



ACTCOSS Budget Priorities

March 2013

About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS acknowledges Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We pay respects to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations, people living with disadvantage and low-income citizens of the Territory.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

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

The membership of the Council includes the majority of community based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and interested individuals.

ACTCOSS 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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Introduction

ACTCOSS has provided this Budget Submission as part of our ongoing dialogue with the ACT Government about the challenges people and community organisations in Canberra face in overcoming disadvantage, reducing vulnerability and making best use of the opportunities we have to ensure everyone in Canberra can live with dignity.

The community sector is working hard to improve the sustainability of our efforts and impacts of our work. Organisations are improving their quality, effectiveness and administrative systems. Organisations join with community, business and philanthropic partners to bring non-government resources into social services. We also work with both government and non-government funders to reduce unnecessary administrative, reporting and compliance tasks that take our resources away from assisting our communities.

We recognise the 2013-14 Budget is being developed in the context of a constrained fiscal environment, and that these constrained circumstances are likely to continue over the forward estimates.

However, it is a false economy to reduce investment in the fundamental universal services on which we all rely. A continued investment in the building blocks of social and economic wellbeing - schools, primary care, family support and health and disability care - is essential. ACTCOSS supports the ACT Government prioritising adoption of the education reforms recommended by the Gonski Review and the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The community sector plays a significant role in building the economic and social health of our community, however the operating environment is changing for the community sector. Not only are we seeing significant reform of regulatory settings and requirements, but funding models are changing and eligibility for income support is tightening. It is impossible to anticipate exactly how these changes will impact on supply of services, affect workforce needs and change the experience of people who access services. In this context, it is critical to sustain resourcing to ACT peak bodies who can work with consumer groups, service providers and the Government to identify risks and respond to emerging needs. Peak bodies are uniquely placed to provide information - that government would otherwise be unable to access - about the positive and negative impacts of the changing environment on the strength and capability of the service systems which people in Canberra value and rely on.

The most cost effective way to address vulnerability and disadvantage in Canberra is to continue to invest in prevention and early intervention, both in the life of people and in the life of problems. The biggest long-term risk, from the community sector's perspective, to the fiscal health of the ACT government is a failure to reduce demand over time for the high cost, high complexity services that are needed to respond to crisis or to address multiple concurrent problems.

This submission lists the current investments from governments that need to continue. We have identified new investments which will address gaps both in prevention and early intervention, and in the provision of effective, timely and

sufficient services to people and communities who need care and support for higher and more complex needs. We have also suggested small investments in making better use of data to build a whole-of-government approach to deploying resources and measuring the impact of funding and policy changes in different sectors on demand and outcomes across all portfolios.

The Budget provides an opportunity for the ACT Government to commit to a long-term view of addressing the causes of disadvantage and exclusion in our community, and demonstrate this commitment by investing strategically to build Canberra's social and economic strength.

What services do you believe are most important for the Territory?

ACTCOSS believes the most important services for the ACT are those which reduce disadvantage and social exclusion. Of particular importance are services which complement mainstream services by ensuring people and families with high or complex needs get the most benefit from universal services through their access to appropriate additional support.

The past 12 months have seen significant changes in service provision and policy reforms at both a Territory and National level. People accessing services need assistance – via good information and advocacy services – to have their needs met. Service providers themselves need support in order to maintain their current levels of service provision and to evolve to meet increasing demand and complexity. Policy reforms are impacting significantly on operating environments. It is critical to invest in resources that assist both service providers and service users to operate effectively in the rapidly changing environment.

The ACTCOSS submission to the 2013-14 ACT Budget focuses on seven key priority areas:

Housing and homelessness Funding cuts at the National level, and uncertainty regarding the funding of Commonwealth/Territory housing agreements after 2014, will have an impact on the supply of services in the ACT. It will also have an impact on the capacity of services to continue to operate effectively. ACTCOSS continues to recommend the ACT Government increase support for vulnerable groups who may fall through gaps in service provision, including people with specialised needs (for example, for women through a gendered approach to service design and implementation).

Mental Health priorities include funding for education, training, advocacy and support for mental health consumers and carers, especially in preparation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

Increased investment in prevention and early intervention services in **Mental Health** and **Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs** sectors would benefit existing service users and contribute to reducing growth in waiting lists in the future.

The launch of the NDIS in the ACT is welcome, and prompt implementation of the NDIS in Canberra will reduce longer term unnecessary demand for disability support. People living with **Disability**, their carers and the services that work with them, require sufficient funding for education, advocacy, training and support, to ensure people are well prepared and able to exercise their rights in a more market based service system.

Community attitudes around **Justice and Corrections** are beginning to shift towards an understanding of the social factors that are often the underpinning cause of people's involvement with the criminal justice system. Continued support of the new Throughcare Program is vital. Sufficient commitment to and investment in getting Throughcare right will reduce duplication and gaps in justice and corrective services, support better community integration of ex-detainees, lower recidivism and lead to a safer community.

Services which align costs of living with incomes, and address causes of deprivation and exclusion continue to remain important for ACTCOSS. For the area of **Climate Change** it is particularly vital concession schemes are aligned with, and indexed against, energy and water prices (rather than CPI) to ensure they continue to provide an effective buffer for low income households. ACTCOSS also calls on the Government to align concessions so all health care card holders are able to access the current pensioner water and sewerage concession.

Community Sector Viability underpins the capacity of the ACT Government to understand and meet the needs of its citizens. Not for Profit (NFP), community managed services ensure community investment (either through philanthropic or tax funded programs) is focused on service provision. ACTCOSS supports continued strengthening and growth of NFP services' capacity to lead, facilitate and deliver the essential social services people in Canberra need and value.

What capital infrastructure priorities should the Government consider implementing in the next four years?

Infrastructure investment that improves access for everyone in Canberra to affordable housing, transport, health care and education will also contribute to improving the lives and opportunities of people in Canberra living with disadvantage. ACTCOSS supports investment in these areas of infrastructure development. We have listed below more targeted infrastructure needs identified as priorities by the community sector.

Housing & Homelessness

- Continue to resource the development and subsequent operation of the Common Ground project.
- Maintain public housing at a rate of 10 percent of all housing stock, and ensure all future housing developments (and redevelopments) have a mix

of public, community, affordable and private housing, as well as comply with universal design regulations.

Climate Change

- Expand the Public Housing Energy Efficiency Program and commit to continue it past the end date of 2015-16.

Justice & Corrections

- Commit to the construction of a Secure Mental Health Facility in the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

Should the Government maintain its current suite and level of services?

ACTCOSS supports the current investment by the ACT Government in services and strongly recommends this is not reduced. ACTCOSS also notes the need for more use of community sector agencies in delivering human services, greater flexibility in how programs are delivered to allow community organisations greater freedom in meeting the needs of vulnerable people. In addition, in the context of growing demand for community services, there is a need for heightened levels of social infrastructure in certain areas. These are outlined below.

ACTCOSS also supports ongoing adequate funding for bodies that lead and scrutinise social change and support improved outcomes for key population groups in Canberra, such as the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, the Human Rights Commission and peak bodies.

Housing & Homelessness

- Supplement Commonwealth Rent Assistance with ACT investment to assist Canberrans experiencing disadvantage to access private rental.
- Continue to invest in growth of community housing, working with providers to allow a range of options in market provision.

Mental Health

- Increase mental health growth funding.

Disability

- Fund appropriate respite for carers and families of people with disabilities.

- Expand after-school care programs and transport support through education funding.
- Ensure funding for aides to support students with disabilities in schools.

Climate Change

- Continue and expand the Outreach Program, including a focus on education about energy efficiency.
- Commit to funding organisations in the community sector to provide informed consumer input on energy and water issues at the National and Territory level.

Justice & Corrections

- Allocate recurrent funding for the Throughcare Pilot Program to ensure the Throughcare Program does not end prematurely and delivers the best possible outcomes for people exiting the justice system.

Community Sector Viability

- Contract administration reforms are welcome, however more whole of government analysis of expected reductions in costs of service delivery is needed, to assess progress and determine future priorities for reform.

How can the Government deliver current services more efficiently and productively?

The primary strategy for increasing the efficiency and productivity of services should be to take a whole of lifespan, whole of government approach to setting priorities, allocating resources, evaluating the impact of government and non-government investment and making changes over time.

In practical terms, this means working better across jurisdictions, portfolios and sectors to identify critical points of intervention, opportunities to maximise impact and identifying risks of changes in one sector or portfolio that will lead to increased demand or reduced effectiveness in another area of service provision.

Housing & Homelessness

- Monitor impact of funding changes on access to and quality of service provision.
- Advocate for changes to Commonwealth Rent Assistance to recognise locational disadvantage.

- Support the expansion of the provision of community housing on a percentage of income basis rather than as a percentage of market rent.

Mental Health & Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

- Increase capacity in the mental health sector.
- Support the ATODA proposal to develop a comprehensive model for outpatient services as per the ACT Government election commitment.

Disability

- Address barriers for vulnerable community members accessing public housing waiting lists, including people with disabilities.
- Fully fund demand for the ACT Equipment Scheme to improve everyday living for people with disabilities.

Climate Change

- Commit to a preliminary evaluation of the outcomes of the Outreach Program with a view to reinforcing success and directing additional resources to these measures which are working successfully.

Justice & Corrections

- Ensure female detainees are provided equal opportunity and access to services and programs while in the AMC.
- Continue peer support services (for example the Women And Prisons group) which play an important role in reducing recidivism and assisting with integrating people back into the community after their release from prison.

Community Sector Effectiveness

- Enable allocation of funds for community-designed programs that are not 'dictated to' by Government, including both direct service ideas and support for capacity and leadership development. This is especially important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Increase funding by 15 per cent to all ACT Government funded community sector contracts, as one measure to address current unmet demand for services. This measure would provide a cost saving over time as the highest cost services are often associated with crisis interventions that become necessary because support is not provided earlier on in the life of a problem.

Reduce duplication of administrative processes

- Streamline collection of data across all programs and sub-sectors (e.g. ATOD, MH, family dispute resolution, housing and homelessness programs). Many people do not just access one service, but they are required to provide the same information about themselves and their circumstances multiple times.
- Adopt a risk-based approach to setting compliance requirements, especially for small grants, to reduce administrative costs for both service providers and government.

Monitor quantitative impacts of Community Sector Reforms

- Monitor impacts of regulatory and reporting requirements implemented through the Australian Charities and Not for profit Commission (ACNC) on costs of service provision.
- Collate evidence of increased harmonisation of regulatory and reporting requirements across ACT and Commonwealth jurisdictions, including evidence of the impact of pre-qualification on reduced administrative load for both services and funding bodies.
- Analyse data from organisations about changes in community needs, trends, gaps, service demand, and unmet demand, and share aggregated data with the community sector. Findings from analysis of this data should be made available to both government and non-government stakeholders and should inform decisions about targeting both efficiency measures and future investment in services.

Other priorities

Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs

- Invest in consultation with the ATOD sector to identify priorities for ATOD measures post-2014.
- Consider long term funding solutions which will result in significant future savings, such as investment in tobacco cessation and reduction activities amongst people experiencing disadvantage in the ACT who continue to smoke.

Climate Change

- Legislate a set of minimum standards for private rental properties.
- Develop a water consumption concession scheme for private rental tenants.

- Implement a targeted communication strategy utilising a variety of mediums, to ensure individuals are aware of concessions, including eligibility and backdating.

Justice & Corrections

- Fund a scoping study to define Justice Reinvestment in the ACT context.
- Evaluate the Throughcare Pilot Program with particular focus on the experiences of female detainees/remandees and detainees of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

Community Sector Workforce Development

- Ensure all community organisations based in the ACT benefit from the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration Order.
- Better access for staff to professional development across the domains of direct practice, program management and business management, including to bachelor degree level.
- Recognise the community sector as a major employer in the ACT and support sector initiatives to recruit and retain both staff and volunteers.