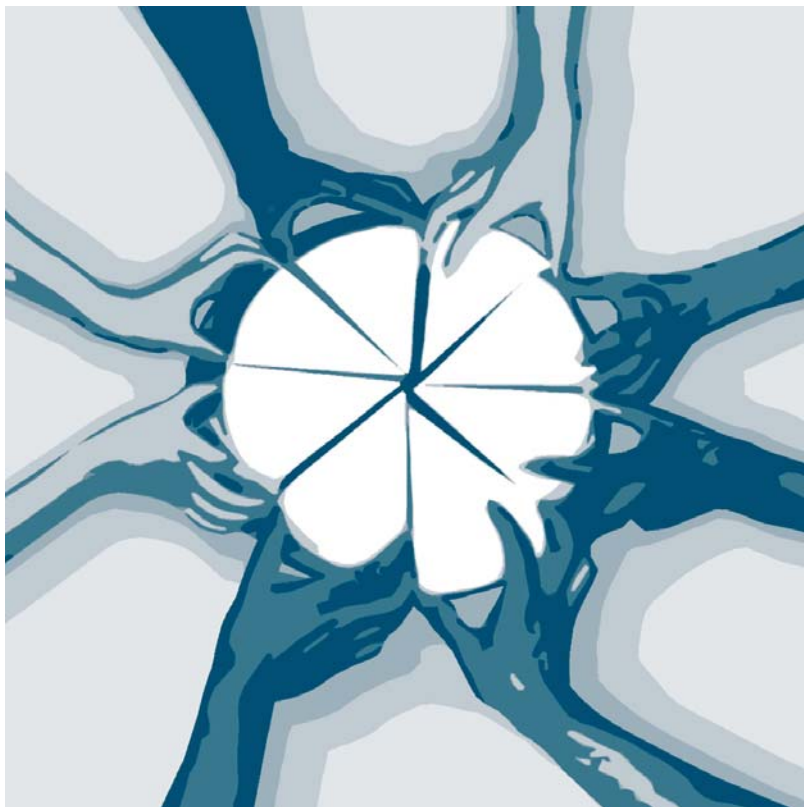




ACT 2012-13
Budget Snapshot

6 June 2012



About ACTCOSS

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 they have suffered as a result of European settlement. 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 receives funding from the ACT Government - Community Services Directorate.

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

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Overview

The ACT Government's Budget for 2012-13 provides no clear skies ahead, leaving the community sector tackling a growing storm of demand and reform.

Recognition of the underpinning issues impacting our community was not forthcoming. Despite some tinkering through investment in meeting current crisis demand we are looking at more young people in out of home care, continuing high levels of incarceration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and potential increases in social isolation due to rising transport costs with no increase in community transport support.

The major focus of this Budget is taxation reform. ACTCOSS welcomes discussion on revenue policy, particularly where the taxation base can be changed to improve its horizontal and vertical equity, remove social distortions, improve administrative efficiency and provide for future growth. ACTCOSS also sees taxation policy as a legitimate tool to encourage socially beneficial investment and behaviours.

The significant reform of taxation is welcome and necessary and we look forward to working with the government on ensuring taxes are well targeted and appropriate concessions are in place. However, the need for reform in service delivery remains – shifting from increasing acute services to supporting early intervention.

The land tax reforms may result in cheaper rental, but only if landlords choose to reduce their rates of rent. We hope the Affordable Housing Action Plan – Phase 3 will be able to target the small funding allocated for its implementation (\$600,000 over 2 years) to ensure a real increase in rental affordability.

However, housing affordability is not about the cost of the dwelling alone – liveability and transport are also significant cost contributors. The increasing cost of public transport and utilities needs to be met with accessible and balanced concessions or we will see more families in housing stress, increased social isolation and preventable health problems.

Community Sector Reform

It remains disappointing the government has not taken the opportunity to provide the growth funding required to meet the existing demands across community services. Demand continues to outstrip sector capacity, and is projected to increase further, particularly in the light of the growing and ageing population. The ACT Government must consider ongoing funding strategically and plan to increase resourcing to the sector for required services. The provision of community sector indexation of 3.25% will assist community service agencies to meet some of the increasing costs associated with continued service delivery.

The government is seeking 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. This co-contribution will equate to 0.34% of total funding from ACT Government contracts (over \$150,000), in effect reducing indexation of those contracts to 2.91%. 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.

Taxation Reform and Economic Initiatives

Selected Initiatives

- **Abolishing duty on insurance, over 5 years**
Every year, over the next 5 years, duty will reduce by 20%. Abolishing duty on insurance will reduce the cost of general and life insurance policies.
- **Phasing out conveyance/stamp duty**
Conveyancing duty will be abolished over a 20 year period, with the reduction in the marginal tax rate focused on low tax brackets.
- **Expansion of General Rates**
General Rates is being made more progressive with the introduction of new tax brackets and increasing marginal tax rates. General Rates will increase by \$122 on average. Around 24% of properties will incur a decrease in rates payable, with 76% incurring an increase.
- **Reducing payroll tax**
The tax free threshold for payroll tax will increase from \$1.5million to \$1.75million.
- **Reform of land tax for commercial and residential properties**
Residential land tax will reduce for around 74% of properties, by an average of \$208, around 12% will have an average increase of \$602.
- **\$740,000 over 4 years for *Assisting People on Low Incomes***
Expands the No Interest Loans Scheme to provide assistance to low-income members of the community experiencing financial hardship.

Associated Concessions

- **Increase in maximum General Rates rebate for pensioners**
Property owners holding certain concession cards are eligible for a rebate of up to 50% of their rates, with the cap on this rebate being increased to \$565.
- **Increase in income threshold for Home Buyer Concession Scheme**
The Home Buyer Concession Scheme will now only apply to the sale of new land or the construction of a new house, with the income threshold extended by 25% to \$150,000.
- **Increased access to Rates Deferral Scheme**
The current scheme will be expanded to include non-pensioners, over the age of 65. The expansion will allow older Canberrans in higher value dwellings but with below average incomes the option to live within their current area, without needing to sell their property.

Issues

The 5 year reform package of taxation aims to phase out inefficient taxes, replacing them with more efficient taxes in the hopes of achieving a fairer and simpler tax system. Currently 32% of revenue comes through ACT taxes. ACTCOSS broadly supports the aims of the reform agenda, in looking to stabilise revenue while phasing out inefficient taxes. ACTCOSS sees taxation policy as a legitimate tool to encourage socially beneficial investment and behaviours.

The initiatives targeted at improving rental affordability, such as the residential land tax reforms will only result in cheaper rents if landlords choose to reduce the rents charged. There is no built-in incentive to ensure or support the reduction in rents in the community. The general rates reform will need to be monitored in the long term to ensure 'bracket-creep' does not adversely impact on low income households and the rebate scheme keeps pace with rising household values.

The eligibility income criteria for the home-buyers concession scheme will increase from \$120,000 to \$150,000. Full concession will now be available for properties to the value of \$385,000 and a partial concession for properties to the value of \$450,000. ACTCOSS sees the value in this initiative as it supports people to reach the aspiration of home ownership.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders

Selected Initiatives

- **\$100,000 one-off funding for the *Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander support and capacity building program***

This initiative will support members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to undertake certificate training in children's services.

- **\$180,000 one-off funding for the *Community Helping Aboriginal Australians to Negotiate Choices Leading to Employment and Success (CHANCES)***

The CHANCES program will provide nationally accredited job-ready training to members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly those deemed to be at risk of homelessness, re-offending or facing long-term unemployment.

- **\$150,000 over 4 years for the *Indigenous Business Development***

This program aims to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to start and grow their own business.

Issues

Although the above initiatives are welcomed, ACTCOSS has concerns about the implementation of programs with one-off funding for a 12 month period. Good practice supports consultation and relationship-building for programs to be successful, and one which needs to be respected. ACTCOSS recommends the ACT Government engage in comprehensive consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in order to ascertain such programs are what the community desires and provides opportunities to learn how they be best implemented.

Of concern are the number of 'priorities' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities contained in the Budget, for example around education, which do not appear to have any funding attached to them. ACTCOSS notes in particular the lack of any mention in the Budget about community or public housing, mental health programs and chronic illness services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Unless proper resourcing is committed to any of these priorities, real positive changes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and services may not be achieved over the coming financial year.

ACTCOSS also notes the lack of additional resourcing for the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body in this year's Budget. Without adequate resourcing, such as at a minimum – a full-time chairperson position, the Elected Body is unable to adequately consult with and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in the ACT, and members are unable to undertake professional development activities.

People with Disabilities

Selected Initiatives

- **\$495,000 over 3 years for *Community Visitors Scheme***
A Community Visitors Scheme will be established to provide an independent and informal service for identifying, resolving or referring matters of concern for people with a disability. This approach will complement existing advocacy services.
- **\$2.9million over 3 years for *Disability Dual Occupancy Housing***
Three dual occupancy properties will be constructed for clients who, because of the complexity of their disability, need to live alone (single tenancy). These purpose-built properties will provide for greater service efficiency in meeting the needs of these individuals by enabling them to continue to live alone, but be managed via a shared model of accommodation support.
- **\$3.2million over 4 years for *Support for CIT Year 12 Program and Students with Disabilities (commencing 2013-14)***
This initiative will support the CIT Year 12 program and the Disabilities Support Area to respond to the increasing demand for enrolment of students with complex needs.
- **\$2million one-off for *Non-Government Schools – Students with Disabilities***
This is a one-off grant to support existing students with disabilities in non-government schools. Funding will be provided on a needs basis utilising the Student Centred Appraisal of Needs approach. This is an internally funded initiative utilising unallocated funds from the Interest Subsidy Scheme.

Issues

While the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is acknowledged in the Budget papers as a 'risk' due to significant work yet to be undertaken and potential financial implications, ACTCOSS is concerned there is a lack of proactive vision for implementation in preparing people with disabilities for major changes involved in the NDIS. There must be work done to prepare people with disabilities to control their own funding, make their own choices, understand their options, and exercise autonomy in line with the expectations of the Productivity Commission in its vision for the Scheme.

ACTCOSS welcomes the funding allocated to the Community Visitors Scheme to provide an informal service to assist in addressing matters of concern for people with disability. We look forward to discussing the proposals for the scheme's implementation and ensuring it will work to complement existing advocacy services.

Additionally, ACTCOSS is pleased the Budget has allocated funds for a number of initiatives to assist young people with disabilities including allocation to Non-Government Schools to support existing students with disabilities, Special Needs Transport funding, Support for CIT Year 12 Program and Students with Disabilities.

Transport

Selected Initiatives

- **\$1.5million over 1 year for *School Transport for Students with Disabilities***
This initiative supports the transport of students with a disability, ensuring access to the nearest most appropriate setting.
- **\$4.5million over 4 years for *Bus Stop Upgrades to Disability Standard (capital expenditure)***
This funding is for the continued improvements of bus stops and shelters to ensure compliance with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.
- **\$38million over 4 years for *ACTION – Bus Replacement Program (capital expenditure)***
Bus replacements for the ACTION fleet to ensure compliance with the requirements of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. An estimated 90 buses will be replaced.

Issues

ACTCOSS is concerned with the increase in public transport fares by 2.5% for students and 2.6% 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. While transport services have associated costs, the desire to encourage more Canberrans to use public transport will be met if prices remain affordable and services are accessible.

ACTCOSS welcomes the announcement of funding to support transport initiatives for people with disabilities, including school transport, the close to \$40 million which will facilitate 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.

ACTCOSS is concerned with the lack of mention of community transport at any point in the 2012-13 ACT Budget. This is despite the fact the ACT has individuals who cannot access public transport for a variety of reasons; an increasing population in satellite suburbs; and current service providers of community transport are at capacity. It is particularly disappointing given the growing body of evidence linking the availability of accessible transport to the social determinants of health, and the understanding of the negative impacts transport disadvantage can have on an individual.

Community Sector Viability

Selected Initiatives

- **3.25% Community Sector Indexation**

Calculated on the formula using CPI and WPI, community sector indexation shows a slight decrease from the 2011-12 financial year, resulting in an indexation figure of 3.25% for ACT Government service funding agreements in 2011-12.

Note: an adjustment of 0.34% will be made to eligible service funding agreements (for organisations receiving over \$150,000) managed by Housing ACT, the Community Services Directorate, and the Health Directorate as a contribution to the “Implementation of Equal Remuneration Case outcomes and Related Community Service Reforms Initiative” (Community Sector Transition and Investment Fund).

- **\$1.391million over 3 years for implementation of *Equal Remuneration Case Outcomes and Related ACT Community Sector Reforms***

This initiative will provide support to the community sector in response to the ACT Government’s commitments relating to the outcome of the equal remuneration case, and will manage a series of community sector reform projects (through the Community Sector Transition and Investment Fund).

This amount represents the contribution of 0.34% mentioned above.

- **\$4.478million over 4 years for *Social and Community Services (SACS) Pay Equity Award***

Funding for the implementation of the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration Order, through the Health and Community Services Directorate and Housing ACT. Funding comes from changes to appropriation in Health Directorate, Community Services Directorate, and Housing ACT.

- **\$550,000 over 2 years for *Woden/Weston Creek Community Hub (Feasibility and Forward Design)***

A feasibility study and forward design for a community hub in the Woden/Weston Creek region to accommodate a community centre, a childcare centre and a seniors centre.

- **\$2.5million over 2 years for *Upgrade of Community Facilities and Childcare Centre Improvements***

Upgrades and refurbishments to community facilities, including youth centres, childcare centres, neighbourhood halls and community rooms.

Issues

It remains disappointing the government has not taken the opportunity to provide the growth funding required to meet the existing demands on community services. Demand continues to outstrip sector capacity, and is projected to increase further, particularly in the light of the growing and ageing population. The ACT Government must consider ongoing funding strategically and plan to increase resourcing to the sector. The provision of community sector indexation of 3.25% will assist community service agencies to meet some of the increasing costs associated with continued service delivery.

The government is seeking 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. This co-contribution will equate to 0.34% of total funding from ACT Government contracts (over \$150,000), in effect reducing indexation of those contracts to 2.91%. 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 welcomes the provision of funding to implement the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration Case. Equal Pay is critical for effectiveness and viability of services provided by the community sector. The implementation of the pay case is to occur over an eight year period. The government has publically committed \$27million to fund the implementation, with approximately \$4.5million allocated in this Budget for the first 4 years of the 8 year phase in.

Additionally, in light of the significant reform agenda both federally and locally, services are facing an increased compliance burden. 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.

Housing and Homelessness

Selected Initiatives

- **\$600,000 over 2 years for the *Affordable Housing Action Plan Phase 3***
This initiative aims to address the shortage of affordable rental properties and to ensure the continuation of existing affordable housing initiatives.
- **\$5million over 3 years for *Expansion of Social Housing – Stage 2***
This project provides for construction of additional dwellings to address social housing needs, with a particular focus on supported accommodation.
- **\$130,000 over 1 year for *Common Ground Supportive Housing Model (Design)***
This project provides for the design of a Common Ground supportive housing complex for people experiencing homelessness and people on low incomes.
- **\$1.5million over 3 years for *Security Improvement Program for Elderly Public Housing Tenants (commencing 2013-14)***
This project provides for additional security measures to improve the safety and security for elderly public housing tenants living in older persons' accommodation and multi-unit complexes.
- **4-year *Indicative Land Release Program***
Includes a release target of 19,500 dwelling sites between 2012-13 and 2015-16. These targets are aimed at meeting housing demand and establishing an inventory of serviced land.

Issues

ACTCOSS welcomes 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 is 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.

Changes in the taxation regime purporting to be targeted at housing affordability such as land tax reductions for 'affordable rental properties' placed little requirement on landlords to pass on savings. The broader changes in stamp duty and land rates generally are welcome and may ease options regarding turn-over of current housing.

We are pleased to see ongoing commitment to the Common Ground Supportive Housing Model with the allocation of \$130,000 over the coming financial year for the design phase. This initiative, if implemented, will provide a further option for addressing homelessness in the ACT.

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 concerned about the potential impact on the provision of homelessness support services in the ACT.

While there is a target for land releases, there is no indication of how these will be taken up and therefore there may not be downward pressure on prices. In addition, it is unclear what proportion of this program is focused on affordable housing.

Climate Change

Selected Initiatives

- **\$2million in 2015-16 for the *Expansion of Public Housing Energy Efficiency***
An extension of the current program to improve the energy efficiency of public housing. The 2011-12 Budget allocated \$8million over 4 years.
- **\$735,000 over 4 years for *Contribution to National Energy Bodies***
The ACT will contribute to national energy policy and administrative bodies, namely the Australian Energy Market Commission and the Council of Australian Governments Standing Council on Energy Resources.
- ***Utilities Concession capped at \$374.82 – up from \$346.20***
Pensioner and Health Care Card holders are able to access a 68% rebate on the cost of the electricity consumed, capped at \$374.82.

Issues

ACTCOSS welcomes the resourcing for contributions to National Energy Bodies as it is important the ACT remain engaged in conversations regarding the national energy market. Some of this funding would best be targeted as a resource in the community sector which would provide informed consumer input at the national level, and advocate for the needs of people experiencing energy poverty in the ACT.

The commitment of \$2million in 2015-16 to continue the expansion of the program to improve the energy efficiency of public housing is welcomed. However, there is a real need to expand the current Outreach program which provides assistance to low-income households in reducing energy bills. This is particularly important as there are no provisions for improvements to energy efficiency of private housing which can have a negative impact on low-income consumers who are renting privately.

While the utility concession is a welcome increase, it does not keep up with the projected increase in electricity bills of 17%, due to come into effect on 1 July 2012, and may not mitigate the negative effect this rise will have on low-income households. ACTCOSS is concerned the Utilities Network Facilities Tax will disproportionately affect low-income households if for-profit utility businesses choose to pass on the cost to consumers.

The \$800,000 committed to the Energy Efficiency (Cost of Living) Scheme is important, particularly for the monitoring of the scheme. However, ACTCOSS is concerned in relation to the projected revenue for the ACT Government of over \$1million in 2013-14 from the scheme. This appears to be reliant on increased diversity in the energy market, which could take more than 12 months.

Justice and Corrections

Selected Initiatives

- **\$900,000 over 3 years for *Street Law Outreach Service for the Homeless***
Building on the pilot program to establish further outreach clinics and referral networks for people experiencing homelessness.
- **\$666,000 over 3 years for *Relocation of the Women's Legal Service Centre (commencing 2013-14)***
The relocation will enable the Women's Legal Service to improve services, and allow expansion of other Community Legal Centres at Havelock House.
- **\$1.137million over 2 years for *Extending Throughcare for Offenders to the Community (pilot program)***
Extending the throughcare model beyond the end of an offender's custodial sentence to support their transition into the community and reduce their risk of reoffending.
- **\$2.915million over 4 years for *Corrective Services Operational Capacity***
Funding increases in staffing to meet service demand, and repair and maintenance costs for the correctional facility.
- **\$588,000 over 2 years for the *AMC Crisis Support Unit Upgrade***
Improving the design and functionality of the Crisis Support Unit at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) to provide a safer environment for staff and detainees.

Issues

ACTCOSS is concerned no funding has been allocated to resourcing the ACT Human Rights Commission (HRC). This is disappointing given the ACT has an established human rights framework, yet the clearly under-resourced HRC has not been supported in this Budget for the work they are required to carry out.

ACTCOSS welcomes the pilot investment in throughcare, which recognises the community sector's concern to ensure the often complex needs of prisoners exiting from detention can be properly co-ordinated, reducing the risk of reoffending. The sector has worked closely with the government in developing this initiative, and looks forward to engaging with its planning and implementation.

The continuation of funding of Street Law is a timely recognition of the needs of people experiencing homelessness, who risk contact with the criminal justice system. While Street Law represents an investment in an early intervention approach, ACTCOSS is disappointed no funding or policy commitment has been made to Justice Reinvestment, despite the evidence this would reduce costs in the longer term.

No direct funding has been provided for the introduction of a needle and syringe program in the AMC, despite clear public health benefits. This risks the further spread of blood borne viruses in the prison, and into the general community as prisoners are released.

Significant new funding is provided for correctional staff and facilities maintenance, however, it appears no additional resources are directed at programs for prisoners, particularly women and prisoners with special needs. The current accommodation arrangements for women at AMC are problematic, and are hampering the delivery of programs to address identified needs.

The upgrade to the Crisis Support Unit is necessary to ensure safety of prisoners and staff, but it is unfortunate funding needs to be directed this way to a facility which is only 3 years old. This calls into question some of the initial design implementation for the AMC. It is hoped any further such upgrades are not at the expense of services to prisoners.

Health

Selected Initiatives

- **\$485,000 over 3 years for *Grant for the Heart Foundation – Active Living in the ACT***

The Heart Foundation will build upon and promote the Active Living principles across the ACT. The Active Living program encourages initiatives in the built environment that support an active Canberra population and promotes the uptake of active living.

- **\$31.6million over 4 years for *Growth in Demand for Acute Services***

This initiative will address general growth in demand for inpatient services at the Canberra Hospital and Calvary Public Hospital. An additional 13 acute beds, 10 Hospital in the Home beds and an 8 bed Medi-Hotel will be provided at the Canberra Hospital. Calvary Public Hospital will have a further 7 general inpatient beds, 5 Hospital in the Home beds and a Community Midwifery Program.

- **\$6.6million over 4 years for *Gunghalin Health Centre***

Additional centre resources will be provided to support a range of health services for all ages, including counselling, screening, treatment, therapy, community support, education and group programs.

- **\$4.2million over 4 years for *Growth in Cancer Services***

This will expand outreach services to provide care at home or in less invasive environments such as outpatient and outreach clinics to maximise lifestyle outcomes for people with cancer.

- **\$300,000 over 3 years for *Healthy Weight Action Plan***

This initiative supports a program of activities across the ACT to reduce rates of obesity. The trend towards high rates of unhealthy weight has been longstanding and has significant implications for the future health of ACT residents and demand for health services.

Issues

ACTCOSS welcomes a number of initiatives in this year's Budget to improve health outcomes for Canberrans, including the Heart Foundation's Active Living in the ACT program, the Healthy Weight Action Plan and the Growth in Cancer Services.

While the Budget includes many welcome health initiatives, more can be done in the area of prevention to lessen the demand on acute health services, and better health outcomes can be achieved by spending allocated money in other ways. ACTCOSS continues to look for expansion in preventative and population health programs.

It is disappointing no health funding has been allocated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services, especially given the government's commitment to closing the gap in healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs and Mental Health

Selected Initiatives

- **\$4.2million over 4 years for *Mental Health Growth***
This initiative will increase the capacity to treat and develop post-traumatic stress prevention programs for newly arrived migrants and refugees, as well as expand on the current community mental health services.
- **\$2million for 1 year for *Adult Secure Mental Health Unit (Finalising Design)***
Funding to finalise the design of a Secure Mental Health Facility.
- **\$150,000 over 3 years for *Enhanced Counselling and Volunteer Services***
This initiative provides for a low-cost counselling service and for support and coordination of existing volunteer services provided by the A Gender Agenda organisation.

Issues

Funding for A Gender Agenda's Enhanced Counselling and Volunteer Services is a welcomed initiative. Additionally, it is heartening to see over \$4million allocated to Mental Health Growth, which will increase capacity to treat and develop post-traumatic stress prevention programs for newly arrived migrants and refugees. While this growth funding targets areas of need, it does not address the broader lack of capacity to meet unmet demand in the community mental health sector.

Funding is provided to upgrade the Crisis Support Unit in the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) and to finalise design of a Secure Mental Health Facility, however this does not detract from the reality that no adequate facility exists for the care of people with mental illness in the AMC, and mental health services for the population of AMC continue to be inadequate to meet need.

ACTCOSS is disappointed there has once again been no funding allocated specifically for major initiatives or explicit investment in the ACT Budget to alcohol, tobacco and other drugs (ATOD), despite the significant ATOD related harms in the ACT and the community, and the policy priority they have. The integration of mental health, justice health, and ATOD services into one funding item makes it difficult to assess whether these areas are increasing as a proportion of the budget.

There are a number of ATOD related initiatives such as the needle and syringe programs in the AMC and on the north side of Canberra, as well as the Alcohol Ignition Interlocks Program, among others, which are in need of funding to support vulnerable people in the Canberra community.

Children, Youth and Families

Selected Initiatives

- **\$15.36million over 3 years for *Out of Home Care Costs***
This initiative will address the increasing number of children and young people in out of home care arrangements including residential care, kinship care and foster care.
- **\$5.492million over 4 years for *Blueprint for Youth Justice***
This initiative provides specialised therapeutic services to support young people already in the youth justice system to overcome specific offending behaviours and a community-based mobile intensive support service.
- **\$5.346million over 4 years for *Additional Positions for Care and Protection Services***
This initiative provides for additional care and protection staff.
- **\$550,000 over 3 years for *Strengthening Care and Protection Services***
This initiative will support further improvements in Care and Protection Services including systems development, professional development and practice improvement.
- **\$830,000 over 4 years for *Attraction and Retention Initiative (Care and Protection)***
This agency funded initiative is part of a 5 year recruitment and retention plan to attract and retain frontline staff to Care and Protection Services.
- **\$1.647million over 2 years for *Early Childhood Education and Care National Quality Framework Reforms***
This initiative will provide for the implementation of the reforms under the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Education and Care.
- **\$93,000 over 3 years for *Early Childhood Playgroup Program***
This program will provide integrated, collaborative support to children to develop a positive start to life and through key life stages, enabling parents to establish stronger networks and be part of the community.
- **\$350,000 in 2012-13 for *Civic Childcare Centre Feasibility Study***
A feasibility study will be undertaken to investigate the options for redeveloping the civic childcare centre, or relocating the centre.

Issues

While significant investment in Care and Protection Services is welcome, the focus on the tertiary end of the spectrum is concerning, as is the forecast that the need for these services will continue to rise. Investment in early intervention and prevention approaches is critical to stop families falling into crisis and requiring tertiary services such as Care and Protection. While the early childhood playgroup program is welcome as an early intervention and prevention initiative, it is disappointing no additional funding has been allocated to the newly established Children, Youth and Family Services Program (CYFSP) which has a focus on early intervention and prevention but is already at capacity.

The Blueprint for Youth Justice is a most welcome initiative, as is the element of early intervention. However, it is unclear what the proportion of the funds will be used for increasing staff at Bimberi which would take resources away from the early intervention focus.

It is unclear whether the additional placements in care and protection are new placements or whether it is 'catch-up' funding for the existing demand in out of home care. Ongoing dialogue with the community sector is required to ensure these funds are directed towards meeting current and foreseen demand. Also, the range of reforms in Care and Protection, with due recognition of the needs of staff, are welcome.