



# Submission 2024-2025 ACT Budget Consultation

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By Communities at Work

February 2024

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## About Communities at Work

Communities at Work provides a range of early education and care services and community services in the ACT and Capital region. Our services and programs make a positive contribution to the lives of Canberrans and create a social impact in our community. People are at the heart of everything we do. We go above and beyond in delivering high-quality services so that the community can experience positive educational outcomes for children, find a helping hand in times of need, enjoy an enhanced quality of life, and engage with positive social change.

Communities at Work is the largest provider of children's services and one of the largest not-for-profit community organisation in the ACT region, with a proud 45-year+ history.

Communities at Work is a public company limited by guarantee and is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. We employ over 600 employees, engage over 75 self-employed Family Day Care and In-Home Care educators, and harness the passionate commitment of almost 100 volunteers to help us carry out our mission of enriching lives today and shaping better futures tomorrow.

As a people-focused for-impact organisation, Communities at Work is committed to creating a sustainable future for the Canberra community. Our surplus-for-purpose philosophy enables us to invest every dollar we earn right back into the Canberra community, including the provision of much-needed essential support such as food, clothing and accommodation assistance to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of our community.

## Purpose, Mission and Values

As a not-for-profit community organisation, Communities at Work's services are run entirely to benefit the community we serve and are driven by our values, which include Integrity, Respect, Progressiveness, Quality and Innovation and Sustainability.

Communities at Work's purpose is to be responsive to the needs of the community, delivering high-quality services that support positive educational outcomes, assists in alleviating hardship, enhances the quality of life and leads to positive social change.

Communities at Work's mission is to enrich lives today and shape better futures for tomorrow.

## Budget submission – Priority Action Areas

Communities at Work welcomes the opportunity to make a submission into the ACT Government 2024-2025 Budget consultation.

We have focused on 7 priority action areas, which we believe address unmet needs of our community in the ACT and proposed changes to enable our organisation to better serve our community. These priority action areas respond directly to a number of the identified wellbeing indicators from the ACT Government Wellbeing Framework.

Communities at Work welcomes any opportunity to further discuss the detailed priority action areas and their recommendations, which are summarised below:

Priority action area	Recommendations
<b><u>Priority Action Area 1:</u></b> Community Assistance Permanent Support Program	1. Establish a Community Assistance Permanent Support Program
<b><u>Priority Action Area 2:</u></b> Peppercorn Lease Arrangements	1. Current Peppercorn Lease Arrangements are renewed for a term of 5 years  2. Review the current facility management of buildings with Peppercorn Lease arrangements and adequately fund the required upkeep of the aging buildings
<b><u>Priority Action Area 3:</u></b> Community Transport Services Unmet Need	1. That Community Transport principles are developed to ensure community transport is embedded within all ACT Government programs and policies.  2. The ACT Government to invest in a three-year pilot program focused on delivering family-oriented community transport options.  3. That a detailed scoping project is adequately funded by the ACT Government to get a true picture of transport disadvantage across the Canberra community
<b><u>Priority Action Area 4:</u></b> Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Incentive Program	1. Invest in an Incentives Program for qualified early childhood educators to enter or return to the ECEC sector to support the implementation of the universal access to ECEC for three-year-old children.
<b><u>Priority Action Area 5:</u></b> Sustainability of Early Childhood Education and Care ACT Government Funded Programs	1. Review the daily sessional fee for the 3-Year-Old Initiative and Children's Services Program to ensure that it remains relative to average fees in the ACT and the CCS Cap for Centre Based services.  2. Review the daily sessional fee for the 3-Year-old Preschool Program to allow for a full day session of access to quality early learning, increased from a 6 hour funded session, and to ensure that it remains relative to average fees in the ACT and CCS Cap for Centre Based services.

<p><b>Priority Action Area 6:</b> Independent Special Assistance School Bus Transport</p>	<p>1. Seek the provision of government funded bus transport to the school.</p>
<p><b>Priority Action Area 7:</b> School-based mental health resources and expertise</p>	<p>1. That the recommendations from the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (the Committee) report into Youth Mental Health in the ACT be reconsidered and that collaboration and support models be explored between ACT Government services and Galilee School to facilitate enhancements to the delivery of mental health supports for students enrolled at Galilee School.</p>

## Priority Area 1: Community Assistance Permanent Support Program

Following the Commissioning by ACT Health of the Community Assistant Support Program (CASP), the redesigned Community Assistance and Temporary Support Program led to a significantly reduced scope of eligible clients for the program. As a result, there are a large number of clients that previously had access to essential support that are now no longer eligible and have been left with no support they could access at the transition 1 December 2023. Those people are suffering from long term/permanent/terminal medical condition/s or illness, who are ineligible for the Community Assistance and Temporary Support Program (CATS), NDIS, My Aged Care Home Care Packages (HCP) or Commonwealth Home Support (CHSP) funding; these are some of our most vulnerable people in our community.

### Recommendation

#### Establish a Community Assistance Permanent Support Program

We recommend that a new program be established - “Community Assistance Permanent Support Program (CAPS)”. The program would include similar, if not the same, services available under the Community Assistant and Temporary Support Program (CATS) to ensure seriously ill people in our community have access to the support they need to achieve their health goals, sustain levels of health or transition through life stages with support and dignity.

The overarching objective of the CAPS program is to ensure vulnerable residents of the ACT do not fall between gaps in existing programs through funding ongoing, low-intensity assistance and support and limited low-cost equipment, not otherwise accessible through another Commonwealth, State, or Territory government scheme or program to allow eligible people to:

- remain in their home, if appropriate and safe;
- discharge safely and quickly from hospital to home;
- are supported to access ongoing medical treatment;
- realise their health and wellbeing goals, including recovery where applicable; and
- foster connection to family, friends, carers, and the community.

### Program Services

We recommend the following services are incorporated into the CAPS program:

- Individual advocacy
- Carer and care relationship support
- Care coordination
- Personal care
- Domestic assistance
- Medical and allied health transport
- Food services
- Bridging support
- Wellbeing Support
- Minor home maintenance (with a cap of \$1000)
- Community participation
- Community transport
- Capacity and confidence building
- Reablement groups

## CAPS Outcomes Framework

The recommended outcomes framework for the CAPS Program includes:

### 1. Healthy Participants

#### **Objective**

Provide flexible low intensity support, assistance and eligible low-cost equipment for eligible participants that:

- enable people to remain in their home, if appropriate and safe;
- facilitate safe and timely discharge from hospital to home and are supported to access ongoing medical treatment;
- are person and family centered and delivered with cultural sensitivity;
- facilitate health and wellbeing goals, including recovery where applicable, and
- foster connection to family, friends, carers, and the community.

#### **Outcomes**

- Participants remain at home where appropriate and safe.
- Safe hospital discharges are supported, and unnecessary re-hospitalisation is reduced.
- Support and assistance are person and family/carers centred, culturally sensitive and human rights focused.
- The health and wellbeing goals of participants, including recovery where applicable, are achieved.
- Connection to family, friends, carers, and the community, is developed and continued, and social isolation of participants is reduced.

### 2. Supported Carers

#### **Objective**

Provide support for carers and family members that nurture the caring relationship and promote the health and wellbeing of the participant, carer and family member.

#### **Outcomes**

- Carers receive the support and assistance they need to support their own health and wellbeing and enable them to deliver high quality care.
- Carers are enabled to engage in leisure and meaningful activities beyond their homes and caring responsibilities.
- Carers can transition out of the caring role where appropriate or necessary.

### 3. Sustainable Delivery

#### **Objective**

Support sustainability in the subsector by enabling subsector capacity-building through such mechanisms as:

- funding for indirect costs;
- reducing the cost of mainstream health services by minimising interactions between participants and hospitals;
- facilitating timely and safe hospital discharges for eligible people, and
- facilitating the transfer of participants to more appropriate Commonwealth programs (i.e., NDIS and CHSP), or other alternate services based on identified need.

### Outcomes

- Participants are supported while they apply, or appeal rejected applications, for assistance through more appropriate programs such as the NDIS, CHSP or other alternative services based on identified need.
- Participants are successfully transferred to more appropriate programs where possible, and their rights are upheld throughout the transfer.
- Service providers are adequately funded to deliver services, including for more complex participants.
- Service providers are enabled to innovate and engage in all capacity building in the interests of participants.
- Service providers have access to, and use, referral mechanisms for other services.

## 4. Responsive Programs

### Objective

Provide mechanisms for participants and their carers and family members to report feedback on providers' programs and services, thereby facilitating continuous evaluation and improvement.

### Outcomes

- Participants and their carers and family members are empowered to report feedback on providers' programs and services.
- The outcomes of provider's programs and services are accurately and thoroughly measured and reported.
- Providers' programs and services are continually evaluated on the basis of outcomes data and refined to better meet the needs of participants.
- Service design is participant-led to enable participant choice and involvement in continuous improvement processes.
- Service delivery responds to identified changes, gaps, and needs in the broader service system.

### Wellbeing Framework Alignment

Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
Access and connectivity	Transport	For individuals with mobility limitations or those who do not have access to private transportation, community transport services provide a vital lifeline for maintaining independence and autonomy. Support for care givers providing relief for carers who may otherwise bear the responsibility of transporting the dependent individual to appointments and activities.
	Access to Services	Enhanced access to essential services and accessibility contribute to better physical health and overall wellbeing by ensuring that individuals can meet their basic needs.
Health	Overall Health	Established and strengthened links to community services based on needs and circumstances. Improved positive social support and networks.
	Mental Health	Established and strengthened links to community services based on needs and circumstances. Improved positive social support and networks. Reduced social isolation.



Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
	Access to Health Services	Enhanced motivation to engage in services. Established and strengthened links to community services based on needs and circumstances. Improved quality of life. Dignified end of life care.
	Healthy Lifestyle	Essential support during treatment for terminally ill individuals promotes a holistic approach to wellbeing that encompasses physical comfort, emotional support, social connection, spiritual care, and dignity at the end of life. By addressing these needs comprehensively, healthcare providers and support networks can help terminally ill individuals maintain a sense of meaning, purpose, and quality of life throughout their journey.
<b>Social Connection</b>	Sense of social connection	Remaining engaged with social activities and relationships fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion within the community, affirming the individual's value and significance beyond their illness.
	Levels of loneliness	Improved positive social support and networks. Reduced social isolation that accompany serious illness.
	Participation in community events and activities	Increased opportunities to engage in community activities. Increased motivation to participate in community.

## Priority Area 2: Peppercorn Lease Arrangements

Communities at Work, as a long-standing community for-purpose provider of Community Services and Early Education and Care, relies on access to affordable fit for purpose facilities to deliver services to the ACT community. As a community partner, the facilitation and maintenance of Peppercorn Lease Arrangements are an important aspect of the effective and affordable delivery of quality community and early education and care services.

The ACT Government has an integral role in providing and strengthening the facility support that will enable community providers to remain viable into the future. Our current Peppercorn Lease Arrangements are or will soon be expired and changes of the arrangement continuation is an unknown variable impacting strategic and operational decision making, posing a significant risk to community providers of Community Centres and Early Education and Care, and Community Centres.

Peppercorn Lease Arrangements allow Not-for-Profit providers to keep costs for Canberra families lower in comparison to for profit providers and provide the structure for successful partnership and implementation of the ACT Governments Children's Services Program and 3-Year-Old-Initiative. Discontinuation or financial changes to the arrangement is predicted to jeopardise the future sustainability of providers' successful implementation of the programs due to the need to subsidise funding, as a result of the daily rate per child already lagging behind the market rate.

Peppercorn Lease Arrangements also allow Not-for-Profit providers who have lease arrangements in place to offer community centres with space for community members and groups to access safe and targeted support and services, as well as participate in community activities. Community centres also support the administration component of not for profit organisations through office space allocation.

All facilities Communities at Work currently occupies under a Peppercorn Lease Arrangement are considered to be aging and requiring significant upkeep and improvement. We acknowledge that where possible services with Peppercorn Lease Arrangements have access to maintenance and activities through ACT Property Group, however the activities are fair below the required upkeep for aging buildings and standard code changes required.

Communities at Work invests significant physical and financial resources into maintaining and improving ACT Government owned buildings to ensure that they remain fit for purpose and safe for service operations. Recent improvement activities have included but not been limited to: installation of permanent fixtures such as new kitchens, flooring, installation of grease traps to meet food safety and waste standards, and changes to emergency access points to meet egress fire and building standards. All of these activities have been directly funded by Communities at Work, adding asset improvement value to ACT Government owned buildings.

### Recommendations

#### 1. Current Peppercorn Lease Arrangements are renewed for a term of 5 years

We recommend that current Peppercorn Lease Arrangements are renewed for a term of 5 years, supporting community providers to continue to work in partnership with the ACT Government to work toward the goal of Universal Access to Early Childhood and to meet the needs of the

Canberra Community experiencing vulnerabilities and hardship in an increasing complex environment impacted by increased costs of living impacts.

The overarching objective is to ensure that community providers are able to continue to operate in the education and community space in partnership with the ACT Government, working toward ensuring that residents of the ACT have access to education and community supports into the future.

## 2. Review the current facility management of buildings with Peppercorn Lease arrangements and adequately fund the required upkeep of the aging buildings

We recommend that the facility management of buildings with Peppercorn lease arrangement is prioritised and the current facility maintenance, improvement and upkeep activities are financially and physically resourced to maintain fit for purpose standards for community service delivery.

Increasing activities in this space will reduce the financial and physical resourcing burden on community providers and realign the ACT Government to effectively and efficiently provide the service levels expected of a landlord, enabling providers to redirect resources back into the community.

### Wellbeing Framework Alignment

Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
Education and life-long learning	Early Childhood Education	Increased support and capacity to deliver educational outcomes, working toward universal access to quality early childhood education.
	Equity of educational outcomes	Reducing the barriers to vulnerable and less advantaged children and families, through quality early childhood education.
Safety	Overall safety	Established and strengthened links to community services and facilities that are safe for all stakeholders including children, families, and as a workplace.
Identity and belonging	Sense of belonging and inclusion	Improved positive social supports and networks.
Social Connection	Sense of social connection	Increased opportunities to connect with community.
	Participation in community events and activities	Improved positive social supports and networks. Reduced social isolation.
	Levels of Volunteering	Volunteers have the opportunity to give back to the most vulnerable in the Canberra community through volunteer opportunities within community centres.
Governance and Institutions	Trust in Government	Government to respond in a timely and appropriate manner to the needs of the community, creating efficiencies in asset management.
Access and Connectivity	Access to Services	Services are easy to find, safe and affordable.

### Priority Area 3: Community Transport Services Unmet Need

Everyone has the right to be connected to their community so they can be supported to thrive. Accessing services in our community whether it is health, education or leisure is essential in supporting people in our communities. For many living in the ACT, accessing these services can be challenging. Some do not have their own vehicle and using public transport is not viable.

The ACT Regional Community Services were awarded a grant from Hands Across Canberra to undertake a scoping project to determine the current extent of challenges around access to community transport in the ACT and to get a better understanding of the need, with a particular focus on families.

The ACT Regional Community Service Organisations (the Regionals) consist of Community Services #1, Communities at Work, Woden Community Services, Capital Regional Community Services and Northside Community Service.

The ACT Regional Community Services are leaders across the Canberra community advocating for an inclusive community. They are made of not for profit organisations that provide high quality, integrated and inclusive programs and services to individuals, families, children and young people across the five Canberra regions.

Community transport is an important service in our community, providing an alternative option for people. The ACT Council of Social Services (ACTCOSS) has defined Community Transport as being “recognised as a specialist door-to-door service that enhances wellbeing and is available to all who need it in the ACT and surrounding regions.”

Transport disadvantage has been defined as “a difficulty accessing transport as a result of cost, availability of services or poor physical accessibility.” Research has also stated that transport disadvantage in Australia is not limited to access but also the difficulties associated with maintaining private transport.

Transport difficulties are consistently identified as a factor that restricts Australian families’ capacity to access services and participate in activities. Research from the Australian National University found that in April 2020, 45.8 per cent of Australian adults said they felt lonely at least some of the time. The mental health and social impacts of COVID-19 have been significant and are long term.

Community transport has several distinguishing features compared with other mainstream transport modes. The most distinctive feature of community transport is the highly personalised nature of the services provided. Community transport benefits those who are otherwise isolated or excluded, enabling them to live independently, participate in their communities, and access education, employment, health and other services.

Research has shown that community transport is essential to people’s ability to live independent lives. A study conducted in the United Kingdom by the Community Transport Association (CTA) found that while users of community transport may have had family or neighbours to provide them with transport, many indicated that they did not want to be too dependent on other people and their preference was to exercise choice and control.

Across the country, community transport providers, represented by Australian Community Transport Association (ACTA), deliver 5.5 million ‘trips’ to 238,000 consumers annually (over 95 million kilometres of travel). Most of these providers are community not-for-profit organisations and have approximately 2,200 paid staff and around 8,000 volunteers – most of them drivers – who provide 2.4 million hours of service.

The ACT Regional Community Services project aimed to document the challenges experienced by community transport providers and outline future options to increase access to community transport. The project included the following discovery channels:

- Survey: Community organisations in the ACT
- Survey: Experience of community transport in the ACT
- Roundtables with community stakeholders
- Review of current assessment criteria for community transport

### Project Findings

- There was a clear and urgent need for action to improve access to community transport.
- When looking at the current eligibility criteria for funded programs that provide community transport, there are some clear gaps.
- There is a lack of services for families requiring support for transport with children.
- Current criteria do not capture instances where people or families may need one off transport support.
- There is a lack of services for young people that are not receiving funding support for community transport, outside of the NDIS or CASP funding.
- There is no flexibility to provide services outside of ‘business hours’ and on weekends.
- There is a lack of culturally safe community transport options.
- There is a need for funding of innovative community transport models to aim to address some of the gaps identified.
- There is a shared sentiment that the challenges and barriers of community transport have been raised over many years and services are at a point where action and collective advocacy needs to occur.
- Challenges explored by stakeholders included funding restrictions and criteria, cost of delivering services and limited flexibility in service delivery.
- The relationship between Transport Canberra and community transport providers was also mentioned as an ongoing issue, particularly in reference to public transport timetables.
- There is a clear need for an increase in funding for community transport services.
- Investment in models that offer flexibility in the way community transport is delivered was supported by attendees.
- The idea of exploring potential partnerships to understand if resources are available in the community that could be used to support community transport delivery was raised.
- Improving the communication links between Transport Canberra, community transport providers and the community was highlighted at both sessions.
- There is a need to highlight how community transport would contribute to the outcomes in the ACT Government’s Wellbeing Framework.

It is clear from all activities undertaken as part of this project that common challenges have been identified and the gaps with community transport are not new. The various activities identified a range of consistent challenges that exist within the community transport sector. These include:

- Lack of funding and resources often results in not being able to be flexible for the clients and not being able to open Community Transport options to a wider group of people.
- Increase in demand in the need for 'out of hours' transport support, such as weekends and after hours. It has been noted that Community Service Organisations try to assist where they can, however the higher wage cost involved in weekend transport can create budget challenges.
- Community transport is often not considered in the broader transport system, but rather as a 'government funded' program. It has been noted that Government departments often have little understanding of the capacity, capabilities, and resources of the Community Transport industry.
- The public transport system is inadequate for people who require additional assistance, resulting in community members needing to access Community Transport options, particularly when changes to the public bus routes are changed with a focus on centre-to-centre routes, leaving members of the community further isolated.
- Information about how to access the various community transport options is not easily available; nor is it found in one location or via a single-entry point.
- There is limited data on the demand for community transport and those experiencing transport disadvantage.

Findings from the Community Organisations Survey and the Roundtable sessions also demonstrated a clear need for action, including:

- The need for funding of innovative community transport models.
- Collective action and advocacy from the community sector to develop a shared vision for improving access and delivery of community transport.
- The ACT Government should develop an ongoing working relationship with community transport providers to increase and strengthen communication channels.

The limitations of this project should be noted in regard to being able to reach all community transport providers and community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. This project should be seen as one piece of the complex puzzle when it comes to community transport and should be used to develop further strategies for engagement and options for ongoing advocacy in this space.

This project confirmed that the challenges that exist in community members accessing Community Transport are not new. Some of these challenges will remain in place until reform occurs across the various levels of government that provide funding for people to access community transport.

### Recommendations

#### **1. That Community Transport principles are developed to ensure community transport is embedded within all ACT Government programs and policies.**

Given the complexities of the program funding, it is recommended that the development of Community Transport principles is considered. Principles would outline the key elements that should underpin any program development and ensure community transport is embedded in program delivery and not an afterthought. Improving access to community transport options supports the ACT's Government Wellbeing Framework (see below). The importance of access and connectivity should be seen as a whole of Government issue as community members have the right to access health, community services, education or justice services. Community

Transport is the key factor in ensuring that members of our community are connected and engaged.

**2. The ACT Government to invest in a three-year pilot program focused on delivering family-oriented community transport options.**

It is a common assumption that unmet community-based transport needs are those relating to providing access to medical treatment. Organisations are reporting an increase in families requiring support for community transport. This support includes assistance in accessing health services, social groups, schools and early childhood education and care. A three-year pilot project could be considered to develop and implement family-oriented community transport options. The pilot program would be enabled through a partnership between the Community Services, Education, Health Directorates and the Regional Community Service Organisations. This program would support families across Canberra experiencing disadvantage access vital services that allow parents, carers and children to be connected to their community.

**3. That a detailed scoping project is adequately funded by the ACT Government to get a true picture of transport disadvantage across the Canberra community**

There is a lack of information on the current demand for Community Transport in the ACT. This makes it challenging for service providers to adequately plan, maintain volunteers and staff levels, and support their clients. This gap in knowledge results in a lack of funding and the potential to develop flexible transport options for clients.

**Wellbeing Framework Alignment**

Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
	Access to Services	Community transport services enable individuals to access essential services such as healthcare facilities, grocery stores, pharmacies, and social service agencies. This accessibility contributes to better physical health and overall well-being by ensuring that individuals can meet their basic needs.
Education and life-long learning	Early childhood education	Community Transport Services enable vulnerable children, such as those from low-income families or remote areas, to access early childhood education programs that they might otherwise be unable to attend due to transportation limitations. Facilitating attendance at early childhood education services, contributing to improving school readiness among vulnerable children. Regular participation in structured learning environments enhances cognitive, social, and emotional development, laying a strong foundation for future academic success.
	Equity of educational outcomes	Community Transport Services support the principles of inclusive education by ensuring that children with diverse needs and backgrounds have equal access to educational settings. By providing transportation to inclusive schools and programs, these services promote diversity, acceptance, and belonging among all students.



Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
		Children from low-income families or remote areas with limited transportation options, have equal access to educational opportunities. By providing transportation to and from school or educational programs, these services reduce barriers to attendance and participation.
<b>Identity and belonging</b>	Sense of belonging and inclusion	By facilitating transportation to community centres, libraries, parks, education and other public spaces, Community Transport Services enable families and children to access resources and services that promote social integration, learning, and recreational activities. This strengthens their connection to the community and enhances their sense of belonging.
<b>Social Connection</b>	Sense of social connection	Transportation is often a key factor in maintaining social connections and participating in community activities. Community transport services facilitate social interactions by enabling individuals to attend social events, visit friends and family, and engage in recreational activities. This can reduce social isolation and loneliness, leading to improved mental health and emotional wellbeing.
<b>Safety</b>	Feeling safe and being safe	Community Transport creates a secure and supportive environment that instils confidence in passengers and caregivers, promotes trust and accountability, and ultimately enhances the overall experience of traveling safely within the community. Clear protocols for safe boarding and exiting of vehicles, including designated pick-up and drop-off locations, assistance for passengers with mobility challenges, and supervision of children to prevent accidents or incidents during transitions.



## Priority Area 4: Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce Incentive Program

A strong qualified workforce is essential to delivering quality Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) services. High quality early childhood education and care services make a significant impact on children, throughout their lives.

The ACT Government's *Set up for Success: An Early Childhood Strategy for the ACT* includes a key foundation area of 'Valuing educators, values children' and a range of actions that focus on supporting the ECEC workforce.

It is well documented that across the country, the ECEC is facing a workforce crisis, which has been exacerbated by the COVID19 pandemic. Early childhood educators earn below the general workforce average wage and early childhood teachers (ECTs) often have substantially worse pay and conditions compared with primary school teachers. This is particularly the case for ECTs working in early learning centres, as they generally offer lower salaries, longer hours, and fewer holidays.

Services across the ACT are experiencing constant challenges attracting staff to work in ECEC settings. As of 17 May 2022, there were 169 job advertisements on Seek for roles within ECEC services including long day care centres and Out of School Hours Care services.

In 2021, the Victorian Government introduced the *Victorian Early Childhood Teacher Financial Incentives* program to support and expand the sector's workforce in line with the statewide roll-out of Three-Year-Old Kindergarten in 2022.

The program offers qualified early childhood teachers joining or returning to the ECEC sector, as well as those coming from interstate and New Zealand, with financial incentives. Individual Incentives worth \$9,000 are available for qualified early childhood teachers working in a different sector to take up a role in any service in Victoria delivering Three-Year-Old Kindergarten. Returning teachers re-joining the sector are also able to access additional professional learning to help with their career move.

Location incentives of between \$9,000 to \$50,000 are also available for qualified early childhood teachers who secure new roles at selected services, in areas that include hard-to-staff programs in metropolitan Melbourne and regional and rural Victoria, and available to the current workforce or those joining the profession. Relocation grants are available for teachers who move more than 200km to take up a position in a hard-to-staff location.

Like the Victorian Government, the ACT Government's commitment to the introduction of universal access to ECEC for three-year-old children is a welcomed policy supporting children to access quality early childhood education and care. As the universal access to ECEC program continues to be implemented across the Territory, there will be an increased pressure of the ECEC sector to manage the workforce challenges.

A financial incentives program modelled on the Victorian program to attract people to return to the ECEC sector or start their career in the ACT would support services in trying to manage the current workforce challenges they are facing.

**Recommendation**

Invest in an Incentives Program for qualified early childhood educators to enter or return to the ECEC sector to support the implementation of the universal access to ECEC for three-year-old children.

**Wellbeing Framework Alignment**

Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
<b>Education and life-long learning</b>	Early Childhood Education	Increased workforce and capacity to deliver educational outcomes working toward universal access to quality early childhood education.
	Equity of educational outcomes	Reducing the barriers to vulnerable and less advantaged children and families, through quality early childhood education
<b>Safety</b>	Overall safety	Increased educational workforce in turn increasing the safety practices for children, and as a workplace.
<b>Identity and belonging</b>	Sense of belonging and inclusion	Improved positive social supports and networks.
	Connection to Canberra	Attracting ECEC Workforce to relocate and become part of the Canberra Community, leading to recommending to others that Canberra is good place to live.
<b>Social Connection</b>	Sense of social connection	Increased opportunities to connect with community.
	Participation in community events and activities	Improved positive social supports and networks. Reduced social isolation.
<b>Time</b>	Work-life balance	Decrease of pressure on the ECEC workforce and allow for appropriate work-life balance for the sector.
<b>Economy</b>	Employment	Increased opportunities for ECEC workforce participation as a rewarding career path, increasing financial and personal wellbeing.

## Priority Area 5: Sustainability of Early Childhood Education and Care ACT Government Funded Programs

Communities at Work welcomed the Government's increased investment in the universal access to early childhood education and care (ECEC) to three-year-old children in the implementation of the 3-Year-Old Initiative and the 3-Year-Old Preschool Program. We support the Children's Service Program (Emergency Care) at 10 of our 12 Early Childhood Education and Care services and are active in the work of the Children's Services Program Advisory Committee giving a voice to our sector and informing the program deliverables.

We are proud to be a partner with the Government in delivering the programs to ensure the long-term aim that all children in the ACT have access to quality early learning. Communities at Work supports the ACT Government's decision for the Children's Services Program and 3-Year-Old Initiative to be delivered by Not-for-Profit community partners.

Lessons from the last 4 years have demonstrated that appropriately funding the respective programs is important for their sustainability. The changes implemented in the 3-Year-Old Initiative since its inception to fund the program at a daily session brought the program closer in line with the national funded Child Care Subsidy (CCS) model. This allowed for ECEC services to deliver quality education and care while also reducing the gap for administration requirements, workforce planning, increased compliance, and professional development activities.

Communities at Work welcomed the announcement of a free day of ECEC access for all 3-Year-Old children under the 3-Year-Old Preschool Program. The implementation of the 3-Year-Old Preschool Program being limited to 6 hours a day of funding is however not reflective of the structure and operations of ECEC services and has provided additional administration burden on providers. Families have been confused about the narrative of a "free day" versus the reality of having only 6 hours funded and the requirement to pay for the additional hours reflected in service operations.

To ensure that the program remains sustainable and is able to reach its target of "Universal Access", it is essential that the daily session fee for the programs are reviewed each financial year to support not-for-profit providers in the provision of quality educational outcomes as part of the program's foundation.

### Recommendation

- 1. Review the daily sessional fee for the 3-Year-Old Initiative and Children's Services Program to ensure that it remains relative to average fees in the ACT and the CCS Cap for Centre Based services.**
- 2. Review the daily sessional fee for the 3-Year-old Preschool Program to allow for a full day session of access to quality early learning, increased from a 6 hour funded session, and to ensure that it remains relative to average fees in the ACT and CCS Cap for Centre Based services.**

Wellbeing Framework Alignment

Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
Education and life-long learning	Early Childhood Education	Increased capacity to deliver educational outcomes working toward universal access to quality early childhood education.
	Equity of educational outcomes	Reducing the barriers to vulnerable and less advantaged children and families, through quality early childhood education
Safety	Overall safety	Increased educational outcomes with access to quality early childhood education leading to breaking the cycle of crime and domestic and family violence, increasing the protective factors for children and families.
Identity and belonging	Sense of belonging and inclusion	Improved positive social supports and networks.
Social Connection	Sense of social connection	Increased opportunities to connect with community.
	Participation in community events and activities	Improved positive social supports and networks. Reduced social isolation.
Access and Connectivity	Access to Services	Services are easy to find and affordable.

## Priority Area 6: Independent Special Assistance School Bus Transport

In 2021 Galilee School engaged with representatives of Transport Canberra and City Services to explore the opportunities for school bus services to be provided for Galilee School. In 2021, enrolments at Galilee School were 69 (as per My-School website).

Galilee School has also advocated through the School Transport Steering Committee and its representatives from the Association of Independent Schools for consideration to be given to the needs of Galilee School.

In 2024, Galilee School commenced the year with 101 enrolments (as at 8 February).

Galilee School operates 2 campuses in Canberra: Kambah Pool Road Kambah and Dixon Drive, Holder. Our Kambah Campus on Kambah Pool Road does not have a bus stop in close proximity to the school. The closest stop is nearly 2 kilometres away.

Galilee School is a Special Assistance School in Canberra supporting some of Canberra's most vulnerable and disengaged young people across Years 7 to 12. Galilee School students often carry a level of social connection 'baggage' with them as they journey through the Canberra education ecosystem. This can serve as a barrier for them in accessing public transport and transitioning through the various bus interchanges, but also can present a risk for others. For some, the challenge of navigating the complexity of public transport also serves as a barrier. Mental health is a dominant factor in our students' capacity to attend mainstream settings and navigate community expectations - reducing the requirement to do so, as they seek to attend school, is a key consideration for us.

The nature of the education and support model provided at Galilee School sees the school operate on a different timetable to mainstream schools. Each morning, Galilee School staff drive one of our self-funded fleet of school buses, to pick up students from safe locations in Tuggeranong, Woden and Belconnen. We drop our students back to these sites in the afternoon. In some instances, parents and carers can support transport to these locations, or students can catch sometimes 'one bus,' or walk or ride.

The time and resource required to support this school transport strategy is significant and diverts those much-valued resources away from other endeavours that would also support attendance, engagement and success at school.

As a baseline principle, Galilee School seeks to do all that it can to remove barriers to attendance and engagement at school for our young people. That said, support with student transport, in a way that recognises the needs of the cohort of young people attending Galilee School, would be a significant engagement to the service, education and support systems available at Galilee School.

The *ACT Government School Bus Services Policy* states that priority will be given to potential dedicated school services based on a number of criteria including:

*the complexity of alternative travel options and any other factors that would materially affect the capacity of students to use alternative services. Priority will also be given to potential dedicated school routes where there is no regular route service available.*

We believe Galilee School, and its students, satisfy this criteria.

**Recommendation**

Seek the provision of government funded bus transport to the school.

**Option 1 (preferred): specialised services, similar to but not exactly the same, as those provided for specialist schools (Special Needs Transport).**

**Option 2: fund the establishment of a bus stop at the entrance to the Kambah Campus of Galilee School to enable local route services to stop at the school and allow access to bus services more safely than currently possible.**

**Wellbeing Framework Alignment**

Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
<b>Access and connectivity</b>	Transport	Student access to suitable and safe transport options to and from school.
	Access to Services	Often, transport barriers are cited by students and their families as a significant factor in school non-attendance.
<b>Education and life-long learning</b>	Equity of educational outcomes	The achievement of education milestones (most significantly the ACT Senior Secondary Certificate – Year 12 Certificate; and to a lesser extent a Year 10 Certificate), are significant determinants of future life trajectory for young people.
	Student belonging	Attendance at a school where students feel a sense of safety and belonging is a proven protective factor in students' social and emotional development
<b>Identity and belonging</b>	Sense of belonging and inclusion	Attendance at a school where students feel a sense of safety and belonging is a proven protective factor in students' social and emotional development.
<b>Safety</b>	Feeling safe and being safe	Safety issues are often the barrier that students at Galilee School cite as their barrier to accessing public transport.

## Priority Area 7: School-based mental health resources and expertise

In August 2020 the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (the Committee) published its report into Youth Mental Health in the ACT.

Recommendation 9 of that report stated:

*The Committee recommends the ACT Government also provide access to school-based mental health resources and expertise to non-government schools, where there is a demonstrated need.*

Recommendation 10 of that Report stated:

*The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consult with the Galilee School on the support they need as they work with young people's mental health issues.*

A copy of Galilee School's submission in response to the Inquiry into Youth Mental Health in the ACT can be found on our [website](#).

In 2021, the Government provide the following responses:

- Recommendation 9 – Agreed in principle. The ACT Government shares resources and supports with non-government schools, including postvention planning after a critical incident when requested. Non-government schools have access to Be You resources, which are specifically targeted at supporting teachers to assist young people with mental health concerns. In addition, the ACT Government is coordinating the roll out the Youth Aware of Mental Health (YAM) Program in ACT schools, as part of the OMHW's LifeSpan approach to suicide prevention. YAM is an evidence-based program, recommended by the Black Dog Institute and developed to promote mental health and address suicidal behaviour in young people. The program is targeted at Year 9 students and is available for ACT public schools and non-government schools.
- Recommendation 10 – Noted. The Galilee School is a non-government school and is funded by the Commonwealth Government and the ACT Government on the basis of need, based on Gonski's needs-based funding model. In addition to this, the Galilee School is able to access the supports referenced in the response to recommendation 9.

In addition, the recently released report of the Expert Panel informing the Australian Government's [Review to Inform a Better and Fairer Education System](#) recommended that 'there be a 'strengthening (of) links between schools and community and health services, particularly in the most disadvantaged communities, to ensure that schools and students receive the support they need'.

Since 2021, Galilee School has been proactive in developing partnerships with providers in support of the mental health and social and emotional needs of our students, including:

- Partnering with the Street University in the provision of one day a week of 'on site' Alcohol and Other Drug' counselling at our Holder Campus in support of our Senior Secondary College students.
- Partnering with Mental Illness Education ACT (MIEACT) for the delivery of in school (incursion model) programs dealing with youth mental health and wellbeing.

- Partnering with Anglicare’s The Junction Youth Health Service for their mobile van to come to Galilee School’s Kambah Campus to provide health care services to students at Galilee School who struggle to access GP and medical treatment via other means.
- Partnering with optometrist practices in Canberra to facilitate eye tests for students – identifying barriers to learning that may have been undiagnosed in young people prior to enrollment at Galilee School.
- Partnering with Head Space ACT for referral services to support young people with challenging mental health needs.

A range of resources for students’ families and the community are also available on our website [Galilee School Guardian and Community Resource - Communities at Work \(commsatwork.org\)](https://commsatwork.org).

There is still unmet need among the student population of Galilee School. The waiting lists for students to access psychologist and psychiatrist services in Canberra are too long to address the mental health needs of students.

In June 2021, The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare updated their report into the impact of Covid19 on young people: [Australia's youth: COVID-19 and the impact on young people - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://aihw.gov.au). Among the many observations and recommendations, the report noted that many life trajectories are set in place during adolescence and young adulthood. Hence, there is a need for ongoing comprehensive monitoring of the impact of COVID-19 on young people’s wellbeing. Areas of particular interest for monitoring include:

- wellbeing, including mental wellbeing;
- access to educational choices after secondary school, education attainment, achievement, and outcomes;
- longer term outcomes for young people; for example, the potential consequences of unemployment on their long-term employment prospects and finances, their access to secure housing, and their mental health;
- the longer-term impact of COVID-19 on child protection services;
- experience of domestic violence, and
- variation in outcomes for different population groups.

Galilee School is supporting some of Canberra’s most vulnerable young people. The mental health needs of these young people have had profound impact on their ability to find success in life and at school. Whilst the partnerships that Galilee School has engaged in are helpful, they are not an adequate substitute for timely access to trained mental health professionals that can provide clinical support, including mental health and comprehensive diagnostic assessments to young people experiencing complex mental health issues.

### Recommendation

**That the recommendations from the *ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (the Committee) report into Youth Mental Health in the ACT* be reconsidered and that collaboration and support models be explored between ACT Government services and Galilee School to facilitate enhancements to the delivery of mental health supports for students enrolled at Galilee School.**



## Wellbeing Framework Alignment

Wellbeing Domain	Wellbeing Indicator	Outcome
Access and connectivity	Access to Services	Students and families report long wait times for accessing clinical mental health services mental health diagnoses.
Health	Mental Health	Galilee School places strong and clear emphasis on the social and emotional development of students at the school. Mental health challenges are highly prevalent among the students attending the school. Working with students and families to impactfully manage the challenges of mental health will address many of the barriers encountered by students with regard to school attendance and engagement.
Education and life-long learning	Student belonging	Attendance at a school where students feel a sense of safety and belonging is a proven protective factor in students social and emotional development. Mental health can be a significant factor in the perceptions that students hold around safety and wellbeing.
Safety	Feeling safe and being safe	Perceptions of safety and the reality of safety are often different for young people experiencing mental health challenges. Understanding that they (the young people) are respected, supported, listened to, and that they can feel safe in their environment are important. Having access to trained mental health professionals that can support the school in gaining understanding of the needs of the young people, and the best ways to support them, will assist greatly.

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