



ACT 2009-10 Budget Snapshot

6 May 2009



About ACTCOSS

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) acknowledges that 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.

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 and territory 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.

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Overview

The Treasurer has stated this is a budget for the times. In these times; times of growing financial unease, of increased pressure on families and individuals - many turn to the community sector for support. However, this Budget fails to address the increasing pressure on community organisations as a result of the financial crisis and has raised significant concerns about long term funding for the sector.

While there are fewer low-income residents in the ACT than in other jurisdictions, they are no better off than their interstate counterparts, and in a privileged community the gap between 'them' and the rest of the population is even larger. The situation is getting worse in 2009 due to the 'GFC' (Global Financial Crisis). Increasingly, people are unable to pay their bills and meet living costs. Organisations which provide emergency relief and financial counselling are seeing increased pressure on their services. It is expected that this demand will only rise as economic conditions worsen.

Community organisations already report they are under-resourced to meet the current needs of their clients and have little capacity to do more. Only 7% of ACT respondents to the 2008 Australian *Community Sector Survey* believed government funding covered the true cost of delivering contracted services.

A contraction in indexation payments and the threat of further reductions in funding due to efficiency dividends across all Departments again asks the community sector to do more with less. This is unsustainable.

However, this Budget does include some welcome initiatives:

- The Homelessness and Elder Law Project will be developed and piloted by the Legal Aid Commission;
- The investment of 50% of community mental health service funding allocated to the community mental health sector;
- 70 extra teachers to be employed to lower average class sizes in primary schools, high schools and colleges;
- Preventative health programs targeting a range of issues across the community;
- Funding for the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative to assist mental health consumers in public housing environments; and
- Building housing partnerships to help break the cycle of homelessness, supporting families to maintain their public tenancies.

And we still await funding to support work being undertaken through:

- The ACT Government's Multicultural Strategy;
- The review of community sector contracts;
- The provision of appropriate throughcare and aftercare at the Alexander Maconochie Centre;
- Anticipated changes to the school-leaving age; and
- The delivery of gender auditing and human rights compliance.

Community Sector Viability

Selected Initiatives

- **3.15% Community Sector Indexation**
Calculated on the existing indexation formula, significant decreases to the Consumer Price Index has resulted in an indexation figure of 3.15% for ACT Government service funding agreements in 2009-10.
- **\$2 million over 2 years for the Tune Up Canberra program**
Providing incentives on a dollar for dollar matched funding basis for commercial property owners to retrofit premises in order to achieve a reduction in energy use.

Issues

The community sector is under-resourced to meet the current needs of people seeking assistance and has little capacity to increase service delivery to people affected by the economic crisis. With unemployment predicted to increase to 3.5% the community sector needs to be adequately resourced to meet the already increasing demands for emergency relief, homelessness services and family counselling. The Budget has done little to address the growing demand on community sector services, or to address the issues around wages, conditions and training detailed in ACTCOSS' community sector viability report *Finding Solutions*.

ACTCOSS is very concerned about the 2009-10 indexation level for community sector funding agreements. The significant drop in indexation from 4% in 2008-09 to 3.15% in this year's budget equates to a significant contraction across the community sector, severely affecting organisations' ability to compete with other employment sectors.

ACTCOSS is disappointed a small amount of one-off funding has not been made available to support community sector organisations in 2009-10.

While ACTCOSS is relieved there were not more substantial cuts to ACT community organisation's funding we are concerned that continuation of funding was not provided for programs such as the Community Inclusion Fund, resulting in an effective cut to services previously funded under the program. ACTCOSS is concerned for the long term viability of community sector funding, as future cuts are made to reduce the deficit in years to follow.

The \$100,000 allocated in the 2008-09 second appropriation for the review of community sector contracts and the improvement of community sector viability was to be commended. ACTCOSS remains concerned, however, that adequate funds have not been allocated to implementing the findings of this review and the 2009-10 Budget appears to have done little to address this.

Finally, ACTCOSS is of the opinion that the 'Tune Up Program' will provide valuable assistance to organisations in responding to climate change and reducing utilities costs. The government should ensure that commercial property

owners leasing premises to community organisations are supported and encouraged to participate in the program.

Health

Selected Initiatives

- **\$11 million over 4 years for a preventative health program**
Funding for the 'Healthy kids, healthy future' program, 'Tobacco use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' program, 'Healthy at work' program, a 'Chlamydia awareness' campaign, and 'Adolescent health' program.
- **\$11 million over 4 years for the Walk-in Centre at The Canberra Hospital (TCH)**
Funding will refurbish an existing area of TCH to accommodate the Walk-in Centre and to staff the centre with Nurse Practitioners.
- **\$104 million over 4 years for E-health Initiatives**
Funding to build up the necessary e-health capacity and infrastructure as part of the capital asset development fund. This will include decision support, Personal Electronic Health Records (PEHR), digital hospital and healthcare infrastructure and support services.
- **\$51.3 million over 4 years for the Belconnen Enhanced Community Health Centre**
Funding for the forward design and construction of the Community Health Centre.
- **\$10.5 million over 4 years for critical care networking beds**
Funding for two additional critical care networking beds, increasing critical care capacity across the ACT public health system.
- **\$25.4 million over 4 years for growth in demand acute care capacity**
Funding increased capacity at TCH and Calvary Hospital, a 16 bed Surgical Assessment and Planning Unit at TCH and enhancement of the 'Hospital in the Home' program of up to 25 hospital 'bed equivalents'.
- **\$8.4 million over 4 years for growth in demand for surgery**
Providing additional surgery capacity and enable TCH and Calvary Hospital to commission additional operating theatre capacity.
- **\$4.2 million over 4 years for growth in cancer services**
Funding to provide Capital Region Cancer Service with resources to meet increasing demand.
- **\$8.2 million over 4 years for workforce development**
Funding for new health professional support roles, physiotherapy extended scope roles, clinical educator positions and an expansion of the nursing and midwifery scholarship scheme.
- **\$12.2 million over 4 years for GP workforce initiatives**
Funding to develop GP scholarships, GP teaching payments, an ACT GP Development Fund, in hours GP locum service and a GP Prevocational Placement Program.

Issues

ACTCOSS commends the government's continued commitment to healthcare services to accommodate increasing demand for services. ACTCOSS is particularly supportive of the funding for preventative healthcare and stresses the need for continued funding in promotion, prevention and early intervention (PPEI). ACTCOSS has long advocated for the need for greater investment in PPEI to ensure where possible consumers are gaining information, support and advice as early as possible.

ACTCOSS commends the government for exploring new ways of delivering healthcare by providing funding for initiatives such as the development of Nurse Practitioner led Walk-in Centres and health workforce development funding for new health professional support roles. However, there is still more work to be done in ensuring that the shortage of GPs in the ACT does not continue to detrimentally affect Canberrans. Further funding is required to expand the roles of Nurse Practitioners, particularly in environments where health professionals are most needed such as aged care and mental health.

ACTCOSS welcomes the funding for the Belconnen Enhanced Community Health Centre and Walk-in Centre and encourages the government to continue to consult with the community regarding the future delivery of services. ACTCOSS stresses the need to consult with the community for both of these facilities at every stage of development.

Mental Health

Selected Initiatives

- **\$8.4 million over 4 years for growth in demand for mental health services in the community**
Funding for promotion, prevention and early intervention, high quality community based clinical and psychosocial support services. This funding will be split 50/50 between Mental Health ACT and the mental health community sector.
- **\$9.7 million over 4 years for the Mental Health Assessment Unit**
Funding for a 6 bed unit that will assess and transfer consumers presenting to the emergency department with acute mental illness.
- **\$600,000 over 2 years for mental health training**
Funding for increased mental health training for police, emergency services workers and teachers.
- **\$1.2 million over 4 years for the Housing Accommodation and Support Initiative**
The implementation of an integrated housing and health program to provide sustainable tenancies in public housing to people with moderate to severe mental illness.

Issues

ACTCOSS welcomes the additional investment in mental health at a time of fiscal constraints. ACTCOSS is particularly pleased to see the investment of 50% of community mental health service funding allocated to the community mental health sector. ACTCOSS also commends the government for including funding for the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative to assist mental health consumers in public housing environments.

However, the funding is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the growing unmet demand for mental health services, particularly in the current social and economic climate, at a time when people will be experiencing increased stresses. In addition the budget increases do not adequately contribute to achieving the target of 30% of mental health funding being allocated to the community sector.

Opportunities have been missed to invest in cost-effective and preventative services such as a mental health legal centre, consumer peer support, a dedicated carer consultant in Mental Health ACT and extended hours in community sector services.

Housing and Homelessness

ACTCOSS notes that the majority of new initiatives under this item are funded through Commonwealth initiatives and the Stimulus Package. It is anticipated that the forthcoming Commonwealth Budget will provide additional information on funding for housing in the ACT. In this context, the material in this section is presented in a different format to the remainder of the document, reflecting capital and recurrent funding separately.

Selected Initiatives

Capital funding (Commonwealth/ACT)

- **\$10 million over 5 years for *A Place to Call Home* – additional housing for homeless families**
20 additional dwellings will be provided over 5 years to house homeless families and assist them to sustain their tenancies.
- **\$3.2 million in 2009-10 to increase social housing under the National Social Housing partnership (Commonwealth funding)**
This is further to \$3.2 million provided in 2008-09.
- **\$102.8 million over 4 years for social housing under the National Building and Jobs Plan (Commonwealth funding)**
This provides for the construction of about 290 new dwellings and refurbishment of approximately 240 existing social housing dwellings that are currently not suitable for occupation.

Recurrent funding

- **\$898,000 over 4 years for a *Street to Home Initiative* to address chronic homelessness (Commonwealth funded)**
Community outreach services will be provided for 'rough sleepers' to assist them into housing and to maintain their tenancy.
- **\$948,000 over 4 years to support public housing tenants (Commonwealth funded)**
The *Building Housing Partnerships* initiative will assist vulnerable families to maintain their public housing tenancies, help them to improve their living skills, undertake training and find employment.
- **\$1.1 million over 3 years for a Foyer Model service for young people (Commonwealth funded)**
This is a service for young people aged 16-25 years, to assist with maintaining stable housing and engage with education and employment services.
- **\$497,000 over 4 years for a Central Homeless Intake Service (Commonwealth funded)**
Provides for a centralising of access to homelessness service and social housing into ACT Housing. It is intended to ensure that clients do not have to negotiate with multiple agencies to access services.

- **\$292,000 over 4 years to expand the Transitional Housing Program (Commonwealth funded)**

The existing program will be expanded to provide an additional 10 places, and provide exit points from homeless services.

- **\$100,000 in 2009-10 to explore support for victims of domestic violence (Commonwealth funded)**

A project to investigate options to assist victims of domestic violence to remain in their own home. This will involve a partnership between Housing ACT, Domestic Violence Crisis Service, and legal service – to remove the perpetrator and re-house them as appropriate.

Issues

The additional capital funding for the construction of new dwellings and upgrading of existing dwellings is very welcome, as it will provide a significant increase to the number of social housing dwellings available in the ACT. This funding represents a partial contribution to the ACT Labor-ACT Greens commitment of increasing public housing to 10% of all housing stock.

There is some uncertainty about the level of funding provided to recurrent funding for homelessness services. ACTCOSS notes that the new recurrent initiatives represent the Commonwealth's contribution under the National Partnership on Homelessness (\$5.1 million). When combined with ongoing funding for SAAP (now homelessness) services, it appears that overall recurrent funding increases from \$20.1 million in 2009-10 to around \$22.3 million in 2012-13. ACTCOSS understands from advice received from DHCS that the ACT's matching contribution of \$5.1 million has not been factored into these figures. There is also provision for a reduction in the level of Commonwealth grants under the Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement (reaching \$3.67 million in 2012-13). The impact of which is unclear. ACTCOSS notes the 'bottom line' figures for social housing services – covering public and community housing and homelessness services is projected to decline in the out years to 2012-13 (if one does not take account of the \$5.1 million to be provided by the ACT).

While the 20 additional dwellings under the *A Place to Call Home* initiative will provide some relief for homeless people, there is no indication that the overall recurrent funding provides additional crisis beds. Indeed the 2009-10 target for the number of SAAP support periods to be provided is 2,900. This is the level of support periods reported in the SAAP National Data Collection Annual Report for 2007-08. While it is possible that the given target may be exceeded, our tentative conclusion is that the recurrent funding provided for homelessness services does not provide any increase in the number of crisis beds or services to be provided. This is a major disappointment, given that ACT homelessness services are at capacity and not able to meet existing demand.

Justice and Human Rights

Selected Initiatives

- **\$290,000 over 2 years for a Homeless and Elder Law Project**
Funding will go to Legal Aid for the development of models for the provision of legal services to older people, people experiencing homelessness and other vulnerable and disadvantaged groups in the community.
- **\$275,000 over 2 years to expand the ACT Magistrates Court Forensic Mental Health Court Liaison Team**
Providing additional resources, including an additional mental health clinician providing mental health assessment, liaison and consultation services to the ACT law courts.

Issues

ACTCOSS welcomes the funding allocated to Legal Aid for the development of a Homeless and Elder Law Project, providing legal services to groups who have traditionally found it difficult to access and engage with the legal system. We look forward to the development and ongoing support of this project.

The lack of any significant funds directed towards the operation of the new ACT prison and youth justice centre or towards services supporting prisoners and their families is a disappointment. ACTCOSS has continuously advocated for greater support and resources for throughcare and aftercare for prisoners. We are concerned the lack of funding will put at risk the government's commitments to rehabilitation and reducing recidivism. We are also disappointed to see that the issue of post-release accommodation, in particular for women exiting the ACT prison, has not been fully addressed in the Budget.

The Human Rights Commission has again failed to receive additional funding to support its work. In light of recent amendments to the ACT Human Rights Act there is an even greater need for funding to provide training to both community organisations and government personnel in human rights obligations. The underfunding of the Human Rights Commission continues to make it difficult for complaints to be addressed in a timely and adequate manner.

Indigenous

Selected Initiatives

- **\$700,000 over 4 years for an Indigenous teachers and teachers' assistants attraction scheme**
Providing 10 scholarships to students in years 11-12 who wish to pursue a career in teaching and 3 Indigenous university scholarships to year 12 graduates to undertake a teaching degree.
- **\$90,000 over 3 years for the continuation of the Indigenous traineeships program**
Funding will allow for the continuation of programs that provide training and employment opportunities for 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- **\$200,000 over 4 years for a Facilitator for the Indigenous Elected Body**
Funding an independent facilitator to give professional guidance and ongoing support to members of the Indigenous Elected Body.
- **\$2.2 million in capital funding over 2 years for Indigenous early childhood development**
Funding will be for a third ACT child and family centre with a focus on integrating Indigenous families into a range of programs.

Issues

Despite a clear understanding of the compounded disadvantage faced by Indigenous people in the ACT there has been no government commitment to fast-tracking change. The ACT does not appear to be in step with the rest of the country in attempting to "close the gap" for Indigenous Australians. The rhetoric always seems sincere but the budget does not reflect any real commitment to ensuring that we change the cycle for ACT Indigenous people. For example, ACTCOSS is concerned the money directed towards Indigenous early childhood development will not be used for reducing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, as it is a mainstream service, and not specifically targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ACTCOSS welcomes funding directed towards supporting the Indigenous Elected Body, however we note that the Elected Body have themselves requested the money instead be used to support the work of the chair as a full-time position.

The Indigenous community has raised a number of issues with the Elected Body they would like to see addressed, which have not received attention in the Budget. These include Indigenous specific housing and homelessness services and aged care facilities. They have also indicated concern about the continued poor outcomes in relation to Aboriginal men's health and mental health as well as the continued lack of action to address the disproportionately high number of Aboriginal people involved in the legal system.

Disability

Selected Initiatives

- **\$2.3 million over 4 years for play therapy services for young children**
Funding play based interventions for young children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and other disabilities.
- **\$3.5 million over 4 years for speech pathology**
Providing additional speech pathologists at Therapy ACT for young children with high priority needs.
- **\$3 million over 4 years for transition of individuals from hospital to the community**
Providing community based support for discharge from the ACT hospital system.
- **\$830,000 over 4 years for expanded flexible support fund**
Expanding the flexible support grants program designed to further assist in maintaining the independence of vulnerable individuals and their carers in the community.
- **\$400,000 over 4 years for the Companion Card**
Establishing an ACT Companion Card Program to enable people with disabilities to attend events and venues without incurring the costs of the carers ticket.
- **\$1.2 million over 4 years for the special care packages for high needs**
Providing capital and ongoing support for people with disabilities.

Issues

ACTCOSS commends the government for providing funding towards the play therapy for children with disabilities program. However, ACTCOSS is concerned that no funding has been allocated to the provision of assistance for children with disabilities towards appropriate and accessible education options, which has been identified as a significant gap in service provision.

ACTCOSS is concerned that the funding provided within this budget and the projections for the next 4 years will not accommodate the increasing demand for services. This demand will continue to increase due to the ageing population and other factors such as the greater number of carers becoming too frail to support their family members with a disability.

ACTCOSS is concerned that despite a large number of initiatives being identified in the Labor 2008 ACT Election Carers Policy, only the Companion Card was funded within the 2009-10 budget. This lack of funding will continue to place stress upon carers who already suffer significant disadvantage in the community.

Children, Youth and Families

Selected Initiatives

- **\$11 million over 4 years to address growth in Out of Home Care**
Funding will assist in addressing the increase in the number of children and young people in out of home care arrangements.
- **\$300,000 for the Children's Physical Activity Foundation**
Providing funding to the Children's Physical Activity Foundation to promote physical activity for children and to assist schools in the delivery of physical activity opportunities.
- **\$80,000 over 4 years for expansion of the Youth Advisory Council**
Increasing the opportunities for ongoing consultation with young people.
- **\$165,000 over 3 years for the Lions Youth Haven**
Enabling the Lions Youth Haven to deliver learning opportunities at Westwood Farm, providing young people with training in basic personal skills.
- **\$7.4 million over 4 years for the establishment of a Third Child and Family Centre**
This facility will be established in West Belconnen, with a focus on integrating Indigenous families into a range of programs which promote child development, positive parenting and family functioning.

Issues

ACTCOSS is supportive of a number of the initiatives addressing the needs of children and young people in the ACT. In particular, the substantial funding allocated to Out of Home Care is welcome. ACTCOSS expects a significant proportion of this funding will be allocated to the community sector, to enable the sector to work alongside government agencies to support children and young people in out of home care.

We note a number of positive initiatives mentioned in other sections of the snapshot, including measures to address the housing needs of young people and increases to community mental health funding.

There appears to have been no attempts to address the identified gaps in services for families in conflict and drug and alcohol detoxification services. There remains a need for AoD services which accommodate parents and children.

Funding to increase consultation through the Youth Advisory Council is a welcome measure to improve the level of genuine engagement with young people in the ACT.

Women

Selected Initiatives

- **\$745,000 over 4 years for extension of Paid Maternity Leave for the ACT Public Sector**

Providing an additional 4 weeks in paid maternity leave for ACT Public Service employees, and an additional week in bonding leave.

- **\$2.7 million over 4 years for Diagnostic Mammography services**

This service will provide access to public diagnostic mammography services for an estimated 2,000 women per year, who do not meet the current criteria for access to the BreastScreen ACT program, including younger women and women who require follow up services after surgery.

Issues

ACTCOSS' greatest concern is the failure of this year's Budget to include a Women's Budget Statement, indicating a lack of focus and attention by the government to the specific needs of women in the ACT. There was little in the Budget to address specific disadvantage experienced by women, including lesser health outcomes and gaps in wage and superannuation earnings.

One of the only women targeted initiatives in the Budget was the extension of paid maternity leave in the ACT public sector to 18 weeks. While ACTCOSS supports the ACT government's commitment to family friendly work practices and paid parental leave, this initiative will have little impact on women experiencing disadvantage, poverty and vulnerability, who are most in need of support. Highly feminised industries, including the community sector, have not received similar support in this Budget. Some resources have been allocated for scholarships and workforce development for the nursing and midwifery profession.

The ACT Labor-ACT Greens Parliamentary Accord committed to the publication of gender impact statements and gender disaggregated data associated with ACT Government legislation, policies, budget and annual reports by 2010. ACTCOSS expected that resources would have been provided for the development of this system, including training and support for both public service and community sector agencies to meet additional requirements under this commitment.

Multiculturalism, Migrants and Refugees

Selected Initiatives

- **\$208,000 for Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services (MARSS)**
Funding to assist MARSS with meeting the needs of refugees and migrants who settle in Canberra.
- **\$3.1 million for English as a Second Language**
Funding to provide eight professional support staff to improve learning outcomes for students with English as a Second Language.
- **\$200,000 for improving language education**
Providing support to ACT Ethnic Schools Association and increasing links with embassies and cultural institutions.

Issues

ACTCOSS welcomes the \$208,000 allocated to MARSS to continue to assist ACT refugees and migrants. ACTCOSS stresses the need for additional funds to be allocated to community sector refugee, migrant and multicultural organisations to support people from diverse backgrounds living in Canberra.

ACTCOSS has concerns regarding the lack of funding allocated to the multicultural, refugee and migrant sector, particularly in relation to youth, housing services and community engagement. The 2008 ACT Labor Election Multicultural Policy identified a number of strategies for young people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) backgrounds. The policy outlined a commitment of \$400,000 to enhance the Transitional Housing Program. Despite election promises, no commitments were made to these programs in the 2009-10 budget.

ACTCOSS continues to advocate for additional funding to develop improved community engagement strategies between ACT government and the migrant and refugee communities to ensure communities are aware of available services.

Older People

Selected Initiatives

- **\$4.2 million over 4 years for growth in older persons services**
Funding for the Aged Care and Rehabilitation Service to meet increasing demand.
- **\$62,000 over 4 years for the Seniors Grant Program**
Increasing the funding available under the Seniors Grant Program to \$100,000 per annum. The Program provides funding for projects that encourage and support older people to participate in community activities and share their skills and knowledge with others.
- **\$1.6 million over 4 years for the Tuggeranong 55 Plus Club**
Funding for the refurbishment or construction of a facility for older people in Tuggeranong.

Issues

ACTCOSS welcomes the increase in funding for the Seniors Grant Program and the Tuggeranong 55 Plus Club. ACTCOSS has long advocated for the need for further funding for social interaction for older people. ACTCOSS is supportive of the World Health Organisation's Active Ageing Strategy which outlines the need for optimising opportunities for participation for older people.

Further strategies are required to improve community involvement for older people including providing accessible transport options and developing further recreational and social opportunities.

ACTCOSS continues to be concerned about the provision of health and community services to older people. While we welcome the increase in funding for the Aged Care and Rehabilitation Service, additional resources are required to support and facilitate access to healthcare for older people, particularly those in aged care facilities. As the population ages, demand for health services will continue to increase resulting in the need for more appropriate and accessible services. Further services and supports are also required within the community for older people to assist them to maintain their independence and remain within their homes.

Education

Selected Initiatives

- **\$22.7 million over 4 years to employ additional teachers to reduce average class sizes**
70 extra teachers will be employed to lower average class sizes to 21 in primary schools and high schools, and to 19 in colleges. \$6 million in capital works over 2 years will provide additional physical capacity for the extra classroom facilities.
- **\$43.5 million construction of Harrison High School**
The school will service the communities of Harrison, Franklin, Forde and Gungahlin.
- **\$6.4 million over 4 years to improve literacy and numeracy in schools**
Specialist literacy and numeracy teachers will coach and mentor teachers in best practice literacy and numeracy teaching strategies. Also funds an extra position to allow the National Capital Literacy and Learning Centre to reach more parents and support literacy learning in schools.
- **\$1.5 million over 4 years for Australian School-Based Apprenticeships**
School students will be able to achieve a nationally recognised vocational qualification by combining paid work and training as part of their education program, and contributing towards their Year 12 Certificate.
- **\$4 million over 4 years to meet high support needs of students in non-government schools**
The funds will assist students with identified learning needs, socio-economically disadvantaged students and special education students.
- **\$1.4 million over 4 years for CIT assistance with fees in areas of skills shortages**
Expansion of CIT's scholarship program, encouraging students experiencing disadvantage to undertake training by providing financial assistance.

Issues

These initiatives represent a substantial down payment on commitments in ACT Labor's 2008 Election Statement, and are to be welcomed. In particular initiatives such as reducing class sizes and enhancing literacy and numeracy education will greatly assist students who are at risk of falling behind and not completing their education. However, if the school leaving age is raised, (and even if it is not) a wider range of initiatives is required to ensure that all students who are in danger of falling behind are able to successfully complete their education. In particular, a greater diversity of education programs will be required to engage the diversity of learning needs.

There are a number of other critical areas for students (and families) experiencing socio-economic disadvantage, that would prevent students from falling behind in their schooling. In the current economic circumstances, with more parents likely to experience unemployment, the provision of an increased number of bursaries for secondary school students would have been enormously beneficial - as would an extension of this provision to primary school students.

Similarly, students from families experiencing socio-economic disadvantage need to be assisted to not fall behind in their access to technology. There are significant gulfs emerging for students who do not have access to computers and the internet at home – unless support for these students is provided, ACTCOSS fears there will be an increasing gap between the performance of these students and those whose families can provide such access.

There is a growing need, particularly in the current economic climate, to provide increased support for the mental health and wellbeing of school students. Both families and children are subject to greater stress, and the government's previous provision to this area is in need of expansion.

While the focus on initiatives for school children is welcome, there is no new provision to address adult learning needs, particularly in the area of literacy and numeracy. This is a significant factor in achieving social inclusion and socio-economic participation. According to international literacy measures, there has been no improvement in the proportion of ACT adults whose literacy/numeracy skills are below the level required for coping with everyday life and work. If substantial additional resources are not directed to these areas, the number of adults who are educationally disadvantaged is likely to increase.

Social Impacts of Climate Change

Selected Initiatives

- **\$1.3 million over 4 years for the Community Partnerships for Sustainability and the Environment**
Supporting the operations of the Canberra Environment and Sustainability Resource Centre, the Canberra Conservation Council and SEE Change ACT.
- **\$19 million over 4 years towards the expansion of the *Switch Your Thinking!* Program**
Delivering a virtual 'One-Stop Shop' single point of access for ACT householders and businesses to access information and support to assist in reducing energy and water consumption and waste.
- **\$2 million over 4 years for repairs and maintenance of public space and infrastructure**
Maintaining the quality of service delivery to the community in the short term.
- **\$1 million for a Trial Rapid Express Direct Service**
This service will include a one year trial of a new bus service for two key cross-town routes. The service will operate every 15 minutes during peak periods, and every 30 minutes during non-peak periods.

Issues

ACTCOSS is disappointed that few new initiatives to address the disproportionate impacts of climate change on vulnerable people have been announced, although we note that changes to social housing will be made as part of the Federal Government's *Nation Building and Jobs Plan*.

ACTCOSS welcomes the investment in the expansion of the *Switch Your Thinking* program, providing a single point of access to assist people in reducing their energy and water consumption. We hope the government will announce specific steps as part of this initiative to make this service more accessible to vulnerable and low-income Canberrans looking to reduce their energy and water costs.

We are pleased that the ACT Government has supported the Community Partnerships for Sustainability and the Environment program, but are disappointed that further steps were not taken to support the work of the community sector in the area of climate change awareness and education, or to fund a position to engage in systemic advocacy around the needs of low-income consumers of essential services. ACTCOSS hopes that the \$2.1 million allocated for the repair and maintenance of urban open spaces and infrastructure will extend beyond sporting facilities to public spaces and community facilities used by low-income and disadvantaged groups.

Given the disproportionate impact of climate change on low-income households, ACTCOSS is disappointed that no new concessions will be rolled out over the next financial year to meet the increased costs of energy and other essential services.

The additional ACTION bus services are a key initiative in addressing the dependence of ACT residents on private vehicle transport, however we are concerned that the new services are concentrated in peak times, so will be of little benefit to many Canberrans experiencing disadvantage or isolation, including young people, older people and people on low-incomes who require transport outside of peak times - evenings and weekends. It is also disappointing that the commitment in the ACT Labor-ACT Greens Agreement to trial demand responsive transport has not been progressed in this Budget as a measure to address the needs of disadvantaged and isolated groups.

Capital investment in the upgrade of footpaths and additional seats and signage at bus stops are welcome, as are investments in improving the energy efficiency of public schools, through the installation of rainwater tanks and solar panels.

Revenue, Governance and Community Engagement

Projected deficit of \$82.2 million in 2009-10

Selected Initiatives

- **\$11 million extra revenue through Public Sector Wage Restraint**
- **\$18 million extra revenue in 2010-11 through Efficiency Dividend implemented from 2010**
- **\$1.6 million extra revenue through an increase in the value of penalty units**

Penalty units are the units on which fines for Territory offences are based. The units are being increased from \$100 to \$110 for individuals.
- **\$1.8 million extra revenue through an increase in parking fees**

This will include increasing ticket machine parking fees by an average of 20% from 1 July 2009 and metered parking fees by an average of 50% from 2010-11.
- **\$880,000 extra revenue through an increase in ACTION bus fares**

Fares will increase on average by 11% from 1 July 2009. Cyclists using bicycle racks will also now be required to pay "the appropriate fare".
- **\$400,000 net revenue over 4 years for Enhanced Fine Enforcement**

Increasing recovery of court-imposed fines and introduce a voluntary community service alternative to imprisonment for fine-defaulters.
- **\$868,000 over 4 years for Reaching Out to the Community (Chief Ministers Department)**

Providing for community engagement initiatives across government, including project funding and an additional worker to work across government to enhance coordination, planning and targeting of engagement activities.
- **\$100,000 over 4 years for Reaching Out to the Community (ACTPLA)**

Enhancing ACTPLA's community engagement by a website upgrade, increasing access and opportunities for engagement and consultation.

Issues

ACTCOSS is concerned about the increase in costs of parking fees, bus tickets and penalty units. While we understand the need for increased revenue at this time, these increases will be felt disproportionately by low-income families and individuals who have the least capacity to absorb increases. Rises in ACTION bus fares and parking charges need to be accompanied by an increase in applicable concessions to ensure these revenue-raising measures are not regressive in their impact on low-income Canberrans. ACTCOSS would like to see penalty units means tested or linked to incomes, as people on lower income will have greater difficulty paying fines than those on higher income. The introduction of voluntary

community service alternatives is a positive step in ensuring that penalties imposed result in equitable outcomes.

In addition to the drop in indexation of community sector funding agreements, the efficiency dividend has the potential to impact negatively on people experiencing disadvantage by putting pressure on departments that deliver services to them. There could be additional pressure on the community sector through difficulties in dealing with under-resourced departments experiencing staff cuts.

The increased expenditure on community engagement is welcome. ACTCOSS urges the government to ensure consultation is genuine, with appropriate consideration given to the input provided by the community, and adequate time and attention given to the process. The recent move of the Community Engagement Unit to the Chief Minister's Department is an excellent opportunity to ensure there is a whole of government focus to consultation and ACTCOSS supports the government's move in this direction through the funding of a designated position. We note that funding has not been reallocated to the Community Inclusion Board. The Board was a valuable opportunity for government to consult with key community representatives on issues of social inclusion and disadvantage, and ACTCOSS is disappointed in its failure to attract ongoing funding.