
Promises delivered but we need energy and purpose to tackle inequality

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) has welcomed elements of today's Budget but has called for greater ambition to deliver on the community's expectation for a practical plan to drive back gathering inequality

Susan Helyar, Director of the ACT Council of Social Service said today, "the Government deserves credit for delivering on the letter of significant promises to the ACT community. The community expects election promises to be met and this includes the delivery of some key election promises to invest in increased health and education resources as the population grows. We also welcome some transport measures which reduce costs and increase availability. Investments in specialist homelessness programs are vital to this overstretched and essential service. On revenue it is good to see progressive taxation via the Lease Variation Charge changes and the vacancy tax on vacant investment properties.

"In addition to delivering on the letter of its promises, the community has a reasonable expectation that government will step up to deliver a vision to act with energy and ambition to hold back the growth of inequality, improve standards of living, reduce costs of living, increase and maintain supply of vital community services and improve amenity for people living on low incomes in the ACT.

"We advised the government in our Budget submission that addressing inequality needed to be a priority in today's Budget through sound targeted investments in housing, transport, mental health and disability services.

"The community set out a shared vision for addressing inequality through its [community shared statement priorities](#) for the ACT election and these informed ACTCOSS's [2017/18 Budget submission](#) and our post-election [Budget briefing](#) – these included a resourced whole of government housing strategy; ensuring truly integrated approaches to planning and transport; monitoring, mapping and retaining contingency funds for emerging gaps in social infrastructure in disability, housing, advocacy and mental health caused by funding changes; investments for people with disability which support effective implementation of the National Disability Strategy, work on better planning for access and maintaining mental health and other programs for those who miss out on the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

"For this reason we are disappointed that, while the Budget checks off a number of election promises, we are still not meeting the community's expectations about action for those who face sustained long term cost of living pressures especially those who can't find affordable and accessible housing.

"There are also gaps in non NDIS funded disability support; mental health services are not able to meet demand; we need improvements in youth detention programs; access to concessions isn't being extended to working households facing enormous cost of living pressures. Investments in alcohol and other drug programs and the carers strategy all fall short of community expectations; and people with disability can't get around our city easily.

“We don’t see the plan that overlays transport, housing and urban renewal to match the ambition we have that renewed infrastructure will contribute to reducing deep disadvantage and growing Canberra’s human capital.

“It is only when you invest in human capital, starting at the bottom, that you get a sustained real uplift in long term economic participation and social inclusion. In a week when we have [heard](#) about the persistent and widening gap between income and cost of living for people on low income in ACT, we see substandard investment in human capital to address the growing gap between those who enjoy Canberra’s prosperity and liveability and those who don’t.”

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