



**Submission on**  
**ACT Budget Priorities 2017-2018**

**December 2016**

# 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, human rights and sustainability and promotes justice, equity, reconciliation 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.

ACTCOSS advises that this document may be publicly distributed, including by placing a copy on our website.

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## Acronyms

ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
CASP	Community Assistance and Support Program
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
SEIFA	Socio-economic Index for Areas
SEIFI	Socio-economic Index for Individuals
SES	Socio-economic status
SHS	Specialist Homelessness Sector
TIS	Translation and Interpreting Service
WCHM	Women's Centre for Health Matters

## Introduction

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 residents of the Territory. 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 individuals.

ACTCOSS' vision is for the ACT to be a fair and equitable community that respects and values diversity, human rights and sustainability and promotes justice, equity, reconciliation and social inclusion. The Community Shared Statement released during the 2016 ACT Election stated that:

In 2015 the OECD launched a publication titled *In it Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All* with the following statement: "The gap between rich and poor keeps widening. Growth, if any, has disproportionately benefited higher income groups while lower income households have been left behind. This long-run increase in income inequality not only raises social and political concerns, but also economic ones. It tends to drag down GDP growth, due to the rising distance of the lower 40% from the rest of society. Lower income people have been prevented from realising their human capital potential, which is bad for the economy as a whole."

(<http://www.oecd.org/social/in-it-together-why-less-inequality-benefits-all-9789264235120-en.htm>)

We see this every day in the ACT. We see a growing gap between those who enjoy Canberra's prosperity and liveability and those who don't. This growing gap compromises individual and family economic and social wellbeing, compromises environmental values and threatens our collective success.<sup>1</sup>

ACTCOSS contributions to the ACT Budget consultation process aim to provide advice on how our vision for the city can be realised and how inequality can be reduced. Our submissions are developed through extensive consultation with our broad member base. ACTCOSS submissions provide detailed information on emerging needs in our community and an evaluation of gaps in our service system as identified by the organisations and agencies at the forefront of delivering social and community services in and beyond the ACT.

The ACTCOSS submission to the Budget Consultation forms ACTCOSS' analysis of the ACT Budget. ACTCOSS releases an analysis of the ACT Budget each year. Last year's copy can be found online<sup>2</sup>.

This Budget Submission builds on the advocacy agenda outlined in the Community Shared Statement for the ACT 2016 Election and advocacy undertaken in the 2016 ACT Election on priority issues identified by our members under the categories of City Infrastructure, Social Infrastructure,

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<sup>1</sup> See ACTCOSS website <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/community-shared-statement-act-2016-election>> and at Attachment A. (Community Shared Statement).

<sup>2</sup> See ACTCOSS website <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/news-events/actcoss-news/act-2016-17-budget-snapshot-now-available>>.

Services and Economic Development. To assist the Government with its budget considerations, we have identified these elections commitments within our submission and provided relevant commentary where necessary.

This submission reports on key areas where intervention is needed in our community and where improvements in outcomes would see significant returns to our community and to future ACT Budgets by reducing inequality and increasing fairness, prosperity and sustainability.

## Evidence of Inequality

The prosperity and liveability of the ACT is frequently referred to in government publications as a point of pride (for example ACT Government 2015: 2, 5). We should be proud of our community and its success. Data shows, for example, that from 1995-2010 the ACT economy delivered an overall increase in household wealth (ABS 2012). It is also the case that ACT household incomes are higher than the national average (ABS 2015, Table 15.1). Similarly, the ACT performs better than other jurisdictions in terms of average educational achievements in the areas of reading, mathematics and science (see Cuzzillo & Ragless 2015: 5).

However, in the ACT our high *average* outcomes conceal real disadvantage experienced by many at the *individual* level. The most important illustration of this is the difference in area measures of disadvantage captured by the Socio-Economic Index for Areas (SEIFA), as compared to individual measures of disadvantage captured by the Socio-Economic Index for Individuals (SEIFI).

When calculated on an *area* measure (using the SEIFA) only 712 people living in the ACT are estimated to be living with the highest level of disadvantage (ACT Community Services Directorate 2012: 3). However, when calculated on an *individual* measure 28,639 people aged 16-24 are estimated to be in the most disadvantaged category (ACT Community Services Directorate 2012: 3). High averages conceal the fact that significant disadvantage exists for many individuals in the ACT.

The significant difference between these numbers highlights several things. Firstly, disadvantage is real in the ACT and the prosperity enjoyed here is not enjoyed equally. Secondly, the very design of our city puts us at risk of underestimating the extent of disadvantage. The intended diversity of income levels in most locations leads to high averages when measuring economic and social outcomes.

### ***Averages conceal disadvantage in the ACT***

<p><b><i>Area/District level measure of disadvantage in the ACT:</i></b></p> <p><b><u>712</u></b> people in the most disadvantaged group</p>	<p><b><i>Individual level measure of disadvantage in the ACT:</i></b></p> <p><b><u>28,639</u></b> people in the most disadvantaged group</p>
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When we focus exclusively on averages in the ACT we are prone to what data analysts call the 'ecological fallacy' – the error that arises 'when we make

judgements about individuals based on the characteristics of the area in which they live' (Baker & Adhikari 2007: 1). The relative affluence of our city drives up costs of living that further reduce affordability and liveability of the city for low income residents.

In the ACT we do not have areas where disadvantage is highly concentrated – so we need to look beyond averages and beyond appearances to understand who makes up our community; to evaluate community needs and determine how best to address them. As an ACT Government report analysing the SEIFI data states:

The SEIFI data has shown that the ACT has one of the highest proportions of 'diverse' suburbs/collection districts (CDs), where diverse suburbs/CDs have high numbers of both the most and the least disadvantaged individuals living side by side. This is highly unique to the ACT and, as a result, the averaging effects of SEIFA chronically under-reports disadvantage (ACT Community Services Directorate 2012: 3).

This report shows that the ACT is a unique jurisdiction – government decisions, particularly in relation to the ACT Budget, must reflect what makes us unique. If government financial decisions do reflect this unique configuration of disadvantage they will not be able to address the disadvantage experienced by the 28,000 plus individuals who fall into the category of being among the most disadvantaged citizens in the whole of our country.

## Background

Our community needs a clear and transparent plan for how essential public infrastructure and key community services will be delivered into the future as our population grows. We need a progressive tax system in the ACT and ACTCOSS has supported tax measures which achieve this goal. However, we also need greater clarity and transparency on issues involving negotiation with the Commonwealth Government and greater consultation with the community about the future funding of social and community services.

ACTCOSS does not oppose the principle of fee-for-service where such measures are appropriate and do not reduce access for households whose incomes are in the bottom 40 per cent – the lowest two income quintiles. But we are concerned that high average incomes in the ACT can obscure the negative impacts of flat tax measures. Flat tax and fee charging measures are sometimes introduced alongside concessions for people on low incomes. Concessions are expensive for government and are, therefore, tightly targeted. In practice this can mean that concessions are of limited effectiveness in cushioning the impacts of cost of living pressures for people in low wage and/or insecure jobs. People in these circumstances often do not qualify for concessions despite being financially vulnerable (ACT Government 2012).

Consider, as one example, the way increases in the rate and timeframes for charging parking fees impact disproportionately on low-wage workers in the retail and hospitality sectors. These workers, being in a low-wage industry where insecure work is the norm, have limited capacity to absorb increased parking fees without displacing spending on other essential items. However concession schemes are unlikely to cover these groups. They are left to manage increasing costs of living that they simply cannot afford.

This example highlights the fact that tightly targeted concessions are not always effective in meeting across-the-board cost of living pressures and why it is important that securing a revenue base for our community does not come at the expense of those who can least afford it. ACTCOSS supports more extensive use of concessions to address the regressive impacts of flat taxes via refinements in the concessions scheme.

***In order to address inequality and meet community need in our city we need a secure revenue base built on principles of progressivity and fairness.***

In a context where we are constantly reminded that resources are constrained we can find ourselves designing policy and programs from the perspective of how best to use the resources that we have. It seems to make sense. Good, sound, fiscal sense. The problem with that approach is that we can end up designing policies and programs that don't actually connect with what people in our community are experiencing. The problems we solve are technocratic problems – how to use our resources more 'efficiently' – to address the real life problems that the people in our community actually experience.

There are other perverse outcomes that can arise from taking a 'resource' approach to policy and program planning. The worst is that we can start to see



people themselves as the problem we need to solve. We have limited resources and we want to maximise their efficiency. As a result, the community expresses frustration because we think that the people using services are not “the most vulnerable or disadvantaged” or are not maximising the benefit they should gain from access to scarcely rationed resources, or are they taking more than we think they should from the system.

It is a mistake to expect people to act like ‘utility-maximising automatons’. Not only because people are not highly driven robots but because the benefits of social programs do not just arrive from a primary transaction. Benefits come equally from the secondary *social* outcomes that come from that initial transaction. Being rushed into and out of a service might maximise the efficient use of that resource – but it won’t build a relationship with the service provider or with the other people utilising that resource. It won’t build trust in your community, confidence in your ability to adapt, grow and sustain changes you seek and it will not sustain a sense that you are valued by your community or by your government.

When we try to design social programs to maximise the efficiency of delivery of the primary resource we sometimes forget the secondary social outcomes, and in turn, we lose to the opportunity to support positive solutions for people.

***The ACT Budget should be designed and prioritised to ensure we utilise our collective resources in ways that build strong, sustainable relationships in and across our communities. This is different from ensuring that we use resources in the most efficient manner over the current forward estimates***

That effective and sustainable universal services such as education, health care and public transport are vital to an inclusive and thriving community is widely acknowledged. But as important as these universal services are, they are only part of what is needed to address and reduce inequality. If we are really serious about addressing inequality we cannot just think of inequality as the gap between those households in the middle income quintiles and those at the top of the income scale. We need to direct additional resources and support to those households whose incomes are in the bottom two income quintiles. That requires investing in quality social and community services.

One of the shortcomings of the existing model for delivering social and community services in the ACT, as elsewhere in Australia, is that the imposition of a market framework brings with it concepts such as ‘competitive neutrality’ and ‘unfair market advantage’. In practice this can mean that the advice of the people and organisations delivering services is discounted in an erroneous attempt to maintain ‘neutrality’ in the tender process and/or can be interpreted as being self-interested.

Government cannot design effective community services and programs unless it heeds the advice of those organisations delivering services. It is the activity of service delivery that allows insight into community need and service gaps. This ACTCOSS submission is one example of frank and forthright advice on current community need and gaps in our service system.

In this submission we have identified a lack of appropriate data underpinning funding decisions for social and community services. Our services cannot be effective if community need, service experiences and the impacts of interventions are not well understood or critically assessed. Without an investment in data collection or impact assessment we can't determine the correct levels of funding. Developing a proper assessment mechanism for service demand and funding service capacity is vital.

A related issue threatening the capacity and sustainability of services is uncertainty in funding. A stark example is funding for homelessness prevention, support and recovery services, who have been on one year roll over of funding for four years. This compromises their ability to plan for and invest in future development. The workforce is unstable and it is difficult to retain skilled staff. And this is all in the context of growing need for services and growing evidence of the value of reducing homelessness in leveraging savings in the health and justice systems.

***In order to deliver an effective social and community service system we need to acknowledge and respond to the insight of service providers in identifying gaps in the current system and to deliver funding certainty for essential services the community needs.***

## Recommendations

ACTCOSS has outlined a number of recommendations below, categorised by portfolio. Similarly, the ACT Government made a number of commitments during the election, these are itemised accordingly. Linkages between these commitments and the Community Shared Statement are also identified.

### Housing

Increasing affordable housing is one priority for improved city infrastructure. ACTCOSS believes that as a priority of Affordable Housing development, affordable housing should be directed to assist the bottom 40 per cent income quintiles, and increased housing supply which is accessible for and visitable by people with disabilities. Focus should also be on reducing homelessness, and ensure adequate responses to meet the demand for homelessness services. Shared responsibility for funding and delivering improved outcomes for affordable housing, including social housing, and reducing homelessness across all ACT Government portfolios, should also be a priority.<sup>3</sup>

ACTCOSS understands that the ACT Government has made promises relating to affordable/social housing within its election commitments. These commitments align with the Community Shared Statement:

- Renew Canberra's ageing public housing stock<sup>4</sup>
- Develop new approaches to affordable housing
- Develop a housing strategy<sup>5</sup>
- Develop affordable housing targets<sup>6</sup>
- Housing for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People<sup>7</sup>
- Strengthen specialist homelessness and housing support services<sup>8</sup>
- Convene a Homelessness summit<sup>9</sup>
- Expand OneLink for weekend and after hours<sup>10</sup>
- LDA restructure<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Community Shared Statement 'Increase affordable housing', Attachment A.

<sup>4</sup> Parliamentary Agreement for the 9<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory, 2016. 4.1, (Parliamentary Agreement).

<sup>5</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 4.2.

<sup>6</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 4.6.

<sup>7</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 4.9.

<sup>9</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 4.10.

<sup>10</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 4.11.

ACTCOSS will closely monitor the delivery of these commitments. More so, when determining priorities for spending to deliver on the commitments above, ACTCOSS recommends the following:

1. Fund independent professional housing advocacy for people living with disability, including mental health, by investing funding for one FTE dedicated housing advocacy position to be based at ADACAS.
2. Increase funding for COTA ACT's Housing Option Advice Service to cover two FTE staff.
3. Divert \$100 million from the current Government bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing. The fund would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates.
4. Fund the Housing Policy Consortium peak bodies: ACT Shelter, the ACTCOSS, the Youth Coalition of the ACT, and the Women's Centre for Health Matters (WCHM) to continue to undertake local original research into housing and homelessness in the ACT.
5. Improve access to emergency housing.
6. Any directorate not already contributing at least one percent of their operating budget to housing and/or reducing homelessness to allocate one percent of their operating budget to fund additional measures that increase provision of services to reduce homelessness and increase supply of accessible, affordable housing.
7. ACTCOSS encourages the ACT Government to ensure that all directorates report in their Annual Reports on how their programs and policy reforms contribute to increasing affordable housing and reducing homelessness.
8. 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 to enable people to sustain their housing.
9. Deliver on the full number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care units that were promised as a government commitment. Of the ten units that were promised only five have been constructed. We recommend that the government deliver on its commitment and build the five overdue units as a matter of urgent priority. The location of these units should be determined in consultation with services working closely with elders in the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community and with services supporting them.

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<sup>11</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.5.

## Transport

The Community Shared Statement identifies the need to develop transport services that are accessible, affordable and fit for purpose. This is particularly critical for people working outside the 9-5 Monday-Friday work cycle, and all residents living with disabilities, those that do not drive, or do not have access to a private vehicle, people who have mobility challenges and/or cognitive or mental health barriers to using transport services .<sup>12</sup>

The ACT Government has committed to initiatives that focus on transport service delivery:

- Trial of free rapid buses on new routes<sup>13</sup>
- Expand the reach and accessibility of the flexible bus service to the Inner North<sup>14</sup>
- Develop an ACTION Fleet Management Strategy<sup>15</sup>
- Conduct a strategic assessment of innovative transport options for Canberra<sup>16</sup>

These commitments provide the capacity to help resolve issues affecting people who experience transport disadvantage. ACTCOSS would encourage the ACT Government to ensure that its commitments focus on service accessibility and functionality.

However, when determining priorities for spending to deliver on the commitments above, ACTCOSS recommends the following:

10. Ensure that a percentage of funds to improve delivery of ACTION services is directed towards improvement and increase in access to public transport in neighbourhoods and regional centres, with a focus on increasing affordable and accessible transport for East-West travel.
11. Expand the 2016-17 investment in public transport infrastructure to ensure that all bus stops, interchanges, lighting and pedestrian infrastructure meet accessibility standards.
12. Ensure that the layouts of and location of taxi ranks meet accessibility standards.
13. Expand eligibility for and promotion of Flexibus to any residents in the areas covered who experience transport disadvantage.
14. Fund community transport at sustainable levels and in a manner that will ensure that community transport continues to be available to all

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<sup>12</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Develop transport services', Attachment A.

<sup>13</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 3.4.

<sup>14</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 3.3.

<sup>15</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 3.5.

<sup>16</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 3.6.

in our community who are in need of it. That means ensuring a community transport system that is not only available to people eligible for an individualised funding package through Commonwealth initiatives like the NDIS or an aged care package.

15. Establish a properly resourced technical access planning advisory group combining technical expertise and user input. This advisory group would advise the Disability Reference Group and the ACT Government on how to address access issues for transport and new developments.
16. Take a social determinants of health approach to transport infrastructure. Assess investment in transport against the impact of transport infrastructure spending on increasing the affordability, and accessibility of transport for people who are transport disadvantaged to access work, health and education facilities, food, shopping, other amenities and social networks.

## Education

The ACT Government aims to diversify the local economy, with a focus on increasing access to work in tourism, digital and knowledge industries. This economic development strategy requires investment in human capital. It also requires a better focus on addressing inequality in education outcomes. The focus of increases in or targeting of school spending should be on improving outcomes for students not meeting attainment benchmarks and for students who have disengaged from education settings.

The Community Shared Statement identifies the most at risk groups for low education attainment or disengaging from school are children and young people in Out Of Home Care, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people those living with disability, are affected by mental health issues and/or living with financial disadvantage.<sup>17</sup>

The ACT Government has committed to initiatives that focus on improving student experience and outcomes:

- Psychologists for public schools<sup>18</sup>
- Supporting Parents Plan
- Develop alternative Teaching Methods Project
- Improve University admission processes
- Recruiting more School Assistants
- More Support for Teachers
- Gonski needs based funding

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<sup>17</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Improve education attainment and outcomes', Attachment A.

<sup>18</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 2.3.

- Safe Schools
- Streamlined mental health and wellbeing referral process that can be utilised by all schools
- Building teaching capacity
- Dedicated culture and language programs in schools
- Support for Study Canberra<sup>19</sup>
- Higher education research hub development<sup>20</sup>
- VET Funding of CIT<sup>21</sup>

When determining priorities for spending to deliver on these commitments above, ACTCOSS recommends the following.

17. Invest in community services to increase capacity to partner with schools and provide targeted intensive supports to young people and their families.
18. Provide social and emotional support and interventions in early childhood and education settings that strengthen peer relationships.
19. Provide targeted support to children and young people, particularly those aged 8-12, to successfully transition from primary to high school.
20. Provide case management and group work in schools, and expand resources to expand capacity and reach of community services who work collaboratively with schools.
21. Invest in early identification of disadvantage, and increase access to support throughout childhood and teenage years using long term programs.
22. Continue to focus investment in supporting students from key equity groups, including students from low socio-economic backgrounds; students with English as an additional language or dialect; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; and, students with disability.

## **Improving accessibility and competence of services for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds**

ACTCOSS believes that government should develop an inclusive and community-consulted multicultural policy. One that genuinely listens to, understands, and commits to addressing the priorities and needs of newly

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<sup>19</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.2 and 2.3.

<sup>20</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.2f.

<sup>21</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 2.2.

arrived migrants and refugees and established multicultural communities (including the health and pastoral care needs of multicultural seniors) and their faith-based groups.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, defending and promoting multiculturalism should always be a priority of the ACT Government.

The Government has made a number of commitments that align with the Community Shared Statement:

- Job support for refugees and asylum seekers<sup>23</sup>
- English language programs
- Multicultural Advisory Board<sup>24</sup>
- Inclusive and welcoming Canberra<sup>25</sup>

ACTCOSS will monitor the Government's implementation of these initiatives with a view to seeing progress on building broad community acceptance of diverse cultures, increase access to and cultural competence of services and reduce racism and exploitation.<sup>26</sup> ACTCOSS also recommends:

23. Expanding funding for access to TIS provided in the 2016 Budget so that all not-for-profit services working with people experiencing disadvantage that require TIS can access services

## Health

The ACT has some of the best health outcomes in Australia. The critical problem to address in our community is poor social determinants of health, which reduces health status and increases health costs. The Community Shared Statement specifies the need for government to invest in health infrastructure that prioritises increasing access to services, especially mental health, sexual and reproductive health, drug and alcohol, chronic disease and aged care services.<sup>27</sup> More effective health services will promote consumer control, amplify consumer advocacy voice, and expand access to services for people with the poorest health status.

During the election the ACT Government committed to health service delivery and ACTCOSS acknowledges these initiatives:

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<sup>22</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Develop an inclusive community-consultation and led multicultural policy, Attachment A.

<sup>23</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.6.

<sup>24</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 7.3,

<sup>25</sup> Parliamentary, Appendix 2.6f.

<sup>26</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Develop an inclusive community-consultation and led multicultural policy, Attachment A.

<sup>27</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Invest in health infrastructure that priorities increasing access to services', Attachment A.



- Nurse led Walk in Centres<sup>28</sup>
- Bulk billing GP centres<sup>29</sup>
- Expansion of Centenary Hospital<sup>30</sup>
- Two additional mobile dental centres<sup>31</sup>
- Build an Aboriginal health clinic for Winnunga Nimmitjah Aboriginal Health Service<sup>32</sup>
- Free vaccinations for Canberra babies
- Increase capacity of Hospital in Home (HITH)<sup>33</sup>
- Model for patient care navigators
- Upgrade facilities at Calvary Public<sup>34</sup>
- Develop a North Side hospital scoping paper
- Create a Preventative Health Coordinator<sup>35</sup>
- Health Research investment
- Family Assistance Fund
- Health care checks for grade six students
- Additional funding for mental health
- Expand Mental Health Consultation Services
- Help for new parents in relation to Post and Ante Natal Depression Support and Information (PANDSI)
- Establish an Office for Mental Health<sup>36</sup>
- Low-income Dental Care Subsidies<sup>37</sup>
- Community Based Counselling<sup>38</sup>
- Expand Healthy Weight Initiative<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix, 1.1.

<sup>29</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix, 2.1.

<sup>30</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix, 2.1.

<sup>31</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.4.

<sup>32</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.5.

<sup>33</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.6.

<sup>34</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.1.

<sup>35</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 1.3.

<sup>36</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 1.2.

<sup>37</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 1.4b.

<sup>38</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 2.3b.

<sup>39</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 1.3.

ACTCOSS will collaborate with other peak bodies within the health sector to monitor whether and to what extent delivery on these commitments.<sup>40</sup> We expect to see health services promoting consumer control and amplifying consumer advocacy capacity and impact.

We note no commitment has been announced regarding the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm. ACTCOSS recommends the ACT Government:

24. Announce as a matter of urgency the time frame to deliver on the commitment to the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm, so it reaches its full capacity of 16 beds.

## Justice System

ACTCOSS welcomes the inclusion of Community Legal Centre funding as part of the ACT Government elections commitments.<sup>41</sup> This election commitment meets one of the Community Shared Statement priorities for services – to sustain and expand access to specialist legal information, advice and representation. Going forward, ACTCOSS will monitor the Government's implementation of this commitment to ensure funding for family and domestic law, employment, discrimination, consumer law, tenancy and social security law is sustained at existing levels and grows to meet community needs.

ACTCOSS recommends the following additional investments in justice services:

25. Provide ongoing funding for the Street Law program
26. Provide recurrent funding for the Corrections Throughcare program

## Safer Families Agenda

The Community Shared Statement identifies the need to reduce violence and improve support for people recovering from trauma. This is especially critical for women and children experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence.<sup>42</sup>

ACTCOSS acknowledges that the Government made election commitments that focus on addressing Domestic Violence:

- Expand the definition of domestic violence and sexual violence reform<sup>43</sup>
- Introduce an ACT Rights of Victims Charter<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Invest in health infrastructure that priorities increasing access to services', Attachment A.

<sup>41</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 7.7.

<sup>42</sup> Community Shared Statement 'Reduce violence and improve support for people recovering from trauma, Attachment A.

<sup>43</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 11.2.

When determining priorities for spending to deliver on the commitments above, ACTCOSS recommends the following:

27. All of the recommendations and measures outlined by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and in the Death's Review be acted upon as a matter of priority. The Gap Analysis Report highlighted a lack of appropriate services, supports and protections regarding elder abuse and other forms of family violence. This is a significant oversight given the findings of the Death Review in particular.
28. Funding provided to primary prevention services was a special measure that was not costed as part of ongoing Budget expenditure in 2016-17. ACTCOSS recommends ongoing funding be provided to continue these services.

## **National Disability Strategy and gaps arising from NDIS Transition**

Significant gaps are emerging in the service system through the NDIS transition process. There is a need to engage genuinely with the community, collect data and maintain a commitment to the core principles of improved choice, control and life outcomes that underpinned agreement to the NDIS. The ACT Government can deliver on its commitment to the NDIS only if it invests in social and service infrastructure as recommended below:

29. Continue developing the InvolveCBR initiative as a model for the implementation of the National Disability Strategy but ensure that the Initiative is backed by significant whole of government work by setting aside funds in each Directorate for initiatives under InvolveCBR.
30. Fund and/or reinstate specialist Mental Health programs, to support individuals living with mental illness who do not identify as living with a disability and therefore do not seek to be assessed as eligible for the NDIS or who choose not to be participants, preferring to access services outside of the context of the NDIS.
31. Establish a Capital Housing Support Program to provide expert advice to people with disability and/or families/supporters who are considering home modifications to their family home, the purchase of a new property, or accessing equity in their family home, to provide suitable and secure housing tenure for their family member or members with disability.
32. Establish a funding stream for carer supports alongside but distinct from supports to individuals eligible for the NDIS or the Community Assistance and Support Program (CASP).

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<sup>44</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 7.6.

33. Ensure that people with disability are appropriately resourced and supported to undertake pre-planning, access peer support and to develop peer networks.
34. Scope out, fund, and promote pathways which will allow Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people who are currently acting as informal carers to undertake qualifications that would allow them to formally fulfil roles as disability support workers in the community.
35. In order to ensure that eligible Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples are accessing the NDIS, information and referral pathways need to be provided in culturally safe ways. This requires additional funding to be provided for linkage and referral services within existing organisations accessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It also requires adequate funding to enable culturally safe support and assistance through the NDIS planning process.

## **Concessions Program**

Concessions provide essential support to low income households in a city with a high cost of living. ACTCOSS recommends the following improvements to the Concessions scheme offered by the ACT Government:

36. Introduce license and registration concessions for probationary and restricted licenses, and for low-income households of working age.
37. Expand promotion of the concessions program, including for those who do not access online information.
38. Adopt a comprehensive financial assistance scheme for the ACT Alcohol Ignition Interlock Program that will introduce flexibility for individuals on low incomes. The financial assistance scheme should include, in addition to maintenance of the existing 35 percent concession, severe financial hardship assistance for those assessed as eligible. Such a scheme could be developed to be consistent with the approach of Infringement Notice Management Plans whereby individuals who are deemed eligible to participate may be able to repay the cost of their interlock device by instalments, by participation in a Work or Development Program, or potentially receive a waiver in extreme circumstances.
39. Ensure no additional charges are incurred for making use of payment plans rather than upfront complete payment of fees, fines and charges.

## **Sustaining Our Environment for the Future**

ACTCOSS Community Shared Statement also focuses on ensuring that government policy invests in the future of our environment, and promotes clean energy initiatives. We call on the ACT Government to support 100 per cent

renewable electricity by 2020, and zero net emissions by 2040.<sup>45</sup> We also call on government to address climate change and reduce energy poverty through targeted expansion of household energy efficiency measures, and ensure a just transition to adapt to climate change. Future responses should be created in consultation with climate affected communities and workers.

ACTCOSS acknowledges the work the Government has conducted in this space over the last term of government and notes that its commitments during the election align with the Community Shared Statement:

- Tackling environmental issues
- Sign up to Under2MoU<sup>46</sup>
- Review of energy efficiency ratings schemes<sup>47</sup>
- 100% renewable electricity<sup>48</sup>
- Minimum EER standards for rental properties<sup>49</sup>
- Funding for the Environmental Defenders Office<sup>50</sup>

ACTCOSS will collaborate with environment and sustainability advocacy organisations to monitor implementation of these commitments.

## Community Engagement and Citizens Voice

Improved community consultation and transparency of decision making is necessary to ensure that policies, programs and planning decisions are made following a process of deliberation with the community as a whole, with strong representation by the people who are directly affected by the decisions that are made.

As identified in the Community Shared Statement, the Legislative Assembly and the public sector should engage directly with communities and guarantee that proper consultation processes are undertaken.<sup>51</sup> ACTCOSS recognises that the government made a commitment relating to community consultation in respect of the planning process and major projects<sup>52</sup>. These commitments to community engagement should be extended across the implementation of programs and initiatives (beyond city infrastructure) to include service development, social infrastructure delivery, and economic development.

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<sup>45</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Ensure there is a safe climate and clean energy' Attachment A.

<sup>46</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 6.2.

<sup>47</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 5.3.

<sup>48</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 6.1.

<sup>49</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 6.7

<sup>50</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 6.3.

<sup>51</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Develop an inclusive community-consultation and led multicultural policy, Attachment A.

<sup>52</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 5.2.

ACTCOSS acknowledges that the Government has made some commitments that align with the Community Shared Statement in relation to improved community engagement and Citizens Voice:

- Support for carers<sup>53</sup>
- Develop an Office for Disability<sup>54</sup>
- Establish a Policy Unit to support the NDIS and other disability supports<sup>55</sup>
- Office of LGBTIQ Affairs<sup>56</sup>

When determining priorities for spending to deliver on these commitments above, ACTCOSS recommends the following.

40. Continue and increase support for systemic peak advocacy noting the importance and appropriateness of user lead advocacy by Disabled Peoples, Carers, Multicultural Community, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, LGBTI and Women's organisations.
41. Work with the community to develop a comprehensive Disability Strategy that works across the domains of education, recreation, economic participation, employment, housing, transport and access to services. This should be oversighted by a properly resourced Disability Reference Group with discrete responsibility for the oversight of the implementation of the National Disability Strategy in the ACT
42. Develop a Carer Strategy that will have the capacity to support and respond to the needs of carers, improve health, wellbeing, housing, work opportunities and attainment (particularly for younger carers 12-25 years old).
43. Continue the implementation and further development of the ACT Government Agreement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
44. Support volunteering as a key strategy to improve community well-being.
45. Build, support and sustain independent Non-Government Organisations that enable self-determination and control. In particular, support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community controlled organisations.
46. Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that fund direct engagement by the community for whom the services are provided to ensure services meet

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<sup>53</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 71.

<sup>54</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 7.2.

<sup>55</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, 7.2.

<sup>56</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.6.

expectations, and improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce.

## Economic Development

ACTCOSS believes that government should focus on increasing access to secure jobs. Those that pay a living wage, including by investing in the public sector, public services, urban and suburban renewal and social infrastructure projects that increase jobs in the local economy.<sup>57</sup>

ACTCOSS acknowledges that the ACT Government made commitments that align with this priority:

- Maintain the size of the ACTPS<sup>58</sup>
- Business Development Plan: Boost Areas of Strength<sup>59</sup>
- Business Development Plan: Export Investment<sup>60</sup>
- Canberra Convention Bureau
- Business Development Plan: Funding and Grants<sup>61</sup>

ACTCOSS will monitor whether and to what extent ACT Government projects and investments to improve access to secure jobs, paying particular attention to developing better work opportunities and secure work for young people, older people, people who are returning to work from caring roles, and people who have been long term unemployed<sup>62</sup>.

Initiatives intended to boost ACT business activity, employment and export industries should include a focus on community and health services. As one of the fastest growing labour markets and a part of the economy that contributes to reducing inequality and developing human capital, it should be incorporated into government's broader economic and export plan.

The Community Services Industry Strategy that was developed jointly by the ACT Government and the community sector demonstrates recognition by the ACT Government of the critical place of this industry in our local economy.

When determining priorities for spending to deliver on the commitments above, ACTCOSS recommends the following:

47. Provide seed funding to support development of partnerships between the private real estate industry and housing support services

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<sup>57</sup> Community Shared Statement 'Increase access to secure jobs', Attachment A.

<sup>58</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.3.

<sup>59</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.3.

<sup>60</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.3.

<sup>61</sup> Parliamentary Agreement, Appendix 2.3.

<sup>62</sup> Community Shared Statement, 'Increase access to secure jobs.'

48. Fund development of the Community Services Industry Strategy Implementation Plans – with the first priority being workforce supply and development. Specific gaps in the current workforce include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention, trauma-informed practice in mental health and housing services, working effectively with people in contact with the criminal justice system. There is also a critical need to increase support for the mental health and wellbeing of the community sector workforce.
49. Prioritise self-determination and community control when evaluating organisation funding proposals submitted to commissioning processes for the delivery of social and community services.
50. Fund a Socio-Economic Index for Individuals (SEIFI) data set drawn from the 2016 ABS Census.
51. Update ACT demographic data and develop an accurate assessment methodology of social need in the ACT. Utilise this assessment methodology, alongside an agreed costing mechanism, when calculating funding for social services in the ACT.



## **Policy Work needed to reduce inequality, increase social inclusion and deliver on election commitments**

Further policy work is needed to complement and maximise the value of investments made via the ACT Budget. Priorities for policy development in the 2017-18 year are:

1. Legislate expanded minimum standards for private rental properties which include the removal of no-grounds evictions.
2. Apply the principles underpinning the Affordable Rental Scheme (that sets rent payments as a percentage of income instead of a percentage of market rent), currently open to people over 65 who meet an income eligibility threshold, to a wider group of low income households in order to create a system that could be applied to all people experiencing disadvantage in the ACT.
3. Establish a Community/Government/Industry Steering Group to oversight and provide advice on implementation and evaluation of effectiveness of the Affordable Housing Action Plan.
4. Require all new dwellings to comply with universal design standards. Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that engage directly with the community to ensure services meet expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.
5. Lobby the Commonwealth Government through Disability Reform Council to recommit to concrete measures under the National Disability Strategy such as work on disability access, Universal Design housing, the reinstatement of ABC Ramp Up and work on leadership development. Work with the NDIA and the Commonwealth to ensure the provision of properly resourced grassroots local feedback mechanisms to the NDIA with two way accountabilities to the ACT Government and the NDIS Board. These should focus on customer experience feedback, gap identification, risk mitigation and ensuring the NDIS has good sources of local feedback from key groups especially people with psycho-social disability, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people and people in supported decision making arrangements.
6. Ensure that NDIS Information, Linkage and Capacity Building (ILC) services are appropriate and remain viable and available to all people living with disability in the ACT. Map and address key gaps in systems and supports including maintaining capacity to fund

underpinning supports, services and advocacy covering people outside the NDIS system. Significant gaps not fitting into the ILC Guidelines include individually designed/ modified equipment through TADACT and Communication services like the Radio for Print Handicapped.

7. Undertake a range of intersectional work with groups with barriers to entry to the NDIS and dual disadvantage including people using supported decision making, women and girls, people who identify as LGBTIQ and people from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse backgrounds or from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

# Detailed evidence of inequality and supporting evidence for recommendations

## Affordable Housing and Adequate Crisis Services

### Housing Costs in the ACT

The ACT has one of the most expensive rental markets in Australia (Tanton, Vidyattam & Mohanty 2013: 2-3). In 2016, we published research which drew on the Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot<sup>63</sup> to calculate the number of affordable rental properties for anyone on either a minimum wage or income support. We found that, in the whole of Canberra, there was no affordable housing for a couple on Newstart with two children aged under 5 and 10 years of age.

In total there were only 329 affordable houses for the income categories we considered and the large majority of these were only affordable to people at the higher end of the income range considered (ACTCOSS and ACT Shelter 2016: 26-30). Given that the SEIFI found 28,000 plus people were in the category of most disadvantaged it becomes clear that the numbers of available affordable housing just do not meet the level of need experienced in our community.

When people cannot access affordable accommodation it means that they cut back on other essentials. In 2015 the ACT Housing Policy Consortium<sup>64</sup> undertook qualitative research looking into what Canberrans on low incomes are compromising in their efforts to meet their housing costs. The graph below captures that information. It highlights that people who are renting, whose incomes are just above concession entitlements, are struggling most to make ends meet in Canberra.

Relative to the rest of Australia the ACT is characterised by higher levels of public housing but lower levels of community housing. Additionally, in the ACT, as elsewhere, the policy trend has been to target public housing tightly to people facing the most urgent need. This means that there is a fairly large cohort of people who are not eligible for housing supports who are 'squeezed' by tight rental markets and limited lower-cost rental properties.

As at 4 October 2016 there were a total of 1,891 applications for social housing in the ACT.<sup>65</sup> Average wait times for social housing range from 280 days for those in the priority needs category (40 applications) to 730 days for those in

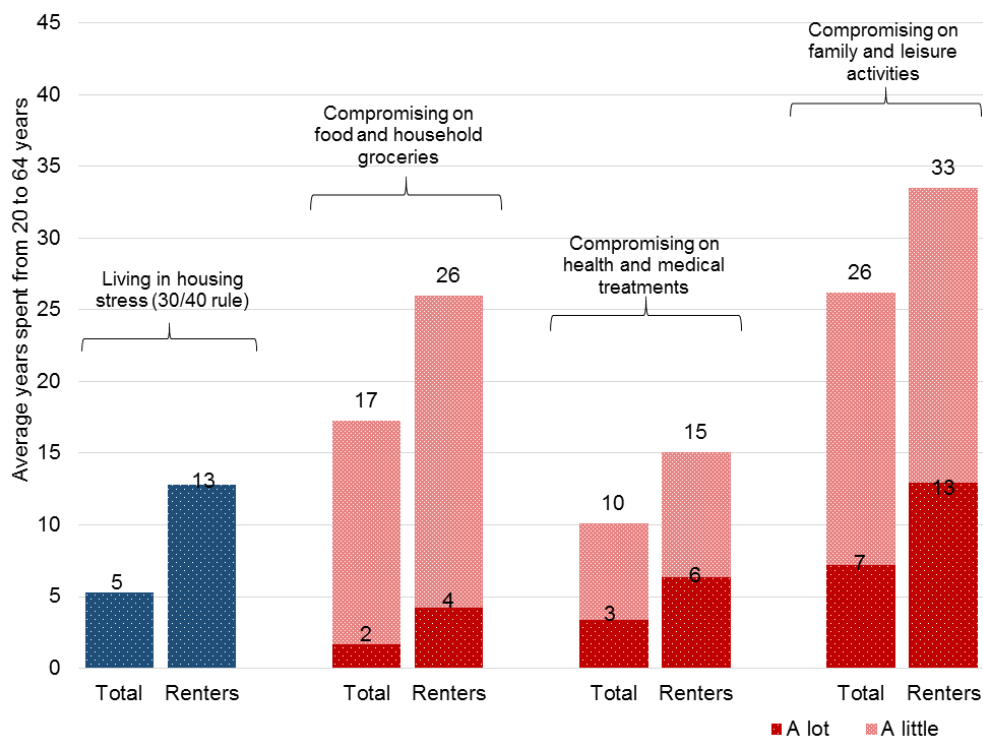
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63 The Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot was undertaken on the weekend of 11 April 2015. '2,125 private rentals and share house rooms were advertised for rent in the ACT and Queanbeyan region [that weekend]. Private rentals were surveyed from local newspapers and websites including Realestate.com.au and Allhomes.com.au, and shared housing options were surveyed from Gumtree.com.au' (Anglicare Australia 2015, 41).

64 Comprised of ACT Shelter, ACTCOSS, the Youth Coalition of the ACT and the WCHM.

65 Figures taken from ACT Government, 2016, 'Social Housing Waiting List', Community Services webpage, accessed 11 October 2016, <[http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/services/social\\_housing/waiting\\_lists](http://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/services/social_housing/waiting_lists)>.

the high needs housing category (1,015 applications) and 820 days for those in the standard needs category (836 applications).



Source: ACT Shelter et al. (2015)

## Homelessness in the ACT

At the time of the 2011 Census the ACT had the second highest rate of homelessness in the country (ABS 2012b: 8). In fact, the ACT was one of few regions in which homelessness had actually worsened in the period since the 2006 Census (ABS 2012b: 8). While people become homeless for different and diverse reasons, a lack of affordable housing impedes a return to stable housing for all people experiencing homelessness.

A 2015 review of changes to the specialist homelessness sector (SHS) commissioned by the ACT Government found that:

Over the reform period [2009-2014] the SHS system has experienced greater demand from service users with higher needs accessing the system in less stable housing situations. The SHS sector has provided more services, particularly non-accommodation supports, and has achieved better non-housing related outcomes for service users, especially in employment. However, while the ACT still has a much higher rate of exits into social housing than in other jurisdictions, exits into stable accommodation have declined over the period. ...Integration has improved across all service types, but gaps remain—a core challenge remains the availability of social housing and private rental accommodation for people moving out of the SHS sector, with implications for the development of

products and services designed to help people rent in the private rental market (ARTD 2015: 12).

In recent years homelessness services in the ACT have faced the dual pressures of consistent community demand and Commonwealth funding cuts and uncertainty. Homelessness services funded under the National Partnership Agreements have particularly felt the pressures arising from negotiating with the Commonwealth Government which has offered little in the way of advance notice regarding future funding. Ensuring that there is a core revenue base from which homelessness services are funded is vital to addressing need in our community.

It is also necessary to acknowledge trends and risk factors that identify some people in our community as being more likely to experience homelessness than others. Specifically, data clearly demonstrates that people who have had major interactions with the human service system in one sphere of life are over-represented in homeless populations. This includes young people who have been in the out-of-home-care system,<sup>66</sup> people who have served custodial sentences,<sup>67</sup> people who have contact with the mental health system<sup>68</sup> and women who have experienced domestic violence.<sup>69</sup> Data also clearly demonstrates that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, who are over-represented in other areas of the human services system like out-of-home-care (CFCA 2015) and justice (ABS 2014), are also overrepresented in homeless populations (ABS 2012b). Nationally and locally our human service system must do better for these groups.

We acknowledge a significant investment has been made in the area of out of home care in reducing contact with the criminal justice system. But until we see drastic improvements in outcomes for the groups noted above we cannot afford to become complacent. For this reason ACTCOSS has been advocating that each directorate report on how their programs both reduce or contribute to risks of homelessness and how they contribute to growth in affordable housing for members of our community. We have also advocated for one per cent from the budget of each directorate – where that directorate is not already funding homelessness interventions – to be directed towards such measures. This could mean pooling those funds and directing them to programs overseen by the Housing Directorate, or it could simply mean directorates establishing programs or work practices that reduce risks of homelessness and increase

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66 The CREATE Foundation 2009 survey of young people transitioning from out-of-home care found, for example, that 'over one-third [of survey respondents] had at least one experience of homelessness in their first year of independence [from care]' (McDowall 2009: 6).

67 The 'Journeys Home' Report, for example, found that survey '[r]espondents that have ever been incarcerated, whether in juvenile detention, adult prison, or remand are particularly prone to homelessness, even when comparing to similarly vulnerable people' (Bevitt et al. 2015: 3).

68 To the best of our knowledge there is no data kept in Australia that systematically records the number of people experiencing homelessness who have a mental illness. However, available data demonstrates a strong correlation (for an overview of the research see MHCA 2009: 14-15). This data includes a survey of people living with mental illness by SANE that 'found that 94 per cent of respondents had been homeless or were without suitable accommodation at some point in their lives' (as reported in MHCA 2009: 14).

69 The 'Journey's Home' Report, which documents the findings of a longitudinal survey of people with high levels of housing insecurity, for example, found that: 'homelessness and recent experiences of either physical or sexual violence often go hand in hand. This is particularly true of primary homelessness' (Bevitt et al. 2015: 26).

supply of affordable housing for those groups overrepresented in homeless populations that they serve.

What is vital is that there is cross-government responsibility for homelessness and that institutional settings which currently create risk for people becoming homeless are remedied.

***In order to address affordable housing and homelessness in Australia we need a whole-of-government policy that delivers affordable rental and for-purchase housing for households at all levels of the income spectrum.***

## Transport

Canberra has the second highest expenditure on transport amongst capital cities in the country. Darwin, the city with the highest transport expenditure was \$233.78 per week, with Canberra only marginally behind on \$232.23. In terms of the proportion of household income expended on transport, Canberra sits at third highest (spending 15.1 percent of weekly expenditure), behind only Darwin and Melbourne.

Only housing (19.6 percent) and food (15.4 percent) constitute greater expenditure areas for Canberra households (ABS 2011, Table 23A). In fact, Canberra households spend almost as much on transport (\$232) as they do on food (\$235) (ABS 2011, Table 23A). Apart from Darwin (and the NT as a whole), where expenditure on transport in fact does exceed expenditure on food, all other capital cities spend between \$15 and \$40 more per week on food than on transport (ABS 2011, Tables 231, 27A).<sup>70</sup>

While households in the ACT spend significantly more (\$40) per week than the national expenditure on transport, ACT households also have the second highest average income levels in the country (\$2537 per week) when compared with greater capital city areas across the country, behind only greater Perth (\$2686) (ABS 2015b, Table 18). Despite their high average income, Canberra households still have the third highest expenditure on transport in terms of the proportion of the weekly household budget when compared with all capital cities (ABS 2011, Table 23A) – this indicates that transport costs are high.

A 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) analysis of transport found that Australians in the bottom income quintiles experience transport difficulties far more frequently than those in the top quintile: '9.9% and 1.3% respectively' (as cited in Rosier and McDonald 2011). Additionally, in a 2013 report, the ABS state that:

In 2010, nearly half (48%) of adults without access to a passenger vehicle felt they sometimes or often had difficulty getting to places. However, for

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<sup>70</sup> In terms of states/territories, as compared to capital cities, the gap between the expenditure on food and transport is much narrower – in the NT transport expenditure is greater than food expenditure; and in Queensland food expenditure is only \$1 more than transport expenditure. The narrower gap in states and territories partly reflects the increased costs of transport in states/territories with larger remote populations (ABS 2011, Table 27A).

people who had access to a passenger vehicle, 1 in 10 adults (10%) felt that they sometimes or often had difficulty getting to places. (ABS 2013)

This data shows a correlation between income and transport disadvantage particularly where income enables or impedes ownership of or access to a passenger vehicle. Given the high proportion of household expenditure on transport in the ACT it can only be assumed that households with low incomes struggle to cover transport costs.

It is also well established that particular population groups are more likely to experience transport disadvantage, including: 'families with young children, people with a disability and Indigenous Australians' (Rosier and McDonald 2011). In a survey of local ACT literature need ACTCOSS found that young people, people living with disability, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, and marginalised families all have unmet transport needs (ACTCOSS 2016: pp.9-12).

Research highlights that unmet transport need in the ACT impacts on access to food, access to health care and cross-border travel (see ACTCOSS 2016: pp.12-14). A detailed analysis of food insecurity in the ACT published by Anglicare ACT and the Australian Red Cross in 2013 found that:

Clients from St John's Care were most likely to have needed and been unable to access food assistance at some point in the past 3 months. 2 respondents said that they were unable to get help because they didn't have petrol to drive there. A number of clients of other services mentioned transport or being unable to access a service as an impediment, though some stated that they were able to contact their local church or another organisation in the end. St Benedict's clients who had been unable to access food assistance tended to just go without, or in one unfortunate case, the respondent's children went hungry. (Anglicare ACT and Red Cross 2013, p. 22)

As a city the ACT is at an important juncture in terms of urban design and infrastructure. We have important decisions to make about the future design and location of our community amenity. If we are to address rather than entrench disadvantage it is imperative that we ensure that transport investments acknowledge the needs of people experiencing transport disadvantage and do not only focus on the transport needs of Monday to Friday 9–5 commuters.

It is also imperative that we design our cities so that affordable housing is situated in close proximity to high quality public transport. If we do not, if we further establish the trend of pushing affordable housing out to regions where there is limited public transport coverage we will entrench patterns of disadvantage in our community. We will also undermine the growth of industries like hospitality and tourism that rely on low-wage jobs and low-wage workers to be able to travel easily to access jobs.

***In order to address transport disadvantage we need a transport system that is accessible, affordable, addresses the coverage needs of people experiencing disadvantage and makes people feel safe.***

## Education

For the past two years ACTCOSS has been working in partnership with the Youth Coalition of the ACT and our members to highlight the issue of educational inequity in our city. As noted above, education is another area where our strong average performance conceals disadvantage at the individual level.

Results from the 2012 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) show that, on average, ACT students outperform students from other states and territories across reading, mathematical and scientific literacy measures. However, relying on the ACT's comparative 'average' rank in national and international testing hides the significant inequity in the ACT's education system (Cuzzillo and Ragless 2015: 5).

Researchers in curriculum and educational systems and policy from the University of Canberra, Philip Roberts and Dr Simon Leonard (2013) highlight the issues that arise when only looking at the average performance of students in the ACT. They suggest that the ACT relies on the large cohort of students from high socio-economic status backgrounds to maintain the appearance that the ACT is leading the country when it comes to education and that 'ACT students from average and low SES [socio-economic status] backgrounds do not achieve as well as students from similar backgrounds in most other states' (Roberts and Leonard 2013).

Roberts and Leonard further note that:

'A close examination of the PISA report shows that the ACT quickly falls to near the bottom of the nation when it comes to equity in education with only the Northern Territory showing a greater connection between SES background and PISA achievement.' (Roberts and Leonard 2013)

In fact, Roberts and Leonard have even stated that '[i]t could be suggested that Canberra schools are reproducing social gradients rather than reducing them' (Roberts and Leonard 2013). It is not just that our education outcomes conceal disadvantage in this case, but that the system risks entrenching the uneven distribution of life chances.

Education has a significant bearing on the welfare and wellbeing of individuals. Education impacts on people's labour market experiences and their earned incomes in later life. The ACT is primarily a knowledge economy and growing this part of our economy has been a part of deliberate government policy in achieving economic diversification goals.

In 2014, ACTCOSS in partnership with the Women's Centre for Health Matters, undertook research into labour market trends in the ACT. That research highlights the relationship between educational attainment job security and income. It found, from ABS data, that in the ACT:

People aged 25-34 who have not completed Year 12 have an 8.4 percent unemployment rate and the lowest employment participation rate of 72.1 percent.



Those with a Certificate I/II as their highest level of education have a 13.7 percent unemployment rate and an 80 percent participation rate.

Those with a bachelor degree have a 2.2 percent unemployment rate and 90.9 percent participation rate.

Those with a Certificate III/IV also have a low unemployment rate at 2.1 percent and the highest participation rate of 92 percent (Perry 2014: 15).

Education is often pointed to as the most effective mechanism for addressing inequality in countries such as Australia because it enables social mobility. We cannot accept an education system that reproduces rather than reduces the social gradient and does not deliver great outcomes for students with low socio-economic status.

***In order to address the attainment gap and ensure all students in our schools have equal opportunity to realise their abilities we need matched investment in community services so they can better partner with schools and expand their role in supporting disadvantaged students.***

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## Attachment A: COMMUNITY SHARED STATEMENT FOR ACT 2016 ELECTION

There should be no better place in the world to live than Canberra. When we built Canberra together, we created a city to be proud of. We do not want to see two Canberras where the common good suffers with some in our community isolated, disadvantaged and/or impoverished.

In 2015 the OECD launched a publication titled *In it Together: Why Less Inequality Benefits All* with the following statement: "The gap between rich and poor keeps widening. Growth, if any, has disproportionately benefited higher income groups while lower income households have been left behind. This long-run increase in income inequality not only raises social and political concerns, but also economic ones. It tends to drag down GDP growth, due to the rising distance of the lower 40% from the rest of society. Lower income people have been prevented from realising their human capital potential, which is bad for the economy as a whole." (<http://www.oecd.org/social/in-it-together-why-less-inequality-benefits-all-9789264235120-en.htm>)

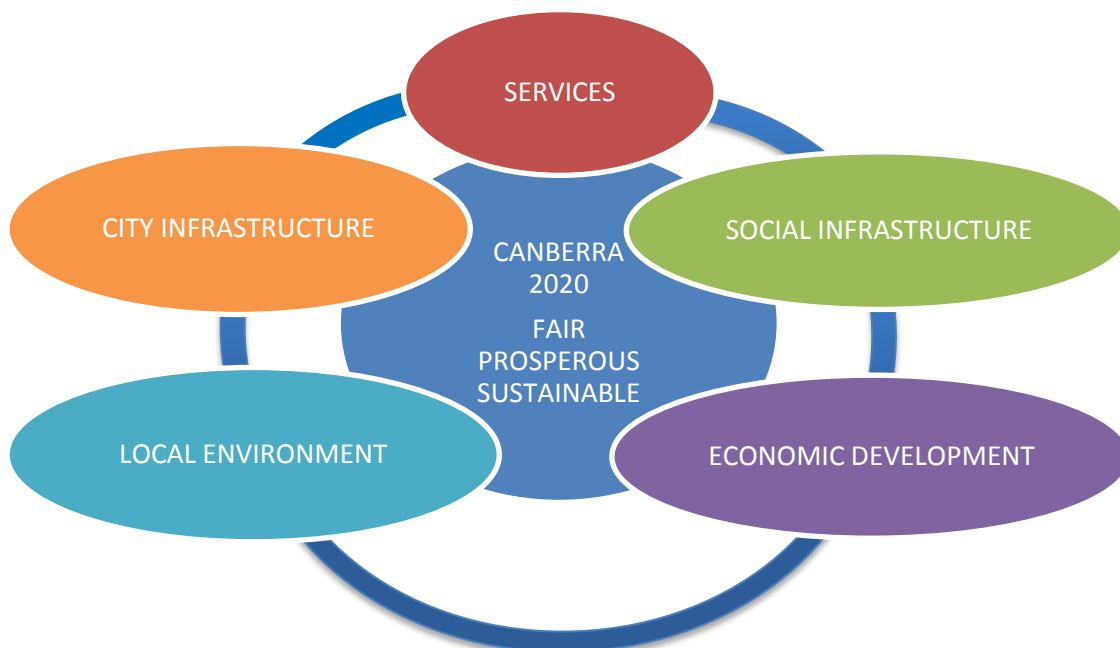
We see this every day in the ACT. We see a growing gap between those who enjoy Canberra's prosperity and liveability and those who don't. This growing gap compromises individual and family economic and social wellbeing, compromises environmental values and threatens our collective success.

For Canberra's political leaders on all sides, the major task in the next term of government is to resist and reverse trends for growing inequality and division in our local economy and community. The ACT Election is a moment for candidates for public office to raise the alert about the enormous risks of growing social inequality in Canberra, and commit to find solutions.

The signatories to this document urge all parties and candidates contesting the ACT Election to set out practical policies and specific measures to address inequality in the ACT, and to do so early in the election campaign. We believe we can build a more egalitarian, inclusive and sustainable Canberra if in the next term of government well targeted investments are made in city infrastructure, social infrastructure, services the local environment and economic development.

Whatever is important to you, the chances of making it happen will be eroded by rising inequality. When you understand that inequality hurts all of us, it is clear what needs to be done.

**City infrastructure, services, social infrastructure, the local environment and economic development** are linked underpinning resources that we need to invest in and harness in unison if we are to achieve a fair, prosperous and sustainable Canberra for all of us over the life of the next ACT Legislative Assembly.



# Attachment A: COMMUNITY SHARED STATEMENT FOR ACT 2016 ELECTION

## City Infrastructure

Increase affordable housing for households in the bottom 40 per cent income quintiles and increased supply of housing which is accessible for and visitable by people with disabilities. Reduce homelessness, and ensure adequate responses to meet the demand for homelessness services. Share responsibility for funding and delivering improved outcomes for affordable housing, including social housing, and reducing homelessness across all ACT Government portfolios.

Develop transport services that are accessible, affordable and fit for purpose, especially for people working outside 9-5 Monday-Friday jobs, for people with disabilities and for people who do not drive or have access to a private vehicle. Ensure transport information is easily accessible, the services are accessible to people with mobility and/or cognitive barriers, and services offered enable people to complete activities of daily living and participate in their community.

Ensure urban renewal increases affordability, accessibility, sustainability and inclusiveness for all ages, promoting a diverse economy, high amenity green spaces, enhancing biodiversity, maintaining natural spaces in urban settings, affordable community facilities, affordable, fit for purpose accommodation for community organisations and a socially rich experience for all residents. Ensure that urban planning and city design decisions are made with genuine involvement and consultation with the communities that live, work and use those spaces, including residents, workers and local businesses.

Invest in health infrastructure that prioritises increasing access to services, especially mental health, sexual and reproductive health, drug and alcohol, chronic disease and aged care services; promote consumer control in service design and delivery; amplify consumer advocacy voice; expand access to services for people with the poorest health status and outcomes by providing health services in diverse settings, increasing the cultural appropriateness, cultural competence and quality of services.

## Services

Improve education attainment and outcomes for students not meeting attainment benchmarks and students who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from school. The focus should be on children and young people in the out of home care system, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, those living with disability, dealing with financial disadvantage and culturally and linguistically diverse people. Schools and local community service agencies are resourced to build strong collaborative relationships, and have capacity to respond flexibly and share resources to improve educational outcomes for young people. Better support for students who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education.

Reduce violence and improve support for people recovering from trauma - especially women and children experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence. Actions and investments should be guided by the voices of people who experience violence, reflect the evidence based approaches that have been recommended by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and respond to the recommendations from the three reports on the impact of family violence on the ACT community and service system responses to this serious issue.

Sustain and expand access to specialist legal information, advice and representation, including through community based legal assistance services; and engage with community advocates on reducing the social determinants of contact with the legal and criminal justice system.

# Attachment A: COMMUNITY SHARED STATEMENT FOR ACT 2016 ELECTION

## Social Infrastructure

Develop a comprehensive Disability Strategy to guide whole of government action through a dedicated policy capacity within the ACT Government. This strategy will have a whole of community focus on and capacity to deliver a truly accessible and inclusive community across the domains of education, recreation, economic participation, employment, housing, transport and access to services.

Develop a comprehensive Carer Strategy to guide whole of government action through a dedicated policy capacity within the ACT Government. This strategy will have community capacity to support and respond to the needs of carers - improve health, wellbeing, housing, work opportunities and education attainment (especially for younger carers 12-25 years old).

Support ongoing implementation and further development of the ACT Government agreement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Develop an inclusive community-consulted and led multicultural policy that listens to, understands and commits to addressing the priorities and needs of ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, newly arrived migrants, refugees and established multicultural communities (including the health and pastoral care needs of multicultural seniors) and their faith-based groups. Defending multiculturalism, build on multicultural celebrations and take action to engage at grass roots, build broad community acceptance with understanding and address racism and exploitation.

Support volunteering as a key strategy to improve community well-being by supporting volunteer engagement and management through actively advancing a whole of government and community approach by effecting the 2016 - 20 ACT Volunteer Statement and Implementation Plan.

Build and sustain independent Non Government Organisations that enable self determination and community control. These organisations, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations, should have the capacity and authority to hold services and decision-makers to account, and advocate for policies and services that meet community needs.

## Economic Development

Increase access to secure jobs that pay a living wage, including by investing in the public sector, public services, public and social infrastructure projects that increase jobs in the local economy. Improving access to secure jobs should pay particular attention to young people, older people, people who are returning to work from caring roles and people who have been long term unemployed.

Ensure there is a safe climate and clean energy by supporting 100% renewable electricity by 2020 and zero net emissions by 2040. Address climate change and reduce energy poverty through targeted expansion of household energy efficiency measures, and ensure a just transition to adapt to climate change by developing further responses in consultation with climate affected communities and workers.

Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that engage directly with the community to ensure services meet expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.

## Attachment A: COMMUNITY SHARED STATEMENT FOR ACT 2016 ELECTION

**Listed below are the organisations that have developed this shared agenda for the 2016-2020 term of the ACT Government.**

ACT Council of Social Service [www.actcoss.org.au](http://www.actcoss.org.au)

ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body – [www.atsieb.com.au](http://www.atsieb.com.au)

ACT Shelter Inc [www.actshelter.net.au](http://www.actshelter.net.au)

ACT Mental Health Consumer Network [www.actmhcn.org.au](http://www.actmhcn.org.au)

Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drug Association ACT (ATODA) [www.atoda.org.au](http://www.atoda.org.au)

Carers ACT [www.carersact.org.au](http://www.carersact.org.au)

Canberra Multicultural Community Forum [www.cmcf.org.au](http://www.cmcf.org.au)

Conservation Council of the ACT [www.conservationcouncil.org.au](http://www.conservationcouncil.org.au)

Council on the Ageing (COTA) ACT [www.cotaact.org.au](http://www.cotaact.org.au)

Create [www.create.org.au/what-we-do/research-and-advocacy/position-papers/](http://www.create.org.au/what-we-do/research-and-advocacy/position-papers/)

Families ACT [www.familiesact.org.au/](http://www.familiesact.org.au/)

Health Care Consumers Association of the ACT [www.hcca.org.au](http://www.hcca.org.au)

Mental Health Community Coalition ACT [www.mhccact.org.au](http://www.mhccact.org.au)

P&C Council of ACT [www.actparents.org.au/index.php/component/k2/item/249](http://www.actparents.org.au/index.php/component/k2/item/249)

People With Disabilities ACT [www.pwdact.org.au](http://www.pwdact.org.au)

Unions ACT [www.weareunioncbr.org.au/priorities](http://www.weareunioncbr.org.au/priorities)

Volunteering and Contact ACT [vc-act.org.au](http://vc-act.org.au)

Women's Centre for Health Matters [www.wchm.org.au](http://www.wchm.org.au)

Youth Coalition of the ACT [www.youthcoalition.net](http://www.youthcoalition.net)