



**LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY**  
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

---

**SELECT COMMITTEE ON COST OF LIVING PRESSURES IN THE ACT**  
Mr Johnathan Davis MLA (Chair), Dr Marisa Paterson MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

## Submission Cover Sheet

### Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT

**Submission Number: 034**

**Date Authorised for Publication: 5 April 2023**



**Submission to the Inquiry into Cost of Living  
Pressures in the ACT**

[youth.interact@act.gov.au](mailto:youth.interact@act.gov.au)

## Introduction

This submission to the Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT was prepared on behalf of the ACT Youth Advisory Council (Council) and is representative of the lived experiences and diverse views of approximately 80,000 young people living in the ACT.

Council is comprised of 15 members aged 12 to 25 years at their time of appointment, and who reflect the diversity of young people living in the ACT. Membership includes young people who identify across the gender spectrum and within the LGBTQIA+ community; who live with disability; young people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and who have varying levels of educational attainment and employment status. Council recognise that many young people often have identities which intersect across a number of these areas and may identify with communities and experiences outside of those listed here.

Council are proud to serve as a link between young Canberrans (aged 12-25 years) and the ACT Government by facilitating young peoples' needs, ideas, aspirations, and concerns to be heard through participation in consultations, surveys, community forums, open meetings and written submissions. Council welcome the opportunity to make this submission to the Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT, and to elevate a youth perspective in the conversation.

Council acknowledge that we meet and prepare this submission on Ngunnawal land and pay our respect to the traditional custodians of this land and to the Elders of the Ngunnawal Nation, both past and present.

## Accessible, Safe, Secure, and Affordable Housing

As the committee would be aware, the Canberra region has not been exempt from the current nation-wide crisis in affordable housing. In fact, the ACT is being impacted by a ‘perfect storm’ of intersecting housing pressures, with a high rate of rental stress (defined as paying 30% or more of income toward housing costs) among low-income households in the private rental market (73%)<sup>1</sup>, and a vacancy rate of just 1.5%<sup>2</sup>.

Currently, young renters working in the hospitality and retail sectors, or receiving Youth Allowance are paying between 48% and 92% of their income to rent one room in a two bedroom unit<sup>3</sup>. Anglicare Australia’s 2022 Rental Affordability Snapshot found that out of 1,354 private rentals advertised for rent in the ACT and Queanbeyan in March 2022, none were affordable and appropriate for a single person aged over 18 or living in a sharehouse who is receiving Youth Allowance, and only 2% were appropriate and affordable for a single person on minimum wage<sup>4</sup>.

As Council have previously highlighted<sup>5</sup>, young people face additional barriers in accessing safe, appropriate, and affordable housing, including age discrimination in the private rental market, no or shorter rental histories, insecure working arrangements, and discrimination against shared-housing arrangements. These barriers are furthered by young people’s preference/need to live within easier access of public transport, educational institutions, and essential services, and severe power imbalance in the rental market, and can leave young people with a non-choice between living in unsuitable and/or unsafe housing, and being homeless.

Council recognises this experience is exacerbated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, LGBTQ+ young people, young people with disability, young

---

<sup>1</sup> *Report on government services (2023) Productivity Commission*. Available at: <https://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services>

<sup>2</sup> Research, D. (2023) *Vacancy rates: January 2023, Domain*. Available at: <https://www.domain.com.au/research/vacancy-rates-january-2023-1192737/>

<sup>3</sup> Levi (2022) *Young Australians crunched by housing crisis, Everybody's Home*. Available at: <https://everybodyshome.com.au/young-australians-crunched-by-housing-crisis/>

<sup>4</sup> *2022: Rental Affordability Snapshot (2022) Anglicare Australia*. Available at: <https://www.anglicare.asn.au/publications/rental-affordability-snapshot-2022/>

<sup>5</sup> ACT Youth Advisory Council (2022) submission to the Inquiry into Housing and Rental Affordability. Available at: [https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/2074888/17-ACT-Youth-Advisory-Council.pdf](https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/2074888/17-ACT-Youth-Advisory-Council.pdf)

people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and young people from other marginalised backgrounds

**Recommendation 1:** To continue identifying and investing in innovative ways to increase the supply of supported and affordable housing in the ACT region.

**Recommendation 2:** Reinstate or create a new independent body similar in scope to the *Tenants Union of the ACT*, dedicated to protecting the rights of tenants and providing legal advice and a voice for renters of the ACT to government.

**Recommendation 3:** To scope potential opportunities to increase young people's competitiveness in the private rental market, including by introducing measures to prevent 'bidding' on rental properties.

**Recommendation 4:** Increase awareness of the Bond Loan Scheme<sup>6</sup> among young people and consider the viability of providing other waivers or small loans to support young people (who would be otherwise unable to afford to) to pay up-front housing costs such as energy connection fees.

**Recommendation 5:** To assess the viability of de-identifying rental applications to remove bias against age and cultural identity.

---

<sup>6</sup> ACT Government; Community Services (2022) *Rental bond help, Housing*. Community Services. Available at: <https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/housing/rental-bonds-and-other-help/rental-bond-help#:~:text=The%20rental%20bond%20help%20is%20an%20interest-free%20loan,to%20the%20ACT%20Revenue%20Office%20on%20your%20behalf>

## Transport

The ACT Council of Social Services' 2022 Cost of Living Report outlines transport as the third largest area of expenditure for low-income households, with fuel costs accounting for a similar proportion of income as energy costs<sup>7</sup>. For young people who are undertaking the process of obtaining their learner drivers licence; fuel costs, driving lesson and road-ready course costs, test, and licence fees, can converge to make it untenable for a young person to obtain their licence to drive - barring them from the autonomy and independence a licence brings with it.

For a young person who does not require any repeat tests, takes 10 hours of driving lessons and the Safer Driver Course, and receives no concessions, Council estimates it would cost approximately \$1,500 to obtain their driving licence (excluding fuel and general car costs). These costs are detailed below in figure 1:

Type	Fee
Issue of learner driver licence	\$51.10
Hazard perception test (each attempt after the first attempt)	\$26 <sup>8</sup>
Provisional licence	\$129.50
Full licence valid for 5 years	\$211.10
Driving assessment booking fee	\$115.30
Re-book within 48 hours of the scheduled time or when five minutes late or fail to attend	\$115.30 <sup>9</sup>
One-hour driving lesson (ACT Driving School)	\$79 <sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 2022 act cost of living report, ACT Council of Social Service Inc. Available at: <https://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/2022-act-cost-living-report>

<sup>8</sup> ACT Government, Hazard Perception Test. Available at: <https://safeplatetesting.act.gov.au/c/spt?a=da&did=2001421#:~:text=You%20are%20required%20to%20have,connection%20before%20attempting%20the%20test.>

<sup>9</sup> Access Canberra, ACT driver licence information. Available at: <https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/s/article/act-driver-licence-information-tab-forms-fees-and-concessions>

<sup>10</sup> ACT Driving School, Our Pricing. Available at: <https://actdriving.com.au/our-pricing-packages/>

ACT Safer Driver Course (Road Ready Centre)	\$168 <sup>11</sup>
---	---------------------

*Figure 1: ACT licence and driving lesson costs*

Council have heard it is increasingly likely young people require multiple paid driving lessons to obtain their mandatory 100 hours of supervised driving<sup>12</sup>, especially where parents/carers are taking on additional work to meet household costs, or where young people do not have family support. It is also increasingly necessary for young people living in Canberra to have access to use of a private vehicle to access essential services and social activities, especially where they do not live in inner suburbs, have evening or weekend employment, public transport is unreliable or infrequent, or they have accessibility requirements not met by current public transport options.

Currently, the 50% fee discount on one year licences that is available for individuals “who have been unemployed for six months or more and are receiving Centrelink unemployment benefits” (65% for those who meet the eligibility requirements and have a good driving record), do not apply for learner and probationary licences<sup>13</sup>, and there are limited alternative options. There is currently no specific initiative available to young people to receive discounted driving lessons. Young people may be eligible for other support such as grants, but this is often small and one-off amounts of money.

**Recommendation 6:** Review current licence concessions and discounts for low-income earners and explore the viability of introducing discounts that support young people, for whom it would be otherwise unaffordable, to obtain their licence.

<sup>11</sup> Road Ready Centre: <https://roadreadycentre.com.au/>

<sup>12</sup> Access Canberra, getting your provisional driver licence. Available at: <https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/s/article/act-driver-licence-information-tab-getting-your-provisional-licence>

<sup>13</sup> Access Canberra, forms, fees, and concessions. Available at: <https://www.accesscanberra.act.gov.au/s/article/act-driver-licence-information-tab-forms-fees-and-concessions>

## Mental Health and Wellbeing

The withdrawal of JobKeeper and the Coronavirus Supplement saw the poverty rate in the ACT increase to approximately 9.0%, representing an estimated 38,300 Canberrans – including approximately 9,000 children and young people.<sup>14</sup> A single person receiving Youth Allowance now has a weekly income that is \$197 below the poverty line.

Young people in the ACT are working one or more jobs (often in addition to full time study) to support themselves, younger siblings, and their households. Many also pay their own school fees, extracurricular expenses, and essential costs - meaning that sadly, young people commonly cannot afford the costs associated with sporting and recreational activities and travel, or discretionary spending on social activities. With limited support to maintain social engagements with friends and/or continue in recreational activities, young people have told Council they are feeling increasingly isolated, lonely, stressed, and unhappy. One young person said they feel they are ‘just existing’.

The current financial climate is having detrimental impacts on young peoples’ mental health, socialisation, and wellbeing. Unfortunately, the rising cost-of-living and increased pressures on frontline and community services is exacerbating wait times for (mental) health services and primary care. Council have heard school counsellors are often oversubscribed and that other free services, like Headspace, can have waiting periods of more than 12 months for a first appointment.

**Recommendation 7:** Review financial schemes such as the *Youth InterACT Scholarships*, *Future of Education Student Equity Fund* and other similar schemes to ascertain where young people most need financial support, and to inform future cost-of-living support measures for young people.

---

<sup>14</sup> 2022 act cost of living report, ACT Council of Social Service Inc. Available at: <https://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/2022-act-cost-living-report>