposed budget allocation for operating the increased support model outlined in the Social Plan.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS understands that there is no easily accessible reconciliation of the funds spent to date and would hope that this would also be provided in the Budget papers.
- ⇒ ACTCOSS will be looking to see how the Government provides resources to achieve these environmental goals while not without penalising low income households.
- ⇒ There is also no commitment to research and development of programs to target long term unemployment, despite this being a key indicator of success for the social plan. ACTCOSS will be looking to the Budget papers for clarification on this issue.

⇒ We also note the important work that has been achieved by the Linkages Program, as previously discussed. Prevention of homelessness is an important strategy in addressing poverty. We look forward to seeing the Government's commitment to this goal further enunciated in the 2005-06 Budget.