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21 April 2023

Mr Andrew Barr  
Chief Minister  
Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Dear Chief Minister

**Re: In support of Meridian – Submission to the ACT Government Budget Consultation 2023-2024**

I write to acknowledge and endorse the Meridian submission to the ACT Government Budget Consultation 2023-2024.

AFAO is the national peak organisation for the community-controlled HIV response in Australia. Our [member organisations](#) include state and territory-based AIDS Councils that provide primary health care and health promotion to LGBTIQ+ communities in their jurisdiction and peak organisations representing key populations in Australia's community response to HIV.

Meridian is our ACT member, who we support through advocacy, policy and health promotion initiatives at a high and strategic level. Our members have evolved over time into centres of excellence that have built a deep level of trust from the diverse community they represent. As such we endorse Meridian's request for funding in the 2023-2024 budget to continue to deliver sustainable services in mental health, primary care, gender affirming care and sexual health. Meridian seeks funding to support:

- Essential operating costs including overheads, governance and administration
- Mental health support for LGBTIQ+ communities through counselling, psychosocial services and group work
- Community development and community capacity building including volunteering as a grass roots action that supports all other services
- Education and training to raise awareness about the importance of inclusion and diversity in organisations and businesses across the ACT
- Gender affirming primary health care

Meridian has substantive evidence to demonstrate that their services have impact on community and has a comprehensive framework for continual improvement. Meridian is innovative and creative and works to support communities to enhance health and wellbeing.

Meridian is the best-placed organisation in the ACT to deliver effective and targeted peer-led services for LGBTIQ+ people, families, and communities. Their deep connection and understanding of contemporary issues facing their communities have been at the forefront of the ACT's successful HIV response, and additional funding will increase their capacity and sustainability to address shortfalls in LGBTIQ+ health.

The health and well-being of LGBTIQ+ people are among the poorest in Australia. This results from their exposure to multiple, interconnected, and recurring forms of discrimination, marginalisation, stigma, social exclusion, abuse, and violence. COVID-19 exemplified inequalities and feelings of distress, and we ask the ACT Government to see the Budget as a crucial opportunity to invest in Meridian and help establish high-quality, community-based health services in Canberra.

*AFAO is the national federation for the HIV community response in Australia. AFAO works to end HIV transmission and reduce its impact on communities in Australia, Asia and the Pacific. AFAO's members are the AIDS Councils in each state and territory; the National Association of People with HIV Australia (NAPWHA); the Australian Injecting & Illicit Drug Users League (AIVL); the Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA); and Scarlet Alliance, Australian Sex Workers Association. AFAO's affiliate member organisations – spanning community, research and clinical workforce – share AFAO's values and support the work we do.*

AFAO believes the fulfilment of adequate funding to Meridian in the areas outlined in their submission will assist the city of Canberra in its objective to become Australia's most LGBTIQ+ inclusive city.

Should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact Ben Wilcock, Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer, on +61 2 9557 9399 or at [Ben.Wilcock@afao.org.au](mailto:Ben.Wilcock@afao.org.au).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ben Wilcock', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ben Wilcock  
**Acting Deputy Chief Executive Officer**