



ACTCOSS Budget Priorities 2014-15

October 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 welcomes the opportunity to provide a Submission to the ACT Budget for 2014-15. This Submission has been informed by consultations with our members including other peak bodies.

We understand the ACT Government has said this Budget will focus on 'growing the economy, improving liveability and opportunity, better health and education outcomes, and urban renewal'. Our submission provides advice in three of these domains – improving opportunity, better health and better education outcomes.

As with any conversation we have with Government, this Budget Submission will draw attention to our constituents – that is people living with disadvantage, and the community sector organisations that support them.

The ACT enjoys one of the best standards of living in Australia. We have relatively good urban infrastructure, relatively high education attainment, relatively good health and relatively low unemployment. We also have a relatively high cost of living, driven by high average wealth and high average income. In this context most households are doing well, with their income rising faster than the costs of living, and benefiting from the growth in property prices.

Alongside this, the ACT has a much higher level of relative disadvantage than has previously been thought, as revealed in a report released by the Community Services Directorate in 2012. Using a new measure of relative socio-economic disadvantage (the Socio-Economic Indexes for Individuals or SEIFI), it was found that there were 28,639 disadvantaged people 'hidden' in the ACT due to our unique situation of having one of the highest proportions of diverse suburbs (where there are large numbers of both the most, and the least, disadvantaged citizens living next to each other).¹

The 2013 Anti Poverty Week Committee for the ACT commissioned research to better understand poverty and inequality in the ACT. This research found that:

In 2011, there were 21,528 people living in poverty; 9,910 households experiencing housing stress; 14,148 people experiencing financial stress; 1,785 experiencing homelessness; and 28,639 disadvantaged people according to the ABS SEIFI Index in the ACT. Many of these will be the same people, so there will be a number of people experiencing multiple disadvantage (for example, in poverty and homeless; or in poverty, in financial stress and in housing stress).²

1 ACT Government, *Detecting Disadvantage in the ACT: Report on the comparative analysis of the SEIFI and SEIFA indexes of relative socio-economic disadvantage in the Australian Capital Territory*, ACT, 2012.

2 Tanton, R, Vidyattama, Y and Mohanty, I, *Disadvantage in the ACT: Report for ACT Anti-Poverty Week*, NATSEM, Canberra, 2013.

The ACT needs a Budget Strategy that responds to this evidence, ensuring that investments made by governments in capital and social infrastructure prioritises delivering better opportunities and outcomes for people living with disadvantage.

Social justice is not the only imperative to develop a Budget Strategy based on this principle. The other imperative is financial sustainability of government provided social and capital infrastructure. If we are to genuinely reduce demand for expensive crisis and statutory services we need to ensure the people most at risk of needing these services get access to preventative and early intervention services, and other social and economic resources. We also need to ensure we maximise the investment made to improve access to opportunity, health and education outcomes.

The Budget Strategy needs to demonstrate that it invests resources in a way that gets the right services to the right people at the right time, at the right intensity and duration to change people's circumstances and trajectory.

ACTCOSS is concerned about the impact of proposed cuts to the Federal Public Service on employment and economic activity in our city and region. Public sector employees who take redundancies or early retirement will need access to good financial advice and advocacy, and support to match their skills and experience to other employment fields, to ensure their changed circumstances don't put them or their families at financial risk down the track. We need to reduce the risk of these households joining the group of disadvantaged households in Canberra.

Additionally, we also need to recognise there may be reduced employment, and growing underemployment, in the private sector (e.g. hospitality, retail, property). These are the industries that provide entry level jobs and part-time work opportunities for people with lower education qualifications. In a tighter labour market disadvantaged job seekers will get even less opportunities to find and keep a job. We know that unemployment and underemployment are major causes of poverty, and poverty is a major driver of demand for government provided services.

ACTCOSS is keen to work with the ACT Government to advocate to the Federal Government for a structural adjustment package for our city that includes:

- High quality, comprehensive life transition counselling - including financial advice about investing redundancy payments, post retirement financial planning, advocacy with creditors, and support to maintain social and emotional well-being through significant changes in financial circumstances and roles
- Increased assistance to Financial Counselling and Emergency Relief services - who will see increased demand during at least the next three years
- Increased resources for family and relationship support services - to provide the support that will reduce risks of family breakdowns through potentially several years of financial difficulty

This submission makes recommendations on:

- Enhancing access to the essential infrastructure that will reduce disadvantage – housing, utilities and transport
- Targeted investments that will increase health and education outcomes
- Measures that maximise access to resources for service provision

We understand the 2014-15 ACT Budget will take place in a particularly tight fiscal environment. However, we do not support reallocation of resources within portfolios to meet emerging needs by defunding effective and valued programs working with people who are disadvantaged. The Budget Strategy needs to incorporate a transparent within and cross-portfolio analysis of the costs and benefits of all decisions, and the expected impact of these changes on other areas of government expenditure, on opportunities for social and economic participation, and on delivering better health and education outcomes for the 28,639 who do not enjoy the good opportunities, good health and good education our city offers most of its citizens.

Inviting early engagement by the community sector and citizens more broadly in development of the 2014-15 Budget Strategy is very welcome. ACTCOSS looks forward to working closely with the ACT Government as budget priorities are determined and as more detailed work is done on the design and implementation of specific measures.

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

ACTCOSS believes the most important services for the ACT are those which reduce inequality, promote social inclusion, and support participation in the community by everyone, including economic participation.

Any new budget initiatives should be targeted at the people and communities we know are most likely to drive demand for services, especially those people who traditionally have 'fallen through the gaps'. This includes people living with disability; people experiencing long-term unemployment; people in, or exiting, the youth justice or adult corrections systems; children and young people in the out of home care system; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and newly arrived refugee communities.

Enhancing access to the essential infrastructure that will reduce disadvantage – housing, utilities and transport

- **Community transport** is a vital service, and addresses various causes and impacts of disadvantage and social exclusion. In particular, community transport allows for economic participation from people who may otherwise be limited by a lack of transport options in the ACT including people with disabilities and older people. Access to community transport could be extended to others whose economic and social participation, and access to services, is limited by transport difficulties. These groups include people exiting prison or who are eligible for day release while still in custody, and young people. ACTCOSS recommends the ACT Government allocate funds in the 2014-15 Budget to resource implementation of recommendations of the current Community Transport Review that will address transport disadvantage.
- Programs which address energy poverty in low-income households while maintaining the ACT's commitment to reduce its carbon footprint are vital. ACTCOSS continues to recommend the expansion and continuation of the **Public Housing Energy Efficiency Program** and the **Outreach Program**, both of which have proven to be valuable in supporting low-income households. As well as supporting public housing tenants, ACTCOSS recognises the need to extend this support to the private rental market, where low income households face significant barriers in lowering their utilities bills and would benefit from support to engage landlords and property managers in ways to increase water and energy efficiency in their properties.

Targeted investments that will increase health and education outcomes

- ACTCOSS recommends allocation of resources that will enable full funding of the **Outpatient Service for Drug and Alcohol Services** as per the 2012 ACT Government election commitment and the **Aboriginal and**

Torres Strait Islander Smoking Cessation Program as per the 2012 ACT Government election commitment.

- The **Corrections Throughcare** initiative was initially funded as a two-year pilot program. We strongly recommend recurrent funding for the Corrections Throughcare initiative as research has shown the provision of coordinated support for detainees exiting prison has a positive impact on re-integrating them into the community and reduces the risk of them re-offending by addressing the social factors underlying their offending behaviour. Early data coming out of this program indicates it is already making a difference, with prisoners staying in the community for longer. Since the commencement of the program in June 2013, 68 ex-prisoners have been through the program to date, with only 6 returns to prison of which all were due to parole breaches rather than reoffending. This is a significant reduction in returns to prison when compared with pre-Throughcare data.
- With the cost of keeping one detainee in the Alexander Maconchie Centre over \$100,000 per year and the recent revelations that the AMC is currently at capacity, the benefits of continuing to fund the Throughcare program (at a relative low financial cost, whilst delivering positive individual and community outcomes) are clear.
- With the ACT prison at capacity, and the high-cost correctional interventions associated with keeping people in gaol, now more than ever there is a need to think of ways of addressing the social determinants of crime, so that people are less likely to enter the criminal justice system from the start, and less likely to re-enter the system through their lives. A **Justice Reinvestment** scoping study, in collaboration with key stakeholders, as per the 2012 ACT Government election policy statement for a *Fair, Just and More Equitable Society: Justice and Law Reform*, would be money well spent. It could identify areas where less money (than \$100,000 in prison costs, plus capital costs of expanding the AMC) could be spent more effectively to address the underlying social factors which result in people committing crimes and entering or re-entering the AMC (such as homelessness, mental health issues, intellectual disability and acquired brain injury, and lack of education and employment opportunities).

Measures that maximise access to resources for service provision

- The NDIS will mean more **people with disability are able to make more choices and have more control of their own lives** and ACTCOSS fully supports this. We also believe that choice and control for individuals is supported by building the ability of community organisations to fully embed the social inclusion values underpinning the NDIS into their day-to-day operations. We recommend the ACT Government provides funding for consumers and community organisations to develop toolkits, information and specific programs which support enhanced decision making by people with disabilities' in articulating their hopes and aspirations and through managing their NDIS packages.

- Support for people experiencing **Homelessness** will continue to be a pressing issue in the ACT and ACTCOSS. ACTCOSS is working with others in the community sector and with the ACT Government to advocate to the new federal Minister for housing to continue the funding provided through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness (NPAH). However, if this advocacy is not successful the ACT Government needs to maintain the current level of funding provided to ACT based homelessness services by offsetting any funding cuts to Homelessness Services to ensure that services that have community support and are currently funded under the NPAH are maintained.
- That the ACT Government specifically resources the development and implementation of the long term cross portfolio investment and long term procurement strategy that has been called for previously by ACTCOSS³. This strategy would aim to:
 - a. Meet demand for affordable housing in the bottom two income quintiles
 - b. Reduce the number of people in Canberra who do not have a home to call their own
 - c. Pool funds from across portfolios to maximize prevention of and early intervention in homelessness, reduce demand for crisis services, facilitate prompt access to and maintenance of stable, affordable, appropriate housing for people who have been homeless
 - d. Ensure housing and homelessness support services can respond effectively to meet current and emerging needs

³ ACT Council of Social Service, *Submission Letters of Offer to Non-Government Providers of Housing and Homelessness Support Services*, June 2013.

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

Investment in both capital and social infrastructure should be a key priority of the ACT Government, particularly in areas which reduce poverty, improve equality and strengthen social inclusion.

Funding for the following social infrastructure priorities will give a good return on investment through reducing the demand on services in other areas.

Enhancing access to the essential infrastructure that will reduce disadvantage – housing, utilities and transport

- A shortage of **affordable and appropriate housing** continues to remain a key issue in the ACT. The ACT is facing a crisis in housing affordability, with one of the most expensive housing markets of all states and territories, making it very difficult for those on low and moderate incomes to purchase or even rent somewhere to live. Private rental costs in the ACT are among the most expensive in the country⁴. In addition, the ACT housing market is also characterised by a scarcity of housing appropriate for people with specific housing needs – such as affordable housing for older people; people living with disabilities, chronic health conditions and increasing frailty; and housing for larger families on low incomes.

There are certain groups who remain vulnerable to the shortage of housing in the ACT, among them people with disability and people with a lived experience of mental illness. However, as the Mental Health Community Coalition note in their budget submission, availability of accommodation alone will not lead to sustained tenancies unless appropriate support is also provided.

ACTCOSS recommends adequate investment in low-income and affordable housing and supported accommodation to reduce unnecessary demand for other services such as crisis accommodation, mental health crisis services and domestic violence crisis services. ACTCOSS supports ACT Shelter's recommendation that the ACT Government establishes an Affordable Housing Steering Committee to:

- Oversee and assist with the implementation of the Affordable Housing Action Plan, particularly Phase III;
- Contribute to ideas for further iterations of the Plan;
- Assist with and provide advice on more effective communication of initiatives to people on low to moderate incomes; and

4 Tanton, R, Vidyattama, Y and Mohanty, I (2013), *Disadvantage in the ACT: Report for ACT Anti-Poverty Week*, NATSEM, Canberra, 2013.

- Work across Government portfolios in the identification of opportunities for the development of the Community Housing Sector in the ACT (arising from research as outlined in foregoing recommendation).

We also support evolution of land use policy to facilitate development of affordable housing in places close to public transport, health, education and community services and employment opportunities.

- While ACTCOSS supports the roll out of the NDIS in the ACT, the scheme by itself will not in itself result in social inclusion for people with disabilities. As such, there remains a need for funding for **accessible physical and social infrastructure to enable people with disabilities** to fully participate in the community. This includes:
 - A commitment that all new housing in the ACT is built according to the standard of the Australian Network on Universal Housing Design.
 - Funding to remedy the layouts of bus interchanges and location of taxis ranks to make them more accessible for people with disabilities.
 - An access audit of all ACT buildings (new and old) to find where there are barriers to accessibility for people with disabilities. This could include ensuring all public buildings have adequate lifts; accessible toilets; hearing loops; tactile ground service indicators; ramps; widened doorways; lighter doors; and lower service counters.
 - Ensuring all mainstream schools in the ACT are accessible to students with disability through additional support for special teacher positions in schools; assisted technology in classrooms; and upgrades of school grounds to be more accessible.
- **An expansion of alcohol and drug treatment services to North Canberra** is required to address the negative consequences for people who face barriers to accessing drug treatment due to locational and/or transport disadvantage. Below is a case study which highlights why this service is vital:

Case study: Sarah⁵

A single mother in her 20s has two children under five and is accessing drug treatment as part of tier one Opioid Treatment Service (OTS). She did not complete year 10, she has never been employed, she was a child in care, has experienced repeated homelessness, is a Centrelink recipient and does not have family and social supports in Canberra. The only health and community service she accesses is through the OTS program. She is in poor health, particularly for her age, began using heroin in her teens and after 10 years began treatment as part of the OTS program. She, and her two children, are required to attend The

⁵ Excerpt from ATODA, *Meeting Current and Future Demand for Drug Treatment in North Canberra: Expanding Opioid Maintenance Treatment and Needle and Syringe Programs*, 2011.

Canberra Hospital daily via public transport for her to receive her medication. They reside in Gungahlin in public housing, their house is a bus ride from the Gungahlin town centre. On the weekend, her small family will spend 5 hours a day travelling to and from Woden to access the mother's treatment. The demands on her family to access treatment mean that she is not able to engage in education and training and therefore her chances of reaching economic and social independence are limited. Currently, Sarah would have to choose between accessing drug treatment and engaging in employment / education / training – and this is incongruous with the evidence. Sarah's chances of relapsing into heroin use, and potential overdose, are greatly increased if she ceases OTS.

Targeted investments that will increase health and education outcomes

- Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities in the ACT have identified a need for support for **children and young people to access language education that enables them to build and maintain bilingual proficiency**. Proficiency in both the language of their parents and grandparents and in English is essential for strong family relationships, maintaining connection with culture and for parents to partner with the school and their children to achieve good education attainment. How can a parent provide education support if they do not have adequate proficiency in English and their children do not have adequate proficiency in their home language to communicate sophisticated ideas and concepts? A modest investment in making learning facilities available on the weekend, and paying language tutors would deliver large returns in education attainment and family wellbeing.

Measures that maximise access to resources for service provision

- In recent years, corporate volunteering has become an integral part of corporate social responsibility programs in Australia. More and more employers, in both the business and Government sectors, are seeking volunteering opportunities for their employees. ACTCOSS support the proposal for Volunteering ACT to be funded to coordinate a volunteering brokerage service to match pledges of assistance from business and Government employers to requests for assistance from not for profit organisations:
 - through *either* Group Volunteering *or* Skilled Volunteering
 - on a fee for service basis paid by employers, tailored to the particular circumstance including: sourcing of volunteering placements, alignment of activity with strategic business objectives, WHS considerations, employee liaison/engagement and evaluation of the corporate volunteering experience
 - supported by a comprehensive risk management process

The 2013-14 ACT Budget saw funding for a number of infrastructure initiatives limited to design and planning, and not through to construction. In addition the Budget did not make mention of additional funding needed to support the implementation and running of the initiatives, such as funding for staff.

In a constrained fiscal environment, ACTCOSS recommends rephrasing development of major infrastructure so that more resources can be made available to invest in social infrastructure that will prevent growth in demand for crisis services and statutory services (such as child protection, youth justice and adult corrections, emergency health care).

- **Sustainability of services** should remain a high priority for the ACT Government, particularly given the legislative, regulatory, purchasing and reporting reforms that are currently underway and expected into the future. ACTCOSS would welcome continued efforts in streamlining collection of data across all programs and subsectors to allow continuity to those people accessing multiple services and avoid duplication of data reporting processes. Further progress is needed towards adopting a risk-based approach in setting compliance requirements for small grants to reduce administrative costs for both service providers and government.

The ACT Government has implemented a revenue generation measure via a 0.34 per cent levy on all Community Services Directorate funding agreements in 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15. These funds have contributed to work across federal and territory governments to align legislation, regulatory, administration and reporting requirements, development of red tape reduction measures and access to resources for community managed organisations to build their strength and resilience.

Continued support for this measure will be tested with release of acquittals to the organisations that have contributed these funds, with the first acquittal due at the end of 2013.

To sustain return on this investment of resources, ACTCOSS proposes any sector development resources generated as a result of these funds is provided to ACTCOSS so we can build these into our workforce learning and development and sector development programs. ACTCOSS would need additional funds for staffing in 2014-15 and 2015-16 to support integration of these resources into our suite of programs to support community managed organisations, after which time we could self sustain delivery.

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

We again stress the need for services to be tailored to meet the needs of those groups who are most likely to drive increased demand for services as a way of current services being delivered more efficiently and productively.

We also stress the need for any savings in high cost services as a result of decreased demand to be diverted into prevention and early intervention services, as evidence shows that money spent in those areas reduces risk factors and social harm to individuals and families, saves further expenditure in crisis and tertiary level services, and improves the capacity of people to contribute to their families, be part of their communities and participate in the economy.

Working with a whole-of-government approach is vital if the Government is to manage to continue to deliver services in the current environment. This means Directorates working together to support vulnerable people who will often be facing a multitude of issues. For example, while education attainment by young people clearly falls in the realm of the Education and Training Directorate, given that young people who have disengaged from school have often done so due to other circumstances (such as child protection, homelessness or family breakdown), we would encourage this to be seen as a whole-of-government issue which results in funding across different directorates – an investment in people rather than programs.

Enhancing access to the essential infrastructure that will reduce disadvantage – housing, utilities and transport

- Making better use of community facilities and repurposing buildings as sites for affordable housing and affordable short-term accommodation]
- Legislate a set of **minimum standards** in energy efficiency for private rental properties, whilst maintaining affordable rents.
- Develop a **water consumption concession scheme** for private rental tenants.

Measures that maximise access to resources for service provision

- There is a need for a collective analysis for investment in people. There is a need to undertake resource mapping to define current resources and how best to use and/or redeploy them to focus more on disadvantaged and marginalised groups. ACTCOSS congratulates the government for adopting a genuinely collaborative approach to determining future priorities for social service provision, the design of our service system and the strategy for investing in human and capital infrastructure to support service provision through engagement the community sector early in the development of the Human Services Blueprint. We strongly advocate that

this approach should be the way of the future as social policy and service investment decisions are reviewed and determined.

Care and Protection – currently in the ACT, there is inadequate support for People with Disability to be parents. ACTCOSS recommends the introduction of a targeted investment in a specific program to provide support to parents and reduce the need to remove children from the family unit.

With the cost of keeping a child in placement almost \$180,000 per year, the benefit of a targeted program to assist people with parenting and care skills to allow families to stay together is measurable. A program such as the Healthy and Safe resource run through Wanslea Family Services in Western Australia which complies with the Signs of Safety Framework and is solution and child focussed, and client directed, provides a good model for engaging and supporting people with disability to maintain their parenting roles and support the development, safety and wellbeing of their children.

The program uses a home-based education resource tailored to the learning needs of parents with learning difficulties and is designed to equip parents of young children with the knowledge and skills necessary for managing home dangers, accidents and childhood illness.

Are there any new ways to generate revenue and/or services you consider that the community should make a direct contribution to (a fee for service)?

ACTCOSS welcomes the invitation to provide commentary on opportunities to generate revenue and/or implement fees for service.

ACTCOSS supports implementation of a comprehensive tax reform agenda that picks up on many of the recommendations about state, territory and local government tax reform from the Henry Tax Review of 2010. ACTCOSS welcomed this decision, because:

- Building a sustainable revenue base for the ACT Government will enhance the capacity of the ACT to meet its communities needs now and in the future
- Improving the redistributive capacity of the tax system should contribute to reducing the tax burden on lower-income households and sharing the wealth that is generated in our economy
- Shifting revenue collection away from transactions and focused instead on generating revenue from wealth creation will make the tax system more fair
- Reducing levies on essential goods and services should cut the costs of living—for example, removing the levy on insurance premiums will contribute to improving the affordability of risk protection

Canberra has the highest average wealth and income of any city in Australia (around 28 per cent higher than the Australian average)⁶ and Australia has been rated as having the highest average wealth of any nation in the world⁷. ACTCOSS is confident there is room to increase revenue to the ACT Government and implement a reasonable fee for service approach to apply to those people with capacity to pay for services.

ACTCOSS would consider working with our members and the ACT Government on development of service and business models that, where appropriate, can allow people with access to sufficient resources to access fee for service programs and free up funding for more targeted initiatives aimed at the most marginalised and disadvantaged groups and individuals. This work would need to be resourced to ensure all stakeholders could contribute and participate.

However, this component of the Budget Strategy needs to be informed by:

6 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) 6554.0 - Household Wealth and Wealth Distribution, Australia, 2011–12.

7 Sourced 31 October 2013
http://images.smh.com.au/file/2013/10/09/4815797/cs_global_wealth_report_2013_WEB_low%2520pdf.pdf?rand=1381288140715

- Transparent information to the community about current revenue and fee structures, and any inequities or inconsistencies in how these are applied
- An agreed set of principles that underpin decisions regarding adoption of revenue generation and/or fee for service measures
- The need to build the workforce for social service provision - for many therapeutic and support services there is not a workforce from whom people can buy services even if they do have the resources available
- Good assessment of both capacity to pay and risk of adverse outcomes if fee structures create a disincentive to accessing services

The concept of proportionate universalism articulated in the social determinants of health evidence base could provide a useful framework for better targeting mainstream health and education services to meet the needs of disadvantaged people in Canberra:

Focusing solely on the most disadvantaged will not reduce health inequalities sufficiently. To reduce the steepness of the social gradient in health, actions must be universal, but with a scale and intensity that is proportionate to the level of disadvantage. We call this proportionate universalism.⁸

⁸ Marmot, M, *Fair Society, Healthy Lives*, The Marmot Review, 2010.

Could the Government stop providing particular services?

ACTCOSS would not advocate for the ACT Government to cease providing any services that support disadvantaged and vulnerable people in Canberra to meet their needs, develop and pursue their talents and fulfil their potential. However, as we have previously noted, we know which population groups and locations carry the most risk of poor housing, health, education and other social outcomes. Any move to stop providing services needs to ensure those people and communities at highest risk, and those risk factors we know are most critical to address, are not in scope.