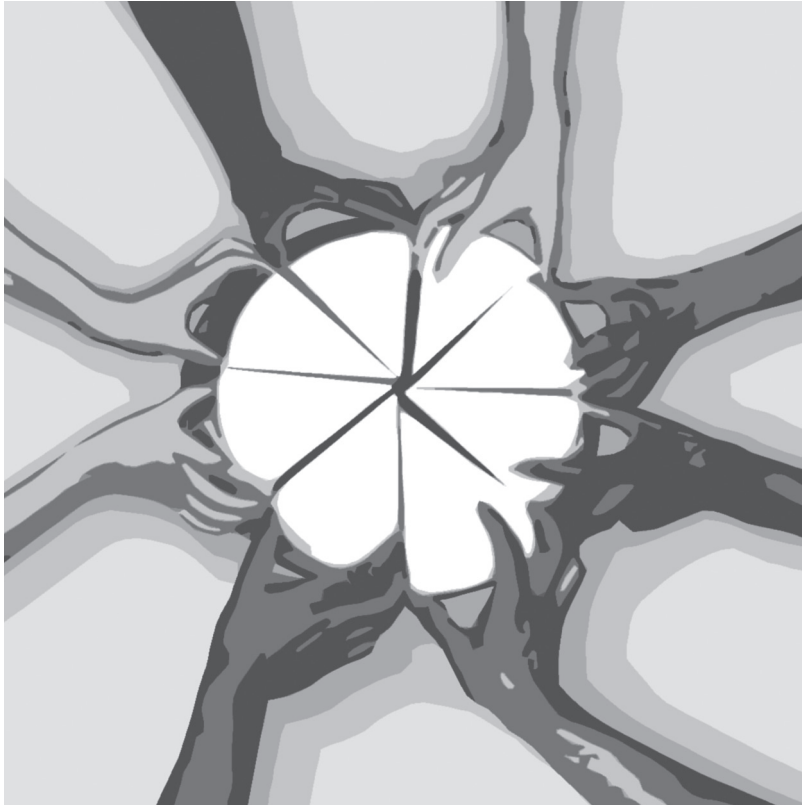


# Canberra 2013

## Fair and Equitable

ACTCOSS Submission to the ACT Budget 2012-13  
February 2012





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## 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' objectives are a community in which all people have the opportunities and resources needed to participate in and benefit from social and economic life and the development of a dynamic, collaborative and viable 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 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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## Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACAT	ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service Inc.
ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AMC	Alexander Maconochie Centre
CPI	Consumer Price Index
JR	Justice Reinvestment
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NEM	National Electricity Market
NSP	Needle and Syringe Program
SDoH	Social Determinants of Health
WACOSS	WA Council of Social Service Inc.
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Introduction

While the city of Canberra is preparing to celebrate its centenary next year, the ACT Council of Social Service will also enter its 50th year in 2013.

And while the Council has a long history of supporting the territory's community sector, and through it the most vulnerable members of its community, the challenges facing the sector are as great as they have ever been.

The after effects of the Global Financial Crisis, which disproportionately hit the less well off, and the growing effects of the latest financial crisis in Europe are taking their toll on those who are least able to afford it. This impact is amplified in Canberra, where high average incomes push up the cost of living for all.

Community sector organisations in Canberra increased their workload by 10 percent in 2009-10, but it was not enough to keep up with the increased demand, and sadly turn away rates were up 17 percent.

The 70 local agencies that completed the Australian Council of Social Service's annual *Community Sector Survey* helped people on 541 367 occasions, but most (60 percent) also reported that government funding fell short of the actual cost of delivering these services.<sup>1</sup>

ACTCOSS and the sector look forward to the ACT Government using the budget to fulfil its promise to 'fully fund its share of the wage increases covered by [the] decision by Fair Work Australia to raise the SACS Award for community sector workers'.<sup>2</sup> But much more is needed to ensure that the Council's vision of a fair and equitable Canberra that respects and values diversity is met.

The 2012-13 Budget finds the ACT at a significant crossroad, with opportunity to progress this vision or to limit the prospect of achieving it.

With growing economic disparity fuelling social exclusion and increasing demand for community services, leadership from the Assembly is required to achieve the dream of the 2008 *Canberra Plan – Towards Our Second Century*.

Canberra will be recognised throughout the world as a truly sustainable and creative city; as a community that is socially inclusive — acknowledging and supporting those who are vulnerable and in need and enabling all to reach their full potential; as a centre of economic growth and innovation; as the proud capital of the nation and home of its pre-eminent cultural institutions; and as a place of great natural beauty.<sup>3</sup>

The years 2012 and 2013 will see the community sector transformed, by external government reforms and a resulting shift in the focus of service delivery. The community

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

2 J Burch MLA, 'ACT Government commits to fully fund Equal Remuneration case for community workers', media release, 1 February 2012.

3 ACT Government, *Canberra Plan – Towards our Second Century*, 2008, p. 5.

sector and government are partners in seeking to ensure an equitable and just Canberra, and government must realise the pressure and demands such reform will put on the sector. The challenge for the next ACT Budget is to recognise and respond to these challenges accordingly.

The Council's submission focuses on the five areas that most need the government's attention at this time. These are community sector viability, affordable and accessible housing, the social impacts of climate change, the provision of corrective services in a human rights framework and consideration of the social determinants of health.



## Summary of Recommendations

- Increase funding by 15% to all ACT Government funded community sector contracts immediately.
- Undertake detailed consultation with the community sector regarding the ongoing growth in demand.
- Ensure all community organisations based in the ACT benefit from the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration decision.
- Resource the design of a whole of community sector workforce development strategy.
- Maintain current supplementary funding for the homelessness sector.
- To maintain outcomes, increase funding over the longer-term to address the coming shortfall in Commonwealth funding for homelessness in the ACT.
- Increase public housing stocks in the ACT and maintain a minimum rate of at least 10 percent of all housing stock.
- Work with private and community housing to support the development of affordable private rental in the ACT.
- Support an extension of Rent Assistance, through dialogue with the Federal Government.
- Continue to resource the growth of community housing, working with smaller providers to allow a range of options in market provision.
- Support the expansion of the provision of community housing on a percentage of income basis rather than as a percentage of market rent.
- Continue to resource the development of the Common Ground project following the outcomes of the feasibility study.
- Ensure every ACT public housing property has access to retrofitting for heating systems as required.
- Expand current programs on energy retrofitting to actively engage private tenancies.
- Resource a community position to undertake engagement and research on issues of energy poverty and the NEM implementation.
- Undertake a trial of a Justice Reinvestment model which encompasses an integrated and collaborative approach between community services and government agencies.
- Ensure all prisoners have access to appropriate services and programs identified through a thorough assessment of their circumstances upon incarceration.

- In collaboration with the community sector, continue to develop and implement a throughcare policy framework, including funding, to ensure services are available and accessible.
- Review the current provision of community transport with the aim of expanding services, ensuring flexibility and meeting demand.
- Ensure community transport is included in reviews of the ACT transport system.
- Explore options, including outreach services, to ensure access to community services.
- Ensure proven alternative education programs are accessible for young people at risk of disengaging from school.
- Ensure adult literacy education programs are, at a minimum, maintained.

# Community Sector Viability

## Increasing Cost of Service Delivery

The community sector has been underfunded by governments for the services they are tested to deliver, for many years. The Productivity Commission found governments have routinely paid only 70 percent of the cost of services they have contracted to community organisations.<sup>4</sup> In the ACT the vast majority of respondents to the *ACOSS Australian Community Sector Survey*<sup>5</sup> stated the level of funding they received in 2009-10 was insufficient to cover the true costs of delivering contracted services.

Many services report the only increase in funding they have received in recent years is indexation. While indexation is welcome, it is only designed to address the increasing costs of existing service provision, and in no way meets the cost of the ever increasing demand on already stretched services.

The *Australian Community Sector Survey* showed in 2009-10 ACT community organisations increased their workload by 10 percent, but it was not enough to match the rising demand for services, as turn-away rates rose by 17 percent.<sup>6</sup> An Australia Institute Survey undertaken in April 2011 found 85 percent of Canberrans believe the ACT Government should increase funding to the community sector so services can be maintained.<sup>7</sup>

Additional funding is required to meet the existing demands on community services. As demand is projected to increase further for many years to come, particularly in light of the growing and ageing population, the ACT Government must consider ongoing funding strategically and plan, as they have in health services, to increase resourcing to the sector.

There have been significant national and local legislative and policy reforms implemented in recent years and forecast in the near future. 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. These reforms include:

- harmonisation of health and safety legislation;
- increasing accreditation and quality frameworks across the sector;
- outcomes based reporting and prequalification frameworks;
- Standard Chart of Accounts; and
- national regulation of not-for-profits.

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

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

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

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

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

The 2010 report on the contribution of the not-for-profit sector by the Productivity Commission noted:

available evidence suggests [government funding for services is] an average of around 70 percent, with fees and charges making up some of the difference.<sup>8</sup>

The *Australian Community Sector Survey* found nearly 22 percent of funding for services was from own source income, with only 8.5 percent coming from fees.<sup>9</sup> In 2011 the Western Australian Government sought to address such critical issues facing community services by allocating additional funding to resource the community sector to meet the real cost of service delivery. The Western Australian Government's 2011-12 budget increased funding to the community services sector by an average of 25 percent by 2014-15.<sup>10</sup> This included a commitment of \$600 million over four years and an additional \$18 million to support the implementation of sector contracting reform and education programs. Importantly, this funding was not allocated for new programs but rather to appropriately fund the cost of existing service delivery. As outlined by WACOSS:

The intention of this funding is clearly to improve the sustainability of community services. The predominant use of this extra funding is to be directed towards improving wages of staff in the sector, as well as investing in training and professional development and the sustainability of the organisation.

The funding commitment signals to the sector that the Government is serious about rebuilding the Government's relationship with the not for profit sector so we can deliver better outcomes for those most disadvantaged in our community. It is a serious step in addressing a significant shortfall in funding that has worsened over recent years and put enormous pressure on service organisations.<sup>11</sup>

The ACT Government is encouraged to take similar measures to provide a significant injection to ACT Government funded community services, ensuring the ongoing viability of the community sector in the ACT. An increase in base funding of 15 percent will halve the current funding gap.

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8 Productivity Commission, *Contribution of the Not-For-Profit Sector*, 2010, p. 281.

9 ACOSS, 2009, quoted in Productivity Commission, *Contribution of the Not-For-Profit Sector*, 2010, p. 281.

10 Western Australian Government, 2011-12 Budget Fact Sheet: *Sustainable funding and contracting with the not-for-profit sector – overview*, viewed 8 December 2011, <<http://www.dpc.wa.gov.au/Publications/EconomicAuditReport/Documents/Budget%20Fact%20Sheet%20-%20Overview.pdf>>.

11 WACOSS, 'Update on State Government funding announcement', viewed January 2012, <[http://www.wacoss.org.au/newsletter/State%20Budget%20Funding%20Annoucement\\_2011\\_05\\_27.html](http://www.wacoss.org.au/newsletter/State%20Budget%20Funding%20Annoucement_2011_05_27.html)>.

### Recommendations

- Increase funding by 15% to all ACT Government funded community sector contracts immediately.
- Undertake detailed consultation with the community sector regarding the ongoing growth in demand.

## Equal Pay

In 2010 two out of three organisations said poor pay made it harder to find and keep workers.<sup>12</sup> Equal pay is crucial to ensure the effectiveness and viability of the vital services provided by the community sector. Fair Work Australia, in determining the question of equal remuneration for the community sector:

concluded that for employees in the SACS industry there is not equal remuneration for men and women workers for work of equal or comparable value by comparison with workers in state and local government employment.<sup>13</sup>

Due to the history of inadequate funding, and many years of increasing demand, the community sector is in no position to fund the wage increases awarded through the case. It is welcome the ACT Government has committed to fully funding their 'share' of wage rises with new funds provided to organisations for this purpose.<sup>14</sup>

Higher wages are essential for addressing many of the workforce problems in the sector, and therefore the effectiveness of social services in meeting the needs of low-income Australians. Organisations will need increased funding to cover higher wage costs. The growing disparity in wages between the (not-for-profit) community sector and government or the private sector has been driven by a number of factors including those specifically relating to funding:

- The sector's work has been undervalued by governments who have sought to cut their own costs by outsourcing social services to the community sector.
- The sector has undercut decent wages for its own workforce as it has responded to competitive tendering practices for government funding.<sup>15</sup>

If the disparity in wages is not adequately addressed the sector will face a crisis, not being able to sustain the vital workforce and as such organisations will not be able to

12 ACOSS paper 173, *Australian Community Sector Survey, Volume 2 – Australian Capital Territory*, 2011, p. 24.

13 Fair Work Australia, *Decision – Equal Remuneration Case*, May 2011.

14 J Burch MLA, 'ACT Government commits to fully fund Equal Remuneration case for community workers', media release, 1 February 2012.

15 ACOSS, *Decent Wages for Community Sector Workers: A discussion paper towards a nationally consistent approach to government funding of the equal remuneration order*, 2010, p. 2, viewed 13 December 2010, <[http://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/ACOSS\\_paper\\_funding\\_PE.pdf](http://acoss.org.au/images/uploads/ACOSS_paper_funding_PE.pdf)>.

continue their crucial work. This will pose significant issues for government who will then be called upon to support the vulnerable members of the community who are no longer able to access support from community services. This issue applies to all community organisations, not just those who are currently funded through Service Funding Agreements with the ACT Government. If the pay equity outcome is not appropriately funded and community services are expected to absorb the costs of pay increases, the ultimate result will be cuts to essential services which support the most vulnerable members of our community.

The ACT Government is also urged to provide this funding without linking it to additional requirements on community services. The Equal Pay Case has been put forward to address historical inadequacies of pay. To place additional requirements on services if funding is given, would be to reject the key premise of the case.

#### **Recommendation**

- Ensure all community organisations based in the ACT benefit from the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration decision.

## **Workforce Development and Leadership**

The projected increasing demand for community services due to the growing and ageing population will in turn lead to an increasing demand for appropriately skilled staff. A recent ABS Australian Social Trends paper indicates the past decade has already seen substantial growth in the number of people employed in Australian community service industries:

Between 2000-01 and 2010-11, the number of people employed in community service industries grew 51% compared with 26% for all industries. The number of people working in community service industries went from an average 340,000 workers in 2000-01 to 513,000 in 2010-11.<sup>16</sup>

Strong recent growth in the community services workforce is expected to continue:

In the 5 years up to 2014-15, it is projected that workforce growth of between 3.3% and 3.7% per year will be achieved in the various community service sub-industries, compared with 1.8% for all industries.<sup>17</sup>

The community sector workforce itself is ageing. In 2001 10 percent of the workforce was aged 55 and over, this had increased to 14 percent in 2006 and 15.2 percent in 2008-9.<sup>18</sup> This trend is expected to continue.

16 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), *Australian Social Trends September 2011: Community Service Workers*, September 2011, p. 1.

17 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p. 313.

18 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2007*, 2007, p. 335. and AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p. 318.

Despite the growth of the community services workforce in the ACT there are still concerns the sector is not considered by education providers or the ACT Government in a similar vein to other growth industries. A recent national study of education, training and workforce undertaken by the University of Queensland, supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council highlights this issue:

Australia's community and health services are among the fastest growing sectors of employment in the nation but the sustainability of an appropriately qualified workforce is threatened. Yet there is little integration of education and workforce planning for the community services sector.<sup>19</sup>

Workers in community services are increasingly required to further develop their skills in order to: meet the needs of people accessing services with increasingly complex needs; address changing reporting requirements; and to ensure changing legislation is appropriately applied. This training is currently happening in an ad-hoc way and further strategic sector development of the workforce is required. The 2010 *Environmental Scan* identified:

In community services, key issues include increasing skill profiles and redesigning jobs through sector development to reflect the increased complexity of skills required in service provision, and improving workforce conditions. The need for public funding and for industry-level coordination to meet the skills and qualifications requirements within the industry also remains an issue.<sup>20</sup>

Reforms in the sector mean there is even greater need for strategy around skills development and addressing career pathways in the community sector. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare have found:

Reforms in community services include shifts towards more person-centred care and community-based service delivery, coordinated across more than one program area. These changes require the redesign of roles, the acquisition of new and more sophisticated skills and changes to training programs by vocational and higher education providers. Increased competition for skilled workers can constrain the capacity of service providers to recruit workers with the qualifications and skills that these reforms require.

When suitably qualified workers are attracted to community services work, there is evidence that limited opportunities for career development and lack of permanent roles in the industry, particularly in small service organisations, can lead to the workers becoming overqualified for their current position but unable to progress to advanced roles and therefore potentially difficult to retain.<sup>21</sup>

The community services sector would benefit greatly from a workforce development strategy. Such a strategy should be developed in partnership between government, education providers and community service agencies. If workforce development is not addressed, a critical skills shortage may result in the future.

19 K Healy & B Lonnie, *The social work and human services workforce*, January 2010.

20 Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council, *Environmental Scan 2010*, 2010.

21 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p. 315.

Further support also is required to resource and develop leadership in the community sector. Government has indicated a desire to form close partnerships with the community sector, especially when implementing reform agendas. Government has also indicated a desire for community sector organisations to develop strong partnerships between organisations to ensure more connected and efficient service delivery and a more integrated sector. In order to develop effective and lasting partnerships, and to support innovation, community sector leadership must be enhanced and supported. There are limited affordable and accessible professional development opportunities for senior staff working with smaller organisations, especially in the area of leadership. Sector wide supports for leadership should be investigated, such as a mentoring program where established community sector leaders might make themselves available to mentor new managers and directors.

Additionally with increasing accountability and compliance requirements placed on community sector organisations, supporting the development of governance knowledge in the sector is crucial. Governance of community service organisations is overseen by voluntary boards and management committees. ACTCOSS is currently funded to provide basic governance information and has developed an online resource for this purpose.<sup>22</sup> It is essential members of these governing bodies are provided with the necessary skills and information required to ensure effective and accountable oversight across the ACT community sector.

**Recommendation**

- Resource the design of a whole of community sector workforce development strategy.



## Adequate, Affordable and Liveable Housing

'The availability of affordable, sustainable, and appropriate housing underpins good health and the social, educational and economic participation of individuals.'<sup>23</sup>

In 2007-8 more than one in five (22 percent) low income households in Australia were considered to be in housing stress, of these 42 percent were with a mortgage and 45 percent were renting from a private landlord. Growth in house prices has outstripped income growth over the past decade. Between 2001 and 2011, median Australian house prices rose by 147 percent, whereas median disposable household income only rose by 57 percent.<sup>24</sup>

In September 2011 Canberra's median weekly asking rent was \$470 for houses and \$440 for units. Canberra has exceeded all other capitals in the growth of house rentals, increasing by +3.3 percent over the year. This reflects the surge in demand for rental properties over the latter part of 2010 and early 2011, particularly from first home buyers unable to access the market for housing, due to high prices and interest rates.<sup>25</sup>

In September 2011 Canberra's median housing price was \$566,095 and for units \$390,916. Although there are indications nationally the growth in housing prices has slowed. Canberra is the only capital city to have recorded any growth over the year ending September 2011.<sup>26</sup>

Canberra is set to record increases in home buyer activity as economic growth fuels increased public service activity in the national capital. A chronic undersupply of housing will drive prices growth through 2012 and expect this to be around 5% by year's end.<sup>27</sup>

Canberra faces significant housing affordability issues which are unique to this jurisdiction.

Unlike large metropolitan cities, Canberra does not have an existing low cost rental market of any scale, in terms of property size, location and amenity, nor are there areas where housing costs remain relatively less expensive to rent or purchase. In recognition of the lack of housing options for people on low incomes to purchase or rent, the ACT has retained a higher than average proportion of public housing stock than other jurisdictions over time.

The ACT's high median income also means that the rental market predominately provides housing for medium income individuals and families. However, high median

23 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p. 275.

24 *ibid.*, p. 274.

25 Australian Property Monitors, *Rental Report*, December 2011.

26 Australian Property Monitors, *House Price Report*, September 2011.

27 Australian Property Monitors, *State of the Market Report*, December 2011.

rental costs in the ACT means that many households of low to middle income in the private rental market also suffer the highest levels of housing stress.<sup>28</sup>

Housing affordability can have far reaching consequences for individuals, going well beyond lack of material resources. Research indicates those struggling with housing affordability often have to 'cut back on the necessities of life including food, reduced access to services, living with risk, worry and stress on family relationships.'<sup>29</sup>

## Homelessness

During 2010-11 approximately 3500 people received support from government-funded specialist homelessness services (58 percent of these were clients and 42 percent were accompanying children), in the ACT. This was equivalent to one in 101 people in the ACT using such services.<sup>30</sup>

There continues to be significant unmet demand in specialist homelessness services across the nation. 'The data indicates government-funded specialist homelessness agencies are operating to capacity and are unable to completely meet the demand for accommodation.'<sup>31</sup>

An undersupply of accommodation appears to be the key reason why people are turned away from government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation – in 85% of valid unmet requests for immediate accommodation people were turned away for this reason.<sup>32</sup>

In 2010-11 59 percent of all people who sought immediate accommodation were turned away.<sup>33</sup> This is similar to the 2009-10 results where 58 percent of all people who sought immediate accommodation were turned away.<sup>34</sup> Homelessness Australia provided the following analysis:

Despite the 7% increase in the number of people who received support from specialist homelessness services the turn-away rate for people seeking new and immediate accommodation fell by 3.2%. This coincides with the largest increase in funding for specialist homelessness services in many years and confirms what the sector has been arguing for many years; that inadequate resources are the main

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28 ACT Ombudsman, *Housing ACT – Assessment of an Application for Priority Housing, Part 5 – Agency Response*, June 2011, p. 15.

29 Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), *Positioning Paper 135, Housing, public policy and social inclusion*, September 2011, pp. 18-19.

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

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

32 *ibid.*, p. 17.

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

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

reason services are unable to meet overall demand and that if base funding was increased significantly, the proportion of people turned away would significantly decrease.<sup>35</sup>

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 percent of the ACT population (3 percent nationally), around 16 percent of service users in the ACT identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander<sup>36</sup> and 29 percent of those requesting immediate accommodation nationally identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>37</sup>

Data indicates 'the ACT is providing overall higher quality services and producing better client outcomes than other States and Territories' and 'the ACT contributed more additional funding than the other States and Territories, more than \$1.5 million above the agreed Commonwealth/State matched funds'.<sup>38</sup>

However, there is significant concern regarding the projected \$3.3 million shortfall in available funding from 2013-14 due to the adjustments in Commonwealth Government funding being allocated to states and territories through the National Affordable Housing Agreement. 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. This has already begun with the youth homelessness sector reforms.

There should be an expectation if funding is reduced there may be a corresponding reduction in outcomes. Even if there is a significant restructure of the homelessness service system the Government needs to be realistic of what the outcomes might be in the light of this projected shortfall in Commonwealth funding.

### **Recommendations**

- Maintain current supplementary funding for the homelessness sector.
- To maintain outcomes, increase funding over the longer-term to address the coming shortfall in Commonwealth funding for homelessness in the ACT.

35 T Gilbert, *Sector Briefing on: People turned away from specialist homelessness services 2009/10*, Homelessness Australia, June 2011.

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

37 AIHW, *People turned away from government-funded specialist homelessness accommodation 2010-11*, December 2011, p. 7.

38 ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-2011*, p. 119.

## Public Housing

One of the vital safety nets for those experiencing homelessness or in severe housing stress is the provision of social housing by government. The lack of affordable private rental in Canberra means social housing is called upon to meet a need which it is not required to the same extent as in other jurisdictions and is almost the only long-term housing option for low income people.

Much of the pressure on the public housing system is a consequence of longer-term structural issues associated with private rental affordability and shortfalls in low cost housing supply. These have the greatest impact on low income households, and result in an increased demand for public housing.<sup>39</sup>

The key advantage of social housing is affordability, as rent setting policies for social housing are designed to limit the burden of housing costs.<sup>40</sup> By 30 June 2011, over 90 percent of tenants in public housing were in receipt of a rental rebate.<sup>41</sup>

Data indicates more than half of all new greatest need households allocated public housing were experiencing homelessness.

According to 2010 National Social Housing Survey data, more than one in five (21 percent) public rental households and almost one in three (31 percent) mainstream community housing households have been homeless at some time in the past.<sup>42</sup>

In Canberra in 2010-11 approximately 23 245 people were supported through 11 483 public housing tenancies.<sup>43</sup> However waiting lists for public housing are still extensive, with approximately 1500 individuals and families on the ACT public housing waiting list in 2010-11.<sup>44</sup>

Current waiting lists indicate availability of stock is a pressing issue. The ACT has not yet recovered from the massive cuts to public housing stocks in the last decade. The total number of public housing dwelling as at 30 June 2011 was 11 805, a net increase of 221 over the number of dwellings as at June 2010.<sup>45</sup> The injection of stimulus funding through the Nation Building project to grow the social housing stock in Canberra has been most welcome. The significant development in targeted older person's accommodation has been particularly well received. However, even with the recent injection of new social housing stock, the proportion of public housing remains below 10 percent of housing stock in the ACT.

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39 ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-11*, Volume 1, p. 109.

40 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p. 302.

41 ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-11*, Volume 1, p. 110.

42 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p.302.

43 ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-11*, Volume 1, p. 108.

44 *ibid.*, p. 109.

45 *ibid.*, p. 111.

ACTCOSS supports the Greens-Labor agreement that public housing be maintained at a rate of 10 percent of all housing stock, and that all future housing developments (and redevelopments) have a mix of public, community, affordable and private housing.

Social housing provides important assistance to many special needs groups, with at least half of all allocations nationally being to households with special needs. Disability was the main special need category.<sup>46</sup>

AIHW found more than a third of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households in Australia were living in social housing in June 2010.

Indigenous-specific programs (ICH and SOMIH) accommodated half of these households and half were in mainstream programs (public rental housing and mainstream community housing). The largest single program providing social housing assistance for Indigenous Australians was not a targeted program but public rental housing.<sup>47</sup>

There has been an increase of self-identified Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander public housing tenancies in the ACT from 435 in June 2010, to 520 in June 2011 housing 1147 residents.<sup>48</sup> However this is still likely to be an under-report of the actual numbers of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders housed in public housing.

Social housing also acts as a critical safety net for older Australians. While only one in 23 young (15-24 year old) renters rely on social housing, almost one in two older renters live in social housing.<sup>49</sup> Demand for public housing for older Australians is projected to more than double by 2028.<sup>50</sup>

There is clearly an ongoing need for additional public housing stock to be provided in the ACT, considering:

- current waiting lists;
- continuing bottle neck in homelessness accommodation services;
- new focus on a Housing First approach;
- a likely decrease in number of crisis and transitional beds in the homelessness system; and
- the knowledge there will be new people seeking support in the future.

46 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p. 274.

47 *ibid.*, p. 295.

48 ACT Government, *Community Services Directorate Annual Report 2010-11*, Volume 1, p.108 & 114.

49 AIHW, *Australia's Welfare 2011*, 2011, p. 284.

50 'Public housing overhaul planned', *The Australian*, 16 March 2011.

**Recommendations**

- Increase public housing stocks in the ACT and maintain a minimum rate of at least 10 percent of all housing stock.
- Work with private and community housing to support the development of affordable private rental in the ACT.
- Support an extension of Rent Assistance, through dialogue with the Federal Government.

## Community Housing

ACTCOSS welcomes the recent injections of community housing stock in Canberra and the ongoing commitment of the ACT Government to increase community housing availability. Due to the significant waiting lists of people eligible for public and community housing, a significant portion of new community housing needs to be income related (as with public housing) rather than being offered at 75 percent of market rent.

While increasing 'affordable housing' stock in Canberra is welcome, housing available at 75 percent of market rent is still more than 100 percent of the current common youth allowance, and is by any definition 'unaffordable' to anyone in receipt of a Centrelink benefit. Therefore there is significant responsibility on government to maintain, and preferably increase, the social housing stock with income related rent in Canberra.

In the coming year the Common Ground feasibility study should be completed with a clear direction for the ACT Government. This successful and viable model of addressing the housing needs of both homeless people and low income earners needs to be taken up and resourced adequately. This is both for the capital costs and the associated operating costs.

While ACTCOSS recommends an increase in community housing stock this should not be at the expense of stock numbers in public housing. Minister for Housing, Joy Burch, reaffirmed commitments of her predecessor, John Hargraves, when addressing the Legislative Assembly on the growth of community housing in the ACT:

- That community housing growth should not occur through the loss of overall stock numbers in public housing;
- Public housing must still be viable; and
- There should be no reduction in the capacity overall to house priority clients into the future.<sup>51</sup>

51 J Burch MLA, 'The Different approaches to Public and Community Housing in all Jurisdictions', address to the ACT Legislative Assembly, 16 November 2010.

**Recommendations**

- Continue to resource the growth of community housing, working with smaller providers to allow a range of options in market provision.
- Support the expansion of the provision of community housing on a percentage of income basis rather than as a percentage of market rent.
- Continue to resource the development of the Common Ground project following the outcomes of the feasibility study.

## Social Impacts of Climate Change

Climate change is a pressing issue internationally, nationally and at the territory level. Although it is difficult to precisely predict what the impacts of climate change may be, it has been estimated that by 2030 Australia will face a further 1 degree Celsius rise in temperature, up to 20 percent more drought and up to a 25 percent increase in days of very high or extreme fire danger.<sup>52</sup> Mitigating the dangerous impacts of climate change require coordinated policies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, stemming from energy consumption, which are currently being released into the atmosphere.

Reducing energy consumption may not always be a straightforward process in the ACT. The ACT is a unique jurisdiction which experiences very cold winters and hot summers, thereby mandating the need for both heating and cooling. In summer, mean daily temperature is 27.7 degrees Celsius, although temperatures in the 40 degree range are often recorded.<sup>53</sup> In winter, the mean temperature for July is 11.2 degrees Celsius while the mean daily minimum is -0.2 degrees Celsius.<sup>54</sup> In 2011 autumn, temperatures plummeted to below -6.9 degrees Celsius.

While reducing emissions may generally involve pricing carbon or increasing the price of energy to deter the levels of consumption, such measures should not increase hardship for peoples already struggling to make ends meet.

## Housing and Appliances

ACTCOSS has previously and consistently raised the need to rectify energy inefficient and inadequate housing stock, as an important means to reduce energy consumption. It should be acknowledged there have been some efforts to improve energy efficiency in public housing. The 2011-12 ACT Budget allocated \$8 million over 4 years to expand energy efficiency programs in public housing and \$4.4 million for improving energy efficiency in low income households. The latter provides household energy assessments and contributes to the installation of energy efficiency appliances. However, while these initiatives were welcomed:

Participation in this program amongst private renters is currently very low and will need to be increased. At present, tenants are deterred from engaging in the program as they need approval to change fixtures within the property from the owner. There is real risk landlords will increase rent on the property once the appliance or fixture is improved.<sup>55</sup>

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52 Australian Bureau of Meteorology, *Climate of Canberra Area*, viewed 5 December 2011, <<http://www.bom.gov.au/nsw/canberra/climate.shtml>>.

53 *ibid.*

54 *ibid.*

55 ACTCOSS, *ACT 2011-12 Budget Snapshot*, 2011, p. 10.



The current programs need to be expanded to enable the retrofitting programs to assist a greater number of people experiencing hardship. In addition there is ongoing need for public housing stock to be retrofitted with adequate heating systems. Currently, many public houses have heaters which are situated in inappropriate areas (such as a hallway), or do not work properly or efficiently. This leads to inefficient heating, with a negative impact on health, energy consumption and costs. The current energy efficiency programs must include the opportunity to retrofit, to ensure every public housing property has adequate heating.

### Recommendations

- Ensure every ACT public housing property has access to retrofitting for heating systems as required.
- Expand current programs on energy retrofitting to actively engage private tenancies.

## Concessions

Adequate concessions for people on low incomes and experiencing disadvantage are a useful tool in enabling vulnerable groups adjust to price increases in energy and electricity. In the 2011-12 Budget, \$12.3 million over 4 years was provided to increase concessions.

The rate at which concessions are set should occur by way of progressive adjustment and keep pace over time. Concessions need to be appropriately targeted and indexed against real energy price rather than the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Concessions can be extended to include the costs associated with water and sewage. Currently, there are no targeted energy concession schemes in place for people in the private rental market. Furthermore, current concessions for sewage extend only to pensioners, where they continue to pay 75 percent of the supply fee.

The ACT Government has established a panel to develop a Targeted Assistance Strategy.

The Government is continuing work to ensure a range of measures are available to support low income and vulnerable households experiencing financial hardship. This includes efforts to develop and expand the ACT Government Concessions Program, which assists with access to essential services or items, and provides support in areas such as energy, water and sewerage.<sup>56</sup>

It is hoped the outcomes of the strategy will be implemented in the 2012-13 Budget, providing positive outcomes both environmentally and socially.

<sup>56</sup> ACT Government, *Targeted Assistance Strategy - background paper*, 2012, <<http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/policystrategic/targetedassistance>>.

## Hardship Programs

The ActewAGL Hardship Program 'Staying Connected' has assisted people experiencing financial hardship manage energy and electricity bills. The scheme is available to residential customers experiencing temporary or long term financial difficulties. Under the scheme, consumers are able to establish a personalised payment plan. While consumers are actively participating in the program, disconnections cannot occur. ActewAGL also undertakes to ensure concessions customers may be eligible for are accessed and connections are made with community organisations who may be able to assist with other impacting issues.<sup>57</sup>

Since the introduction of 'Staying Connected', there have been fewer referrals to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT). The ACAT Annual Report 2010-11 states:

As foreshadowed in the 2009-2010 Annual Report, the commencement of ACTEW'S in-house hardship program for electricity and water customers in August 2010 contributed to a significant decrease in new applications.<sup>58</sup>

According to the report, there were 59 percent fewer electricity applications and 55 percent fewer water applications from ActewAGL customers compared to the previous year. Reconnection orders also decreased by 65 percent in the same period.<sup>59</sup>

The workload for both tribunal members and registry staff benefitted from the reduced number of new applications. Hearing lists were reduced from an average of 2.4 per week to an average of 2 per week.<sup>60</sup>

It is clear such programs can have a positive impact for those struggling to meet a range of financial pressures. The link through ACAT to community support services needs to be maintained so individuals and families can access ongoing and long-term support.

## National Energy Market Reforms

The National Electricity Market (NEM) was established in 1998<sup>61</sup> and is a wholesale market for the supply of electricity. The stated aims of the NEM are:

to drive efficient energy markets through:

- increased information transparency;
- facilitation of competition;

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57 ActewAGL, 'Staying connected – help with energy and water bills', <<http://www.actewagl.com.au/Help-and-advice/Your-account/Financial-hardship.aspx>>.

58 ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal, *Annual Report (annex to Justice and Community Safety Directorate) 2010-11*, 2011, p. 267.

59 *ibid.*

60 *ibid.*

61 National Energy Market, viewed February 2012, <[http://www.ret.gov.au/energy/energy\\_markets/electricity\\_market\\_development/Pages/ElectricityMarketDevelopment.aspx](http://www.ret.gov.au/energy/energy_markets/electricity_market_development/Pages/ElectricityMarketDevelopment.aspx)>.

- better price signals to encourage efficient supply side investment;
- better demand side market participation;
- putting in place an appropriate regulatory access framework;
- strong governance arrangements.<sup>62</sup>

To date, there has been very little participation from the ACT in the conversations regarding the national energy market, especially by and on behalf of consumers. The Australian Energy Regulator does not yet have any functions in relation to energy retailing in the ACT, but expects to assume such by 2013.<sup>63</sup>

There is especially a need for a policy and consumer representative for energy, to engage with debates and rollout of NEM in the ACT. Such an energy and consumer representative could be supported to advocate on the needs of the ACT, ensuring robust and considered implementation of the NEM reforms. A funded position within the ACT, which will work on energy poverty and represent the needs of this jurisdiction on the national scale will ensure energy policies will not further detriment people experiencing disadvantage while trying to adjust to the impacts of climate change.

#### **Recommendation**

- Resource a community position to undertake engagement and research on issues of energy poverty and the NEM implementation.

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62 *ibid.*

63 Australian Energy Regulator, viewed February 2012, <<http://www.aer.gov.au/content/index.phtml/itemId/738405>>.

## Justice and Corrections

ACTCOSS believes an early intervention model should be the focus of justice and corrections policy, as a result of an awareness of the socio-economic factors which bring people into contact with the justice system and the ineffectiveness of prison terms in preventing recidivism.<sup>64</sup> Where there is contact with the justice system, diversionary programs should be employed, and custodial sentencing should be used as a last resort.

When incarceration is unavoidable, there is a need for a holistic approach to the treatment of people whilst they are in gaol, and the focus should be on the welfare, wellbeing and rehabilitation of detainees. In particular there should be a targeted effort at ensuring appropriate programs and services are available for every person incarcerated, regardless of background or circumstance.

Research from the Australian Bureau of Statistics shows some disturbing trends beginning to emerge in relation to Australia's prison population. As at 30 June 2011, there were 29 106 prisoners (sentenced and on remand) in Australian prisons.<sup>65</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples made up 26 percent of this total.<sup>66</sup> The age standardised imprisonment rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners was 1868 per 100 000 adult Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, with the equivalent rate for non-Indigenous prisoners at 130 per 100 000. These statistics show a rate of imprisonment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners at 14 times higher than the rate for non-Indigenous prisoners, with no change from the rate in 2010<sup>67</sup> - a concerning imbalance.

In the ACT as of September 2011 there were 235 people incarcerated in the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). Overall, the ACT's imprisonment rate is 84 per 100 000 adult population.<sup>68</sup> Between 2010 and 2011, the prisoner population increased in the ACT by 8 percent.<sup>69</sup> In 2011, 71.5 percent of all prisoners in the AMC had known prior imprisonments compared to the national average of 54.6 percent.<sup>70</sup> Most worryingly, the highest proportion nationally of female prisoners with a prior imprisonment was in the Australian Capital Territory, with 72 percent.<sup>71</sup>

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64 ACTCOSS, *The Fairness Challenge: ACTCOSS Election Statement - ACT Legislative Assembly Election 2008*, 2008, p. 341.

65 ABS, *Prisoners in Australia*, 4517.0, 2011, p. 8.

66 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 Islanders to self identify.

67 ABS, *Prisoners in Australia*, 4517.0, 2011, p. 50.

68 ABS, *Corrective Services*, 4512.0, September 2011, p. 4.

69 ABS, *Prisoners in Australia*, 4517.0, 2011, p. 27.

70 *ibid.*, p. 37.

71 *ibid.*, p. 42.

## ‘Before’ – Early Intervention and Justice Reinvestment

There is strong international evidence to show early intervention models are a more cost-effective strategy for society in reducing crime and lowering recidivism rates.<sup>72</sup> Early intervention is the system, services and support available to individuals which aim to prevent them from having contact with the criminal justice system, and if they do, diverting them away from custodial sentencing into alternative programs unless absolutely necessary.

One early intervention model which has garnered a lot of attention in the last few years in Australia is the concept of Justice Reinvestment (JR). This is:

a localised criminal justice policy approach that diverts a portion of the funds for imprisonment to local communities where there is a high concentration of offenders. The money that would have been spent on imprisonment is reinvested in programs and services in communities where these issues are most acute in order to address the underlying causes of crime in those communities.<sup>73</sup>

The concept of JR grew as a public policy response to the prison population expansion in the United States from the 1990s, and has been adopted in the UK with much success.<sup>74</sup> The principles behind JR relate to a shift in attitude towards thinking more broadly and holistically about what leads to crime and how communities can prevent it. It is also based on the economic premise that it is far more cost-effective to the government and community to keep people out of prison, with the average daily cost of an ACT prisoner in 2010-11 estimated at over \$300 (or over \$100 000 per prisoner per year).<sup>75</sup>

It is important to note the JR approach does not seek to close down all prisons, as there is still a need for some people to be incarcerated (for dangerous and serious offenders) nor does it condone a lack of access to services by detainees when incarcerated. What JR does advocate is a focus on preventing people from entering the criminal justice system.<sup>76</sup> It seeks to address the socio-economic factors which often are the reason for people entering the criminal justice system. These factors include, but are not limited to, unemployment, alcohol and other drug abuse, homelessness, poverty, and mental health issues.

In a JR approach, funding is diverted from the systems which deal with the consequences of crime, namely prisons, and is reinvested into organisations and services which support people considered ‘at risk’ of entering the criminal justice system based on one or more of those factors. Such services are varied and include support in matters including health, legal, employment, education, mental health and alcohol and other drugs. These services

72 Australian Human Rights Commission, *Social Justice Report 2009*, Chapter 2, viewed 12 December 2011, <<http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social%5Fjustice/sj%5Freport/sjreport09/index.html>>.

73 *ibid.*

74 *ibid.*

75 ACT Government, *Seeing it Through: Options for improving offender outcomes in the community*, December 2011.

76 *ibid.*

would need to be delivered in an integrated way, to meet the often complex needs of people at risk of contact with the justice system

An example of the JR approach would be to first note the higher incidence of mental health problems in the Australian prison population than in the general population, with the ACT recording a particular high incidence, with 67 percent of entrants reporting a history of mental health issues.<sup>77</sup> Understanding this correlation between mental health and incarceration, a JR approach would be to resource services and programs which support people experiencing mental illness, with the aim of preventing them entering the criminal justice system. This could include investing in services such as mental health assessments for new parents or programs for young people who have been diagnosed with depression.<sup>78</sup>

JR requires a whole-of-government and whole-of-community approach if it is to be successful. The development of the Blueprint for Youth Justice in the ACT (the Blueprint), which is being developed with the long term aim of reducing the number of young people who come into contact with the youth justice system, is a current example of a joint government-community sector approach to the issue.<sup>79</sup>

Both government agencies and community organisations need resourcing, and to work in collaboration, in order to provide services which focus on addressing the causes of criminal behaviour, and reducing the number of people entering the criminal justice system. ACTCOSS recommends the government keep this in mind when exploring the JR approach. A trial could review the cost effectiveness of such an approach and provide recommendations for implementation of JR broadly.

#### **Recommendation**

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

## **‘During’ – Access for All to Programs and Services**

Consultations with groups interested in the welfare of prisoners indicate there is still a need for appropriate access to services and programs by prisoners who are incarcerated in the AMC.

77 AIHW, *The health of Australia's prisoners 2010*, Cat. no. PHE 149, 2011.

78 For more on justice reinvestment see ACT Human Rights Commission, *The ACT Youth Justice System 2011: A Report to the ACT Legislative Assembly by the ACT Human Rights Commission*, July 2011, p. 196.

79 For more information visit <[http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/youth\\_justice\\_implementation\\_taskforce#blueprint](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/ocyfs/youth_justice_implementation_taskforce#blueprint)>.

Services and programs must be made available in the AMC which are appropriate for traditionally 'marginalised' groups including women, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, people with disabilities, people experiencing issues with alcohol or other drugs, and mental health consumers.

Of particular concern are the reports of women being unable to access programs and services, as the number of women in the AMC is considered too small for such services. Similarly, it is concerning people on remand are denied access to services while awaiting trial. Access to services is a fundamental human right and can have a positive impact on a person's Social Determinants of Health.<sup>80</sup> This needs to be adhered to if the AMC is to truly be considered a human-rights gaol.

Research has found a relationship between level of education, repeat imprisonment and criminal activity.<sup>81</sup> In particular, there needs to be a provision of appropriate and meaningful education programs for all detainees, with a strong focus on supporting people's literacy and numeracy skills. Programs also need to be developed so education programs which detainees have begun whilst incarcerated, continue once they are released into the community.

## Needle and Syringe Program

ACTCOSS is supportive of a Needle and Syringe Program (NSP) being introduced into the AMC as part of the government's commitment to ensuring prisoners have access to the same health care services as they would in the community.

More than half of Australia's prison entrants have a history of injecting drug use and many of these prisoners will continue to inject in prison.<sup>82</sup> NSPs in the general community (Australia-wide) have directly prevented almost 97 000 new hepatitis C virus infections between the years 2000 and 2009.<sup>83</sup> NSPs in the ACT have been cost-effective at preventing the spread of blood-borne viruses, including hepatitis C.<sup>84</sup> However, while there is not safe injecting equipment in prison, there is a risk of the spread of viruses from the gaol into the community when people are released. An NSP in the AMC would not only protect people who are incarcerated, but also the wider community, from the transmission of blood-borne viruses.<sup>85</sup>

80 ACTCOSS, *Comment on The Policy Review of the Community Facility Zone Development Code and Table*, 2009.

81 AIHW, *The health of Australia's prisoners* 2009, AIHW cat. no. PHE 123, 2010.

82 *ibid.*

83 *ibid.*

84 National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research, *Return on investment 2: evaluating the cost-effectiveness of needle and syringe programs in Australia*, 2009.

85 Information from the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Association (ATODA) website, viewed 5 December 2011, <<http://www.atoda.org.au/policy/nsp/>>.

**Recommendation**

- Ensure prisoners have access to appropriate services and programs identified through a thorough assessment of their circumstances upon incarceration.

## 'After' – Throughcare

There is increasing recognition community safety can be enhanced by successfully reintegrating ex-prisoners into mainstream community.<sup>86</sup> Failure to invest in throughcare and post release programs can put at risk the rehabilitation outcomes of prisoners and can also contribute to higher recidivism rates.<sup>87</sup>

Throughcare is the 'coordinated, integrated and collaborative approach to reducing the risks of re-offending'<sup>88</sup> through the provision of treatment, support and services to prisoners during their incarceration and after their release.<sup>89</sup> The key principle underlying the concept of throughcare is a continuity of care, and is based on a person-centred approach.

To put this concept into action, individual prisoners should be connected with organisations and agencies whilst in prison, so those relationships are built and their knowledge base of services in the community cemented, before prisoners are released. ACTCOSS stresses the importance of the term 'throughcare' being applied to the whole process prisoners undergo, including pre-release, transition back into the community, and support as required, even if this is after their designated parole period finishes.

Some prisoners with additional needs may require extra support after finishing a prison-based treatment program, which also comes under the throughcare category. This could include people experiencing mental health issues, consumers of illicit drugs, or people with chronic health problems. Throughcare is not limited to clinical treatment only but includes providing access to a wide range of services which can support individuals.

ACTCOSS welcomes the recently released paper *Seeing it Through: Options for improving offender outcomes in the community*.<sup>90</sup> This paper outlines the Government's commitment to the extension of a throughcare policy framework, recognising the difficulties

86 Australian Institute of Criminology, *Interventions for Prisoners: Returning to the Community*, prepared for the Community Safety and Justice Branch of the Australian Government Attorney General's Department, 2005.

87 ACTCOSS, *Submission to the Inquiry into the High Levels of Involvement of Indigenous Juveniles and Young Adults in the Criminal Justice System*, 2010.

88 NSW Department of Corrective Services, viewed 20 November 2011, <<http://www.correctiveservices.nsw.gov.au/about-us/publications/throughcare>>.

89 M Borzycki & E Baldry, 'Promoting integration: the provision of prisoner post-release services', *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, no. 262, 2003.

90 ACT Government, Chief Minister and Cabinet, *Extending Throughcare for Offenders*, 2011, <<http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/policystrategic/throughcare>>.



individuals face when integrating into society post-release, and the need for continued support.

The involvement of the community sector is vital if prisoners are to receive effective throughcare services post-release, and ACTCOSS commends the government's commitment to consult with key community stakeholders in early 2012 to discuss timeframes and the next steps needed to progress the policy framework.<sup>91</sup>

**Recommendation**

- In collaboration with the community sector, continue to develop and implement a throughcare policy framework, including funding, to ensure services are available and accessible.

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91 ACT Government, Chief Minister and Cabinet, *Extending Throughcare for Offenders*, 2011, <<http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/policystrategic/throughcare>>.

## Social Determinants of Health

The Social Determinants of Health (SDoH), as identified by the World Health Organisation, are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age.<sup>92</sup> These conditions 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 significant effect SDoH have on people's lives can be explored through the impact a person's birthplace and socio-economic status have on their health, and reveals the SDoH as the cause of many health inequities between, and within, countries. The SDoH approach recognises improved health depends on understanding health is socially determined, and acknowledging social, community based responses are important for improving people's health.

The SDoH advocacy approach should be one which not only focuses on policy and programs, but 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.

Currently health expenditure is nearly one third of the entire ACT Budget,<sup>93</sup> with a significant amount 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 and reduce pressure on the Budget overall. 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.

Contributors to the social determinants of health are multifaceted and inter-related. In many cases a person will be experiencing multiple disadvantages which contribute to poor overall health. Although statistics show the ACT as a place of high education retention rates (of close to 87 percent),<sup>94</sup> low unemployment rates (of less than 3.5 percent) and a higher average weekly income compared to the rest of Australia,<sup>95</sup> this is not the story for many Canberrans. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, refugees and new migrants, women, mental health consumers, people with disabilities and people experiencing intergenerational disadvantage.

Addressing unemployment can contribute to community wellbeing. Well designed, well targeted employment programs for disadvantaged jobseekers have substantial fiscal and social benefits. These extend well beyond reducing unemployment since long term

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92 World Health Organisation, viewed 14 December 2011, <[http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/en/](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/en/)>.

93 See ACT Government, *ACT Budget 2011-12*, Papers 2 and 3, 2011.

94 ABS, *Statistical Information on the ACT and Region*, viewed 7 October 2011, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/E148C4EFA043D699CA2577EE000C8884?opendocument>>.

95 ACT Government, *Quick Stats 2009-2010*, viewed 7 October 2011, <[http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/154501/canberra-quickstats-2009-10.pdf](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0016/154501/canberra-quickstats-2009-10.pdf)>.

unemployment has adverse social impacts, especially when it is concentrated within families and local communities.<sup>96</sup>

Many face combinations of employment, health and personal barriers to employment that require sustained, intensive and integrated delivery of employment, health and social support services. SDoH underpin significant disadvantage, and need to be addressed if employment programs are to be successful and employment is to support individuals gain economic independence.

## Transport

Transport is vital in allowing people to access services, employment and education, areas which impact significantly on the SDoH. A recent report explored the links between public transport and health and found long term unemployed people identified transport as one of the factors which prevented them from obtaining work.<sup>97</sup>

In 2009 the ACT had the second highest rate of passenger vehicle registrations, indicating a high need for a car when living in Canberra.<sup>98</sup> The ACT's jurisdictional and geographical challenges and problematic public transport can mean people who do not own a vehicle are prevented from accessing key local services or attending meetings and social activities such as jobs, healthcare, food shopping or leisure, which can then have a negative impact on their wellbeing.<sup>99</sup>

Recent cost pressures associated with petrol have also impacted on families and volunteers. Organisations who rely on volunteers to help facilitate community transport programs have expressed concern that the increasing costs of petrol are impacting on service delivery.

Problems with transport provision combined with the location of services, increasingly moving to less central locations, is a major source of social exclusion for people experiencing disadvantage, including people with disabilities and older people.

For transport systems to operate in a socially inclusive manner, they must consider the life circumstances of a range of people, including people experiencing disadvantage. Potential solutions include:

- an investment in community transport including community minibuses;
- an expansion of taxi subsidy schemes; and

96 ACOSS, *Towards more efficient and responsive employment services: submission to APESAA*, 2012.

97 B Christl, P Harris and M Wise, *A review of the Evidence of the Impact of Public Transport on Health in Australia*, University of New South Wales, Australia, viewed 12 November 2011, <[http://www.hiaconnect.edu.au/files/Impact\\_of\\_Public\\_Transport\\_on%20Health\\_in\\_Australia.pdf](http://www.hiaconnect.edu.au/files/Impact_of_Public_Transport_on%20Health_in_Australia.pdf)>.

98 ABS, *State and Territory Differences*, 1370.0, 2010, <<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>>.

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

- encouraging public transport services to run outside of peak times and to outer suburbs or lower density areas.

### Recommendations

- Review the current provision of community transport with the aim of expanding services, ensuring flexibility and meeting demand.
- Ensure community transport is included in reviews of the ACT transport system.

## Access to Services

Accessible and appropriate community facilities and services are inherent in addressing SDoH.<sup>100</sup> The World Health Organisation suggests one way a government might reduce health inequity is:

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.<sup>101</sup>

Access to services can increase social inclusion through providing opportunities for a person to engage with their community and to address health and other needs. The availability of efficient transport close to community facilities is linked to social inclusion, and poor transport provision or inaccessible location of services will reinforce social exclusion and poor physical, social and mental health.

The location of public amenities and social infrastructure also impacts on a person's ability to access employment, education, health care and broader social support.<sup>102</sup> While access to basic services such as medical centres and shops is important, it is just as important that people's cultural, spiritual and recreational needs are met as this increases a sense of belonging, connectedness and social enrichment. Local clubs, libraries, halls, schools, shops and community centres can provide a space for people to meet and pursue the activities which give them a sense of connectedness and wellbeing

Although traditionally people living in the ACT have had a high participation rate in sports and recreational activities (88.6 percent in 2008) and cultural events (89.8 percent in 2006),<sup>103</sup> there are still a number of people who miss out on access to these events and services. People experiencing disadvantage, in particular those with limited transport

100 ACTCOSS, *Comment on The Policy Review of the Community Facility Zone Development Code and Table*, 2009.

101 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.

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

103 ACT Government, *Quick Stats 2009-2010*, viewed 7 October 2011, < [http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/\\_\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0016/154501/canberra-quickstats-2009-10.pdf](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/___data/assets/pdf_file/0016/154501/canberra-quickstats-2009-10.pdf)>.

options such as older people or people with disabilities, are especially vulnerable to social exclusion and so it is vital they are given the opportunity to participate in community events.

Where people are unable to go to services, services should go to them. Outreach services play a vital role in ensuring adequate access for people with limited transport options or other barriers to access. Services such as mobile libraries or community health nurses can increase a person's social inclusion by providing an avenue for service access and community participation which suits their requirements and circumstances. ACTCOSS recommends the Government explore the idea of outreach services when discussing increasing opportunities of community participation.

### Recommendation

- Explore options, including outreach services, to ensure access to community services.

## Education

Education is crucial in SDoH and supporting an individual's social inclusion.<sup>104</sup> Educational outcomes impact on every aspect of life including further education options, employment prospects, social skills and self esteem.<sup>105</sup> The link between education and economic participation is strong, and research has shown the higher the education qualification, the higher the chance of continuous employment. In May 2010, Australia's national unemployment rate for people aged 25-54 years with a bachelor degree or graduate qualification stood at 3.2 percent as compared with an unemployment rate of 7.2 percent for people whose highest education attainment was Year 11 or below.<sup>106</sup>

With statistics such as these, it is obvious why education is imperative in promoting SDoH and why the UN Convention of Human Rights lists access to education as a basic human right.<sup>107</sup> Unfortunately whilst the ACT has historically exhibited higher than average apparent retention rates than other jurisdictions,<sup>108</sup> there are still groups of people within Canberra who do not obtain a proper education. This can occur for a number of reasons which are often a by-product of other areas of disadvantage, in particular lower socio-economic background. Research has revealed even within the same school, a student

104 ACTCOSS, *Comment on Tertiary Taskforce: Creating a connected ACT Tertiary Education Environment*, 2010, p. 3.

105 ACTCOSS, *Submission on the DHCS Discussion Paper: Maximising Potential: improving life transitions for young people in care*, 2010.

106 *ibid.*

107 UN, *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, <<http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>>.

108 ABS, *Statistical Information on the ACT and Region*, viewed 12 December 2011, <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/E148C4EFA043D699CA2577EE000C8884?opendocument>> .

who comes from a higher socio-economic group will achieve better results than a student from a lower socio-economic group.<sup>109</sup>

Mainstream education systems need to build in flexibility and support, allowing all young people the opportunity to participate in a range of learning environments to meet their individual needs.<sup>110</sup> Programs need to be inclusive and responsive to the needs of particular students, with the flexibility to ensure as many students as possible can participate and have the opportunity to achieve the educational outcomes of their peers. Alternative education programs need to be accessible for those students who are at risk of disengaging with mainstream classes, with such students supported at the appropriate time to access such classes, rather than being suspended or otherwise 'shunned' from the system.

Increasingly, education is being seen as a lifelong process, and not one which is solely confined to the formative years of a person's life.<sup>111</sup> ACTCOSS has previously highlighted the significant number of adults living in Canberra whose literacy skills are not sufficient to meet the needs of everyday life.<sup>112</sup> Close to 78 000 adults in the ACT have a literacy level of below 3, meaning they have trouble understanding what is written on a medicine bottle, or cannot read a bus timetable.<sup>113</sup> Likely impacts of poor literacy skills highlighted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics include low income, low social participation and inclusion, and poor health.<sup>114</sup> Whilst the focus has traditionally been on improving an adult's literacy for employment reasons, literacy skills are an important tool for individuals to overcome other areas of disadvantage and participate more fully in society. Programs such as the Adult Migrant English Program run at the Canberra Institute of Technology have been running successfully for a number of years, supporting adults improve their literacy skills. ACTCOSS recommends the government keep investing in such programs in order to address the discrepancy between the nearly 22 percent of adults who have low literacy levels and the rest of the adult population in Canberra.

### Recommendations

- Ensure proven alternative education programs are accessible for young people at risk of disengaging from school.
- Ensure adult literacy education programs are, at a minimum, maintained.

109 Erebus International, *Review on the Recent Literature on socio-Economic Status and Learning*, 2005, p. 2.

110 ACTCOSS, *Submission on the DET discussion paper: Improving ACT Public High Schools and Colleges*, 2010.

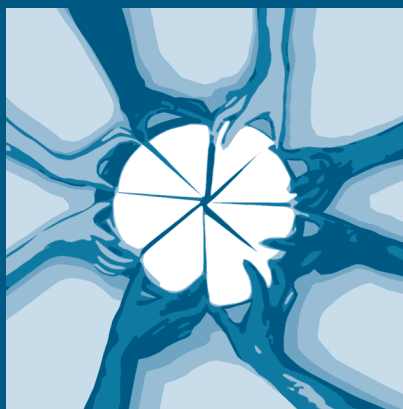
111 AIHW, *Australia's welfare 2011*, 2011.

112 ACTCOSS, *On the Same Page: Towards Partnerships for Adult Literacy in the ACT*, 2009.

113 *ibid.*

114 ABS, *ABS Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary results, Australia 2006*, 2008, cat. no. 4228.0.





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