



**People With
Disabilities**
ACT Inc

Australian Capital Territory
Budget Consultation 2019/2020
ACT Chief Minister and Treasury
By email:

Date: 31 October 2018

Submission to 2019-20 ACT Budget

People with Disabilities ACT acknowledges the traditional owners of the land on which we work and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to elders past, present and emerging.

PWD ACT acknowledges the financial support of the ACT Government through the Office of Disability.

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About PWDACT

People With Disabilities ACT Inc. (PWD ACT Inc.) is an organisation of people with disabilities, owned by people with disabilities. PWDACT works to promote the inclusion of people with disabilities in all aspects of community life, to remove barriers to inclusion and to inform community discussion of disability issues by bringing to those discussions the daily lived experience of people with disabilities. PWDACT advocates from a human rights perspective and acknowledges the [UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

PWDACT has informed its individual and organisational members of the ACT Budget consultation process and has sought their input into this submission through its e-bulletins and its social media. This submission reiterates matters which the ACT Government has not addressed in the 2017 and 2018 budgets and adds other matters which have come to our attention through our systemic advocacy.

Priorities

PWD ACT puts forward the following priority areas for the 2019-20 ACT Budget. These are:

- full implementation of the promised 9.3% increase in disability funding and adopting a transparent approach to the allocation of these funds;
- Implement action on Universal Housing Design mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement;
- Resource and more prominently and clearly situate the Access Reference Group mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement;
- Attention to the accessibility of our physical environment - PWDACT has put in a joint submission with Living Streets Canberra on the issue of accessible and safe footpaths;
- Achievement of accessibility of the Canberra bus fleet by 2020;
- Implement the recommendations of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services in its report of its Inquiry into the Employment of People with disabilities;
- Action to address Energy costs for people with disabilities;
- Action on social inclusion gaps – specifically a more coordinated effort by ACT Government to support social inclusion activities offered by small community groups for people with disabilities, including sporting and arts activities. This could be addressed by ACT Government providing a quick and easy funding pathway for small community groups to support costs such as venue hire/set up and catering.
- Action on Disability justice full funding to implement the Disability Justice Strategy – inclusion in this Strategy of specific funding to support children with a disability in the 11-14 year age group. There is a need for a proper facility for young people to access mentoring or other support outside the justice system.



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Increased funding for Disability

It is vital for people with disabilities that the ACT Government keep its announced commitment of a 9.3% increase in funding for disability. It is also important that this increased funding be allocated in a transparent manner to achieve effective outcomes. This requires an open and inclusive consultation process which involves people with disabilities, service providers and carers. This process must recognise that the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is only reaching approximately 10% or 6,808 of the 65,000 people with disabilities in the ACT (see NDIS quarterly report for September 2018.) The ACT Government has a substantial role to play in funding services for people whose needs are not met by the NDIS and to provide essential supports for NDIS participants which the NDIS does not provide.

Implement action on Universal Housing Design mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement

Background

In its Housing Policy Platform for the 2016 election, PWDACT asked for:

- mandated housing to the Liveable Housing Design Guidelines;
- support for the inclusion of accessible and adaptable housing standards within the Building Code of Australia at the National Level through COAG mechanisms;
- work to invest in, and incentivise non-government investors' to fund accessible housing construction with a focus on private rental;
- work to address rental discrimination against people with disability through community education, promotion with private real estate agents and industry; and
- work to prioritise the rollout of accessible housing within all new public and social housing developments.

In the Parliamentary agreement the Government has committed to encourage Universal Housing initiatives by: holding a roundtable to develop incentives that will encourage construction of new homes and apartments that meet the Liveable Housing Design Silver and Gold Levels; developing training programs for architects and builders; showcasing Universal Housing in demonstration housing projects; and playing an active role at COAG to push for genuine progress on the 2010 COAG agreement (in the National Disability Strategy), for new housing to meet Universal Design Standards.

Why this is important:

In both housing and rental markets, the shortage of housing puts people with disability at a triple disadvantage – accessibility, liveability and affordability.



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People with disability are more likely to be on low and irregular incomes or on income support. There are only a handful of private for purchase and private rental houses in Canberra which are affordable for someone on the Disability Support Pension;

This undersupply of accessible housing leaves people isolated as it is difficult for them to visit friends or neighbours; and

the overheated rental and auction markets mean that it's difficult for people with disability to compete, negotiate and identify access modifications;

The [2017 Productivity Commission Report on Government Services](#) demonstrates the continuing unmet need of people with disabilities in Canberra for housing which is accessible, visitable and affordable;

The report of the ACT Official Visitors show that there are currently 65 people who are young persons with disability who are inappropriately accommodated in aged care accommodation because of the lack of other suitable housing for them.

Even when developers are willing to invest in the construction of accessible housing they are hindered by unexpected additional implementation costs. Another major stumbling block is that the plans for construction of accessible housing are not approved before construction begins. Sign-off certification and approval of the construction is only given by ACT authorities after the house or unit has been completed

What needs to happen?

PWD ACT calls on the ACT Government to implement the commitments in the Parliamentary Agreement. In 2017-2018, PWD ACT contributed to the ACT Government's consultations on housing and homelessness. The housing issues for people with disabilities have been raised and recognised in the reports of these consultations and in the ACT Government's responses, including its recently released Housing Affordability Strategy. However, despite this recognition, there has been a lack of progress in the past two years of the current Government. PWD ACT calls on the ACT Government, now in its third year, to implement and fund the commitments in the Parliamentary Agreement. The next \$250,000 allocation from the Housing Innovation Fund should include an initiative to promote accessible, affordable and visitable housing for people with disabilities. The current blocks to investment in accessible housing need to be addressed. One avenue may be through the Housing Round Table mentioned in the Parliamentary Agreement. PWD ACT is actively participating in the current national consultations being conducted by the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) which will include enhanced provisions for accessible housing in the Building Code. PWD ACT looks to the ACT Ministerial representative at the Building Ministers Forum to play a lead role in supporting any positive access recommendations which come from this consultation process.



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PWDACT also calls on the ACT Government to address the situation of the 65 Canberra residents who have disabilities and who are inappropriately accommodated in aged care facilities by taking funding initiatives to enable them to live in the community with the supports they need.

Resource and more prominently and clearly situate the Access Reference Group mentioned in the 2016 Parliamentary Agreement.

Background

PWDACT refers to and reiterates its submission on this matter to the 2018-2019 budget consultation process.

In its 2016 election Policy Platform for access, PWDACT asked for a dedicated Access Taskforce – a key coordination point for the planning of disability access in Canberra that was previously situated within Transport and City Services. This would bring together consumers, planners, architects and policy-makers who would work towards improving access in the older areas of Canberra and ensuring that new developments were planned and implemented with access issues a priority.

In the Parliamentary Agreement the Government committed to the establishment of a resourced Disability Reference Group to include people with disabilities and to address access issues for transport and new developments. However, the Government did not follow through on this commitment in 2017 and instead placed responsibility for access issues with the Disability Reference Group. With no clear accountability for who was responsible.

The past two years have only heightened our concerns that in the absence of a stand-alone Reference Group on Access issues, there would be insufficient attention and action on these issues. There has been no significant progress towards the ACT Government's vision for Canberra as a highly liveable, all inclusive city. Suburban, residential, community and transport developments are proceeding without appropriate oversight of access issues. This leads to a high risk of access requirements not being made which in turn results in expensive retrofitting solutions. There have already been re-developments of suburban shopping areas for the Light Rail construction. In the context of light rail, to date, there has been a lack of engagement by Canberra Metro with the disability sector to allow people with disabilities to test and confirm the accessibility of light rail and its infrastructure. PWD ACT receives at least two requests a month on access issues but lacks the human and financial resources and the specialist expertise to respond appropriately.

Why this is important

Good planning for access supports sustainable ACT Government spending and helps manage the ACT's fragile revenue base. Canberra is heading for an increase in the ageing population and it is more cost effective and sustainable to plan for this in advance and build access features into development rather than retrofit later.



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Bad access has consequences – like young people with disabilities being unable to participate in education, employment, cultural and recreational activities.

In relation to accessible transport, light rail needs to be allied to fully accessible buses; paths of travel to and from the tram stops; improvements to wheelchair taxis; plus a strategy to help disadvantaged people living off trunk routes to get to where they need to go.

Accessible transport needs to be linked to a good city infrastructure. Canberra is a growing city with an ageing population. Our cityscape remains broken and inaccessible to people with disability - we are unable to visit friends in their homes, move around the city, get on a bus or find inclusive, affordable, and accessible housing.

What needs to happen

Canberra needs a separate, access-focussed reference group, ideally placed within Transport and City Services, which will work exclusively on access and transport issues. It will have the right people with expertise and it will have the power and resources to influence/implement change. As part of the ACT Budget Community Consultation Process, PWD ACT has strongly advocated for a discrete and dedicated point of advice, working along the lines of the model structure and terms of reference provided as part of our [2016/17 Budget Submission](#).

In its 2018-2019 budget submission, PWD ACT has stated that these access issues have been loaded onto the existing Disability Reference Group without any additional resourcing. We have given cogent reasons for this view. The lack of progress on access issues in the past two years is evidence of both our view and our reasons. A ministerial advisory role needs to be kept separate from a policy development and co-ordination function.

PWD ACT notes that the Report of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities includes Recommendation 13:

3.74 The Committee recommends that the ACT Government establishes an access committee, comprising of representatives with disabilities, to provide advice and comment on planning and transport policies.

PWD ACT interprets this recommendation as supporting our call for a targeted and specific purpose Committee on access and planning issues to address access issues in transport and in new developments.



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Accessible Footpath

PWDACT is combining with Living Streets Canberra to call on the ACT Government to commit to, and fund initiatives, to fix Canberra's broken footpaths. When we talk to our members about access, the state of Canberra's footpaths and the access problems they cause for people who have mobility disabilities and who use mobility aids, one of the main issues raised. We wish to point out that footpaths which are safe and accessible for people with disabilities are also safe and accessible for the community as a whole. This is why PWDACT endorses and supports the recommendations relating to footpaths in the Budget submission made by Living Streets Canberra.

Achievement of Accessibility of the Canberra Bus Fleet by 2020

In its 2016 Policy Platform on Transport, PWDACT called on the ACT Government to achieve accessibility of the Canberra bus fleet by 2020. Although this is two years ahead of the required date in the National Disability Discrimination Act Transport Standards, this achievement is, we believe, both realistic and of practical benefit to community as a whole.

PWDACT calls on the ACT Government:

- to fund Transport Canberra so that it can achieve this milestone in access to public transport for people with disabilities.

to implement the recommendations of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services in its report of its Inquiry into the Employment of People with disabilities.

Background

The Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Service conducted an Inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities in April and May 2017. The Committee released its report in September 2017 and the Government responded to this report in early 2018.

The Committee's Report is a comprehensive document which includes material and research from both within and outside the ACT and contains recommendations relating to employment in the ACT Public Service and in the wider community. The Report has been well accepted by the disability sector as evidenced from a discussion of the Report and its recommendations co-ordinated by PWDACT attended by 25 people and held on 27 October 2017.

The ACT Government has implemented many of the Report's recommendations. PWDACT takes the opportunity of this Budget submission to remind the Government of the need to address and fund any remaining outstanding recommendations and to continue the dialogue with us on other measures which it might take to increase employment opportunities for people with disabilities.



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Action to Address Energy Costs for People with Disabilities

PWDACT has identified energy costs as a significant concern for people with disability in the ACT. PWDACT refers to its submission to the Review of Concessional Payments in February 2016.

The ACT is an inland elevated area and as such has extremes of summer heat and winter cold. Accordingly energy costs in Canberra are high and the high costs of heating and cooling comprise a large proportion of living costs of people on low incomes many of whom are people with disabilities. In addition, people with some disabilities and health conditions have temperature regulation issues and are more affected by extremes of heat and cold than the general community and incur higher costs in heating and cooling. Examples of people affected in this way are amputees, people with quadriplegia and people with Multiple Sclerosis. In this regard we refer the review to the submission of MS Australia to the 2016 budget consultation and to the article on this matter on page 12 of the Canberra Times of Saturday 25 February 2012.

People with disability are also over-represented in the group of people experiencing long term unemployment and low incomes who need to access public and social housing. Some people live in older housing built to a lowest bid standard which lacks energy saving measures such as double glazing, full insulation or north facing housing. The above evidences that there are disability specific factors which cause some persons to incur higher energy consumption for heating and cooling and thus higher energy costs. PWDACT submits that factors relating to high energy costs for people with disabilities need to be included in the work of the ACT Energy Consumers Policy Consortium.

Social inclusion gaps

PWDACT sees a need for a more coordinated effort by ACT Government to support social inclusion activities offered by small community groups for people with disabilities, including sporting and arts activities. Many of these small groups play key roles in the economic social and cultural participation of their members in the life of the community. These same groups are poorly resourced and struggle to exist and provide their valuable supports. It is becoming increasingly difficult for small groups to find free or low cost meeting venues and to meet operating costs such as insurance and financial compliance costs. This could be addressed by the ACT Government providing a quick and easy funding pathway to support costs such as venue hire/set up costs for small community groups.

Disability justice for young people at risk

PWDACT welcomes the ACT Government's commitment to the Disability Justice Strategy and advocates for the Government to keep its commitment to the funding of this Strategy over the next three years. A matter which has come to our attention in relation to this Strategy is the need to better support children with a disability (including but not limited to mental health issues) in the 11-14 year age group. There is a need for a proper facility for young people to access mentoring or other support outside the justice system. This would be designed to steer children away from the justice system. This could include respite outside of the justice system, along the lines of the QEII model with access to specialists on staff, living in.