

Carers ACT submission to

**ACT Government  
2018-19 ACT Budget**

A Canberra that cares for carers – an ACT Carers  
Strategy

October 2017

## **About Carers ACT**

Carers ACT is the ACT peak body representing the diversity of Canberrans who provide unpaid care and support to family members and friends with a:

- disability
- chronic condition
- mental illness or disorder
- drug or alcohol problem
- terminal illness, or
- who are frail aged.

There around 48,500 unpaid carers in the ACT caring for a family member, a friend or neighbour who are an integral part of our aged, health and disability systems.

Carers ACT has a constitutional mandate to represent the voices of carers to government and the wider community. We consult regularly with a diversity of carers and caring families to enable improved understanding of their needs, and better inclusion for them and the people they care for.

Carers ACT also provides advocacy support to Canberra's many Kinship and Foster carers that care for children and young people in out of home care.

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## **1. Introduction**

Carers ACT appreciates the opportunity to respond to the ACT Government's invitation to comment on priority commitments for its 2018-19 Budget.

Carers ACT is the ACT peak body representing the diversity of Canberrans who provide unpaid care and support to family members, friends and neighbours with a:

- disability
- chronic condition
- mental illness or disorder
- drug or alcohol problem
- terminal illness
- or who are frail aged.

There are around 48,500 unpaid carers in the ACT who provide care to family members, friends and neighbours. They are an integral part of our aged, health and disability systems. Deloitte Access Economics estimated carers provided 1.9 billion hours of unpaid care nationally in 2015. The estimated replacement cost of this care with formal care services was \$60.3 billion.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, many Canberrans provide care as Kinship or Foster carers to children and young people in out of home care. Carers ACT also delivers the ACT Government-funded Kinship and Foster Carer Advocacy Program.

Our response to the ACT Government's budget consultation invitation focuses on the implementation of the ACT Carers Strategy, and the Government's commitment to recognise and respond to the needs of carers, their rights, choices and opportunities to participate fully in all areas of life.

## **2. The ACT Carers Strategy**

### **2.1. Background**

The ACT Government was a national leader in its support for carers through specific carer policies and legislative amendments. These included *Caring for Carers in the ACT – A plan for action 2004-2007*, the *Carers Recognition Legislation Amendment Act 2006 (ACT)* and the *2011 ACT Carers' Charter – Caring for*

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<sup>1</sup> Deloitte Access Economics (2015) *The economic value of informal care in Australia*, 2015 for Carers Australia, Canberra.

*Carers* that was to provide a policy framework to guide the way government and community services met the needs of carers in the ACT.

In its *2016-17 ACT Budget Submission – Caring for Canberra’s Carers*, Carers ACT recommended that the ACT Government build on this earlier work and:

- invests in the development and implementation of an ACT Carers Strategy to support ACT carers sustain and continue their caring role through major change in the aged and disability community care sectors
- engages carers in the development of the recommended ACT Carers Strategy to identify and set priority focus areas to support carers’ needs
- invests in comprehensive research (separate to national carer, aged or disability population studies) to provide important baseline information about carers in the ACT for planning purposes by the ACT Government and other organisations, as well as monitoring the impact of the recommended ACT Carers Strategy.

The commitment of the 2016 incoming ACT Government through its *Parliamentary Agreement for the 9<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory* made a commitment to “... Develop a carers strategy in close consultation with Carers ACT, disability groups and other affected community members ...”<sup>2</sup> was welcomed by Carers ACT, carers in our community and organisations that support carers and the people they care for.

The Chief Minister and Treasurer stated in the 2017-18 ACT Budget’s Social Inclusion Statement that “In recognition of the valuable contribution carers make to the community, the Government will provide administrative and financial support to Carers ACT to develop and implement an ACT Carers Strategy. The ACT Carers Strategy will help guide policy development and delivery of Government and community-led programs and activities.”<sup>3</sup>

## **2.2. A carer friendly Canberra deliberative democracy process**

The ACT Government, in partnership with Carers ACT and democracyCo, undertook to develop the ACT Carers Strategy through a deliberative democracy process involving carers and the wider community. The theme of the deliberative process was ‘what would a carer friendly Canberra look like?’.

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<sup>2</sup> ACT Legislative Assembly (2016) *Parliamentary Agreement for the 9<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory - Agreed priorities and outcomes no. 7. Making our community even stronger and more inclusive, Canberra.*

<sup>3</sup> ACT Government (2017) *Australian Capital Territory Budget 2017-18 For a better Canberra, Social Inclusion Statement*, p.6, Canberra.

As part of this process a deliberative panel – the Carers Voice Panel, including carers and community members – was recruited by democracyCo and met on Thursday 12 and 19 October to deliberate on the development of a carers strategy for the ACT. Minister for Community Services and Social Inclusion, Rachel Stephen-Smith, met with the Carers Voice Panel during their deliberations. The ACT Chief Minister and Cabinet will consider the foundation for the ACT Carers Strategy prepared by the Carers Voice Panel in November 2017. From this action plans for the implementation of the Carers Strategy will be developed.

Without pre-empting the work of the deliberative panel, the need for wide generational and cultural change among the ACT community to become aware of carers and recognise their caring roles was a key outcome of the deliberative democracy process. This would require a long-term commitment from government, agencies and the community to an ACT Carers Strategy.

### **3. Recommendations**

#### *Recommendation 1*

That the ACT Government adopts a long-term commitment to the ACT Carers Strategy to bring about the generational and cultural change required to achieve increased awareness of carers, their caring role and their support needs. A ten-year commitment will provide the foundation required for such change and demonstrate the level of commitment this Government has to carers and leaving a legacy of support and recognition for carers in the ACT community.

#### *Recommendation 2*

That the ACT Government endorses and funds a carer-led governance group to advise on and monitor the implementation of the ACT Carers Strategy. In this way the deliberative democracy process that formed the Carers Strategy would continue to oversee the implementation of the work required to make Canberra a carer friendly city. This recommendation is built from the work of the Carers Voice Panel who recommended that carers are central to the implementation and accountability of the Carers Strategy. We would propose that this group be auspiced by Carers ACT and funding of \$50,000 per annum would be allocated to cover the costs involved.

#### *Recommendation 3*

That the ACT Government establishes a dedicated centralised Carers Officer with the responsibility to coordinate the development and implementation of the ACT Carers Strategy across the ACT Government and its agencies and funded non-government organisations. This Officer would be located within an

appropriate Directorate and be allocated funds and work in partnership with the Care- Led Governance Group to enable projects under the Carers Strategy to be implemented.

*Recommendation 4*

That the actions relating to Kinship and Foster carers highlighted in the ACT Carers Strategy be adopted into the action plans of the Carer Wellbeing Working Group of the ACT Government's *A Step Up for Our Kids – Out of Home Care Strategy 2015-2020*. Also, that funding is allocated to ensure these actions are implemented in order to increase the supports available to Kinship and Foster carers within the ACT.