

Joy Burch MLA
Minister for Community Services
ACT Legislative Assembly

Via email: joy.burch@act.gov.au

Dear Minister Burch,

ACTCOSS is generally supportive of a centralised checking system that provides consistent and additional protection to vulnerable people in the ACT as proposed by the Working With Vulnerable People Checking System, as due for debate by the ACT Legislative Assembly. The ACT Government is to be commended for being the first Australian jurisdiction to extend such a scheme beyond children to other vulnerable adults.

The discussion about the scheme has been welcomed. Thank-you for convening a community roundtable, to explore issues regarding the proposed legislation, in an inclusive and constructive manner.

ACTCOSS is of the opinion the introduction of a minimum compulsory checking system offers one layer of protection to children and adults accessing services in the ACT community. However, the checking system is not sufficient protection on its own. A checking system must be accompanied by additional risk management processes and procedures and community education campaigns to offer the highest possible protection to vulnerable people in our community. Work has been undertaken in other jurisdictions, including NSW and QLD to support organisations develop practices that encourage the development of 'child safe and child friendly' organisations. ACTCOSS would be supportive of similar programs being available in the ACT.

Most, if not all, staff in the majority of ACT community organisations will be required to undergo checks. It is important the concerns and questions of community organisations are considered and addressed as the system is developed. To this end ACTCOSS recommends a multi-disciplinary panel be established to support the review of complex cases. Such a panel could consist of individuals with a range of experiences relating to the community sector and working with individuals with 'lived experience'. The insight offered by such a panel will support the Office of Regulatory Services with their functions and ensure complex issues can be considered in a broader context, with the recognition of lived experience as a significantly valuable asset in working with individuals and families living with disadvantage.

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ACTCOSS also acknowledges the proposed checking system will have a significant impact on ACT community organisations. The scheme will impact on staff, volunteers and managers across a broad range of not-for-profit organisations. As such, sufficient support and training will need to be made available for all organisations as they support staff and volunteers to undertake the checks, in the ongoing implementation of the scheme, and to meet the goal of implementing best practice for 'child safe and child friendly' organisations. Such training needs to be delivered in a way that is cognisant and respectful of the broad diversity of organisations and individuals who work with vulnerable people.

ACTCOSS would welcome the opportunity to review the associated instruments to the legislative scheme, before the legislation is debated by the Assembly. Such a review could allow further input from the community sector on the operation of the scheme, supporting a smoother transition to implementation.

ACTCOSS looks forward to further dialogue with you, the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, and the Department of Justice and Community Safety regarding the implementation of the Working With Vulnerable People Checking System.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Roslyn Dundas', enclosed within a large, loopy oval shape.

Roslyn Dundas
Director

Email: roslyn.dundas@actcoss.org.au

9 December 2010

Cc:
Vicki Dunne MLA, Shadow Minister for Family and Community Services

Meredith Hunter MLA, ACT Greens Spokesperson for Community Services