



**Submission on**  
**ACT Budget Priorities 2018-2019**

**November 2017**

## About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS acknowledges Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We pay respects to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations, people living with disadvantage and low-income citizens of the Territory.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS' vision is to live in a fair and equitable community that respects and values diversity, human rights and sustainability and promotes justice, equity, reconciliation and social inclusion.

The membership of the Council includes the majority of community based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and interested individuals.

ACTCOSS receives funding from the ACT Government.

ACTCOSS advises that this document may be publicly distributed, including by placing a copy on our website.

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November 2017

ISBN 978-1-876632-49-6 (electronic version)

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## Acronyms

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
ACT PHN	ACT Primary Health Network (currently Capital Health Network)
CALD	Culturally and linguistically diverse
CASP	Community Assistance and Support Program
LGBTIQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex and Queer
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme

## Executive Summary

This ACTCOSS submission to the 2018-19 ACT Budget builds on the advocacy agenda outlined in the Community Shared Statement for the ACT 2016 Election and advocacy undertaken in the 2016 ACT Election on priority issues. The issues identified by our members were: city infrastructure, services, economic development, and social infrastructure.

## Urgent priorities for investment

We have highlighted three urgent priorities: housing; early intervention; and a fit for purpose community services procurement framework and a sustainable community services industry.

### Housing

#### Investment is needed in:

- a sizeable, practical centrepiece of the ACT Housing Strategy that would make a measurable impact in the chronic undersupply of affordable housing for people on low incomes in the ACT. We propose diverting \$100 million from the current ACT Government bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing. The fund would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates. Alternatively, it could be the capital contribution necessary for the establishment of a new vehicle for financing affordable and social housing, enable asset recycling, and channel cash and in-kind contributions and investor capital from other sources.
- growing the supply of public housing at the same rate as population growth. This should include ensuring social housing is well located and facilitates access to opportunities and resources that enable social and economic participation and mobility.
- a land release pipeline.

### Early intervention

#### Investment is needed in:

- addressing confusion about pathways for complaints for people in the care and protection system
- bolstering community services and evidence-based approaches which keep children out of care and protection
- prioritising procurement of community-controlled services
- supporting groups of vulnerable parents

- building policy capacity and evidence-based approaches
- addressing cultural issues within services systems and response systems such as people with intellectual disability facing hyper-vigilance and a default presumption they are at risk parents
- early intervention, pre-crisis and non-justice responses to domestic and family violence (as identified by Families ACT and other organisations)
- promotion, prevention and early intervention as an ongoing target for mental health funding across all age groups. Primary prevention of self-harm and suicide should be a significant focus of investment. Investment to enhance mental health services for children under 12 years of age, LGBTIQ communities and CALD communities is also a priority.

## **ACT Community Services Industry Innovation Fund and fit for purpose procurement framework**

### **Investment is needed in:**

- an ACT Community Services Industry Innovation Fund to resource initiatives the ACT Government has agreed to progress in partnership with the community services industry through the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026.

## **Other priorities for investment**

This submission outlines an extensive list of areas in need of investment by the ACT Government in the 2018-19 ACT Budget. These priorities have been identified through extensive consultation with ACTCOSS members and other key stakeholders. These investment priorities are categorised as follows:

### **City infrastructure**

- Community infrastructure
- Housing
- Planning
- Transport

### **Services**

- Children, young people and families
- Disability
- Domestic and family violence
- Early childhood
- Early intervention

- Health
- Justice
- Mental health
- Older people
- Squalor and hoarding

### **Economic development**

- ACT Community Services Industry Innovation Fund and fit for purpose procurement framework
- Address cost of living pressures
- Development of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses and community-controlled organisations
- Digital transformation
- Employment of people with disability
- Ensure there is a safe climate and clean energy
- Increase access to secure jobs

### **Social infrastructure**

- Community voice

## **Policy gaps within ACT Government**

This submission identifies a number of policy gaps within ACT Government have been raised in our consultations with ACTCOSS members. These gaps relate to:

- Justice
- Economic development
- Inclusive city and suburban development



## Introduction

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) is the peak representative body for not-for-profit community organisations, people living with disadvantage, and low-income residents of the Territory. The membership of the Council includes the majority of community-based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and individuals.

ACTCOSS' vision is for the ACT to be a fair and equitable community that respects and values diversity, human rights and sustainability and promotes justice, equity, reconciliation and social inclusion. There is conclusive evidence that reducing inequality is central to both prosperity and sustainability. The OECD has said:

The gap between rich and poor keeps widening. Growth, if any, has disproportionately benefited higher income groups while lower income households have been left behind. This long-run increase in income inequality not only raises social and political concerns, but also economic ones. It tends to drag down GDP growth, due to the rising distance of the lower 40% from the rest of society. Lower income people have been prevented from realising their human capital potential, which is bad for the economy as a whole.<sup>1</sup>

The Community Shared Statement of Priorities for the 2016-2020 ACT Legislative Assembly said:

We see this every day in the ACT. We see a growing gap between those who enjoy Canberra's prosperity and liveability and those who don't. This growing gap compromises individual and family economic and social wellbeing, compromises environmental values and threatens our collective success.<sup>2</sup>

This Budget Submission builds on the advocacy agenda outlined in the Community Shared Statement for the ACT 2016 Election and advocacy undertaken in the 2016 ACT Election on priority issues identified by our members under the categories of: city infrastructure, services, economic development, and social infrastructure. Within these categories we have identified priorities for investment and have highlighted three urgent priorities: housing; early intervention; and a fit for purpose community services procurement framework and a sustainable community services industry.

ACTCOSS will be looking for the 2018-19 ACT Budget to outline a clear and transparent plan for how essential public infrastructure and key community services will be strengthened and sustained as our population grows.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD, *In it together: why less inequality benefits all*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2015, accessed 20 November 2017, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264235120-en>>.

<sup>2</sup> ACTCOSS et al., *Community shared statement for ACT 2016 election*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 2016, accessed 20 November 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/community-shared-statement-act-2016-election>>.

We expect to see the 2018-19 ACT Budget investing in measures that will: ensure all residents can influence how the city in which they live develops, hold back the growth of inequality, reduce costs of living for people in the bottom 40 per cent income groups, increase and maintain the supply of vital community services as our population grows, and improve amenity for people living on low incomes.

Our submission was developed through extensive consultation with our members (140 individuals and organisations working for a stronger, more equal community) and community peak bodies. These individuals and organisations are at the forefront of community development, delivering services and building social capital in and beyond the ACT.

Our recommendations are intended to create a city that can offer a good life for everyone who lives here. If implemented, they would spread prosperity more justly and equally. These are the keys to delivering on the promise of the ACT as a jurisdiction that is a leader in human rights.

Acting on the recommendations in this submission would see significant returns to our community and to future ACT Budgets by building social and human capital and through these actions increasing fairness, prosperity and sustainability.

## Budget Priorities

ACTCOSS's 2018-19 ACT Budget priorities focus on city infrastructure, services, economic development, and social infrastructure. This focus is based on these being linked, underpinning areas that we need to invest in and harness in unison if we are to achieve a fair, prosperous, equitable and sustainable Canberra for all over the life of this ACT Legislative Assembly.

This submission provides recommendations to address gaps in, and the erosion of, city and social infrastructure; the compounding effects of economic and technological change; and ACT Government policy work needed to deliver on reform agendas in a time of rapid change.

## City infrastructure

The Community Shared Statement outlined the following priorities for city infrastructure for the 2016-2020 term of the ACT Government:

- Ensure urban renewal increases affordability, accessibility, sustainability and inclusiveness for all ages; promoting a diverse economy; high amenity green spaces; enhancing biodiversity; maintaining natural spaces in urban settings; affordable community facilities; affordable, fit for purpose accommodation for community organisations; and a socially rich experience for all residents. Ensure that urban planning and city design decisions are made with genuine involvement and consultation with the

communities that live, work and use those spaces, including residents, workers and local businesses.

- Develop transport services that are accessible, affordable and fit for purpose, especially for people working outside 9-5 Monday-Friday jobs, for people with disabilities and for people who do not drive or have access to a private vehicle. Ensure transport information is easily accessible, the services are accessible to people with mobility and/or cognitive barriers, and services offered enable people to complete activities of daily living and participate in their community.
- Invest in health infrastructure that prioritises increasing access to services, especially mental health, sexual and reproductive health, drug and alcohol, chronic disease and aged care services; promote consumer control in service design and delivery; amplify consumer advocacy voice; expand access to services for people with the poorest health status and outcomes by providing health services in diverse settings, increasing the cultural appropriateness, cultural competence and quality of services.
- Increase affordable housing for households in the bottom 40 per cent income quintiles and increased supply of housing which is accessible for and visitable by people with disabilities. Reduce homelessness, and ensure adequate responses to meet the demand for homelessness services. Share responsibility for funding and delivering improved outcomes for affordable housing, including social housing, and reducing homelessness across all ACT Government portfolios.<sup>3</sup>

We need to see a plan for guiding investment consistently across urban renewal, transport, health and housing to ensure current and future generations of Canberrans can enjoy the amenity this city offers current generations. We need to see investment at a scale sufficient to address gaps in amenity for low income and marginalised residents. Together, these investments will ensure renewed infrastructure will not only invigorate our city and region but also contribute to reducing deep disadvantage and growing Canberra's human capital.

## Community infrastructure

There is a need for better upkeep of existing community facilities and also for new facilities. The change in the management of community facilities from the Community Services Directorate (CSD) to ACT Property Group has seen a loss of understanding of community needs.

### Investment is needed in:

- the planning, administration and growth of community facilities. As a first step there should be consultation with community organisations about

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<sup>3</sup> *ibid.*

their needs and planning for community facilities. This could commence with a whole-of-sector forum to discuss issues and needs.

- work to remediate ageing, frayed and unsuitable community infrastructure and ensure that population growth centres are resourced with places for community meetings and voluntary activities. A priority should be to ensure community infrastructure, including the community hubs are accessible, digitally enabled and fit for purpose.
- a combined community services hub in Woden and better upkeep of the community hubs in Belconnen and Hackett.

We support calls from the ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community for consultation and action around their community infrastructure priorities.

#### **Investment is needed in:**

- new facilities for the Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation. Gugan Gulwan are seeking consultations and a pathway towards new accommodation for their services.
- the restoration of Boonamulla Oval as a significant facility for the ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community. This remains a community priority and requires action.

The need to invest in the proper sequencing of the redevelopment of the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Service is also identified under the 'Health' section below.

## **Housing**

The foundation for a decent life is affordable, accessible, safe housing with security of tenure. We need to see measures that will deliver the scale of growth of housing supply needed in the lowest cost end of the market, including both growth in public housing stock in line with population growth as well as growth of other housing options for low-income renters not eligible for public housing.

The ACT Government needs to shore up its strong commitment to an affordable housing strategy, growth of community housing and reducing homelessness by a well targeted ACT Housing Strategy with significant investments.

ACTCOSS is disappointed that, so far, only minimal investments have been flagged by the ACT Government to progress its election commitments regarding affordable housing. While we welcomed the investments announced at the Housing and Homelessness Summit in October 2017 these are not enough.

Investments are needed at a scale that delivers thousands of new dwellings.

### **Investment is needed in:**

- a sizeable, practical centrepiece of the ACT Housing Strategy that would make a measurable impact in the chronic undersupply of affordable housing for people on low incomes in the ACT. We propose diverting \$100 million from the current ACT Government bonds to create an investment fund for community housing providers for the purpose of building new accessible, affordable rental housing. The fund would be held in perpetuity and repaid at government bond rates. Alternatively, it could be the capital contribution necessary for the establishment of a new vehicle for financing affordable and social housing, enable asset recycling, and channel cash and in-kind contributions and investor capital from other sources.
- growing the supply of public housing at the same rate as population growth. This should include ensuring social housing is well located and facilitates access to opportunities and resources that enable social and economic participation and mobility.
- a land release pipeline.

Changes to the Territory Plan are needed to facilitate better utilisation of available land in green-fields, in-fill and renewal sites. These changes would need to ensure urban infill and densification:

- acknowledges the existing neighbourhood and social fabric and is of high quality design and construction
- provides access to urban infill sites for community housing organisations and community housing developers
- addresses the gap between supply and demand for different housing types by increasing the diversity of housing form, including accessibility, work on Universal Design and size (e.g. micro-units).

Unaffordable housing and homelessness impact across many services provided or funded by ACT Government and throughout the ACT economy. ACTCOSS recommends that all ACT Government directorates have responsibility to resource implementation of an ACT Housing Strategy. This should include:

- pooling funds from across ACT Government portfolios to: maximise prevention of and early intervention in homelessness; reduce demand for crisis services; and facilitate prompt access to, and maintenance of, stable, affordable, accessible, appropriate housing for people who have been homeless.
- a minimum allocation of one percent of total funds from the Justice and Community Safety, Education, and Health directorate budgets to contribute to expansion of housing crisis services and transition support.
- annual reporting from ACT Government directorates that includes information on how decisions and investments in each portfolio have

contributed to reducing homelessness and/or increasing supply of affordable housing.

## Planning

Priority should be given to addressing a lack of transport links, community facilities, community services and facilitation of local commerce around new suburbs and urban infill and in older group centres, especially people experiencing transport disadvantage are located. Some town centres, like Woden, are difficult to navigate as a pedestrian, have out-dated and inadequate community facilities and need revitalisation and investment. Some group centres, like Lanyon, have limited amenities and facilities that can contribute to community connectivity, engagement and development (e.g. not having a public library).

A renewed emphasis on integrated social and built environment planning is needed in the ACT which takes into account the need for development and renewal of urban and human services, population shifts, workforce changes and demographic changes. We should develop a more integrated and strategic view of the way that investments in housing, urban renewal and transport can ensure good amenity for all Canberrans including young people, seniors and people with disability.

Redesign of group centres should prioritise development of social infrastructure such as youth recreational facilities and community organisation meeting spaces.

Planning for the city as we age and our mobility needs change requires mandatory requirements for universal design and establishment of a disability access advisory structure that monitors and provides advice on development proposals.

### **Investment is needed in:**

- local government style community development to build on and extend the successful work by the Linking into New Communities taskforce and Mingle program, so they are available all across the city and consistently over time.

ACTCOSS recommends involving community development workers and volunteers, local residents, community councils and community organisations representing communities of interest (e.g. newly arrived communities and language communities) in the development of a set of shared expectations about the priorities for community facilities and service development and to ensure the Directorates leading urban planning and those leading service planning have a co-ordinated, strategic approach.

## Transport

Community, neighbourhood and mass transport systems need to develop in an integrated way. Planning should include an emphasis on supporting those with the greatest barriers to transport and access to community facilities and services to get to where they need to go. Investment in community and neighbourhood transport services needs to be integrated into urban renewal planning.

Investment is needed in transport infrastructure that will deliver for people experiencing social disadvantage.

### **Investment is needed in:**

- investigating transport gaps for people experiencing social disadvantage and funding any improvements in public transport coverage and frequency required to meet the needs identified.
- funding community transport at sustainable levels and in a manner that will ensure that community transport continues to be available to all in our community who are in need of it. That means ensuring a community transport system that is available to more than just people eligible for an individualised funding package through Commonwealth initiatives like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or an aged care package. For example, women with young children or family members needing mobility assistance, who are primary carers and do not own a private vehicle; or people who do not have a driver's license and/or own a private vehicle or who are unable to use public transport because of mental health issues.
- improving the fairness and adequacy of transport related concessions. This should include: concessions for learner, probationary and restricted driver's licenses and aligning the discount on license fees for Health Care Card holders (currently 50% of costs) with Pension Card Holders (100%).
- evaluating accessibility of existing public transport infrastructure (vehicles and fixed infrastructure) for people with disabilities and other mobility issues and fund improvements to meet accessibility standards as an urgent priority.
- undertaking a study of transport costs to examine how individuals on low and fixed incomes meet costs of vehicle operation and maintenance and if and to what extent this involves reliance on sub-prime loans. Measures should then be developed to address findings on the broader relationship between transport costs, indebtedness and infringements (e.g. driving unregistered) for people on low and moderate incomes.
- ensuring the bus network renewal plan delivers improved proximity to transport services for people who are transport disadvantaged.
- amending the frequency of Rapid Services from four per hour to three per hour and using resources freed up to increase the flexibility and reach of regional and neighbourhood bus services.

## Services

The Community Shared Statement of priorities for the 2016-2020 term of the ACT Government outlined the following priorities for services:

- Improve education attainment and outcomes for students not meeting attainment benchmarks and students who have disengaged, or are at risk of disengaging, from school. The focus should be on children and young people in the out of home care system, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, those living with disability, dealing with financial disadvantage and culturally and linguistically diverse people. Schools and local community service agencies are resourced to build strong collaborative relationships, and have capacity to respond flexibly and share resources to improve educational outcomes for young people. Better support for students who have disengaged or are at risk of disengaging from education.
- Reduce violence and improve support for people recovering from trauma - especially women and children experiencing domestic, family and/or sexual violence. Actions and investments should be guided by the voices of people who experience violence, reflect the evidence based approaches that have been recommended by the Domestic Violence Prevention Council and respond to the recommendations from the three reports on the impact of family violence on the ACT community and service system responses to this serious issue.
- Sustain and expand access to specialist legal information, advice and representation, including through community based legal assistance services; and engage with community advocates on reducing the social determinants of contact with the legal and criminal justice system.<sup>4</sup>

In an economy that is presented as strong, diversifying and with a sustainable growth trajectory, there should be room to match investment in universal health and education services and once-in-a-generation infrastructure renewal projects with investment in essential social services that support people not served well by universal systems and infrastructure and who are at risk of being left behind through economic change. Only when a community invests in human capital, starting at the bottom, will it achieve sustained uplift in long-term economic participation and financial security.

We need to see respect for people and organisations working in community services as first responders to people facing difficult circumstances and adverse life transitions who are not and cannot be assisted effectively by universal services like health and education. We need to see community services on an equal footing with these other human services when setting budget priorities.

The service gaps are clear:

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<sup>4</sup> ACTCOSS et al., *Community shared statement for ACT 2016 election*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 2016, accessed 20 November 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/community-shared-statement-act-2016-election>>.



- population growth is outstripping supply of social infrastructure and services which are not keeping up with 11 per cent population growth.<sup>5</sup> Sixty per cent of community services operating in the ACT say current funding does not allow them to meet demand.<sup>6</sup>
- some community-based health and social services are being eroded through underinvestment, especially specialist services for people with disability, women, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- other services are getting lost in transitions especially as a result of changes in funding, jurisdiction responsibilities and models of care.
- there is a lack of support for locally-led, community-controlled services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

### Children, young people and families

Out of home care was identified as a key area of concern for community services in the ACT through our consultation with ACTCOSS members and key stakeholders.

#### Investment is needed in:

- work with families, including extended families, to prevent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people from entering the out of home care system in the first place.
- developing the capacity of non-Indigenous carers to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in their care to have cultural support. This may be in the form of an Indigenous Foster Care Support Program that supports non-Indigenous carers to access and/or provide cultural supports for children and young people in their care.
- culture camps for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out of home care that would address the need for both cultural connection for kids and respite for carers. This would be a strengths-based approach.
- ensuring the funding of service provision matches the need for staffing capacity in order to address the overloading of caseworkers and burn out of staff.
- funding for advocacy as a component of ACT Government contracts in children, youth and family services. There is a need for funding of

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016 Census, *Australian Capital Territory records the nation's largest population growth*, 27 June 2017,

<<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mediareleasesbyReleaseDate/3059F9B40EF0A8C2CA25814800078629?OpenDocument>>

<sup>6</sup> N Cortis & M Blaxland, *The State of the Community Service Sector in the Australian Capital Territory, 2016* (SPRC Report 19/16), Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia, Sydney, 2016, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/state-community-service-sector-act-2016-report>>.

advocacy to be reinstated as a valued role of peak bodies and community sector service providers.

- adequate funding and resourcing of the Children and Young People Commissioner and Public Advocate to provide advocacy, safeguards and protection for children and young people in and exiting out of home care.
- after-care support that provides a clear pathway from out of home care and proper funding to meet the needs of children and young people (including young adults 18 years and over). This includes a need to support young people once an out of home care order has ended. We support CREATE Foundation's advocacy at the national level to lift the age of eligibility for services to 21 years, including the ability to remain with their existing care giver – this would apply to foster, kinship and residential out of home care. As the ACT after-care policy is being drafted, there is a need for young people to be consulted in the policy's development.
- addressing the shortfall of carers in the out of home care system, challenges to the recruitment of carers, and the need for greater support for current and new carers. There is a need to be more responsive to the needs of carers, particularly kinship carers. This includes a need for respite for carers. Measures are needed to address the lack of training and financial support for carers. This is a particular issue for kinship carers who lack access to supports and services available through ACT Together.

## **Disability**

The ACT needs to fulfil its obligations under the National Disability Strategy, including its role as funder/provider of last resort for people with disability and their families to cover gaps in the transition and coverage of the NDIS, while pressing the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) to fulfil its obligations.

### **Investment is needed in:**

- maintaining contingency funds to ensure the ACT retains key social infrastructure (including advocacy services, peer support, community information services, respite services, back office support for self help services) following changes in policy and funding responsibilities across the ACT and Commonwealth jurisdictions.
- work to stocktake, map, quantify and prioritise meeting demand for tailored, personalised and specific services prior to devolving further services to the NDIS that were previously provided by the ACT Government. A key priority is ensuring ongoing availability and reach of community-based mental health recovery services.
- providing long-term contracts and surety to key underpinning services to enable business planning and continuity.
- covering the gaps in mental health, ageing, housing and other human services areas. This includes: guardianship law reform; supported decision making; children exiting the NDIS following a period of early intervention; and home-based care and life skills supports for people with disability who

need a small amount of support and do not have a health condition that gives them access to the Community Assistance and Support Program.

- supporting the sectors that need to manage the change - especially in housing, mental health, aged care and disability. This includes investing in quality improvement when regulators find gaps in capability or provision.

Priorities for ACT Government advocacy to the NDIA and the Australian Government include:

- restore person-centred planning including direct contact with planners in the NDIS and focus on peer support and capacity building for self-management.
- make deregulation genuine and let consumers provide the final test of proof. Deregulation that creates more process or complexity for any group of consumers is failed deregulation.
- restore human rights to the centre of person-centred reform.
- heed the lessons from the NDIS in changes to housing and aged care.
- respond to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's expectations for community-controlled NDIS services.

## **Domestic and family violence**

**Investment is needed in:**

- increased funding to specialist women's services to support women who are experiencing domestic and family violence and provide funding continuity for domestic violence services currently contracted until 2019
- fully committing to the next stages of the domestic violence agenda
- improving support to children and young people who experience violence in the home
- early intervention, pre-crisis and non-justice responses to domestic and family violence (see 'Early intervention' section below)
- providing dedicated and adequate resources to deal with financial abuse which often occurs in conjunction with other forms of domestic and family violence but which currently lacks specified resourcing – this includes elder abuse as well as partner abuse.

## **Early childhood**

**Investment is needed in:**

- the trial of a new school-based playgroup program and integrated systems of family supports for children with disability in primary schools

- Supporting, sustaining and growing early childhood services that prioritise access and inclusion for children identified as at risk of not reaching development milestones.

### **Early intervention**

A number of investments have been made in past budgets in specialised social services unable to meet current demand, including homelessness and housing support programs, mental health services, justice programs, legal assistance, disability support and child protection.

We do not expect the funding provided in 2016-17 and 2017-18 will fully meet demand or turn the tide of demand because there is not sufficient focus on prevention, early intervention or support through recovery.

There are modest investments in multicultural and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community needs. But we don't see authentic and genuine engagement with these communities or the people within them most affected by racism, discrimination, exploitation and exclusion.

Community organisations and leaders are best able to design interventions to address these issues and need to be firmly at the centre of decision making and service delivery. We need community controlled and led services, and procurement methodologies in community services that deliver on the policy objectives of the ACT Government Local Industry Participation and Indigenous Procurement policies.

The failure to invest in early intervention early enough, rapidly enough and thoroughly enough is perpetuating family violence, creating overrepresentation of children in out of home care, and putting pressure on acute responses.

There are unacceptably high perverse outcomes for particular groups of families and for children in Canberra.

Urgent investments and policy responses are needed to provide early intervention responses to prevent children, young people and families from entering the care and protection system. This investment should prioritise working preventatively with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander parents and parents with a disability.

#### **Investment is needed in:**

- addressing confusion about pathways for complaints for people in the care and protection system
- bolstering community services and evidence-based approaches which keep children out of care and protection
- prioritising community-controlled services
- supporting groups of vulnerable parents

- building policy capacity and evidence-based approaches
- addressing cultural issues within services systems and response systems such as people with intellectual disability facing hyper-vigilance and a default presumption they are at risk parents
- early intervention, pre-crisis and non-justice responses to domestic and family violence (as identified by Families ACT and other organisations)
- promotion, prevention and early intervention as an ongoing target for mental health funding across all age groups. Primary prevention of self-harm and suicide should be a significant focus of investment. Investment to enhance mental health services for children under 12 years of age, LGBTIQ communities and CALD communities is also a priority.

ACTCOSS expects that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations will lead decisions on prevention and early intervention with their communities and that Disabled Peoples Organisations will guide responses to address overrepresentation of parents with a disability.

The ACT Government has indicated they intend to reorient funding and service models to focus on prevention and early intervention as program funding comes up for renewal and when new funding is allocated. However the prevailing mood in community sector debates is one of pessimism that prevention and early intervention are not valued and properly understood.

The Families ACT submission puts it well:

*The best way to deal with domestic and family violence is to stop it before it starts. Rather than focusing on results or symptoms, the ACT Government needs to invest in primary prevention methods, such as education in schools and communities, and workplace programs and discussions, to change the culture around and attitudes towards violence by men, including sexual assault.*

*Attitudes at a local level influence whether victims feel comfortable in disclosing violence and seeking help – and these attitudes also affect the decisions of other people in the community in acting in response to the violence.<sup>7</sup>*

The priorities for early intervention in addition to reducing the risk of contact with the child protection system, exposure to domestic and family violence, and mental health include:

- security of funding for early intervention and prevention

<sup>7</sup> Families ACT, *ACT Budget Submission 2018-2019*, Families ACT, Canberra, 2017, accessed 22 November 2017, <  
[https://www.budgetconsultation.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0012/1121115/34.-Families-ACT-ACT-Budget-2018-19-Submission.pdf](https://www.budgetconsultation.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0012/1121115/34.-Families-ACT-ACT-Budget-2018-19-Submission.pdf)>.

- more investment in pre-crisis and non-justice responses
- the need to prioritise models of care that strengthen protective factors and divert people away from risks and adverse circumstances
- improved consistency of practice when working with children and young people
- voices of lived experience guiding priorities and investment.

## Education

There are gaps in targeted support to children and young people, particularly those aged 8-12, to successfully meet education attainment benchmarks in literacy and numeracy and transition successfully from primary to high school.

### Investment is needed in:

- supporting community services to increase their capacity to partner with schools and provide targeted intensive supports to students and their families, such as through case management and group work by community services working collaboratively with schools.
- early identification of the risks of not reaching education attainment benchmarks, and increased access to support throughout childhood and teenage years using long-term programs that can travel with a student across their school career and adapt as circumstances and settings change.

There are a number of proposals from community organisations to address the gaps in services and capacity. One example is provided by Woden Community Service in their submission to the 2017-18 ACT Budget which sought funding for Wrap Around positions across the four Child, Youth and Family Service regions: Belconnen, Inner North/Gungahlin, South Weston and Tuggeranong.

## Health

### Investment is needed in:

- the co-design, development and delivery of Specialist Services Plans and Models of Care that are both patient centred and span the spectrum of care
- effective implementation of the evidence-informed, patient-centred and whole-of-system Heart Failure Model of Care and associated outcomes framework
- authorising and resourcing the ACT Health/ACT PHN Joint Clinical Council to develop a model for a whole-of-system Clinical Incident Review System to ensure quality of care and the safety of patients across the ACT

- accelerating the implementation of the Model of Palliative Care for the ACT and surrounding region and undertake work recommended by the Capital Health Network
- the Chronic Disease program
- workforce planning throughout the ACT Health System, from 2018
- work to ensure the digital and information technology capacity in health settings is up to date and fit for purpose (see also the section on 'Digital Transformation' below)
- replacing the Civic Community Health Centre after the existing location is sold
- proper sequencing of the redevelopment of the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Service
- a pain clinic and pain support services including on the north side of Canberra and through general practice and community health centres
- the Weston Creek Walk in Centre
- improving the access and responsiveness of tertiary health care settings to people with disability
- ongoing recurrent funding for the University of Canberra Public Hospital as a modern, purpose-built rehabilitation hospital which models good patient care, digital capacity, and disability access.

## Justice

In 2014-15, \$50 million was allocated to increasing the number of beds in the Alexander Maconochie Centre. At that time ACTCOSS said we would not support another injection of funds into prison beds before we saw an equivalent investment in reducing the social determinants of crime and incarceration. The top priority is reducing the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people having contact with the criminal justice system.

### **Investment is needed in:**

- fully funding implementation of the recommendations from the Moss Review.
- renewal of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Partnership.
- systemic change and education to address racism and inherent bias in the justice system.
- preventing children and young people being removed from their families, placed in foster care and, as is too often the case, ending up in detention.

- committing resources to support families and providing 'safety-nets' to counter-act the impacts of negative childhood experiences.
- social support and health services to address underlying causes of victimisation and offending.
- ongoing, recurrent funding of the Disability Justice Strategy to cover both criminal and civil justice, from the commencement of legal processes, to minimise the risk of people with disabilities being further marginalised by the justice system.
- continuation of the Socio-Legal Practice Clinic that provides combined legal and social worker services to people who face a high degree of vulnerability and have significant barriers to achieving a successful resolution of their legal matter. The Socio-Legal Practice Clinic has addressed gaps in access to justice for people experiencing homelessness, especially women and children affected by family violence. The program also assists clients with other legal problems including social security and disability discrimination matters.
- growth funding to conflict resolution services to respond to growing demand for interventions in community and neighbourhood disputes.
- the capability and engagement of community organisations to contribute to law reform, review of human rights issues, reform in the criminal justice system (including courts, law enforcement and corrections systems), legislative reform in the justice and community safety portfolio and improving access to civil and criminal justice. These contributions are sought regularly but there is no specific funding to facilitate collection, analysis and presentation of insights from community legal services or from non-legal services working with people who are overrepresented as victims and perpetrators of crime.
- adequate resourcing and support for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led initiatives such as diversionary programs or ongoing help for people who have been in prison to reintegrate back into the community.

Leadership from government and senior management is needed to drive genuine change in this area, particularly in relation to addressing the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the criminal justice system.<sup>8</sup>

The community services and legal sectors need a policy resource to improve the quality and quantity of input provided to ACT Government decisions regarding the intersection of human rights, social and economic disadvantage, ACT government-funded community service provision, and law and justice issues.

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<sup>8</sup> S Payne, *Report on the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Commemorative Forum*, ATSIEB & ACTCOSS, Canberra, 2017, accessed 21 November 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/report-25th-anniversary-royal-commission-aboriginal-deaths>>.



## Mental health

### Investment is needed in:

- sustained work on suicide prevention. Work needs to be undertaken to ensure ongoing alignment of ACT Budget priorities with the Parliamentary Agreement in relation to suicide prevention. The Parliamentary Agreement commits to set targets for suicide prevention as part of the work of the Office for Mental Health. This would include the mapping of existing initiatives and how they fit into the proposed model for suicide prevention. There should be community consultation around new strategies to ensure they are well-planned and that there is confidence they meet community need.
- addressing gaps in access to mental health support and recovery services revealed in the rollout of the NDIS. We note the promise of Commonwealth funding to be matched by State/Territory funding, but want to see this rolled out to areas that have been lost or reduced by the introduction of the NDIS. For example, low barrier to entry services along the line of the Personal Helpers and Mentors Program.
- resourcing community spaces and providing continuity of service. At present there is a lack of funding for capacity to run community programs and provide community spaces, such as drop-in centres and group programs. There has been a loss of community building where services and/or spaces have disappeared in transition to the NDIS where 'community' services are unable to fit within 'individual' packages.
- funding a Recovery College. We note that Mental Health Community Coalition ACT have a specific ask in relation to the establishment of a Recovery College in partnership with CIT and have built an evidence base for this. The Recovery College, in part, aims to address NDIS gaps for people living with mental health issues.
- creating accommodation options for people who are unwell. There needs to be an adequate number of human rights compliant housing options for people living with mental health issues, including both low-cost suitable housing as well as formal supported accommodation for people with high and complex needs.

## Older people

### Investment is needed in:

- funding to support the community sector to adequately and consistently prevent, reduce and respond to elder abuse
- education programs that can be provided in community settings to people exercising Enduring Power of Attorney to guide them in the use of a human rights compliant approach

- work to address a safety and quality oversight gap in residential aged care - only people under 65 years of age get oversight from ACT Government Official Visitors.
- work to recognise the role of grandparents as carers of young children through events and community-based programs.

## Squalor and hoarding

### Investment is needed in:

- supports for squalor and hoarding to respond to rising demand. Woden Community Service is currently self-funding programs for both house cleaning and psychiatric intervention services.

## Economic development

The Community Shared Statement of priorities for the 2016-2020 term of the ACT Government outlined the following priorities for economic development:

- Increase access to secure jobs that pay a living wage, including by investing in the public sector, public services, public and social infrastructure projects that increase jobs in the local economy. Improving access to secure jobs should pay particular attention to young people, older people, people who are returning to work from caring roles and people who have been long-term unemployed.
- Ensure there is a safe climate and clean energy by supporting 100% renewable electricity by 2020 and zero net emissions by 2040. Address climate change and reduce energy poverty through targeted expansion of household energy efficiency measures, and ensure a just transition to adapt to climate change by developing further responses in consultation with climate affected communities and workers.
- Develop a fit for purpose service procurement framework that includes processes that engage directly with the community to ensure services meet expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the priorities outlined in the Community Shared Statement it is vital that the 2018-19 ACT Budget addresses the inadequacy of current systems to support the growing number of people in Canberra unable to cope with the cost of living. We have also identified an emerging priority around ensuring investment in the digital transformation of our economy and service

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<sup>9</sup> ACTCOSS et al., *Community shared statement for ACT 2016 election*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 2016, accessed 20 November 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/community-shared-statement-act-2016-election>>.

systems delivers improved access, amenity and opportunities for community services and low-income households.

### **ACT Community Services Industry Innovation Fund and fit for purpose procurement framework**

Addressing service gaps is vital, but so is building an adaptive, sustainable community service ecosystem.

ACTCOSS was surprised in June 2017 by the invisibility of community services in the economic material presented at the community briefing on the 2017-18 ACT Budget. We are the fastest growing labour market in the ACT. Community and health services are projected to grow by 16.6 per cent through to 2020.<sup>10</sup> Currently these labour markets contribute 24 per cent of jobs growth in the ACT.<sup>11</sup>

Employers in the community services industry welcome and foster diversity (80% have paid staff, 68% of organisations are led by women, 70% of staff have an experience of disadvantage or as a service user).<sup>12</sup>

Community services provide entry-level jobs and a career pathway beyond those entry-level positions. We build human capital and skills as volunteers, as employees and as leaders. We are active collaborators among community organisations and with other sectors (e.g. business, research, education). We maximise community impact by careful use of resources: 83 per cent make use of volunteers to extend their reach and reduce their costs, 71 per cent of organisations generate income for service delivery from outside of government sources, 20 per cent use shared corporate services.<sup>13</sup>

ACTCOSS welcomed the recommendation of the ACT Procurement Board that ACT Government directorates develop a strategic approach to human services procurement that creates a coherent approach to planning, funding and evaluating the impact of services. We support the adoption of a 'best investment' approach to procurement. As noted in the Community Shared Statement a fit for purpose procurement strategy should ensure services meet community expectations, improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce. The procurement framework should ensure funder accountability to the community that is entitled to and/or accessing the service and drive ongoing improvement of

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<sup>10</sup> Department of Employment, *2016 Employment Projections, Regional projections – interactive tool*, Department of Employment, Canberra, 2016, accessed 30 June 2017, <<http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/EmploymentProjections>>.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> N Cortis & M Blaxland, *The State of the Community Service Sector in the Australian Capital Territory, 2016* (SPRC Report 19/16), Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Australia, Sydney, 2016, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/state-community-service-sector-act-2016-report>>.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*

procurement processes and outcomes from the perspective of service users.

In July 2016 the ACT Government endorsed the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026 (the Strategy).<sup>14</sup> The Strategy stated that an Innovation Fund was needed to resource key initiatives that should be pursued to build the industry's capabilities to achieve the desired outcomes outlined in the Strategy and improve its overall sustainability.

Implementation of the Strategy can inform development, guide sequencing and ensure effective implementation of a strategic approach to procurement of community services.

A number of key initiatives in the Strategy are being progressed from within existing resources. Workforce development initiatives are being progressed with existing program funding (e.g. Social Housing and Homelessness Services, Children, Youth and Family Support) and with funds retained from the 2015-2017 0.34 per cent levy on community services. Regulatory body, peak body and philanthropic funds are being used to progress the initiatives related to governing body skills and capabilities, and to develop cross-industry tools and resources to enhance strategic planning, financial management and overall corporate governance.

**Investment is needed in:**

- an ACT Community Services Industry Innovation Fund to resource initiatives the ACT Government has agreed to progress in partnership with the community services industry through the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026. These include:
  - new approaches to tendering for human services to encourage collaboration amongst providers and promote diversity in the provision of services, increase funding certainty and support diversification of funding sources
  - common ICT infrastructure, as well as quality and service costing systems
  - a collective research, planning and evaluation agenda with designated research priorities
  - an in-depth community needs assessment targeting particular communities which would take into account demographic characteristics including levels of disadvantage and the current availability and distribution of services
  - an outcomes measurement framework for human services that can be applied across services and which can capture both the tangible

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<sup>14</sup> Joint Community Government Reference Group, *ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026*, JCGRG, Canberra, 2016, accessed 22 November 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/documents/2016-ACT-Community-Services-Industry-Strategy-pdf-version-1.pdf>>.

and intangible outcomes generated by community services including increased social cohesion and inclusiveness

- a regular survey of the size, nature of services, clients, staffing levels, revenue and asset base of providers of community services.

This fund should be generated from within the business development portfolio, not from service delivery or program funds.

## Address cost of living pressures

Analysis of 2016 Census of Population and Housing data commissioned by ACTCOSS has revealed hidden disadvantage in the ACT, with just over one in 10 Canberrans living in low-income households (defined as having less than \$500/week before-tax income), including 12 per cent of children.<sup>15</sup>

Our 2017 *ACT Cost of Living Report* showed a persistent and widening gap between income and living costs for low-income households in the ACT.<sup>16</sup> For the third consecutive year, ACTCOSS's cost of living analysis has shown that living costs in the ACT have increased disproportionately for those households that can least afford it – particularly those receiving a government transfer payment such as Newstart or Youth Allowance, but also households on low-wage income.

The increase in cost of living for low-income households in the ACT was also reflected in the ACT Government's Cost of Living Statement in the 2017-18 ACT Budget Papers.<sup>17</sup>

Economic change needs to be better managed to mitigate the risks of increasing inequality. Better management includes:

- enhanced employment protections that reflect 2017 work patterns and wage projections
- recognising the role and value of the community services industry in growing employment opportunities and human capital
- prioritising addressing cost of living pressures for people on the lowest incomes, including via more finely differentiated approaches to concessions, fees and charges that are administered by the ACT Government.

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<sup>15</sup> R Tanton, R Miranti & and Y Vidyattama, *Hidden disadvantage in the ACT: report for ACT Anti-Poverty Week*, NATSEM, Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis (IGPA), University of Canberra, Canberra, 2017, accessed 22 November 2017, <<https://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/hidden-disadvantage-act-report-anti-poverty-week-2017>>.

<sup>16</sup> ACTCOSS, *ACT cost of living report: tracking changes in the cost of living, particularly for low income households in the Australian Capital Territory*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, June 2017, available at, <<https://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/act-cost-living-report-2017>>.

<sup>17</sup> ACT Government, *Australian Capital Territory Budget 2017-18, Budget Paper 3: Budget Outlook*, ACT Government, Canberra, 2017, pp. 49-62, accessed 22 November 2017, <<https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/budget-2017-2018/budget-papers/bp3>>.

We need a progressive tax system in the ACT and ACTCOSS has supported tax measures which achieve this goal. However, we also need greater clarity and transparency on issues involving negotiation with the Commonwealth Government and greater consultation with the community about the future funding of social and community services.

ACTCOSS does not oppose the principle of fee-for-service where such measures are appropriate and do not reduce access for households whose incomes are in the bottom 40 per cent – the lowest two income quintiles. But we are concerned that high average incomes in the ACT can obscure the negative impacts of flat tax measures. Flat tax and fee charging measures are sometimes introduced alongside concessions for people on low incomes.

Concessions are expensive for government and are, therefore, tightly targeted. In practice this can mean that concessions are of limited effectiveness in cushioning the impacts of cost of living pressures for people on fixed incomes, in low-wage and/or insecure jobs.

The current gap between the concessions available for utility costs and the growing costs of utilities is a case in point.

People without a Commonwealth health care card often do not qualify for concessions despite being financially vulnerable<sup>18</sup> and the risk of losing eligibility for a health care card can be a disincentive to taking up short-term employment opportunities.

#### **Investment is needed in:**

- improving the concessions scheme operated by the ACT Government, and other fee and charging regimes, to expand access according to need, not age or source of income, in view of persistent and widening cost of living pressures for low-income households in the ACT.

### **Development of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses and community-controlled organisations**

#### **Investment is needed in:**

- supporting the development of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned businesses and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. This would include funding for access to incubator programs and innovation supports.

In terms of policy, the ACT Government needs to establish targets for as part of an Indigenous Procurement Policy. Such support and initiatives would provide direct economic benefits to ACT Government and the local economy as well as delivering broader community benefits. Such initiatives are particularly valuable

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<sup>18</sup> ACT Government, *2012 ACT Targeted Assistance Strategy*, ACT Government, Canberra, 2012, accessed 22 November 2017, <  
[http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/open\\_government/in\\_focus/act\\_targeted\\_assistance\\_strategy](http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/open_government/in_focus/act_targeted_assistance_strategy)>.

in providing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the ACT with a real sense of opportunity for their future.

## Digital transformation

Investment in a sound digital transformation is vital at both an institutional level and for households. This includes investment in:

- data systems in health and community services and in funding administration
- a digital transformation agenda that is shaped by and delivers value to low-income households and community organisations
- an ACT Smart City Strategy that supports people who experience digital exclusion to get connected and to maximise their voice in the digital transformation agenda
- better understanding community development and social capital creation in a digital environment, and how to maximise leveraging of traditional platforms for community development and creation of social capital
- electronic health information systems by expediting the secure and seamless sharing of patient information across care settings
- digital health capability to enable digital transformations to enhance patient care across tertiary settings.

In 2017, ACTCOSS has explored telecommunications costs and affordability in the ACT. Key findings from this research include:

- telecommunications are an essential expenditure item
- telecommunications prices have declined but so has affordability
- telecommunications expenditure is regressive (i.e. low-income households spend a greater proportion of their income on telecommunications than do higher-income households)
- telecommunications pricing structures create a poverty premium (i.e. low-income households are unable to take advantage of per unit savings accessed by those with more spending power such as through a home internet plan versus reliance on a pre-paid mobile device)
- a significant minority are either not online or mobile-only
- income support payments and allowances are inadequate
- community-specific initiatives are needed for digital inclusion.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> ACTCOSS, *The cost of being connected: telecommunications affordability in the ACT*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, forthcoming.

Overall, measures that support access to government, commercial and community services by those groups most at risk of digital exclusion will be an essential contribution to making Canberra a liveable city for all residents.

**Investment is needed in:**

- expanding ACT Government’s free public wi-fi especially to outer suburban areas
- ensuring students in low-income households can purchase data as well as devices
- funding ACT-specific research on digital inclusion
- expanding digital capability initiatives to increase digital literacy and confidence
- exploring options for unmetered access to government websites
- a shared value project to identify priorities for action, mobilise community engagement and identify and mitigate implementation risks in the Smart City Strategy. This project should be funded in 2018-2020 and include delivery of:
  - community engagement inviting people living on low incomes and/or with other barriers to digital inclusion to build digital literacy and seek their views on making effective use of digital partnerships, policies and technologies to improve their lives and address the problems they see in their neighbourhoods and workplaces
  - a keynote event that can be attended by community, government and business stakeholders with theme of ‘creating a smart, sustainable, socially just city’
  - a workshop that includes people experiencing digital exclusion to generate material that shapes industry-led initiatives to improve relevance of, access to and adoption of digital technologies and informs the ACT Government Smart City Strategy and digital transformation agenda.

## **Employment of people with disability**

Policy attention needs to be directed to address and implement the recommendations of the inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities.<sup>20</sup>

**Investment is needed in:**

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<sup>20</sup> ACTCOSS, *Submission to the inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 2017, available at, < <http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/submission-inquiry-employment-people-disabilities>>.



- addressing and implementing the recommendations of the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities.<sup>21</sup>

## Ensure there is a safe climate and clean energy

### Investment is needed in:

- appropriately recognising and resourcing the role of environmental workers, rangers and researchers. Additional rangers are required due to policies around biodiversity offsets which are stretching their capacity. Reserve areas are growing due to these kind of policies but the capability isn't growing.
- ongoing support for low income, small business and community organisation customers to participate in energy policy and regulatory decisions, and to contribute to development and implementation of the ACT Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and Action Plans.

## Increase access to secure jobs

The ACT Government should fund implementation of recommendations from the ACTCOSS submission to the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs inquiry into the extent, nature and consequence of insecure work in the ACT. ACTCOSS' fundamental concern in regards to addressing the issue of insecure work in the ACT is to ensure that work pays a living wage and offers basic entitlements.

### Investment is needed in:

- a holistic, whole-of-community response to insecure employment that involves government, community sector, employers, and education and training providers to address socioeconomic disadvantage and barriers to secure employment.<sup>22</sup>

One of the ACT Government's key levers in relation to addressing the prevalence of insecure work in community services is through procurement, including improved funding levels, prioritising sustaining the workforce as a procurement assessment criteria, and longer funding periods (e.g. a five-year minimum).

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<sup>21</sup> Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services, *Inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities, Report 2*, ACT Legislative Assembly, Canberra, 2017, accessed 22 November 2017, <[https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/1096748/9th-HACS-02-Employment-of-People-with-Disabilities.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/1096748/9th-HACS-02-Employment-of-People-with-Disabilities.pdf)>.

<sup>22</sup> A full list of ACTCOSS recommendations to the ACT Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs inquiry into the extent, nature and consequence of insecure work in the ACT is provided in ACTCOSS, *Submission to the inquiry into the extent, nature and consequence of insecure work in the ACT*, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 2017, available at, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/submission-inquiry-extent-nature-and-consequence-insecure-work>>.

## Social infrastructure

The Community Shared Statement of priorities for the 2016-2020 term of the ACT Government outlined the following priorities for social infrastructure:

- Develop a comprehensive Disability Strategy to guide whole of government action through a dedicated policy capacity within the ACT Government. This strategy will have a whole of community focus on and capacity to deliver a truly accessible and inclusive community across the domains of education, recreation, economic participation, employment, housing, transport and access to services.
- Develop a comprehensive Carer Strategy to guide whole of government action through a dedicated policy capacity within the ACT Government. This strategy will have community capacity to support and respond to the needs of carers - improve health, wellbeing, housing, work opportunities and education attainment (especially for younger carers 12-25 years old).
- Support ongoing implementation and further development of the ACT Government agreement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Develop an inclusive community-consulted and led multicultural policy that listens to, understands and commits to addressing the priorities and needs of ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, newly arrived migrants, refugees and established multicultural communities (including the health and pastoral care needs of multicultural seniors) and their faith-based groups. Defending multiculturalism, build on multicultural celebrations and take action to engage at grass roots, build broad community acceptance with understanding and address racism and exploitation.
- Support volunteering as a key strategy to improve community well-being by supporting volunteer engagement and management through actively advancing a whole of government and community approach by effecting the 2016 - 20 ACT Volunteer Statement and Implementation Plan.
- Build and sustain independent Non Government Organisations that enable self determination and community control. These organisations, especially Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations, should have the capacity and authority to hold services and decision-makers to account, and advocate for policies and services that meet community needs.

The unifying theme across all these priorities is the need for community engagement with the people who are at risk of being marginalised and the issues that don't get fully considered in decision-making processes.

Effective reform requires community engagement and clear evidence that community views have influenced government decisions. These are the foundations on which the credibility of public administration and political decision-making are built. The ACT Government has a Social Compact that

outlines why and how it will work closely in development and implementation of economic and social reforms with community organisations and groups that represent people who experience inequality and exclusion. ACTCOSS expects the commitments made in the Social Compact to be more effectively delivered.

## Community voice

Improved community consultation and transparency of decision making is necessary to ensure that policies, programs and planning decisions are made following a process of deliberation with the community as a whole, with strong representation by the people who are directly affected by the decisions that are made.

### Investment is needed in:

- agreed principles for engagement and how they will be upheld across this term of government
- developing capacity in government to establish and sustain reform agendas
- supporting the community to form a view and express this in decision-making forums including via funded community development infrastructure. This would include:
  - properly resourcing, valuing and supporting existing mechanisms like community councils to consult and engage in the community including with young people.
  - community development resources. Government should explore opportunities to bolster broader engagement mechanisms alongside the use of deliberative mechanisms. The community should be resourced to engage with government as equals.

The use of deliberative mechanisms should be guided by the shared principles released by CAPAD and ACTCOSS in 2017.<sup>23</sup>

As identified in the Community Shared Statement, the Legislative Assembly and the public sector should engage directly with communities and guarantee that proper consultation processes are undertaken. ACTCOSS recognises that the government made a commitment relating to community consultation in respect of the planning process and major projects. These commitments to community engagement should be extended across the implementation of programs and initiatives (beyond city infrastructure) to include service development, social infrastructure delivery, and economic development.

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<sup>23</sup> ACTCOSS & Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD), *Citizen's juries – Let's get it right*, media release, ACTCOSS, Canberra, 12 August 2017, available at, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/news-events/media-release/media-release-citizens%E2%80%99-juries-%E2%80%93-let%E2%80%99s-get-it-right>>.

ACTCOSS acknowledges that the ACT Government has made some commitments in relation to improved social infrastructure that amplifies community voices, including:

- support for carers
- an Office for Disability
- establishing a Policy Unit to support the NDIS and other disability supports
- an Office of LGBTIQ Affairs.

When determining priorities for spending to deliver on these commitments above, ACTCOSS recommends the following:

- continue and increase support for systemic peak advocacy noting the importance and appropriateness of user lead advocacy by people with disability, carers, multicultural community, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, LGBTIQ and women's organisations.
- work with the community to develop a comprehensive Disability Strategy that works across the domains of education, recreation, economic participation, employment, housing, transport and access to services.
- develop a Carer Strategy that will have the capacity to support and respond to the needs of carers, improve health, wellbeing, housing, work opportunities and attainment (particularly for younger carers 12-25 years old). The strategy should be adequately resourced.
- developing an inclusive community-consulted and led multicultural policy that listens to, understands and commits to addressing the priorities and needs of ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, newly arrived migrants, refugees and established multicultural communities (including the health and pastoral care needs of multicultural seniors) and their faith-based groups.
- investment is also needed to defend multiculturalism, build on multicultural celebrations, take action to engage at grass roots, build broad community acceptance with understanding and address racism and exploitation.
- community priorities need to set the benchmarks for the multiple policy frameworks for the ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community that are due for renewal in 2018. There is a need for coordination of their development prior to 1 July 2018 and adequate funding for community engagement to establish priorities, review drafts and agree the final documentation.
- support volunteering as a key strategy to improve community well-being.
- build, support and sustain independent non-government organisations that enable self-determination and control. In particular, support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.
- develop a fit for purpose communityservice procurement framework that includes processes that fund direct engagement by the community for

whom the services are provided to ensure services meet expectations, and improve quality, continuity, diversity and sustainability of both the service offer and the workforce.

## Policy gaps within ACT Government

Within ACT Government a number of policy gaps have been raised in our consultations with members.

### Justice

ACTCOSS members have noted there is limited policy capability to progress Guardianship Law Reform and the Disability Justice Strategy.

We have been advised that Official Visitors need to be a conduit into closed places and the right people need to be properly resourced in roles that support people to assert their human rights, open up access to justice and scrutinise and improve practice.

Resources are needed to provide community education and individual advocacy to reduce growing confusion about complaints pathways for people in specialist services between the Office for Regulatory Services, the ACT Human Rights Commission, and the ACT Ombudsman.

There is a need to prioritise investments which support human rights compliance including supporting a social justice commissioner, bolstering the capacity of the ACT Human Rights Commission and making investments in the Restorative City Agenda.

### Economic development

We note Unions ACT's proposals to increase capacity within the ACT Government to drive inclusive economic development:

- create a Job Code to provide regulation in areas not covered by the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cth) and to link into ACT Government work on procurement while addressing capacity gaps
- establish an advisory service for students and workers in casualised industries so that they have information about their rights
- establish a registration program for street collectors employed by third parties or agents to collect for charities, including consideration of the pre-qualification of contractors to prevent exploitation of vulnerable workers with appropriate resourcing of the charitable sector in any transition arrangements and costs relating to pre-qualification
- more resourcing and visibility of key mechanisms within the ACT Government to monitor and improve work health and safety compliance and completion of remedial actions.

## **Inclusive city and suburban development**

We need a focus around inclusive city and suburban development for older people and people with disability. This policy work should focus on the potential for Canberra to be a city that is easy to get around, up to date, smart and inclusive for older people and people with disability.

People need accessible places to live, ways to travel and welcoming places to go. To ensure this is delivered the ACT Government needs to establish fit for purpose mechanisms to ensure that the application of accessibility standards is matched by lived experience expertise in designing and approving new developments and the redesign of existing infrastructure. This should be via a taskforce that brings together people with disability, planners and people with expertise above and beyond minimum accessibility standards. This should link to work on universal housing design, accessibility and adaptability and accessible transport to meet our obligations under the National Disability Strategy as well as our responses to ageing in Canberra.