

28 April 2023

ACT Government – pre 2023/24 budget submission

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on priorities for the 2023-2024 ACT Budget.

The work of Relationships Australia Canberra & Region

RACR is a federated member of one of Australia's largest not-for-profit community-based organisations. We are a leading provider of relationship support services for adults, families, children and young people, workplaces, and communities. We aim to support people in Australia to live in positive and respectful relationships. RACR delivers services from offices in the Canberra, Wagga Wagga, Griffith, Bega, Moruya, Goulburn and Albury, as well as providing outreach support to surrounding regions. RACR provides regular outreach services throughout the ACT, including ACT Child and Family Centres, Yeddung Murra, ACT Youth Centres and Gugan Gulwan Youth Corporation.

The ACT government funds RACR to deliver a range of support services including youth support services, psycho-social group programs for people experiencing family violence, Coronial Counselling, the ACT Gambling Support Service, community work, other group programs and therapeutic work for children, young people and their families.

RACR and their staff have extensive experience delivering family dispute resolution programs, therapeutic interventions and specialised violence services funded by a range of Commonwealth agencies, NSW and ACT Government. We work with children, young people and their families who are experiencing family violence through several programs including Children's Contact Centres, Family Relationship Centres and specialist family violence psycho-social group programs. Additionally, RACR have the benefit of specialist youth services in our support system as lead agency for headspace centres in Wagga Wagga and Batemans Bay.

Through these services RACR works with some of Canberra's most vulnerable community members. Many of our clients experience a range of complex vulnerabilities including family breakdown, mental illness, homelessness, family violence and/or disruption to their education and work.

Priority areas for the ACT Government consideration are included below.

Priority area 1: Prioritise the establishment of youth and community supports in the Gungahlin region.

Transport disadvantage and issues accessing services can increase challenges experienced by people who already have complex lives. Many of these people are linked with multiple services throughout the ACT, with geographic location being another barrier to seeking support. In recent years RACR has sought to improve accessibility to our services by taking our services to the clients, including at the ACT Child and Family Centres in Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and West Belconnen. We continue to look for opportunities to co-locate and share space with other organisations to better service people in our region.

RACR has joined with Barnardos, Northside Community Service, and the Multicultural Hub to re-establish 'Gunners Place' to support both youth and their families in the Gungahlin region. Working with the ACT Government, our consortium has identified space for this interim youth and community Gungahlin that can provide a home for Gunners Place to operate until the permanent community centre is established.

The Gungahlin region has experienced rapid growth during the last twenty years, and this growth is projected to continue. In 2021, children aged 5 – 19 years comprised 21 percent of the population. The establishment of community infrastructure has not been able to keep pace with the rate of population growth. This has been particularly significant for young people living in the Gungahlin region who currently have no youth centre to attend that would build and strengthen relationships and offer support through youth and community services

We ask the ACT Government to support the infrastructure fit-out and contribute to the ongoing rental costs for the ‘Gunners Place’ temporary premises, in order to provide continuity of support to young people and their families in Gungahlin until the permanent youth centre is complete.

Key Priority 2 – Expand the delivery of Specialised Family Violence Programs

RACR provides a comprehensive range of counselling and support services for people affected by family violence and those who use power and control within their families. We continue to work to implement evidence-based programs, working alongside and in collaboration with other agencies.

RACR has previously run the following specialist, evidence based, family violence programs but has been unable to resource these services through mainstream funding, due to the specialist training and resourcing. This is despite positive feedback from clients who have attested to the difference these services have made in their lives.

1. Men’s Behaviour Change

Relationships Australia Canberra and Region has delivered Men’s Behaviour Change Programs (MBCP) for approximately 6 years in both the ACT and Wagga Wagga, ceasing in 2022. Our program, Taking Responsibility for Respectful Relationships (TRRR), is a best practice model and accredited by the NSW Government. TRRR require specially trained facilitators who are skilled in engaging the men in a supported group environment to clarify problems, gain new perspectives to reflect on their behaviour and change behaviours to treat their partners respectfully. The model requires a significant investment of resources, requiring 2 accredited facilitators and between group contact over a 16-week program. Current resources only stretch to the provision of a single program, delivered twice per year.

2. Women and children’s advocacy and support

The field of men’s behaviour change is complex and recent research denotes greater success is achieved if the partners of the participants are engaged and supported and if there is appropriate follow up to build accountability frameworks into the program¹. Research identifies that program quality can be improved by engaging with victims / survivors and with sound accountability planning. Our TRRR program has no capacity to have a dedicated women and children’s advocacy worker. A women’s advocacy worker would dedicate their work to supporting victim/survivors and their children in various contexts, locations and diversity of backgrounds and life circumstances.

Wrap around advocacy work will ensure additional safety measures are also put in place for women and children and enable integration with all service offerings at RACR. Women and

¹ Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety. (2019). Men’s behaviour change programs: Measuring outcomes and improving program quality: Key findings and future directions (Research to policy and practice, 01/2019). Sydney, NSW: ANROWS.

children can be referred into specialist services including specialised family violence counselling, family and relationship services, therapeutic services, family dispute resolution, relationship and parenting education and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, as well as a network of other non-government and government services available across the ACT.

We ask the ACT Government to provide dedicated funding for Men's Behaviour Change Programs, with women and children's advocacy/support operating alongside.

Key Priority 3 – Road safety support

The ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety released the [Inquiry into Dangerous Driving](#) in April 2023. This report highlighted the need for support for family and friends of those impacted by a road safety trauma, including accidents resulting in a death.

RACR runs the ACT Coronial Counselling Service, funded by ACT Health, that was mentioned several times in the report. The ACT Coronial Counselling Service was spoken about with the highest of regard during this time by many families during their submissions, and referenced at that the time of the inquiry, the service was unable to offer support due to the level of demand. RACR is deeply appreciative of the additional funding received from ACT Health in late 2022 to increase capacity.

The report has 28 recommendations, with recommendations 21-24 and 26 relating to trauma support and training.

Recommendation 21: The Committee recommends that the ACT Government introduce additional trauma training for health practitioners to improve support to victims of dangerous driving and their families.

Recommendation 22: The Committee recommends that the ACT Government urgently fund a trauma service that is available at the scene of an accident and a 24 hour hotline to help victims and their families.

Recommendation 23: The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide funding for the Victims of Crime Commission to:

- a) provide a wraparound service families of victims as a result of dangerous driving;*
- b) support people with non-fatal injuries as a result of dangerous driving; and*
- c) extend support for victims of 'negligent driving'.*

Recommendation 24: The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide extra funding to cover the gap on the coronial support list.

Recommendation 26: The Committee recommends that the ACT Government introduce trauma training for all court staff and judiciary and ensure that there are physical arrangements (such as a family room) to minimise the likelihood of interactions between defendants and families and victims at the courts.

RACR asks the ACT Government to resource all 28 recommendations, including funding to introduce additional trauma support services and counselling, and for trauma informed training.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make this pre-Budget submission. Should you require clarification of any aspect of this submission, or need information on the services that Relationships Australia Canberra & Region provides, please contact me at your earliest convenience.

Yours Sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'SH', with a horizontal line extending to the right.

Dr. Stephanie Hodson
Chief Executive Officer

