



**Submission on**  
**The Draft ACT Planning Strategy**

**February 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' 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.

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## Acronyms

ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
AHURI	Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute
COTA ACT	Council on the Aging ACT
HACC	Home and Community Care
PWD	People with Disabilities ACT
SDoH	Social Determinants of Health
TasCOSS	Tasmanian Council of Social Service
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
WHO	World Health Organisation

## Introduction

ACTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the *Draft ACT Planning Strategy* (the Strategy) and acknowledges the contribution from community organisations including People With Disabilities ACT, Mental Health Community Coalition, Council on the Ageing ACT, and Advocacy for Inclusion in supporting the development of the ideas articulated in this submission.

The *Draft ACT Planning Strategy* builds on the *2004 Canberra Spatial Plan* (the Spatial Plan) which had the goals to:

- Create and maintain a healthy community;
- Sustain employment opportunities;
- Retain the ease of movement and facilitate good travel connections;
- Maintain a unique sense of place;
- Respect the natural environment; and
- Ensure fiscal responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

The Strategy also reflects on *The Canberra Plan – Towards our Second Century of 2008* (the Plan) which embraced the concept of social inclusion and aimed for Canberra to be recognised as:

an inclusive community that supports its most vulnerable people, enabling all to reach their potential.<sup>2</sup>

Retaining the philosophy and goals of the past Plans, the Strategy outlines the vision for Canberra as a city in the years to come and also responds to the changes in the ACT's economic, demographic and environmental circumstances which have occurred over the past seven years. The Strategy has been informed by consultations with the community through the *Sustainable future program* and *Time to Talk: Canberra 2030*.

ACTCOSS commends the Government on taking a broader approach to the further development of Canberra, and including planning in the context of a range of social issues. In particular, it is heartening to see the Government referring to the liveability of the city in regards to health, social inclusion and available community facilities.

Whilst the draft Strategy lays out nine key strategies and targets, and six key actions to achieve a revised direction, this submission will focus on those which ACTCOSS feels are imperative in addressing the Social Determinants of Health and social inclusion. These are:

- Strategy 1: Creating opportunities for increased density and dispersed employment by capitalising on the existing structure of the centres and inter-town transport corridors (transit ways).

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1 ACT Government, *The Canberra Spatial Plan*, 2004.

2 ACT Government, *The Canberra Plan*, 2008.

- Strategy 2: Renewing group and local centres as the hubs of community life and providing new opportunities for lifestyle choices.
- Strategy 3: Improving everyone's mobility and creating more choices in travel by integrating investment in Canberra's transport networks with the land uses it services.
- Strategy 4: Providing more affordable and sustainable living options by promoting more choice in housing location and types.
- Strategy 5: Building the capacity for everyone to participate in community life by improving the quality of the public realm, access to services and information.<sup>3</sup>

ACTCOSS will comment on the underlying principles which are intended to guide the planning, design and implementation of the strategies. This submission will also touch on the concept of the 'child-friendly city' as mentioned in the Strategy.

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<sup>3</sup> ACT Government, *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, 2011.

## Planning and the Social Determinants of Health<sup>4</sup>

The Social Determinants of Health (SDoH) are the conditions in which people are born, grow up, live, work and age which are in turn shaped by political, social, and economic factors.<sup>5</sup> The effect of the SDoH on people's health can be demonstrated by exploring how a person's birthplace impacts upon their health. Disparities between people's health can occur within countries, between states, towns, and even neighbourhoods. There are multiple aspects of the SDoH which can impact upon a person's well-being including areas such as housing, employment, transport and education.

In addressing the SDoH through policy, the key is to first understand inequities in health. The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines inequities as being:

avoidable inequalities in health between groups of people within countries and between countries. These inequities arise from inequalities within and between societies. Social and economic conditions and their effects on people's lives determine their risk of illness and the actions taken to prevent them becoming ill or treat illness when it occurs.<sup>6</sup>

Understanding the SDoH can assist decision makers to develop policies which are more socially just and which address these health inequities.<sup>7</sup>

Remembering the multi-faceted nature of the SDoH is particularly important when developing policies such as the Draft ACT Planning Strategy. For this reason, ACTCOSS recommends the ACT Government consider the SDoH in all aspects of its planning of Canberra.

### Recommendations

- The ACT Government considers Social Determinants of Health in the planning of Canberra.

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4 ACTCOSS, *Social Determinants of Health Fact Sheet*, 2009, viewed on 5 November 2011, [http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/factsheets/factsheet\\_sdoh.pdf](http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/factsheets/factsheet_sdoh.pdf)

5 World Health Organisation, *Social determinants of health: The solid facts*, 2nd edn., 2003.

6 World Health Organisation, *Social Determinants of Health: Key Concepts*, viewed on 10 November 2011, [http://www.who.int/social\\_determinants/thecommission/finalreport/key\\_concepts/en/index.html](http://www.who.int/social_determinants/thecommission/finalreport/key_concepts/en/index.html)

7 Ibid.

## Planning and Social Inclusion

Social inclusion is the term used to refer to people's access to the opportunities and resources which enable them to participate in and contribute to society. It involves people's engagement and social connectedness with other people; their ability to learn, work, access services and undertake leisure and cultural activities; and to have a voice in decisions which affect them in their community.<sup>8</sup>

It is difficult to examine the concept of social inclusion without looking at its antithesis - social exclusion. Social exclusion refers to constraints which prevent people from participating adequately in society, including accessing education, employment, public services and activities. Social exclusion is often linked to people experiencing disadvantage through poverty but it can also be related to people experiencing:

- Poor physical health;
- Mental health issues;
- Alcohol and other drugs misuse;
- Low levels of education;
- Discrimination due to race, culture, age, gender identification, sexual preference;
- Physical or intellectual disability;
- A lack of affordable, adequate or appropriate housing;
- Locational disadvantage (such as living in outer suburbs); and
- Transport disadvantage.

In their recent publication, *Social inclusion principles for spatial planning in Tasmania*, the Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS) states:

Many of the factors contributing to social exclusion can be addressed by better planning in relation to land use, transport and services infrastructure, and urban design.<sup>9</sup>

Social inclusion should be a priority of any policy-making and the Draft ACT Planning Strategy provides a good opportunity for some of the basic issues underpinning social exclusion to be addressed.

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<sup>8</sup> TasCOSS, *Social inclusion principles for spatial planning in Tasmania*, 2011, p.9.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



## Transport

ACTCOSS believes transport is one of the key issues in addressing the Social Determinants of Health. ACTCOSS commends the ACT Government for including transport in the Draft ACT Planning Strategy under strategies 1 and 3.<sup>10</sup>

Transport is inextricably linked to the Social Determinants of Health (SDoH). Cycling, walking and the use of public transport promote health through exercise, and reducing accidents and air pollution. More importantly however, transport is vital in allowing people to access employment and education, areas which have an impact on the SDoH. A recent report released by the Centre for Primary Health Care and Equity at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) explored the links between public transport and health and found long term unemployed people identified transport as one of the main factors which prevented them from obtaining work.<sup>11</sup>

ACTCOSS is aware the ACT Government recently released the draft policy *Transport for Canberra* which allowed the community to give feedback on proposed changes to the transport system in the ACT, in particular with regards to the establishment and extension of rapid corridors and the Frequent Network.<sup>12</sup> The paper also mentioned a review of the ACT Taxi Industry to address the need for a more responsive and flexible taxi service, and touched on community busses and taxis. The link between the Planning Strategy and *Transport for Canberra* needs to be better articulated, so the documents do not exist in isolation from each other.

ACTCOSS is concerned both the *Transport for Canberra* draft policy paper, and the *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, have only a brief mention of the transport needs of people experiencing disadvantage, in particular older people and people with disabilities. It is often these groups who are reliant on public transport and who are most affected by changes to the transport system. The focus on peak time travel should not be at the expense of services providing transport at other times.

Community organisations such as People With Disabilities ACT contend there is a need for further consultation by the Government with people with disabilities in order to find out what is needed to address the issue of transport disadvantage in the ACT for them. It is vital the voices and views of people with disabilities are incorporated into planning strategies for the ACT, as this is a key planning policy contributing to the achievement of a barrier free and universally accessible city.

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10 ACT Government, *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, 2011.

11 B Christl, P Harris and M Wise, *A review of the Evidence of the Impact of Public Transport on Health in 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)

12 ACT Government, *Draft Policy: Transport for Canberra*, 2011.

## Recommendation

- The ACT Government undertakes meaningful and targeted consultation with people with disabilities to develop a strategy to ensure effective and influential input into planning processes.

## Transport and Social Inclusion

ACTCOSS has done significant advocacy around the need to link social inclusion with sustainable and accessible transport. Problems with transport provision combined with the location of services can reinforce social exclusion. People who do not own a vehicle, live in outer suburbs, work irregular hours or are experiencing disadvantage in some way can be prevented by inadequate transport from accessing key local services or attending meetings and social activities such as jobs, learning, healthcare, food shopping or leisure.

*The Path less Travelled* notes the four main ways people can be excluded by transport from the activities they wish to undertake as

- Spatially- they cannot get there at all;
- Temporally- They cannot get there at the appropriate time;
- Financially- They cannot afford to get there;
- Personally- They lack the mental or physical capacities to use the available means of mobility.<sup>13</sup>

In a place such as Canberra which is geographically spread out, moving around the city can take time. If you own or have access to a vehicle, or live close to your workplace and shops this is not such a problem. Strategy 1 of the Draft ACT Planning Strategy seeks to address this issue through increasing urban densification and capitalising on inter-town transport corridors. Whilst this is one solution to the issue of transport in Canberra, the Government must keep in mind the people who will not be living or working in the increasingly densified parts of the city, and do not have cars as a means of transport. As not everyone will be able to live in those zones it is vital to plan for a transport system which does not exclude any from participating in society.

## Socially Inclusive Transport

The ACT Human Rights Act states ‘everyone has the right to move freely within the ACT’<sup>14</sup>. 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.

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<sup>13</sup> ACTCOSS, *The Path Less Travelled – Transport and Social Inclusion in the ACT*, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> *Human Rights Act 2004* s13.

Transport options for people experiencing disadvantage may need to be specifically targeted, servicing only a small number of people or in non-peak periods. Whilst this might not suit an economy-of-scale model, if the ACT is to be planned using a human rights framework then it is imperative that everyone has access to socially inclusive transport, regardless of how many need it. Current planning for the rapid and increased transport routes do not adequately service The Canberra Hospital as a major campus for health care services. Demand-responsive transport can allow transport providers to use resources more effectively by introducing flexible routes where demand is more dispersed or outside of peak times.

Another solution could be for the ACT Government to invest further in alternative methods of public transport, such as community busses. Currently each of the six main regional community service providers<sup>15</sup> have a 22-seater community bus which provides much needed support to people who are socially isolated because of a lack of transport options, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who lack support networks; parents with young children; and people experiencing health problems who cannot access other bus services.<sup>16</sup> Other organisations also provide community transport to people who are unable to access public transport for different reasons, often through the use of volunteers who can drive people to medical appointments or social activities.

Community transport is sorely needed, as evidenced by the high usage of the Community Transport programs. As one example, in the financial year 2010-11, Belconnen Community Services (BCS) coordinated 327,000 kilometres of Community Transport supported by a team of 10 staff, 4 BCS-owned vehicles and a team of volunteers who donated 7,300 hours to the program. BCS estimates an average of 339 people per month are able to remain independent in their own homes through the transport program.<sup>17</sup>

It is important to note whilst the community buses provide a much needed transport option, some service providers find the buses inappropriate for the types of transport their clients need and have noted that several smaller vehicles would be more effective and efficient. ACTCOSS recommends the Government work closely with community organisations to ascertain what type of transport would best suit their needs in order to provide the most appropriate and effective transport to their clients as possible.

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15 Belconnen Community Service; Communities@Work; Gungahlin Regional Community Services; Northside Community Service; Southside Community Service; and Woden Community Service.

16 ACT Government, *Canberra Quick Stats: 2009-2010, Australian Capital Territory*, 2010, viewed 2 December 2011, [http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/28710/Community\\_Bus\\_Brochure\\_26\\_June\\_08.pdf](http://www.dhcs.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/28710/Community_Bus_Brochure_26_June_08.pdf)

17 Belconnen Community Services, Annual Report 2010-2011, viewed 20 January 2012, <http://bcsact.com.au/annualreport2011/#>

### **Recommendations**

- Demand-responsive transport is introduced with flexible routes and public transport available outside of peak times.
- The ACT Government invests further in alternatives to public transport, including community buses and vehicles.
- The ACT Government consult with community service providers on appropriate transport options to meet regional needs.

## Social Inclusion, Community Facilities and Access to Services

ACTCOSS believes accessible and appropriate community facilities and services are inherent in addressing the Social Determinants of Health, in particular the issue of social inclusion. Renewing local centres as the hubs of community life allows people to focus within their community, and also addresses the problem of transport disadvantage. It is commendable of the ACT Government to have included this as a part of the Strategy.

### Community facilities

Strategy 2 of the Draft ACT Planning Strategy focuses on the renewal of group and local centres as the hubs of community life, and providing new opportunities for lifestyle choices.

The location of public amenities and social infrastructure can have an impact on a person's ability to access employment, education, health care and broader social support. People experiencing disadvantage, in particular those with limited transport options such as older people or people with disabilities, are especially vulnerable to social exclusion. Local centres are valuable in providing opportunities for people to engage with their community without having to travel very far. Clubs, libraries, halls, schools and shops can provide a space for people to meet, chat and pursue the activities which give them a sense of connectedness and well-being.

ACTCOSS commends the ACT Government on their commitment to build on and improve the quality, amenity and variety of public spaces in the neighbourhoods of Canberra. However, when discussing the implementation of the strategy, it is of concern to ACTCOSS that one of the actions includes

Working with industry and the community sector to include social services and community facilities to **relocate** into new residential and mixed use developments. [emphasis added]<sup>18</sup>

The provision and access of services and facilities are essential in new areas and neighbourhoods, however there is still a need to grow and build on existing services, and not just move or relocate services to meet the needs of a growing population. This is of particular importance for people experiencing disadvantage who may not have the option of moving to the new areas proposed in the plan, and rely on existing services in their neighbourhood to provide support. ACTCOSS believe it is good practice to strengthen services and facilities which have been proven to work for people, and recommends community services and facilities are expanded, not relocated.

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<sup>18</sup> ACT Government, *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, 2011, p.38.

## Recommendations

- Existing services and facilities are not relocated but are expanded and built on.
- Community facilities are kept at the forefront of all planning

## Access to services

It is a fundamental human right to access basic services including health care, food, and places in which to undertake cultural and leisure activities.<sup>19</sup>

Adequate access to services can have a positive impact on a person's Social Determinants of Health,<sup>20</sup> with the World Health Organisation suggesting 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>21</sup>

Access to services can increase also social inclusion through providing opportunities for a person to engage with their community. For example, a parent or carer at home with a new baby who has access to a parenting group might feel more socially included and supported through being able participate and talk to other new parents.

Conversely, a lack of access to services can have a negative impact on a person's well-being. As mentioned in the 'transport' section above, the availability of efficient transport close to community facilities is linked to social inclusion, and problems with transport provision and the location of services can reinforce social exclusion. As an example, a person with limited mobility who cannot drive and lives in an outer suburb may find it difficult to access transport to go for regular checks at a medical clinic, and so their health suffers; they may also be unable to go to a particular art class they enjoy and hence their social well-being and feeling of connectedness is also affected.

There is a strong need for appropriate services and facilities in accessible locations to meet the needs of people living in the ACT. However, there are times where certain services or facilities may not be able to be provided in some locations and notes in cases such as this, outreach services can play a vital role

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19 See the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights: Article 25 (1) Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control; and Article 27 (1) Everyone has the right freely to participate in the cultural life of the community, to enjoy the arts and to share in scientific advancement and its benefits. Viewed on 30 January 2012, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>.

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

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

in ensuring adequate access to services for people who may otherwise miss out.

ACTCOSS supports a facilitated outreach service model, where organisations can extend their services to people through other services. One example of one such outreach service model is Street Law.<sup>22</sup> Street Law is an organisation which provides legal advice and referral services to people who are experiencing homelessness, or who are at risk of homelessness. It operates on a facilitated outreach service model with lawyers going to places where people experiencing disadvantage are already accessing services, such as women's refuges and family health centres. Street Law refers clients to other legal services where appropriate, acting as an outreach arm for all the free legal services in the ACT. Street Law has assisted clients to get debts waived, licenses restored and criminal charges dropped. Some of these legal interventions have prevented an at-risk person or family from becoming homeless. Others have removed a barrier to seeking housing, and have played a part in getting sustainable housing for a person who was long-term homeless. In most of these cases, the people Street Law has helped would not have approached a legal centre of their own volition, sometimes due to inaccessibility of such places. Because of the outreach service model nature of Street Law, they have been able to reach people through services and facilities they were already utilising.

In addition to outreach services such as Street Law, services such as mobile libraries or community health nurses can increase a person's social inclusion by bringing the services they need to them and allows them to participate in society in a way which suits their requirements and circumstances. ACTCOSS recommends the Government explore the idea of outreach services when discussing increasing opportunities of community participation.

A key feature of the Strategy is access to community facilities by older people and children. This is an important area in which to focus and ACTCOSS is happy to see it included as part of the Strategy. However consideration must also be given to people experiencing disadvantage in different ways. Community facilities and public spaces should be made accessible so people with disabilities can access them, and public transport should be developed so it provides access to public spaces.

Another issue is the idea of providing information on social and community services through the use of the internet and social media to encourage more people to participate in community events and activities. While this is a good strategy, the Government needs to keep in mind those people who do not have adequate access to the internet or a computer, and ensure other ways of communicating information are provided, such as information pamphlets, newsletters, and television and radio advertisements.<sup>23</sup>

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22 For more information visit <http://www.streetlaw.org.au/>

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

## **Recommendations**

- Existing services and facilities are not relocated or moved to new areas, but are kept in place where there is still need, and strengthened and built on.
- Outreach services are provided for people who are otherwise unable to access services and community activities.
- Consideration is given to all people experiencing disadvantage in regards to the access of community facilities and public spaces.
- Information is readily accessible through means other than the internet or social media for people who do not have access to a computer or the internet.



## Urban Densification

Increasing density in urban areas is a sound policy, and one which seeks to address the dual issues of transport disadvantage and access to services. Building on areas where there are already a number of people living and creating more employment opportunities by supporting local area businesses will allow more people to work close to where they live, reducing carbon pollution from cars and encouraging people to be less car-dependant – all things which can have a positive impact on the Social Determinants of Health. In addition, areas of increased density may lead to increased opportunities for people to socialise and connect with their community through attending community events and accessing facilities and services.

However intensification only in the urban areas identified in the Strategy may lead to the neglect of people who are already living in outer suburbs. Not everyone will be able to relocate to the zones identified, and it is vital the Government keep this in mind when considering services, community facilities and transport. Generally speaking, areas which have not been identified for urban densification are the suburbs which can be affordable for many people with low incomes. ACTCOSS is concerned without proper processes, urban densification may lead to ‘ghettos’ of disadvantage forming in the outer suburbs whilst those people living in the ‘zones’ have access to increased services and renewed public realms.

Urban densification can also lead to problems with parking. Already, the city centre in Canberra is considered expensive to park in with some places costing upwards of \$12 per day. The Government’s plan of urban densification in the city will increase the number of people and businesses located centrally. People who live and work in the city are able to walk between places, however consideration must be given to people who will still need to drive to the city and park there, even with improvements to public transport. ACTCOSS recommends the Government plan for more accessible parking for people experiencing disadvantage, in particular people with disabilities and older people, who may not be able to afford to live in the newly densified zones but still need to access services in the city.

### Recommendations

- Areas which have not been identified as ‘zones’ for urban densification still receive adequate funding and resourcing
- Plan for more accessible parking in areas identified for urban densification

## Affordable and Accessible Housing

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states everyone has the right to access adequate housing.<sup>24</sup> For the purpose of this submission, ACTCOSS has taken the term 'adequate' to include the dual criteria of affordability and accessibility.<sup>25</sup>

In a recent submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Social Housing Inquiry, it was noted there are significant jurisdictional issues in Canberra which have an impact on its housing system.<sup>26</sup> In particular, the high rental costs in the ACT combined with the lack of affordable properties for purchase can mean people with low to middle incomes are at a significant disadvantage when it comes to finding affordable housing options.<sup>27</sup>

The lack of affordable private rental means social housing is called upon to meet a need and is almost the only long-term housing option for low income people in the ACT. While increasing 'affordable housing' stock in Canberra is welcome, housing available at 75% of market rent is still more than 100% of the Commonwealth youth allowance, and is by any definition 'unaffordable' to anyone in receipt of a Centrelink benefit.

ACTCOSS has long argued central to any consideration of social equity should be the provision of low-cost housing in the ACT.<sup>28</sup> It is of concern to ACTCOSS the Strategy does not appear to go into much detail on the provision of public and community housing except to state it is important to 'improve the stock of social housing'.<sup>29</sup>

In a previous submission ACTCOSS highlighted the ACT has not yet recovered from the substantial cuts to public housing stocks in the last decade.<sup>30</sup> Even with the injection of social housing stock through the Nation Building project, the proportion of public housing remains below 10 per cent of housing stock in the ACT. ACTCOSS supports the Greens-Labor agreement that public housing be maintained at a rate of 10% of all housing stock, and all future housing developments (and redevelopments) have a mix of public, community, affordable and private housing.

Great concern has been expressed about the unsuitability of a significant portion of social housing stock. A significant proportion of the properties are ageing, requiring major maintenance. While endeavouring to keep prices of properties low so they are more affordable, ACTCOSS notes the need for

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<sup>24</sup> United Nations, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, Accessed 5 December 2011, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>

<sup>25</sup> UN Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing*, Fact Sheet 21, 2009, p.3

<sup>26</sup> ACTCOSS, *Submission on the Social Housing Inquiry*, 2011.

<sup>27</sup> ACT Ombudsman, *Housing ACT – Assessment of an Application for Priority Housing, Part 5 – Agency Response*, 2011, p.15

<sup>28</sup> ACTCOSS, *Submission to the ACT Planning and Land Authority's Planning System Reform Project*, 2005.

<sup>29</sup> ACT Government, *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, 2011, p.45.

<sup>30</sup> ACTCOSS, *Submission on the DHCS Discussion Paper: The Road Map, Chapter 1*, 2010, p.7.

affordable housing to include the long-term costs associated with maintaining a building, including climatic issues such as heating and cooling.

When developing or acquiring new stock it is preferable social housing properties be interspersed among general housing stock, so as to not create areas of concentrations of disadvantage. It is also important to ensure where possible that social housing properties are close to reliable and affordable public transport options.

### Recommendations

- Increase public housing stocks in the ACT and maintain them at a rate of at least 10% of all housing stock.
- Ensure affordable housing includes long-term costing plans.
- Ensure social housing properties are located near reliable and affordable public transport options.

## Ageing within Community

Australia's population is aging, and over the next 20 years the number of people aged 65 years and over is projected to rise by 90 per cent.<sup>31</sup> Canberra is no exception to this trend, with projections showing by 2030 there will be 56,100 people aged 70 years and over (as compared to 25,100 in 2010).<sup>32</sup>

In recent years there has been a trend developing among older Australians to continue to live in their own homes, as opposed aged care facilities, for as long as possible.<sup>33</sup> Whilst this trend is referred to in the Strategy as 'aging in place', ACTCOSS prefers to use the term 'aging within the community'. This is to reflect the idea that staying in the family home may not be appropriate for every older person, and they may wish to explore alternative living options such as apartments, townhouses or other accommodation, within their current community location.

With programs such as the Home and Community Care (HACC), there is some support available for older people who chose to not go into an aged care facility, and receive extra support while living at home. A study released in 2008 by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) demonstrated there are significant cost savings to governments in providing care to older Australians in their own homes rather than in residential care facilities. As well

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31 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. *Australia's welfare 2011*. Australia's welfare series no. 10. Cat. No. AUS 142.

32 ACT Government, *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, 2011.

33 ACTCOSS, *Submission to the ACT Affordable Housing Steering group on options for affordable housing for older Canberrans and to address homelessness*, 2008.

as being sound economic policy, it is good social policy to support older people staying as close to independent for as long as possible.<sup>34</sup>

Consultations with Council on the Ageing (COTA) ACT have brought to the surface the need for a shift in housing arrangements and accommodation to reflect this growing preference of older people to 'age within the community'. In particular, there is a need for options for older people to choose from which are flexible and responsive to their changing needs without forcing them into an aged care facility.

One of the Strategy's implementation actions includes the idea of

providing 'empty nesters' alternative financial incentives to downsize their home to provide an opportunity for people to buy a house in an existing suburban area at a more reasonable price.<sup>35</sup>

Whilst it is encouraging the Government is looking at different options to address the dual issues of housing shortages and 'ageing in the community' ACTCOSS is concerned such a plan as this may encourage older people to leave areas where they have natural support, to live in different areas which, whilst affordable, increases their risk of social isolation. Older people who have spent a large part of their life living in one location will have built up relationships with their community, and it may be disruptive or detrimental to their well-being should they lose their natural support at a later stage in life. In addition, suburbs which may be considered more affordable for an older person to move to may be lacking in basic services essential to their well-being, such as a doctor or accessible transport.

ACTCOSS would recommend such a plan be carefully implemented and with further consultation with groups such as COTA.

### **Recommendations**

- The ACT Government explore a variety of options for older people to 'age within the community'.

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34 C Bridge et al - AHURI, *The costs and benefits of using private housing as the 'home base' for care for older people: secondary data analysis*, Final Report No. 115, 2008.

35 ACT Government, *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, 2011, p.45.

## A Child-Friendly City

The Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) was begun in 1996 as a response to the resolution passed during the second UN Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) where it was declared

the well-being of children is the ultimate indicator of a healthy habitat, a democratic society and good governance.<sup>36</sup>

Child-friendly cities are those which are committed to fulfilling the rights of children as defined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and which ensure these rights are reflected in policies and programs. A fact sheet on child-friendly cities developed by UNICEF lists the rights of children as including the right to:

- Influence decisions about their city;
- Express their opinion on the city they want;
- Participate in family, community and social life;
- Receive basic services such as health care and education;
- Drink safe water and have access to proper sanitation;
- Be protected from exploitation, violence and abuse;
- Walk safely in the streets on their own;
- Meet friends and play;
- Have green spaces for plants and animals;
- Live in an unpolluted environment;
- Participate in cultural and social events; and
- Be an equal citizen of their city with access to every service, regardless of ethnic origin, religion, income, gender or disability.<sup>37</sup>

In a physical context, child-friendly cities provide children with opportunities to engage with and explore their environment. While this includes providing plenty of clean parks and playgrounds, it also has a deeper meaning. In his 2007 speech at the National Museum of Australia on child-friendly cities, Dr Paul Tranter notes

children should have the freedom to playfully and safely explore their environment in ever-increasing circles as they mature without the constant threats of traffic, danger or violence...children should have a sense of connection with their community and their neighbourhood: a sense that they're a valued and important part of their community; and a sense of attachment to the physical aspects of the environment – not only the trees, the rocks and the soil, but also people...If children can have that freedom

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36 United Nations, Accessed 2 December 2011, <http://www.unicef.org.au/Discover/What-We-Do/Child-Friendly-Cities.aspx>

37 UNICEF, *Child Friendly Cities promoted by UNICEF National Committees and Country Offices – Fact sheet*, September 2009. Downloaded from <http://www.childfriendlycities.org/en/overview/what-is-a-child-friendly-city>

and that sense of connection, it encourages their development, not just physical development but also social, cognitive and emotional. It gives them a sense of place.<sup>38</sup>

Canberra already contains some of the characteristics which define a child-friendly city: the multiple parks and reserves which are located in and around the ACT can provide clean, safe environments which allow children to play and learn; the ACT has strong policies and governance on the interests of children; and most children have access to basic services. The Draft ACT Planning Strategy mentions a commitment to the principles of a child-friendly city several times, including Principle 2 noting the need of 'planning and designing neighbourhoods so children can walk and cycle to school, shops and playgrounds'.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the recently released *A Picture of ACT's Children and Young People 2011* indicates the ACT Government is committed to building Canberra to be a safe place for children.<sup>40</sup>

There is room, however, for improvement if the ACT is truly going to be regarded as a child-friendly city. In particular, the ACT Government needs to address the right of children to participate in decision making about their city, including their right to express their opinion on the city they want. ACTCOSS believes the Draft ACT Planning Strategy provides a valuable avenue for the Government to really engage with the young people of Canberra and gives them an opportunity to have meaningful input into how they want their city planned.

### Recommendations

- The ACT Government undertake serious community consultation and engagement with children and youth about the design and plan of Canberra.

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38 Dr P. Tranter, Recorded 27 October 2007, accessed 25 November 2011, [http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/transcripts/NMA\\_tranter\\_20071027.html](http://www.nma.gov.au/audio/transcripts/NMA_tranter_20071027.html)

39 ACT Government, *Draft ACT Planning Strategy*, 2011, p.62.

40 ACT Government, *A Picture of ACT's Children and Young People*, 2011

## Conclusion

Urban densification has its positives, and it is commendable the ACT Government is looking at creative ways in which to address the 'sprawl' of Canberra. ACTCOSS, however, would like to see the areas which fall outside the 'zones' of densification still be on the Government's radar as not everyone will be able to move to the city. When looking at the transport system in the ACT, consideration must be given to people who are reliant on public transport and are affected by any changes made to it.

Access to housing is a human right, and ACTCOSS recommends the Government take serious measures to address the shortage of affordable and suitable housing in Canberra, to ensure everyone has a place to live. This includes increasing community housing stock for people experiencing disadvantage to access and ensuring such housing is close to suitable public transport options.

Good planning of a city has the potential to address the issues underlying social exclusion, and those which have an impact on the Social Determinants of Health – access to employment, services, education and community facilities; adequate transport; and affordable housing. It is for this reason ACTCOSS recommends the ACT Government keep in mind at all times during the planning, implementation and evaluation of the Strategy, the needs of people experiencing disadvantage.

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