



Vision 2012

ACTCOSS Election Statement, ACT Legislative Assembly Election 2012

September 2012

About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS acknowledges Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We pay respects to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing 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 and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS' vision is to live in a fair and equitable community that respects and values diversity and actively encourages collaborations that promote justice, equity and social inclusion.

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

Contact Details

Phone: 02 6202 7200
Fax: 02 6281 4192
Mail: PO Box 849, Mawson ACT 2607
Email: actcoss@actcoss.org.au
Web: www.actcoss.org.au
Location: Weston Community Hub, 1/6 Gritten St, Weston ACT 2611
Director: Roslyn Dundas

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Authorised by Roslyn Dundas, for ACT Council of Social Service

Introduction

The ACT Council of Social Service, peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations, and disadvantaged and low-income citizens of the Australian Capital Territory, is calling on candidates for the ACT election to show vision in key areas of poverty, homelessness, corrections, health, transport, climate change, and community sector reform.

During election time we hear a lot of promises but what we want is vision. There are significant issues facing many Canberra families, as they grapple with trying to make ends meet, keep a roof over their head and remain connected with their community.

While the ACT boasts the highest average weekly earnings of all Australian states and territories, high incomes in the ACT mean it can be a costly place to live for households whose incomes are below the average. The plight of Canberrans on low incomes is often overshadowed by the higher-than-average incomes in the area, yet cost of living remains a pertinent issue for far too many ACT residents.

ACTCOSS is calling on all candidates to recognise that as a community, Canberra should be striving for greater equality within the ACT, not only to benefit the marginalised members of our society, but to increase our community wellbeing as a whole.

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The ACTCOSS call

ACTCOSS calls on the political parties and individual candidates of the 2012 ACT election to:

- commit to a more equal Canberra;
- set and report on a minimum public transport service standard for all new suburban developments in the ACT;
- ensure a speedy and full implementation of the recommendations in the Targeted Assistance Strategy.
- expand the development of affordable private rental housing;
- ensure funding of homelessness programs so support services are not reduced;
- increase housing options for frail aged Canberrans and people with disabilities and increase public housing stock to at least 10 per cent of total housing stock;
- develop initiatives which target the causes of homelessness, and prevention and early intervention approaches that work to prevent people becoming homeless or losing their accommodation security in the first instance; and
- consider gender-specific issues before mainstreaming housing and homelessness services;
- undertake a trial of a Justice Reinvestment model which encompasses an integrated and collaborative approach between community services and government agencies;
- ensure that any policy/service development work on JR and other crime prevention measures includes consultation with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities;
- ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement developed in 2010, to be renewed in 2012, continues to be reviewed annually, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders;
- commit to ensuring that both men and women detained at AMC have access to adequate services and supports that meet their health/mental health and wellbeing needs;
- adopt a 'health in all policies' approach;
- ensure equitable access to health programs and community services;
- focus funding on early intervention and preventative health;
- provide appropriate funding and support for mental health consumers and raise awareness in the area of mental health;

- ensure the proposed community transport review focuses on expanding services, increasing flexibility, and meeting demand, and ensure community transport providers are properly consulted with for the review;
- where there is demonstrated need, provide a broad range of community transport options (other than 22-seater buses) for people unable to access public transport, to assist people to more active engage in their community;
- ensure concession fares remain at a maximum of 50 per cent of the equivalent adult fare, and do not rise faster than inflation;
- introduce demand-responsive transport with flexible routes and public transport available outside of peak times;
- legislate minimum standards for private rental properties, and put in place a system to monitor this;
- expand the current Outreach program which provides assistance to low-income households in reducing energy bills;
- expand current programs on energy retrofitting to actively engage private tenancies, through concessions to landlords for tenants deemed to be low income;
- actively engage low income home owners to retrofit their houses, particularly older citizens, who may be asset rich and capital poor;
- ensure the energy concession keeps pace with the actual increases in costs of energy;
- ensure community voices are able to contribute to national energy reform;
- increase funding by 15 per cent to all ACT Government funded community sector contracts, to meet current demand for services;
- undertake consultation with the sector regarding ongoing growth in demand and strategies to ensure services are available when needed;
- ensure all community organisations based in the ACT benefit from the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration Order; and
- work with community organisations to ensure regulatory reform doesn't increase red-tape and administrative burdens.

Poverty and the Cost of Living

While the ACT boasts the highest average weekly earnings of all Australian states and territories, families in Canberra can struggle financially. Fairly high incomes in the ACT mean it can be a costly place to live for households whose incomes are not high, as a 'buoyant local economy creates high living costs'.¹ The plight of Canberrans on low incomes is often overshadowed by the higher-than-average incomes in the area, yet cost of living remains a pertinent issue for far too many ACT residents.

Expenditure is also an indicative measure of living standards. A concept which has long been accepted by economists is as household income rises, the proportion devoted to necessities, such as food and housing, decrease. Moreover, additional income is available for spending on other items such as recreation and leisure. Increases in daily living costs such as accommodation and transport are likely to put the most significant pressure on low income households, often leading them to sacrifice expenses in other non-essential but vitally important areas.²

Housing costs have gradually comprised a more and more substantial proportion of household income, and are an immense concern for those on low and fixed incomes. Households on low incomes are more likely to be negatively affected by rather high housing costs than households with higher incomes.³ A household is considered to be in 'housing stress' when occupants spend more than 30 per cent on their income on housing costs. In 2009 to 2010, 32.2 per cent of low income households in the ACT were identified as being in housing stress.⁴

Energy is also a point of stress for households on low income, as it is a major expenditure item - even when government concessions are taken into account. Additionally, the price of food directly affects the dietary choices of low and fixed income households, which can often have an undesirable and negative impact on physical health and overall wellbeing.⁵ The South Australian Council of Social Service (SACOSS) says it well when describing the importance of these expenditure items, but notes they will not stand alone to create a fulfilling life,

Goods and services such as housing, food and energy and transport represent items that are necessary for basic survival, but alone and at their bare minimum are insufficient to ensure participation in contemporary Australian society.⁶

1 A. Payne and Q.N. Vu, NATSEM, *Expenditure of Low Income Households in the ACT*, Report for the ACT Council of Social Service, 2008.

2 *ibid.*

3 Australian Government Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services: Part G (Housing and Homelessness): Housing and homelessness services sector summary*, 2012, viewed 9 August 2012, <http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/114972/56-government-services-2012-partg.pdf>.

4 *ibid.* Table GA.5.

5 South Australia Council of Social Service, *Cost of Living Biannual Update*, No. 1, 2009.

6 *ibid.*

There are many other costs to be considered when addressing the critical day-to-day costs of living, including medical expenses, clothing, school supplies, and technological communication items such as mobile phones and internet access.

Recently, through a Targeted Assistance Strategy Panel, the ACT Government sought to consider the current programs in place to assist Canberrans on lower incomes, and to develop an evidenced-based strategy of assistance. The report included many recommendations for short, medium and long term strategies to support vulnerable members of the ACT community, as well as identified areas which require more research and evidence. In the final document, the Panel reported,

Despite high levels of family and community support in the ACT, 29.5 per cent of people in the lowest income quintile have indicated they would be unable to raise \$2,000 within one week in case of emergency.⁷

The report goes on to say raising emergency money is most difficult for one-parent families in which the adult is unemployed. In fact, nearly 75 per cent of low income households are headed by someone who is unemployed.⁸ Figures such as these require action from government and community organisations to reduce the amount of financial burden faced by low income residents of the ACT.

Societies that are unequal with regard to the spread of wealth are more likely to be dysfunctional and experience overwhelming amounts of health and social problems.⁹ Regardless of the ways in which inequality is diminished, societies with greater equality experience a number of benefits, including less health problems and decreased prison populations.¹⁰ As a community, Canberra should be striving for greater equality within the ACT, not only to benefit the marginalised members of our society, but to increase our community wellbeing as a whole.

ACTCOSS calls on the political parties and individual candidates of the 2012 ACT election to:

- commit to a more equal Canberra;
- set and report on a minimum public transport service standard for all new suburban developments in the ACT; and
- ensure a speedy and full implementation of the recommendations in the Targeted Assistance Strategy.

7 ACT Government, *Targeted Assistance Strategy*, 2012, p.14.

8 *ibid.*

9 R. Wilkinson and K. Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why More Equal Societies Almost Always Do Better*, The Penguin Group, London, 2009.

10 *ibid.*

Housing & Homelessness

Having an affordable, safe, secure and appropriate place to live is one of the most basic necessities in one's life. Not only does secure housing allow people to address an array of other social needs and difficulties; having a home gives people a sense of status, comfort and emotional stability. Improved housing has documented positive effects on health, crime, education and employment.¹¹ The Australian Government has also recognised the positive benefits of housing in a number of areas.¹² Housing is recognised as a fundamental human right in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), to which Australia is a party.

Homelessness, and the risk of homelessness, is a significant issue in Canberra as it is in Australia generally. The homeless population is made up of people of all ages who find themselves homeless as a result of a variety of adverse circumstances.

Approximately 3,500 people received support from government-funded specialist homelessness services in the ACT from 2010 to 2011. This is equivalent to one in 101 people in the ACT accessing such services.¹³

There continues to be significant unmet demand in specialist homelessness services across the nation.¹⁴ In 2010-11, 59 per cent of all people who sought immediate accommodation were turned away.¹⁵ This is similar to the 2009-10 results in which 58 per cent of all people who sought immediate accommodation were turned away.¹⁶

The Australian Community Sector Survey for 2012 found housing and homelessness services are the area of highest need in our community, with 81 per cent of services reporting they simply cannot meet growing demand.¹⁷ A total of 20,496 people over the past year nationwide were turned away when seeking services, and many services reported the waiting times to access such services have increased.¹⁸

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented, relative to population size, in those seeking accommodation and those using specialist homelessness services. Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make up approximately 1 per cent of the ACT population, around 16 per cent of

11 AHURI, *Housing assistance and non-shelter benefits* (Phibbs and Young), 2005.

12 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2007*, p.214.

13 AIHW, *Government funded specialist homelessness services: SAAP National Data Collection annual report*, Australian Capital Territory, December 2011, p. 1.

14 AIHW, *People turned away from government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2009-10*, June 2011, p. v.

15 AIHW, *People turned away from government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2010-11*, December 2011, p. 4.

16 AIHW, *People turned away from government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2009-10*, June 2011, p. v.

17 ACOSS, *Australian Community Sector Survey 2012 National Report*, ACOSS Paper 91, ACOSS, New South Wales, 2012.

18 *ibid.*

service users in the ACT identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.¹⁹ These figures do not include the large estimated numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who do not access homelessness services, yet may still be sleeping rough.

Housing affordability can have far reaching consequences for individuals - those struggling with housing affordability often have to cut back on the necessities of life such as food, education and health care, thus putting increased stress on well-being and family relationships.

Assumptions have been made around the continuation of Commonwealth funding for social housing and homelessness which is due to be renegotiated in 2013, however ACTCOSS is apprehensive about the potential impact on the provision of homelessness support services in the ACT. This is particularly concerning in a climate where the ACT Government is seeking a significant improvement in overall outputs and outcomes in this area. With anticipated reduction in Commonwealth funding, significant reforms are anticipated across the homelessness sector.

In the 2012-13 ACT Budget, ACTCOSS welcomed the allocation of funds for the Expansion of Social Housing to construct additional dwellings to address social housing. The lack of overall funding for housing affordability overall was disappointing. However, ACTCOSS welcomes the continuation of the Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase 3 over the next 2 years, noting there are no budgeted initiatives around affordable rental or investment in community housing. It should also be noted there is no real investment in increasing public housing stock, and enhancement strategies are deferred until 2013. Targets for public housing and not-for-profit managed tenancies were not met in 2012-13.

ACTCOSS calls on the individual candidates and political parties of the 2012 ACT election to:

- expand the development of affordable private rental housing;
- ensure funding of homelessness programs so support services are not reduced;
- increase housing options for frail aged Canberrans and people with disabilities and increase public housing stock to at least 10 per cent of total housing stock;
- develop initiatives which target the causes of homelessness, and prevention and early intervention approaches that work to prevent people becoming homeless or losing their accommodation security in the first instance; and
- consider gender-specific issues before mainstreaming housing and homelessness services.

¹⁹ AIHW, *Government funded specialist homelessness services: SAAP National Data Collection annual report, Australian Capital Territory*, 2011, p. 3.

Justice and Corrections

With the average annual cost of an ACT prisoner in 2010-11 estimated at over \$100 000 per year,²⁰ there is a real incentive for a cost effective early intervention model. In addition, ACT-specific statistics reveal an ongoing need to consider alternative approaches to reducing crime and lowering recidivism rates:

- Between 2010 and 2011, the second highest proportional increases in prisoner numbers was in the Australian Capital Territory, at 8 per cent;²¹
- The youngest mean prisoner population for Australia was in the ACT (30.1 years);
- 72 per cent of male prisoners in the ACT had experienced prior imprisonment (much higher than the national average of 54 per cent). More tellingly, the ACT had the highest proportion of female prisoners with a prior imprisonment at the same rate of 72 per cent.²²

ACTCOSS welcomed resourcing of the new throughcare pilot program in the 2012-13 ACT Budget, and is pleased the often complex needs of prisoners exiting from detention have been recognised through the funding of such a program.²³

However, an awareness of the socio-economic factors which bring people into contact with the justice system, and an understanding of the lack of impact prison has on recidivism suggests early intervention models should be the focus of justice and corrections policy. ACTCOSS has previously called on the ACT Government to consider a Justice Reinvestment (JR) approach as an early intervention model for Canberra.²⁴

With growing success as a public policy response to high incarceration rates in the both the US and the UK, a JR approach sees a shift in attitude towards addressing and preventing the socio-economic factors which can lead to people entering the criminal justice system. In a JR model, funding is diverted from the systems which deal with the consequences of crime, namely prisons, and then reinvested into organisations and services in the community which support people considered 'at risk' of entering the criminal justice system. Such services are varied and include support in matters including health, legal, employment, education, mental health and alcohol and other drugs.

Diverting money back into the community through a JR approach does not mean there should be a complete closure of the prison in the ACT, nor does it

20 'Chapter 8: Corrective Services', *Report on Government Services, Part C*, 2012, accessed 10 August 2012, <<http://www.pc.gov.au/gsp/rogs/2012>>.

21 ABS, 4517.0 – Prisoners in Australia, 2011, accessed 7 August 2012, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/FA600B557EA78A58CA25795F000DB3A4?open=document>>.

22 *ibid.*

23 ACTCOSS, *ACT 2012-13 Budget Snapshot*, 2012, p.17

24 ACTCOSS, *Canberra 2013: Fair and Equitable*, ACT Budget Submission 2012-13, 2012.

mean that services for detainees should be cut. While Justice Reinvestment advocates for a focus on preventing people from entering the criminal justice system, this should not be at the expense of the health and well-being of individuals who are, or will be, still detained. ACTCOSS continues to recommend appropriate and adequate services and programs are provided for detainees in the Alexander Machonochie Centre and Bimberi Youth Justice Detention Centre. In particular, given that detainees are highly likely to have poor health and mental health and wellbeing outcomes, and the relationship this has with recidivism, it is vital detainees are given access to mental health services, alcohol and other drug programs, and proper healthcare while they are incarcerated.

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are still over-represented in the criminal justice system.²⁵

- As at 30 June 2011, 26 per cent of the total prisoner population in Australia identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This figure is appalling when considering that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples only make up 2 per cent of the entire population.²⁶
- The rate of imprisonment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners was 14 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous prisoners at 30 June 2011, no change from the rate in 2010, although between 2010 and 2011 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoner numbers increased by 1 per cent.

Given these statistics, it is vital that if a Justice Reinvestment approach is to be considered as an early intervention model of addressing recidivism and the causes of crime, then the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities in the ACT are properly engaged and consulted with. While the 2010 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement has helped provide a higher level of mutual commitment to addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT law and justice system, the need to keep an open line of communication with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community remains. Where young people are involved, there is also a need to appropriately engaged families using individual centre, family focused planning and implementation.

ACTCOSS calls on individual candidates and political parties in the ACT 2012 Election to:

- Undertake a trial of a Justice Reinvestment model which encompasses an integrated and collaborative approach between community services and government agencies;

25 Caution should be exercised when interpreting movements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoner numbers as data movements may be impacted by the willingness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to self identify.

26 ABS, 4517.0 – Prisoners in Australia, 2011, accessed 7 August 2012, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/FA600B557EA78A58CA25795F000DB3A4?open document>>.

- Ensure that any policy/service development work on JR and other crime prevention measures includes consultation with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities;
- Ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement developed in 2010, to be renewed in 2012, continues to be reviewed annually, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders; and
- Commit to ensuring that both men and women detained at AMC have access to adequate services and supports that meet their health/mental health and wellbeing needs.

Health

Good health begins with strong communities. The Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.²⁷ These circumstances are shaped by broader social, political, cultural, environmental and economic factors including the distribution of power and resources at local, national and global levels. The SDoH approach recognises improved health depends on understanding health is socially determined, and acknowledging social, community based responses are essential for improving health outcomes. ACTCOSS advocates a SDoH approach to all policy areas, as this would improve the lives of many Canberrans facing disadvantage and poverty.

According to a recent report from the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM), health inequity in relation to the SDoH costs the government a significant amount of money.²⁸ Currently health expenditure totals nearly one third of the entire ACT Budget,²⁹ with a large portion of this expenditure focused on acute needs. A SDoH approach can develop early intervention and health promotion approaches to minimise need for such acute services which would in turn reduce pressure on the Budget overall. In this regard, ACTCOSS is advocating for health policy which will have the biggest impact on health through the utilisation of current resources as better health outcomes can be achieved by spending allocated money in other ways.

There are significant needs from the community with regard to health services, as government services alone have a hard time meeting increased need. Governments need to consider SDoH, moving towards a holistic and consumer-focused approach to health and incorporating areas which impact upon a person's wellbeing such as education, transport and employment into program and service structures.

The SDoH advocacy approach should be one which focuses on policy and programs as well as equitable access to these programs. Consultations with the community sector have identified transport, education, and access to services to build community inclusion as priorities in the promotion of the SDoH.

In addressing the SDoH, health equity is of the utmost importance. To address health inequities, program and policy development need to ensure people living with the most disadvantage are assisted in a holistic manner. People experiencing disadvantage require services which span various ACT and Commonwealth Government departments. An SDoH approach to health would incorporate areas outside of the ACT Health Directorate which impact upon a person's well-being including housing and employment.

27 WHO, *Social determinants of health*, viewed 9 August 2012, <http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/>.

28 NATSEM, *The Cost of Inaction on the Social Determinants of Health*, CHA-NATSEM Second Report on Health Inequalities, prepared for Catholic Health Australia, viewed 8 August 2012, <<http://apo.org.au/research/cost-inaction-social-determinants-health>>.

29 ACT Government, *ACT Budget 2012-13*.

People experiencing mental health difficulties are among the most disadvantaged in our community. Acknowledging these inequities and improving opportunities for engaging with health and community services is vital for mental health consumers in the ACT. Funding in the area of mental health should include providing better access to services and supports, as well as early intervention and preventative health. It is important to strengthen health promotion programs, particularly in schools and workplaces, as well as through the most disadvantaged population groups.

Understanding the SDoH can assist decision makers to develop policies and programs that are more equitable and socially just. A study of nine of the 'Knowledge Networks' established by the World Health Organization to support the Commission on the SDoH, suggested that governments can use the SDoH to reduce health inequity in three ways:

- By distributing resources in a more equitable way to ensure the provision of basic services, the protection of human rights and the right to a decent standard of living;
- By establishing and maintaining legislative and regulatory frameworks with the goal of health equity; and
- By monitoring the health outcomes of different groups of consumers and evaluating programs that are targeted to reduce inequities to inform further interventions.³⁰

By adopting a SDoH approach to policy development and service provision, we are acknowledging people require a range of supports and services to improve well-being and health outcomes. The investment in such an approach to planning can contribute to increased health outcomes for the people within our communities who are experiencing disadvantage and require the most assistance.

ACTCOSS calls on the individual candidates and political parties of the 2012 ACT Election to:

- adopt a 'health in all policies' approach;
- ensure equitable access to health programs and community services;
- focus funding on early intervention and preventative health; and
- provide appropriate funding and support for mental health consumers and raise awareness in the area of mental health.

³⁰ E. Blas et.al, 'Addressing Social determinants of Health Inequities: What can the State and Civil Society do?', *The Lancet*, Vol 372, 2008, pp.1684-1689.

Transport

Transport is an important factor in addressing the Social Determinants of Health, and plays a vital role in supporting social inclusion. Without access to adequate and affordable transport, individuals can be prevented from accessing key services, education and employment, and attending social activities. This can have a negative impact on their wellbeing, and lead to social exclusion and isolation.³¹

ACTCOSS welcomed the announcement in the 2012-13 Budget of funding to support transport initiatives for people with disabilities, including school transport; the replacement of ACTION buses to ensure compliance with the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*; and the upgrade of bus stops to comply with the same Act.³²

However, there continues to be people in the community experiencing transport disadvantage and social exclusion, and the approach to addressing this needs to be broadened further than public transport buses.

The ACT presents unique geographical challenges, compounded by an increasing population and the expansion of satellite suburbs. The ACT has the second highest rate of passenger vehicle registrations, indicating a high need for a car when living in the territory.³³ People who are unable to access or drive a vehicle and who do not live close to local services are more reliant on public transport as their means of getting around. For some people, this can be problematic for a number of reasons: bus routes are too far from their houses; bus timetables are not at suitable times; or it takes too long to take a bus to where they need to go.

In addition, the 2012-13 ACT Budget included an increase in public transport fares by 2.5 per cent for students and 2.6 per cent for adults. This increase may place a significant burden on low income citizens who are reliant on public transport as their only means of travel and are most affected by increased changes to transport fares.³⁴

For transport systems to operate in a socially inclusive manner, they must consider the life circumstances and needs of a range of people. Addressing transport needs may include: an investment in community transport including community minibuses; an expansion of taxi subsidy schemes; and encouraging public transport services to run outside of peak times and to outer suburbs or lower density areas.

Community transport in particular can address transport disadvantage, and fill the 'gaps' left by public transport problems. At this point, the majority of community transport is available in the form of six 22-seater buses run by the

31 ACTCOSS, *The Path Less Travelled – Transport and Social Inclusion in the ACT*, 2009.

32 ACTCOSS, *ACT 2012-13 Budget Snapshot*, 2012, p.11

33 ABS, *State and Territory Differences*, 1370.0, 2010, accessed 8 August 2012, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/1370.0~2010~Chapter~State%20and%20territory%20differences%20%284.9.3.1%29>>.

34 ACTCOSS, *ACT 2012-13 Budget Snapshot*, 2012.

six regional community service providers, and community transport provided to older people and those living with a disability through the Home and Community Care Program. More flexible than regular buses, this community transport plays a pivotal role in supporting individuals in their transport needs. These buses are operating at capacity, most with a waiting list, and the providers often have to prioritise medical appointments over social events for clients, reinforcing social exclusion for some people. The HACC community transport service is primarily used to transport people to and from medical appointments and hospital based treatment.

ACTCOSS calls on individual candidates and parties of the 2012 ACT Election to:

- Ensure the proposed community transport review focuses on expanding services, increasing flexibility, and meeting demand, and ensure community transport providers are properly consulted with for the review;
- Where there is demonstrated need, provide a broad range of community transport options (other than 22-seater buses) for people unable to access public transport, to assist people to more active engage in their community;
- Ensure concession fares remain at a maximum of 50 per cent of the equivalent adult fare, and do not rise faster than inflation; and
- Introduce demand-responsive transport with flexible routes and public transport available outside of peak times.

Climate Change

Climate change remains a serious issue with current research predicting an increase in severe weather patterns over the coming decades, including flooding, cyclones, heatwaves and droughts. Australia is not immune to the effects of climate change. The ACT in particular is a unique jurisdiction which experiences extremes at both ends of the weather spectrum, with very cold winters and hot summers, and climate change is likely to exacerbate these weather patterns.

It is vital climate change and its impact continues to be addressed through government policy, at both a federal and a state/territory level. The ACT remains a leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, stemming from energy consumption, with its commitment to reduce ACT carbon emissions by 40 per cent.³⁵

ACTCOSS welcomed several new initiatives in the 2012-13 ACT Budget relating to energy and climate change, including resourcing for contributions to National Energy Bodies; \$2million in 2015-16 to continue the expansion of the program to improve the energy efficiency of public housing; \$800,000 committed to the Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Scheme; and the utility concession increase.³⁶

However there is still a need for the social impacts of climate change to remain on the agenda. While reducing carbon emissions is important for the sustainability of the environment, it is vital measures to do so do not fall disproportionately upon people already experiencing financial hardship.

The term 'fuel poverty' refers to people's inability to meet basic needs due to the cost of energy, which can result in a decrease in a reasonable standard of living; prioritisation of utility payments over other essential such as food or medical bills; and accumulation of debt.³⁷ Low-income households are particularly vulnerable to changes in utility costs, especially those with limited capacity to significantly adjust the energy efficiency of their household.³⁸

- The 2008 study by the National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) *Expenditure of High Low-Income Households in the ACT*, found on average people on low-incomes already spend 64 per cent more of their proportionate income on electricity than other households.³⁹
- In 2010-11, out of the top 10 financial issues which people presented with for support at Care Financial Counselling Service (Care), 21 per cent was because of difficulties in paying utilities.⁴⁰

35 ACT Government, *Weathering the Change: Draft Action Plan 2*, Canberra, 2011.

36 ACTCOSS, *ACT 2012-13 Budget Snapshot*, 2012,

37 ACTCOSS, *Submission on the Draft Sustainable Energy Policy 2010-2020*, 2010.

38 ACT Government, *Targeted Assistance Strategy*, 2012, p.41.

39 NATSEM, *Expenditure of Low Income Households in the ACT*, 2008, p. 5.

40 Care Financial Counselling Service, *Annual Report 2010-11*, accessed 7 August 2012, <<http://www.carefcs.org/srcfiles/2011-Annual-Report.pdf>>.

- For the period January to June 2012, 37 per cent of contacts at Care noted utility stress as a reason for seeking assistance from the service, an increase of 18 per cent from the previous reporting period.⁴¹

In April 2012 ACTCOSS submitted a letter to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission, voicing concern over the 17 per cent increase in electricity prices for ACT residents which came into effect 1 July 2012.⁴²

Although the utility concession increase is meant to mitigate the effect this rise will have on low-income households, ACTCOSS is concerned such households will still bear the brunt of the increase in electricity prices.

ACTCOSS has previously and consistently raised the need to rectify energy inefficient and inadequate housing stock, as an important means to reduce energy consumption. ACTCOSS continues to remain concerned about low income households who are privately renting. With no minimum standards in place for private rental tenancies, such households are particularly vulnerable to higher energy bills as they lack the right to request their landlord ensure the house is energy efficient, for example through retrofitting of heaters.

ACTCOSS calls on individual candidates and parties of the 2012 ACT Election to:

- Legislate minimum standards for private rental properties, and put in place a system to monitor this;
- Expand the current Outreach program which provides assistance to low-income households in reducing energy bills;
- Expand current programs on energy retrofitting to actively engage private tenancies, through concessions to landlords for tenants deemed to be low income;
- Actively engage low income home owners to retrofit their houses, particularly older citizens, who may be asset rich and capital poor;
- Ensure the energy concession keeps pace with the actual increases in costs of energy; and
- Ensure community voices are able to contribute to national energy reform.

41 Care Financial Counselling Service, *6 monthly statistical report*, 2012.

42 ACTCOSS, *Letter to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission*, 2012.

Community Sector Viability

The Productivity Commission study into the not-for profit sector showed the sector is worth about \$43 billion a year to the national economy, contributing as much as 4.1 per cent to gross domestic product, and employing about 8 per cent of the workforce. The community sector is an essential component in the development of an equitable and socially inclusive community in the ACT. And as more and more in our society seek more than reassurance from the community sector, the sector itself must be recognised and valued.

The community sector has been underfunded by governments for the services they are contracted to deliver, for many years. The Productivity Commission found governments have routinely paid only 70 per cent of the cost of services they have contracted to community organisations.⁴³ In the ACT the vast majority of respondents to the ACOSS Australian Community Sector Survey⁴⁴ stated the level of funding they received was insufficient to cover the true costs of delivering contracted services.

The Australian Community Sector Survey showed in 2009-10 ACT community organisations increased their workload by 10 per cent, but it was not enough to match the rising demand for services, as turn-away rates rose by 17 per cent.⁴⁵ An Australia Institute Survey undertaken in April 2011 found 85 per cent of Canberrans believe the ACT Government should increase funding to the community sector so services can be maintained.⁴⁶

As demand is projected to increase further for many years to come, the ACT Assembly must consider ongoing funding strategically and plan, as they have in health services, to increase resourcing to the sector. It remains disappointing the opportunity provided by the 2012 Budget to deliver the growth funding required to meet the existing demands across community services was not taken up. Demand continues to outstrip sector capacity, and is projected to increase further, particularly in the light of the growing and ageing population.

There have been significant national and local legislative and policy reforms implemented in recent years and forecast in the near future impacting on not-for-profit organisations. The implementation of these reforms have had, and will continue to have, significant impact on the ACT community sector which is facing a significantly increased compliance burden, and increased administrative and oversight costs. Reform measures which add to the professionalisation of the sector and enhance quality service delivery are certainly welcome, however they have meant the cost of providing a quality community service is increasing. Additional resourcing and support should be allocated to community organisations to ensure the process of implementing

43 Productivity Commission, *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector*, 2010.

44 ACOSS paper 173, *Australian Community Sector Survey*, Volume 2 – Australian Capital Territory, 2011, p.25.

45 ACOSS paper 173, *Australian Community Sector Survey*, Volume 2 – Australian Capital Territory, 2011. p.7.

46 ACTCOSS, 'ACT Community says 'support our community sector'', media release, 15 April 2011.

these reforms does not leave them stretched beyond capacity, with resulting reductions in service delivery.

ACTCOSS has heard significant and varied feedback on the recent announcements made by the ACT Government regarding community sector reform. The ACT Government has sought a co-contribution from the community sector for the establishment of the Community Sector Transition and Investment Fund which will progress the implementation of the equal remuneration case outcomes and related community sector reforms. While we are looking for a significant increase in funding to the sector to meet the needs of vulnerable Canberrans, ACTCOSS acknowledges reform is difficult to progress if left unfunded. The sector, through the fund, will look for meaningful and responsive reform to ensure value for the contribution being made.

ACTCOSS calls on individual candidates and parties of the 2012 ACT Election to:

- Increase funding by 15 per cent to all ACT Government funded community sector contracts, to meet current demand for services;
- Undertake consultation with the sector regarding ongoing growth in demand and strategies to ensure services are available when needed;
- Ensure all community organisations based in the ACT benefit from the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration Order; and
- Work with community organisations to ensure regulatory reform doesn't increase red-tape and administrative burdens.