

Advocacy for Inclusion*Incorporating People with Disabilities ACT Inc.*

2.02 Griffin Centre
20 Genge Street
Canberra City 2601
(02) 6257 4005

ABN: 90670934099

www.advocacyforinclusion.org

Attention: Kate Mickelson

Inquiry into the Appropriation Bill 2023-2024 and Appropriation

(Office of the Legislative Assembly) Bill 2023-2024

E Kate.Mickelson@parliament.act.gov.au; E LACommitteeJCS@parliament.act.gov.au

E Scrutiny@Parliament.act.gov.au

Submission to the Select Committee on Estimates inquiry 2023 - Advocacy for Inclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to make a brief submission to this inquiry and also to give evidence to the hearing on 17 July 2023. We welcome the opportunity to engage with the Inquiry.

About us

Advocacy for Inclusion incorporating People with Disabilities ACT¹ is an independent organisation delivering reputable national systemic advocacy informed by our experience in individual advocacy and community and government consultation. We provide dedicated individual and self-advocacy services, training, information and resources in the ACT.

As a Disabled People's Organisation, the majority of our organisation, including our Board of Management, staff and members, are people with disabilities. Advocacy for Inclusion speaks with the authority of lived experience. It is strongly committed to advancing opportunities for the insights, experiences and opinions of people with disabilities to be heard and acknowledged.

Advocacy for Inclusion operates under a human rights framework. We uphold the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and strive to promote and advance the human rights and inclusion of people with disabilities in the community. Advocacy for Inclusion is a declared public authority under the Human Rights Act 2004.

¹ On March 24, 2021, Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI) officially merged with People with Disabilities ACT (PWDACT), a systemic advocacy organisation based in the ACT. Herein, reference to 'AFI' also acknowledges the values and philosophies of PWDACT.

Pre-Budget Submission

Back in March, Advocacy for Inclusion (AFI) made a comprehensive submission to the 2023/24 ACT Budget community consultation process. AFI offered the ACT Government and community a set of detailed recommended funding and investment packages and initiatives which deliver the intent of Government Strategies for people with disability including the ACT Disability Strategy, the ACT Disability Health Strategy, the Disability Justice Strategy and the ACT Inclusive Education Strategy.

We also urged investments which address gaps in disability support and lift universal design and accessibility in housing, transport and the urban realm amidst the planning review and Canberra's rapid change and city development.

In addition, we emphasised the continuing need to mitigate the continuing impacts of COVID and unintended consequences from legislation on Voluntary Assisted Dying. Finally, we seek targeted funding to facilitate disability rights approaches to climate change and waste reduction as well as a transition of I-Day to community control in the ACT.

We offered a comprehensive set of measures and initiatives which matches the ambition of the stated reform agenda and the magnitude of the issues, opportunities and sustainability challenges which face us as we improve the wellbeing and circumstances of people with disability into 2023/24.

This context includes identified needs for improvements to health, justice and education and to adequately respond to the listening report for the ACT Disability Strategy. In addition, it responds to the ACT's housing crisis and high cost of living pressures, the realities of a city undergoing rapid change in its infrastructure planning and transport, the experience of services under strain, the ongoing consequences of COVID as well as consequential legislative change.

We are also mindful of the wider disability reform agenda and the need to ensure sustainability of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) through commitments to State and Territory services and programs. This is a theme reinforced by the recently released interim report of the NDIS Review which states that:

Community supports for all people with disability, as originally proposed, have not been delivered. As a result, the NDIS has become an oasis in the desert. This has had a significant impact on the cost of the scheme. It has also left people who are not in the NDIS without support. This is deeply unfair.

For these reasons, we chose to make a submission with fundable initiatives in areas of need. Our submission package included an [outline](#), a [shared statement](#) from ACT Disabled Peoples Organisations and Disability Representative Organisations, along with ACTCOSS, and then a more [detailed measure-by-measure table](#) which contains specific fundable measures and a rationale for each in turn.

Budget overview

We welcome the fact that the Budget papers said that Government intends to implement and fund the ACT Disability Strategy, the Disability Health Strategy and the Inclusive Education Strategy, plus continue the Justice Strategy.

However, we were concerned about the lack of specific up front investment provision for these Strategies. These are major whole of government strategies requiring multi-year investment.

Specifically, Canberrans with disability have invested time and expertise working with Government to working to build a disability health strategy. The Health Strategy has now been in development for five years meaning that there are a number of fundable measures on the table. Some of these were detailed in the [ACTCOSS Imagining Better Report](#) and refined in our [Budget submission](#) this year.

People with disability have told Government they need a strategy to deliver dedicated funding to improve diagnostic services, accessible equipment, information and infrastructure and cultural change towards people with disability.

We did however welcome funding for health infrastructure and service improvement which will increase accessible and available healthcare. The continuation of some COVID measures including continuing replacement income for disability workers was also welcomed.

AFI welcomes investments to address cost of living, expand accessible infrastructure, improve housing maintenance and public housing supply, to limit gambling harm and continue the Disability Justice Strategy (especially the liaison officers), to address family violence and a boost to the ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme as well as support with costs of utilities.

Specifically, we particularly welcomed the decisions to fund additional public housing maintenance. The lack of public housing and the upgrades of older public housing homes that need improvements to improve accessibility, address water damage or improve temperature control form a steady stream of current individual advocacy matters for AFI. We understand that there is some provision for public housing at the Gold Standard and we also welcome this.

We are keen for the non-Government social housing and the private build to rent components to also prioritise housing at both the silver and gold levels.

We applaud the decision to increase the ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme cap by 15 per cent and allow members access to more trips per year without needing to continually apply for additional trips. This is in line with our [public advocacy](#), the [Auditor General's findings](#) and our evidence to the Inquiry into Cost of Living and is a modest but high impact response for people experiencing severe transport disadvantage.

We also cautiously welcome a focus on inclusive education. However, our advocacy was for improvements to the student loading for students with disability and funding for universal design of infrastructure and curricula. We are seeking more information on the inclusion coaches' model which will need to be carefully designed and implemented.

We are disappointed that the Social Inclusion Package did not contain specific disability initiatives. We advocated for better targeted work in this space including a transfer of ACT observances of the International Day of People with Disability to community control.

We also sought funding to the community (outside of the public service) which would mitigate unintended consequences of the likely introduction of Voluntary Assisted Dying here in the ACT including funding for suicide prevention work, work on hate speech and trauma and a reserve fund of health and disability supports to be offered to people seeking VAD.

Finally, AFI was disappointed the Budget did not include initiatives to build social planning capacity in the ACT (for transport and built infrastructure, including community facilities) or to ensure just transitions for people with disability in the context of climate change and moves to 100% electrification. We did however welcome building, infrastructure, community centre and other upgrades with an accessibility focus.

These are rapidly emerging priorities driven by policy change and we hope they will be addressed in ongoing work and subsequent funding rounds.

A full summary of Budget measures which impact people with disability, organised by portfolio, forms [Attachment A](#) to this submission.

Please feel free to contact me to discuss our submission on 0477 200 755 or via Craig@advocacyforinclusion.org

Regards

(Signed by email)

Craig Wallace
Head of Policy

10 July 2023

Detailed analysis and responses to Budget measures – Advocacy for Inclusion July 2023

Portfolio analysis – measures which benefit people with disability

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development

Better community infrastructure – Public building upgrades a range of upgrades and rectification works across the Government’s community and government building portfolio. This initiative ensures ongoing functionality and safety, including accessibility - \$4.13m over 4 years

Mental health training in the workforce - Work Health and Safety Liaison grant program delivered through Unions ACT to support education and awareness, including around psychosocial hazards. \$677,000 funded as an offset

Vulnerable household energy support - The Government will continue the Vulnerable Household Energy Support Scheme (the Scheme) to provide support for community housing providers, eligible private rental providers, and low-income homeowners to install energy efficient insulation and replace gas appliances with electrical alternatives. This includes heating and cooling appliances, hot water heat pumps, and stove tops. The Scheme will also support insulation and electrification upgrades in public housing properties.

Free Wi-Fi – The Budget includes funding to retain free Wi-Fi in Canberra centre - \$432,000 over 4 years

Funding for community sector indexation – the Budget includes funding for community sector wage indexation - \$14.981m over 4 years

The Government will provide additional support to low-income households facing escalating living costs. Including:

Increases to the Taxi Subsidy Scheme payment cap by 15 per cent from 1 July 2023. Scheme members will also now be automatically entitled to up to 854 trips per year, increased from 126 trips previously

This is very welcome and a long-term Budget ask from AFI

One-off payments for utilities. - 37,780,000 over 4 years.

The Government will continue to meet the **increased demand for the medical management of driver’s licenses** including funding for the Fitness to Drive Medical Clinic within Canberra. This includes the expansion of commercial health assessments to all Medium Rigid licence class holders and above. – 550,000 over 4 years (only funded for 2, the other years depreciation)

This is cautiously welcomed as AFI has concerns about any expansion of medical restrictions on non-commercial drivers licences.

Increasing housing access, choice and affordability – Build-to-Rent and Affordable Housing Project Fund. A \$60 million Affordable Housing Project Fund to expand the social and affordable housing stock in the ACT. Up to 22 affordable properties for at-risk and vulnerable women under the Ginninderry Build-to-Rent-to-Buy initiative; and around 160 community housing owned or managed affordable rental properties for a minimum of 15 years across three Build-to-Rent developments under the 2022-23 RFP process.

Better community infrastructure – Renewing Canberra's city precinct. public realm and streetscape upgrades across the City Precinct and at Dickson shops to improve access and walkability. - 7,200,000

Community Services Directorate

CDS and CAYPELS- The Government will redesign the Child Development Service (CDS) and the Children and Young Person Equipment Loan Scheme (CAYPELS) to create an integrated and collaborative service model within the Early Childhood Early Intervention system of care. This includes funding to expand the Autism Spectrum Disorder assessment service. \$2.6m mainly funded in the first two years

External merits review for child protection - The Budget includes a measure to implement to Community support and inclusion – Implementing the external merits review process for child protection decisions (funded as offset)

New services to support raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility: The Budget includes new service responses to raising the minimum age of criminal responsibility. This will include funding for an ongoing Functional Family Therapy Youth Justice program, establishment of a Therapeutic Support Panel and intensive case management and support services including accommodation. Funding is \$10.4 million over 4 years

Further investment into frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services - The Government will continue to invest in frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services in the ACT that provide critical supports in responding to cases of domestic and family violence. This funding will also provide additional support for the Safer Families Assistance Program and a review of domestic and family violence initiatives to inform service gaps and the ongoing response to victim-survivor needs. This initiative will be partially funded by the Safer Families Levy and continues the support for frontline domestic violence and rape crisis services. This initiative will be partially offset by Commonwealth Government funding provided through the Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence National Partnership Multilateral Agreement. \$6,740,000.00 over four years.

Justice and Community Safety

Reducing reliance on EGM's - The Government will continue measures aimed at reducing gambling harm caused by ACT electronic gaming machines (EGMs). The Government will also target a reduction of EGMs to 3,500 by 1 July 2025 through a continuation of its EGM buyback initiatives, including forgoing fees and charges associated with surrenders. \$8.8m

Disability Liaison Officers - The Government will support implementation of the Disability Justice Strategy by ensuring Disability Liaison Officers are available to assist people with disability who are victims of crime, including family violence. This initiative is partially offset by funds from the Confiscated Assets Trust Fund. \$266,000 funded through offsets

Once finalised, the Disability Justice Strategy will be released later in 2023 with further actions and initiatives.

Youth Detention Oversight - The Government will provide additional funding to the Office of the Inspector of Correctional Services to oversee the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre and reinforce the ACT's 2023-24 Budget Outlook 176 Investing in the Wellbeing of Canberrans National Preventive Mechanism, a state obligation under the international Optional Protocol to the Convention Against Torture. \$706,000.

Human Rights - The Government will provide additional resourcing to the Human Rights Commission (HRC) to meet a growing demand for its services. This includes additional funding for the Public Advocate to improve outcomes for vulnerable Canberrans, including children and young people. It will also strengthen the capacity of the Discrimination, Health Services, Disability and Community Services Commissioner to better support Canberrans accessing the HRC's complaints process.

Health (ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services)

Continuation of the second Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response (PACER) team, which provides an integrated model of care bringing together police, paramedics, and mental health clinicians - \$1.3 million in 2023-24

Establishment of a centre of excellence of older Canberrans – cost offset by health funding envelope

Improving palliative care – the Government will build a new 12 care specialist palliative care ward at Canberra Hospital. Funding covers design and construction. \$15,466,000.000 over four years.

Funding for the detailed design of the new Northside Hospital, and provisioning construction over six years. \$64.2 million over four years.

Community Health Care - The Government will design and construct a new community-based health services in South-Tuggeranong and conduct site planning and preliminary design for additional community-based health services in North Gungahlin and the Inner South. These centres will focus on preventative care and advice, early intervention and the management of acute and chronic illness. \$255,000.00 over four years.

Expanding and upgrading endoscopy services - The Government will expand and upgrade the endoscopy services at Canberra Hospital delivering greater capacity and a better experience for public patients. \$298,000.00 over four years.

Community based mental health accommodation and early intervention services - The Government will expand and upgrade the endoscopy services at Canberra Hospital delivering greater capacity and a better experience for public patients. The cost of this is offset by the health funding envelope.

Improving support for mental health emergency department presentations - The Government will provide funding for a feasibility study and early design of a safe assessment area in the North Canberra Hospital Emergency Department for mental health patients presenting with high-risk behaviours. \$250,000.00 over the next year.

Managing the ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and other emerging health threats - The Government will continue funding the ACT's ongoing response to COVID-19, supporting resilience and capability to respond to current and emerging public health threats. The Government will also continue the Post-COVID Recovery Clinic at the University of Canberra and the COVID Care at Home service by Canberra Health Services in 2023-24. \$5,437,000.00 over two years.

Research into the health impacts associated with climate change - The Government will provide funding for research on the health impacts of climate change, and the development of a comprehensive climate change adaptation and resilience action plan for the ACT health sector. The cost of this program is offset by the health funding envelope

Education

CIT Upgrades - Building and equipment upgrades across CIT campuses to improve disability access and ensure facilities are compliant with Work Health and Safety requirements. \$1.7 million in 2023-24.

Universal Access to Preschool for Three-Year-Olds - The Government will ensure that all three-year-olds in the ACT will be able to access one day per week of free quality early childhood education from January 2024. The Government will also invest in early childhood education workforce initiatives to support, attract and retain our quality early childhood workforce, and ensure an adequate supply of high-quality early childhood education and care in the ACT. \$28,885,000.00 over four years

Environment Planning and Sustainable Development

Gungahlin community centre design and construction - The Government will deliver a new community centre in Gungahlin which will provide facilities for a range of integrated community services, including a youth drop-in centre, and a dedicated community activity space. Funding includes rental costs to re-establish a youth drop-in centre at an interim location in Gungahlin until the new community centre is completed. \$2,325,000.00 over four years.

Housing and Homelessness

Money to maintain public housing - The Government will provide additional funding to Housing ACT to grow, renew and maintain high quality public housing - \$177m (4 years)

Growing public housing - The Government will provide additional funding to the Growing and Renewing Public Housing program to deliver 140 public housing dwellings - \$55m

Affordable Housing Project Fund – New fund to help deliver government commitments under the Parliamentary and Governing Agreement and the National Housing Accord, and to support the growth of the community housing sector in the ACT - \$60m

Social Housing Accelerator payment – Commonwealth payment to the ACT Government to support a permanent boost in the ACT's social and/or public housing stock - \$50m

Additional support for land release - \$11m

Homelessness Services funding package - \$20m (1-4 years, depending on component)

Initiatives we are unclear on / have concerns about:

Education

Inclusive Education – Inclusive education strengthened in the ACT public schools through the phased implementation of Inclusion Coaches. Starting in Tuggeranong public schools network. The Government will also support transitions for students with disability and to develop workforce capability. This initiative builds on the Government's commitment to review disability funding and support in Education, including providing funding during the 2021-22 Budget initiative Investing in public education – Disability Education Review. \$7,474,000.00 over four years.

Issues: Unclear why coaching model identified and how targeted (i.e., starting in Tuggeranong). Sectors asks were for investments in universal design work and an increase in the student loading

Infrastructure Upgrades Across Canberra Schools - \$21.9 million over four years for infrastructure upgrades across Canberra schools, including roofing works at four schools, and supporting infrastructure upgrades at Black Mountain School and Cranleigh Specialist Schools. \$650,000 over four years.

Issues: AFI supports infrastructure work to keep children safe, but we question decisions which prioritise general infrastructure upgrades in specialist schools rather than accessible infrastructure in mainstream schools

Relocatable Learning Units Across Public Schools - The Government will continue to increase school capacity through the re-use of six existing Relocatable Learning Units (RLUs) across ACT public schools to meet projected enrolment growth and classroom needs. \$399,000 over four years.

Issues: We question investments in RLU's rather than better accessible fixed infrastructure