

Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS
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Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Via email: ndis.sen@aph.gov.au

To the Joint Standing Committee on the NDIS

Response to NDIS Workforce Inquiry

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) advocates for social justice in the ACT and represents not-for-profit community organisations.

Many ACTCOSS members are providers of National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services or are organisations that represent clients of NDIS services. We also work with organisations providing disability services outside of the NDIS and with other service providers providing general services to people with disability.

In the context of the ACT, ACTCOSS would like to take this opportunity to highlight some key issues for consideration by the Committee when making its recommendations on the NDIS workforce, including:

- The role of the individual state and territory jurisdictions in providing and implementing local workforce development plans for the NDIS and broader community sector workforce. This highlights the need for Commonwealth and Territory policy to be complementary and coordinated. For example, the ACT has an ACT Community Services Workforce Plan 2017-2020. As part of this Plan, the [ACT Community Services Industry Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis](#) report was commissioned and published. The Needs Analysis report forms part of this submission.
- The interaction of NDIS workforce needs with employment in adjacent sectors, including health, aged care and other community services.
- The specific tertiary education sector and policies in the ACT (and other states and territories).
- Challenges in attracting and retaining the NDIS workforce in regional locations, including the ACT, particularly where there are high living costs.

ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026

The [ACT Community Services Industry Strategy](#) was co-developed by the ACT Government Community Services Directorate and representatives of the ACT community services sector, including disability, aged care and other community service providers and unions. An Industry Strategy Steering Group chaired by ACTCOSS stewards the implementation of the Industry Strategy.

One of four priority areas identified in the Industry Strategy is to 'ensure excellent outcomes are achieved through a highly skilled and developed workforce'. In pursuance of this, an ACT Community Services Workforce Plan 2017-2020 was developed.

Under the Workforce Plan, a [Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis](#) was produced to:

1. Describe the current ACT community services industry workforce
2. Project growth, diversity, skill and knowledge needs into the future, to best meet the needs of the ACT community.

The project's overall goal was to assist the industry to ensure that future workforce development effectively meets emerging community needs.

In summary, the Needs Analysis found that:

- 'ACT community services industry faces socio-demographic and workforce issues common to the industry around Australia. The population is growing, with aged cohorts growing fastest... this is putting increasing pressure on the aged services and disability sectors in particular, with workforce shortages emerging.' (p.3).
- 'Worker supply will need to be enhanced with active strategies to recruit and retain younger people, seek to improve pay and conditions, and take a more strategic approach to skills, qualifications and professional development.' (p.3).

The Needs Analysis also highlights the need for coherence in workforce policy across community service sectors.

Workforce policy aimed at improving skills, retention and capability in the one particular sector must not be done to the detriment of other community service sectors.

For context, 'the largest sectors within the ACT community services industry in 2016 were [using ABS categories] Child Care Services, Social Assistance Services and Aged Care Services. Disability is covered under Social Assistance Services, and has seen a very rapid growth area over the past few years.' (p.17).

ACT Region NDIS Access Challenges

Unless NDIS and other community service workforce needs are met, the ACT waiting periods for access to key NDIS services will remain high.

For example, in the ACT region (including rural NSW area) it is our understanding that the waiting period for some participants to access speech pathologists (both NDIS-registered and unregistered providers) is approximately 4-6 months. This can be considerably longer for participants under the age of 7.

As a result, some participants find it difficult to engage with an available and/or suitable provider and may reach the end of their annual NDIS plan without using the budget allocated for these supports.

Because of these current workforce challenges in the NDIS and other community service sectors, and in order to ensure a fit-for-purpose future workforce, the [Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis](#) report was commissioned. We commend this research to the Committee.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you require further information on the ACT disability and broader community services sector.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Campbell." with a period at the end.

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Chief Executive Officer

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