



AIDS ACTION COUNCIL OF THE ACT
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Mr Andrew Barr
Chief Minister
ACT Government
GPO Box 158
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Chief Minister

2018 – 19 Budget Consultation Process

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the development of the 2018/19 ACT Budget.

This letter outlines the expressed need for additional counselling services for LGBTIQ communities. There is conclusive evidence that LGBTI people experience higher levels of depression, anxiety disorders, self-harm, suicidal ideation and suicide compared to the general population because of stigma, prejudice, discrimination and exclusion.

The AIDS Action Council is proud to offer LGBTI competent counselling to members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans/gender diverse communities, including people who are intersex or identify as genderqueer, nonbinary or gender-questioning. However our service is at capacity and there is an unqualified need for additional funding in this space.

The AIDS Action Council of the ACT is the ACT's leading community based HIV organisation. The Council provides care and support to people living with and impacted by HIV and AIDS as well as education, prevention and health promotion activities. One of the Council's primary population groups is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) communities, and as such it provides current information, support and education on all aspects of health and welfare related issues affecting LGBTIQ people.

As well as providing counselling via a team of staff at the AIDS Action Council, the Council works with community professionals practitioners who are appropriately skilled and experienced (LGBTIQ competent). All practitioners listed are supported by the Council through training, education and fees for service are subsidized. This service would be centrally coordinated by the Council and aims to provide community members with access, options and choices throughout Canberra and the region.

The Council understands the concerns LGBTI people bring to counselling are often universal to all people and not necessarily related to their personal sexual orientation or gender identity. We are committed to providing a safe, nonjudgmental and inclusive therapeutic environment. Many of our staff are peers and all counsellors are qualified, competent, trained and experienced working in therapeutic settings with LGBTI communities. This approach builds community capacity, promotes local jobs and local practitioners and small business owners.

At this current time we have seen an increase in demand for service impacted by the upcoming retirement of one of the long terms HIV counsellors (funded through Capital Health Network) who is referring their client group onto the Council. In addition to the LGBTIQ support needs, we anticipate a continued increase in demand for counselling as new technologies and bio medical preventions of HIV become more readily available in the ACT.

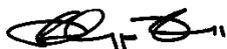
We work in partnership with other organisation and have strong connections through the CBR LGBTIQ Community Consortium. Counselling is in high demand and the Council is strongly advocating for specific counselling support and direct funding for counselling and peer support services through the AIDS Action Council.

Proposed annual budget

	Annual budget
Counselling Staff (1 FTE)	\$80,500
Peer Mentoring Expenses	\$15,000
Referrals and advocates – community counsellors	\$20,000
Admin	\$12,000
TOTAL	\$127,500

Please accept this submission to the ACT Government Budget Consultation Process.

Kind regards



Philippa Moss
Executive Director
24 October 2017