



ACTCOSS Budget Priorities 2015-16

October 2014

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.

Contact Details

Phone: 02 6202 7200
Fax: 02 6288 0070
Address: Weston Community Hub, 1/6 Gritten St, Weston ACT 2611
Email: actcoss@actcoss.org.au
Web: www.actcoss.org.au
Director: Susan Helyar

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
HASI	Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative
JaCS	Justice and Community Safety Directorate
NATSEM	National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
SEIFI	Socio-Economic Indexes for Individuals

Introduction

ACTCOSS welcomes the opportunity to provide a Submission to the ACT Budget for 2015-16. We understand that, continuing the themes introduced in the previous Budget period, this Budget will focus on 'growing the economy, improving liveability and opportunity, better health and education outcomes, and urban renewal'. In responding to these issues in our 2014-2015 Budget Submission we offered advice on three of these topics – improving opportunity, better health and better education outcomes. ACTCOSS drew attention to our constituents – people living with disadvantage and the community sector organisations that support them. This year our Budget Submission will focus on the same topics and constituency.

We noted in our submission last year that the ACT has a much higher level of relative disadvantage than has previously been thought. This fact was 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). This Report 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

In Anti-Poverty Week in 2013 research was released that documented poverty and inequality in the ACT, and provided evidence that people considered living in poverty in the ACT were just as disadvantaged and excluded as those living in poverty in other places in Australia. 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

As we argued in our previous submission, the ACT needs a Budget Strategy that responds to this evidence, ensuring that investments made by Government in capital and social infrastructure prioritise delivering better opportunities and outcomes for people living with disadvantage, and provide the conditions for social mobility so that over time we see a reduction in disadvantage and exclusion in our city.

We understand the 2015-16 ACT Budget will take place in a particularly tight fiscal environment. However, we do not want to see reallocation of resources within portfolios to meet emerging needs by defunding effective and valued

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

programs working with people who are disadvantaged and excluded. Instead, the Budget Strategy needs to adopt a social outcomes framework in order to deliver better health and education outcomes for the 28,639 people who do not enjoy the opportunities, good health and good education our city offers most of its citizens. ACTCOSS calls on the ACT Government to incorporate a transparent within and cross-portfolio analysis of the costs and benefits of all decisions, and the expected impact of any changes on other areas of government expenditure, including any opportunities for social and economic participation.

ACTCOSS also calls on the ACT Government to prioritise and phase development of major infrastructure so that more resources can be made available to invest in affordable housing, homelessness services and other social infrastructure that will ensure everyone in the city has access to the most basic of human needs – housing - and prevent growth in demand for crisis services and statutory services.

Spending on social infrastructure will have additional dividends for the community and for the economy by generating employment opportunities. We know from research released in Anti-Poverty Week in 2014 that, second to public administration and safety, the industry with the biggest share in employment opportunities in the ACT now and into the future is the Health Care and Social Assistance sector. In the recent ACT Budget the Government made a series of commitments to investing in the economy and fuelling labour market growth. Most notably, these commitments included a \$2.5 billion Infrastructure Investment to generate jobs in related industries.³

Reprioritising the ACT Government Infrastructure Investment into affordable social infrastructure (e.g. affordable housing) would generate employment dividends just as effectively as other infrastructure spending as well as reduce inequality, deprivation and exclusion.

Our members have identified three areas of urgent need that we advise the Government to invest in as a matter of priority if we are to improve, and in some instances just maintain, liveability and opportunity, health and educational attainment and fair and achieve equitable growth in our economy. These areas of urgent need emerge out of current and specific trends impacting on the extent and experience of disadvantage and exclusion in our community and on the sustainability of services on which we rely.

Our Budget Submission also includes some key asks around affordable housing and homelessness that community sector organisations have come together to promote. This one key area of public policy has been chosen because we collectively believe on-going investment will underpin and facilitate genuinely better and more sustainable outcomes for disadvantaged Canberrans in the areas Government has identified as priorities for action in its Budget Strategy. Put simply, without adequate investment in affordable housing and reducing homelessness we do not believe that the Government will be able to deliver on its stated priorities for health, education, equitable growth, liveability and opportunity.

3 ACT Government, 'Budget 2014-2015: Investing In Canberra', Treasurer's Budget Speech, 2014, p. 3.

While ACTCOSS' work is always informed by consultation with our members we emphasise the extent to which support on the issue of housing is far-reaching and wide-ranging in the community sector. Together with our members and our advocacy partners we consider affordable housing and homelessness to be the major policy issue that needs long term planning and investment by the ACT Government.

Urgent Needs in Our Community

Liveability for All: Accessible services and Community Infrastructure

It is characteristic of the ACT that on most measures many of our citizens and residents enjoy higher than average wellbeing. It is also characteristic that this high performance at the aggregate level conceals real disadvantage and exclusion that is experienced by more than 28,600 individuals in our relatively affluent community. Factors which positively impact wellbeing, including access to services and engagement with and in local communities, need to be available to all residents. In particular, increasing access in these areas for older people and people living with disability is an identified need from our consultation process. Our members report that in some local areas the design of our neighbourhoods and our public services prevents free and easy access for older people and for people who are living with disability.

ACTCOSS would like to see government adopt an approach to building, planning and delivering social and physical infrastructure that, in the context of an ageing society, and of a paradigm shift in the way that people living with disability participate in social and economic life and access disability services, public services and community environments are accessible and responsive to the needs of all.

Creating and Maintaining Access to Liveable Communities Asks

- Seniors concessions – maintain them at 2013-14 levels plus inflation and improve them where possible.
- Footpaths – create them in suburbs where they do not exist and improve quality where they do exist.
- Increase access to health & hearing services for older people, especially early intervention assessment and assistance to maintain good health and hearing.
- Provide specialised and adequately funded drug and alcohol rehabilitation for older people.
- Improve and increase access to public transport, including improving accessibility of bus stops and pedestrian infrastructure.
- Provide funding to remedy the layouts of bus interchanges and location of taxi ranks to make them more accessible for people with disabilities.
- Provide spaces in group centres and local shopping precincts for no cost social interaction.
- Sustain funding and support to day hospices.

- Support for children and young people to access language education that enables them to build and maintain bilingual proficiency, supporting both education attainment and maintaining relationships with older family members.
- Fund the flexibus community transport trial beyond its pilot phase and increase eligibility for those needing and able to access this service.
- Expand the Energy Efficiency Program and the Outreach Program to more proactively engage private sector and community housing landlords and tenants who are unable to afford fee-for service support, and recurrent funding for the Public Housing Energy Efficiency Program and the Outreach Program.
- Develop a water consumption concession scheme for private rental tenants.
- Legislate a set of minimum standards in energy efficiency for private rental properties, whilst maintaining affordable rents.

Prevention, Early Intervention and Targeted Assistance

ACTCOSS advocates that government address growth in demand for acute and costly services through targeted investment to meet urgent needs. Coupled with this investment, we would like to see a reorientation of funding to prevent long term growth in demand for services by reducing deprivation, exclusion and the need for tertiary level services. While our core interest in advocating this course of action is reducing the risk, frequency and negative impacts of experiencing crisis, there is also a financial dividend for government in adopting these measures.

ACTCOSS recognises the need for financial sustainability of government funded social and capital infrastructure. If we are to genuinely reduce demand for expensive crisis and statutory services we need to ensure that people, particularly those most at risk of needing crisis services, are able to access preventative and early intervention services. We also need to see regulation and development of the ACT housing, health, education and labour markets so these markets offer products and services that are affordable to individuals and households in the bottom 40 per cent income quintiles, and facilitate social and economic wellbeing.

Early Intervention and Targeted Assistance Asks

- Fully fund the implementation of the Out of Home Care Strategy
- Recurrently fund the Solaris drug and alcohol rehabilitation service at the Alexander Maconochie Centre
- Improve service options outside of tertiary health system for people living with chronic illness and/or disability

- Build access to support for health, wellbeing and independence after acute interventions in the health system. This is especially important for people with ongoing risk factors for unnecessary repeat or extended admissions, such as people with multiple needs, with complex interactions around health, social connectedness, substance use, mental illness, disability, financial security and community safety
- Enhancing Volunteer Support to create informal support networks, improve wellbeing of volunteers, build community relationships and provide opportunities for relationships of reciprocity for people who are otherwise socially isolated
- Improve access and reduce costs for young people to engage in education. There is a critical need to focus on students 8-12 years old showing low attainment and at risk of entering high school unable to participate and fulfil their learning potential, including young carers, students involved in the out of home care system, and families in contact with care and protection services
- Increase access to lifelong learning and development of literacy and numeracy skills at any age
- Ensure parenting programs are provided across the spectrum from generic programs to programs that support parents at risk or having children removed to keep their children safe and well at home
- Fund implementation of the recommendations arising out of research by Families ACT on evidence-based parenting programs
- Provide recurrent funding for the Corrections Throughcare initiative
- Streamline collection of data across all programs and subsectors to allow continuity to those people accessing multiple services and avoid duplication of data reporting processes

Reorienting and prioritising service delivery in the context of whole-of-community roll out of the NDIS

The NDIS presents one of, if not the most, significant shifts in the operating context of community service organisations. The NDIS, when fully realised and implemented, will provide eligible people living with disability the opportunity to determine their own needs and to purchase goods and services consistent with their own identified life goals.

It is the case, however, that not all people living with disability are eligible for the NDIS. It is imperative that the roll out of the NDIS does not result in the creation of two levels of service for individuals with disability – with enhanced opportunities for those eligible to participate in the NDIS and reduced service levels or unavailable services through reduced government funding for those ineligible.

It is also vitally important that the process of transition to the NDIS does not result in the loss of services, and consequently, a reduction in service *choices* for individuals living with disability. ACTCOSS believes that the need to carefully monitor the impacts of the new market context – and to respond appropriately by intervening in the market where necessary – are fundamental in order to ensure that the principles underpinning the NDIS are realised for all people living with disability. We are already hearing from some smaller specialist organisations that there will be significant threats to their sustainability in the NDIS context. The loss of such services will constitute a market failure and will not result in the realisation of fair or adequate services to people living with disability.

Effective outcomes for *all* people living with disability in the ACT community Asks

- Ensure that Tier 2 NDIS services, including the design and development of aids and equipment; advice, information; peer networking; and independent advocacy, remain viable and available to all people living with disability in the ACT. Where necessary and appropriate this may require ongoing block funding.
- Ensure that people who are not eligible for the NDIS but require home-based support are able to access services and that existing services are adequate to meet current and future demand
- Where there is evidence of need provide growth funding for services, eg services for people who have cognitive and decision-making challenges, concurrent with physical and mental health issues
- Align funding to existing services through the transition phase to actual rollout of individualised packages

Support development of a sector development plan that sustains and grows the role of community-managed organisations in supporting the economic and social wellbeing of our city

The ACT Government has, via a 0.34 per cent levy on all Community Services Directorate funding agreements in 2012-13, 2013-14 and 2014-15, co-funded sector development and reform of the relationship between funding bodies and community organisations. These funds have contributed to work primarily in the Community Services Directorate 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.

Change in Federal Government administration and cuts to funding of federally funded programs is creating an uncertain operating environment for community

managed organisations delivering vital social services and providing essential community infrastructure.

The Healthcare and Social Assistance industry is one of the largest employers in the ACT, second behind Public Administration and Safety, and ahead of the Education, Construction, Retail and Hospitality industries. Development and strengthening this industry provides a two-fold return on investment. Investment firstly increases competency, quality, access to and strength of essential services on which we all rely. And secondly, growth in the reach and effectiveness of the social infrastructure that reduces disadvantage and exclusion ensures more people overcome the causes of disadvantage and exclusion and are able to contribute and participate fully socially and economically.

ACTCOSS calls on the ACT Government to continue ACT Government funding to the sector development and red tape reduction office operating in the Community Services Directorate, and to fund an equivalent resource in ACTCOSS, through which we can jointly:

- Review the outcomes of sector investment, identify areas of ongoing need for organisation development, and outline the most efficient approaches to meeting these needs
- Commission research on current changes and emerging challenges in the operating environment for the healthcare and social assistance industry, and build the local evidence base of what will sustain and strengthen community managed not-for-profit organisations so they can better meet community needs
- Build social impact measurement capability and resources
- Work with all Directorates to develop a Pre-Qualification process that will reduce unnecessary duplication in ACT Government Human Service administration, tendering and reporting requirements

Long term need in our community: substantial investment in increasing affordable housing and reducing homelessness

Homelessness is fundamentally a failure of economic policy settings (labour market, housing market, income support) and secondly a failure of existing services and supports to respond to individual vulnerabilities.

Income poverty and a failure of the housing market to offer an affordable product to low income households are a substantial cause of homelessness in the ACT.

The prevention of homelessness is a whole-of-government responsibility requiring collaboration between the economic policy levers that create jobs, ensuring adequate income when people are not in paid work, providing affordable housing and enabling access to a range of social supports, including services that help people to access jobs.

The costs of inadequate responses to homelessness are not recognised or calculated in mainstream services (e.g. longer bed days in acute health care settings, increased use of emergency health services, increased risk of criminal offending, reduced capacity to complete education or get and keep a job).

Credible research has been published that provides evidence about the costs and savings possible from different forms and ways of intervening to reduce the incidence and impacts of homelessness. Evaluations of the Doorway program in Victoria and the HASI program in NSW found substantial cost offsets to mental health services. Zaretsky⁴ et al found that supported accommodation for single men and women delivered substantial savings of \$1,389 and \$8,920 per client per year respectively in reduced health, justice and net welfare payments (2010-11 dollars).

Many citizens are unable to access targeted services (e.g. mental health, drug and alcohol, legal assistance) early enough and for long enough to address their individual vulnerabilities and risks of homelessness. Investment in these services can reduce the risk and recurrence of homelessness.

Single access points (e.g. Mental Health Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team and First Point) enable us to see and better understand unmet need, but this increased visibility is not coupled with adequate resources to respond, especially to people unfamiliar with or who have had bad experiences with accessing systems. This compromises the credibility and use of single access points. We need to align availability of housing options with demand for housing assistance.

In any housing market, tenants and homeowners (particularly those on low incomes) need strong consumer protections, advocacy and legal assistance to

4 K Zaretsky, P Flatau, A Clear, E Conroy, L Burns, & B Spicer, *The cost of homelessness and the net benefit of homelessness programs: a national study*, Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI), Final Report No. 205, 2013, available online <<http://www.ahuri.edu.au/publications/projects/p82014>>.

ensure their rights and needs are respected. In the tight and expensive housing market we have in the ACT, consumer protection, advocacy and legal assistance are even more important as the housing market can preference the interests of financing institutions and landlords in the knowledge that there is a ready alternative owner or renter if the current owner/tenancy arrangement breaks down.

Increased collaboration between mainstream and specialist homelessness services is essential if we are to address the risk factors for homelessness and repeat homelessness. Better collaboration is feasible both practically and economically.

Short-term commitments

Focus on Prevention

- Sustain funding for existing housing-related legal services
- Increase access to tenancy advice/advocacy/legal assistance and links with support that can address individual risk factors for tenants/owners at risk of losing their housing
- Maintain and expand the funding for the Street Law program, a specialist legal outreach service, to increase its capacity to assist people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness
- Expand tenancy advice, assistance and legal services to provide specialised services for older women, families dealing with domestic violence, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, people who have experienced trauma, people exiting the criminal justice system, people living with a disability, people with mental health issues, people with drug and alcohol issues, young people, humanitarian entrants and people seeking asylum and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Fund knowledge and skills development so that people working with men and women exiting out of home care, mental health, drug and alcohol, acute health care, criminal justice and homelessness services are able to provide tenancy advice/advocacy/support
- Re-invest in the 'Good Life Planning Program' grants (or similar) to support people with disabilities and their caring families plan a housing and care support pathway to provide long term certainty about housing tenure, transition planning and necessary legal and other specialist advice. The investment should include funding to broker or provide legal and other specialist advice for caring families who are unable to meet these costs

Increase Housing Market Responses to Housing Needs in the ACT

- Increase public housing stock levels
- Expand funding for community housing construction and management to increase the number of affordable (to purchase/rent and heat/cool), accessible dwellings, with a focus on increasing access to the three groups most at risk of homelessness – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, young people and women and children escaping violence. This housing should fill the gap in the market between public housing that is charged at 25 per cent of income and affordable housing that is charged at 80 per cent of market rates.
- Affordable Housing Action Plan:
 - Fund and implement Phase III of the Affordable Housing Action Plan
 - Establish a Community/Government/Industry Steering Group to oversight and provide advice on implementation and evaluation of effectiveness of the Affordable Housing Action Plan
- Require all new dwellings to comply with universal design
- Sustain public housing tenant rent charges at 25 per cent of assessable income
- ACTCOSS would like to see the principles underpinning the Affordable Rental Scheme, currently open to people over 65 who meet an income eligibility threshold, developed more fully in order to create a system that could be applied to all people experiencing disadvantage in the ACT. Ensuring that such a scheme meets needs in an equitable way will require some detailed financial analysis. However any such system should set rent payments as a percentage of income and not market rent.
- Provide seed funding to support development of partnerships between the private real estate industry and housing support services, including:
 - The Supportive Tenancy Service - to increase its reach into the private rental market, recognising the benefits of tenancy support to government, landlords, real estate agents and tenants
 - The Human Services Gateway – to increase access to private rental market accommodation options
 - Funding a Home Ground Victoria-type model (<http://www.homeground.org.au/>) in which a housing support agency is supported to set up a commercial real estate and property management agency which will support the NGO housing agency.

Improved Service Responsiveness

- Improve access to emergency housing by:

- Expanding single point of entry to improve access to information and referral services (including staffing extended hours and outreach)
- Allocating one per cent of total funds from the Justice and Community Safety, Education & Training and Health budgets to contribute to expansion of housing crisis and transition support to improve access for older women, families dealing with domestic violence, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, people who have experienced trauma, people exiting the criminal justice system, people living with a disability, people with mental health issues, people with drug and alcohol issues, young people, humanitarian entrants and people seeking asylum and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Sustain funding to Commonwealth/ACT joint funded programs under the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, even if Commonwealth withdraws funding
- Continue Housing Policy Consortium funding in 2015-2017 at the level specified in the Parliamentary Agreement. This funding would be used to comprehensively assess:
 - Cost-effectiveness and outcomes of current service models and forms of intervention offered in Canberra to prevent homelessness, ways to intervene early when homelessness occurs and respond effectively to housing crises
 - Critical factors in Canberra for stabilisation of housing
 - Maintenance of good housing outcomes for people who have been homeless
 - Any changes needed in the service system as a whole in Canberra to more effectively respond to people who are homeless and reduce homelessness

Long term plan

The ACT needs a plan to reduce, respond to and prevent recurrence of homelessness – with commitments that expand on the current ACT Government Affordable Housing Action Plan, the expansion of community housing and public housing renewal.

The ACT Government needs to work with the community sector and housing industry to develop, implement and monitor progress of a cross portfolio investment and long term procurement strategy that will:

- Meet demand for affordable (to purchase/rent and heat/cool), accessible housing in the bottom two income quintiles
- Reduce the number of people in Canberra who do not have a home to call their own

- Pool funds from across portfolios to maximise 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
- Ensure housing and homelessness support services can respond effectively to meet current and emerging needs

This long term investment and procurement strategy could utilise funds allocated in 2014-2015 ACT Budget to stimulate the construction industry. Re-allocating some of the \$2.5b construction industry and urban renewal stimulus funding to affordable housing for households in the bottom two income quintiles would deliver a three-pronged return on investment:

- Sustain activity and employment in the construction industry
- Create spending in the retail and hospitality sectors as the lowest income households could spend less on housing and spend more on other consumption
- Increasing access to affordable housing and enabling spending on other essential items (such as paying utility bills, nutritious food, accessing health-care) will reduce unnecessary demand on government and philanthropic funded emergency financial assistance services.

Reference list

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