

2023

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR
THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL
TERRITORY**

**GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO
AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT**

**No. 7/2022 – *ACT Childhood Healthy Eating and Active Living
Programs***

**Presented by
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Minister for Health
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Introduction

The ACT Childhood Healthy Eating and Active Living Programs Audit (the Audit) was tabled out of session in the Legislative Assembly on 9 November 2022 and is published on the Audit Office's website.

The audit considered the activities of ACT Government agencies between 2013 and 2021 to support childhood healthy eating and active living through:

- the establishment of comprehensive preventive health strategies
- the effective planning for, and management of, preventive health programs, and
- the effective delivery of treatment services.

The audit found the ACT Government has delivered a range of investments in healthy eating and active living programs for children, and that further action as part of the *ACT Preventive Health Plan 2020-2025* (the Preventive Health Plan) and evaluation of existing programs would be likely to improve childhood health and wellbeing outcomes.

Childhood healthy eating and active living programs are delivered through a whole of government effort, and the audit findings are relevant to several portfolios. The Government notes that health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people are influenced by many factors outside government programs, including services offered by primary care providers.

The Government welcomes the audit and supports the intent of the recommendations which focus on the Government's role in protecting and improving the health and wellbeing of children in the ACT, particularly those most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

The Audit recommendations highlight the importance of prevention and its contribution to long-term health and wellbeing, as well as the importance of evaluation and monitoring to demonstrate the significant contribution of prevention across the life course. The Government's response to the audit will strengthen these efforts.

The Preventive Health Plan provides a framework for action in prevention across government, thereby determining a large part of the preventive health agenda in the ACT. Strategies and actions under the Preventive Health Plan aim to either:

- keep people healthy by creating healthier places to live and making healthier choices the easier choice; or
- prioritise early detection and/or intervention risk factors for chronic disease at a population level.

The Preventive Health Plan also supports the ACT Government's response to national prevention initiatives such as the *National Preventive Health Strategy* and the *National Obesity Strategy*.

The Government agrees to three recommendations; agrees in principle to four and does not agree to one recommendation.

By agreeing in principle to a recommendation, the ACT Government supports the intent of the recommendation while considering there to be an alternative approach to implementation.

The Government does not agree to recommendation 6 focusing on the inclusion of food relief and financial support for active living in the Plan as these issues are deemed out of scope.

The Government recognises that poverty and food insecurity affect some Canberrans and responds to these issues in a variety of ways. Substantial work to address financial support for active living is being undertaken by the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) and the Community Services Directorate (CSD) provides funding to community organisations for Emergency Material and Financial Aid, including food assistance to support vulnerable families. The scope of the Plan focuses on public health approaches to improve health and wellbeing.

The audit identifies the need for all government directorates to contribute to actions to support childhood health and wellbeing.

ACT Government Response to Recommendations

Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation (action, timeline)
<p>RECOMMENDATION 1: PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND GUIDELINES</p> <p>The ACT Health Directorate should include strategic actions for introducing or strengthening professional learning opportunities and practice guidelines about weight stigma and discrimination in the second three-year action plan for the implementation of the Preventive Health Plan. The professional learning opportunities and practice guidelines should support the ACT workforce to approach issues of healthy eating, active living, body size and health sensitively and without bias, blame, discrimination or stigma.</p>	<p>Agreed in principle</p> <p>The ACT Government recognises the importance of ensuring issues regarding children’s weight are addressed in an appropriate way throughout policy, program and service delivery settings. Strengthening professional learning opportunities and practice guidelines about weight stigma and discrimination requires joint action from front-line health service providers, health professional bodies and tertiary institutions across the ACT. Professional learning in public sector hospitals includes weight stigma-related information.</p> <p>The Preventive Health Plan is not the appropriate mechanism to further workforce professional development regarding non-stigmatising approaches in the treatment and management of body weight in children.</p> <p>A consistent national approach to reducing weight stigma and discrimination in the health sector is also required and will be addressed through the <i>National Obesity Strategy 2022-2032</i>. The ACT Government will contribute to evidence-based options for addressing weight stigma and discrimination through its membership of the National Obesity Strategy Working Group.</p>	<p>ACT Health Directorate raised the need for a national approach to weight stigma and discrimination with the National Obesity Strategy Working Group in November 2022.</p>

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<p>RECOMMENDATION 2: PLANNING FOR EQUITY OF ACCESS</p> <p>The ACT Health Directorate should include strategic actions in the second three-year action plan for the implementation of the Preventive Health Plan with respect to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) understanding the needs and barriers experienced by the priority population groups identified in the plan; b) designing activities to maximise the likelihood of the identified priority population groups accessing programs and services; c) obtaining evidence for whether activities have effectively reached and met the needs of identified priority population groups; and d) ensuring the needs and barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT are addressed specifically. 	<p>Agreed</p> <p>ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD) is conducting a targeted consultation process with community organisations and peak bodies as part of developing the next Preventive Health Action Plan (2023-2025), which will address a), b), d) and e).</p> <p>Evaluation and monitoring processes for the Preventive Health Plan collect data on reach to priority population groups and assess the effectiveness of interventions where possible and appropriate, addressing c).</p>	<p>Government agreement to release of the Preventive Health Action Plan before the end of 2023.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 3: STRATEGIC MONITORING AND REPORTING</p> <p>The ACT Health Directorate should improve monitoring and reporting for the Preventive Health Plan by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ensuring annual activity reports include all programs and services delivered by ACT Government agencies that contribute to the priorities, objectives and strategic actions of the Preventive Health Plan; and b. reporting progress against specific performance measures or targets, to provide evidence of what works and evidence for the comparative value of different activities. 	<p>Agreed in principle</p> <p>The Preventive Health Plan Cross-Directorate Working Group oversees the development, implementation and evaluation of the Preventive Health Plan.</p> <p>Each Directorate is responsible for reporting activities and evaluating outcomes included in the plan to the ACT Health Directorate. The Directorate requires identification of targets and activity reports for all relevant programs/services included in the Preventive Health Plan.</p>	<p>Government agreement to release of the Preventive Health Action Plan before the end of 2023.</p>

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<p>RECOMMENDATION 4: EVALUATING SCHOOL ACTIVE TRAVEL PROGRAMS</p> <p>The Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate should, as part of its forthcoming evaluation of school active travel programs, review the impact of the programs on different cohorts of children, including the most disadvantaged and at-risk student cohorts. As part of the evaluation, the Directorate should measure the number of children travelling actively to school, both before and after program interventions.</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Transport Canberra and City Services has commenced an evaluation of its school active travel programs. Through the evaluation, Transport Canberra and City Services will address the impact of programs on different cohorts of children, including disadvantaged student cohorts. Transport Canberra and City Services will also consider how the future active travel program implementation can be tailored to better support disadvantaged student cohorts.</p>	<p>School active travel programs evaluation report expected June 2023.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 5: SCHOOL CROSSING SUPERVISORS</p> <p>If the School Crossing Supervisors program is continued beyond 2022, then the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> review allocation of school crossing supervisors to crossings and schools; and publish information about the allocation process and selection criteria. 	<p>Agreed in principle</p> <p>Transport Canberra and City Services is currently undertaking an evaluation of its active travel programs, including the School Crossing Supervisor program. Through the evaluation, Transport Canberra and City Services will assess feedback about the current school crossing supervisor locations to determine if these locations need to be reassessed.</p> <p>Transport Canberra and City Services will re-publish information about the allocation process and selection criteria on the Transport Canberra website.</p>	<p>School active travel programs evaluation report expected June 2023.</p> <p>School crossing supervisors allocation and selection criteria re-published on Transport Canberra website January 2023.</p>
<p>RECOMMENDATION 6: FOOD RELIEF AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR ACTIVE LIVING</p> <p>The ACT Health Directorate should, in consultation with responsible ACT Government agencies and community organisations, include strategic actions in the second three-</p>	<p>Not agreed</p> <p>The provision of food relief and financial supports for active living are out of scope for the Preventive Health Plan.</p>	<p>Food and Emergency Relief Advisory Committee established August 2022.</p> <p>Government</p>

Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation (action, timeline)
<p>year action plan for the Preventive Health Plan for addressing poverty and food insecurity in the ACT that consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) ongoing measurement of poverty and food insecurity in the ACT; b) provision and/or co-ordination of (i) food relief and (ii) financial supports for active living; and c) provision of accessible, coordinated and current information about food and financial relief options supporting childhood healthy eating and active living. 	<p>A range of relevant initiatives are already being undertaken by ACT Government Directorates.</p> <p>The Community Services Directorate currently provides funding to community organisations for the provision of emergency material and financial aid, financial counselling, food assistance and a no interest loan program.</p> <p>The 2021-22 Budget included funding of \$475,000 over 4 years to consider long term solutions for food sustainability across Canberra beyond COVID-19. This work, led by VolunteeringACT, supports a community-led model to provide a more streamlined and needs-driven response to food security. It includes a food relief database and the establishment of a cross-sectoral Food and Emergency Relief Network to share resources, ideas and best practice approaches.</p> <p>The ACT Government continues to invest in the sport and recreation sector through direct support for programs, projects and facilities that create participation opportunities and may reduce the end cost of access. The Government has increased targeted support through the Future of Education Equity Fund and an investment (\$75,000 p/a for three years) in Every Chance to Play (which provides targeted support for sport registration).</p> <p>The Government has committed \$1.6m over three years to support children’s participation in sport emerging post-COVID-19. This will support six organisations to deliver on-ground activities that support a diversity of participation opportunities. Funded programs will commence roll out in 2023.</p>	<p>agreement to release of the Preventive Health Action Plan before the end of 2023.</p>

Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation (action, timeline)
	<p>The ACT Health Directorate is undertaking research to better identify and measure the prevalence and underpinning social determinants of household food insecurity in the ACT. This strategic action is already included in the Preventive Health Plan.</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATION 7: KINDERGARTEN HEALTH CHECK</p> <p>The ACT Health Directorate should evaluate the eating, activity, weight, height and Body Mass Index components of the Kindergarten Health Check. The evaluation should consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) whether the method of collecting data about the size of children’s bodies and reporting this to families is consistent with better practice; b) whether the information provided is accessible and culturally safe for families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; c) whether the information provided has unintended negative consequences for either the child or family, such as increased body dissatisfaction, risky dietary restriction or disordered eating; d) whether the information provided effectively supports families to safely increase healthy eating or active living; and e) whether the information provided effectively supports families to access appropriate healthcare. 	<p>Agreed in principle</p> <p>ACT Health Directorate and Canberra Health Services will continue to investigate links between the ACT Kindergarten Health Check (ACTKHC) and the provision of healthcare services for 0-17 year-olds as part of addressing both recommendations 7 and 8.</p> <p>The current ACTKHC data collection methods have been reviewed by the Academic Unit of General Practice in conjunction with Australian National University and are consistent with international best practice.</p> <p>The risk of negative consequences needs to be balanced by a duty of care to inform and minimise the risks of obesity and overweight which are significant. The ACT Health Directorate Research Ethics Committee has determined that on balance it is better to measure and address childhood overweight and obesity early to minimise the significant longer-term health and psycho-social impacts of overweight and obesity.</p>	<p>Options for an ACT Kindergarten Health Check evaluation expected to be scoped by June 2023.</p>

Recommendation	Government Response	Implementation (action, timeline)
<p>RECOMMENDATION 8: EVALUATING COMMUNITY NEED FOR TREATMENT SERVICES</p> <p>Canberra Health Services should evaluate community need for multidisciplinary healthcare services for children aged 0 to 17 years-old with atypical eating and activity behaviours, atypical weight gain and associated health concerns, to address the risks of unmet demand and incomplete service delivery present in current service design. Options for addressing these risks should be presented for government consideration.</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Canberra Health Services will evaluate community need for multidisciplinary healthcare services for children aged 0-17 years and provide evidenced-based options to address current service gaps. The options will be developed in partnership with ACT Health Directorate and presented for the Government’s consideration.</p> <p>All options will be informed by key policies and strategies including <i>Best Start for Canberra’s Children: The First 1000 Days Strategy</i>, <i>Preventive Health Plan</i>, <i>National Obesity Strategy 2022-2032</i> and the <i>Australian Early Development Census National Report 2021</i>.</p> <p>Any changes to treatment services would be subject to future government funding decisions.</p>	<p>Evaluation of community need and provision of options for consideration by June 2023.</p>