

**2024**

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

**TENTH ASSEMBLY**

**Standing Committee on Public Accounts Report 20 - Inquiry into Auditor-General's Performance  
Audit Reports July – December 2022**

**Government Response**

## **Introduction**

At its meeting on 15 February 2023, the Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Public Accounts resolved to undertake further inquiry into all Auditor-General's performance audit reports published between 1 July and 31 December 2022:

- a. No 5/2022 – Procurement and contracting activities for the Acton Waterfront Project
- b. No 7/2022 – ACT Childhood Healthy Eating and Active Living Programs
- c. No 9/2022 – ACT Emergency Services Agency Cleaning Services Arrangements

The Committee held public hearings on 25 May and 5 July 2023 and published its report on 24 October 2023.

Across the three performance audit reports being inquired into, seven recommendations were made to the Government. Responses to these recommendations are provided below.

Standing Committee on Public Accounts – Report 20 – Auditor General’s Performance Reports July - December 2022 – Government Response

RECOMMENDATION	GOVERNMENT RESPONSE
<p><b>Recommendation 1</b></p> <p>The Committee recommends that, as part of due diligence following any future changes in administrative arrangements, ACT Government entities should conduct a risk-based assessment of the procurement and contracting arrangements supporting any legacy contracts that have been assumed by those entities.</p>	<p><b>EXISTING GOVERNMENT POLICY</b></p> <p>The ACT Government is finalising the ACT Government’s Contracting Guide, which will include the required risk-based due diligence activities for procurements and contracts affected by machinery of government changes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assurance over the probity of the Government entity’s administrative processes relating to the procurement prior to the letting of the contract; and</li> <li>• advice as to the remaining potential for price and time variations to the contract given the original intent of the procurement, in order to maintain the integrity of the agreed value-for-money consideration.</li> </ul> <p>The Contracting Guide, which will be supported by a suite of templates and eLearning Modules, is expected to be released in early 2024. Subject to the successful passage of legislation, from 1 July 2024, the Contracting Guide will become part of the Government Procurement Rules issued as a legislative instrument by the Minister for Procurement.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 2</b></p> <p>The Committee recommends that the above assessment should provide:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• assurance over the probity of the Government entity’s administrative processes relating to the procurement prior to the letting of the contract; and</li> <li>• advice as to the remaining potential for price and time variations to the contract given the original intent of the procurement, in order to maintain the integrity of the agreed value-for- money consideration.</li> </ul>	<p><b>AGREED</b></p> <p>The actions to address Recommendation 1 partly address Recommendation 2. In addition, the ACT Government will review the “Probity in Procurement Guide” and associated eLearning module to include cross references to the material in the Contracting Guide.</p> <p>More broadly, the ACT Government notes that the proposed amendments to the definition of “value for money” in the Government Procurement Amendment Bill 2023 (the Bill), will require decisions relating to entering into or amending a procurement contract to achieve value for money.</p> <p>It is anticipated the Bill will be debated in the Legislative Assembly in early 2024 and is expected to commence on 1 July 2024. Subject to the successful passage of legislation, the ACT Government will develop guidance and training to support the introduction and the application of the Bill.</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 3</b></p> <p>The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a preventive health plan to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• measure poverty and food insecurity in the ACT on an ongoing basis;</li> <li>• identify and measure Preventive Health Plan dependencies on food relief and financial support for active living; and</li> <li>• identify and demonstrate strategies to address risks that arise from these dependencies.</li> </ul>	<p><b>NOTED</b></p> <p>The ACT Government already has a preventative health plan in place. The <a href="#">Healthy Canberra: ACT Preventive Health Action Plan 2023-2025</a> is a whole of government plan that aims to reduce the prevalence of chronic disease in the ACT and support good health at all stages of life.</p> <p>Two of the priority areas under the plan include enabling active living and increasing healthy eating. Actions under these priority areas include identifying policy and related actions to prevent household food insecurity in the ACT.</p> <p>However, as outlined in the <a href="#">Government response</a> to the <a href="#">Auditor-General’s Report No 7/2022</a>; food relief mechanisms are out of scope of the Preventive Health Plan. These domains continue to be addressed through government programs and initiatives led by the Community Services Directorate (CSD) and the Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, including the provision of funding to community organisations for 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 four years for CSD to consider long term solutions to address the need for food relief across Canberra beyond Covid-19. This work, led by VolunteeringACT, supports a community-led model to enable a needs driven response to the provision of food assistance in the ACT.</p> <p>The <a href="#">Government response</a> to the 2023 <a href="#">Select Committee on Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT</a> Inquiry provides further details on a wide range of existing government initiatives addressing cost of living issues including food relief and active living.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 4</b></p> <p>The Committee recommends that all healthy eating and physical activity program interventions from the ACT Government should be aligned with best practice in the prevention of eating disorders and body image issues.</p>	<p><b>NOTED</b></p> <p>As stated in the <a href="#">Government response</a> to the <a href="#">Auditor-General’s Report No 7/2022</a>, the ACT Government continues to use evidence-based research, policies and guidelines when developing initiatives pertaining to all health promotion programs, including those that highlight healthy eating and physical activity.</p> <p>It is recognised that a range of complex, psychological and sociocultural factors underpin eating disorders and, while health promotion work has a general focus on both physical and mental wellbeing, it does not provide information or advice on managing specific health conditions. As such, eating disorders research and best practice cannot specifically inform the objectives or intent of <u>all</u> healthy eating and physical activity programs.</p>

<p><b>Recommendation 5</b></p> <p>The Committee recommends that evaluations of ACT Government nutritional education and physical activity programs for children should include body image, disordered eating and eating disorders in their outcome measures.</p>	<p><b>NOT AGREED</b></p> <p>Noting the response to Recommendation 4, in addition, outcome evaluation measures are dependent on the objectives and intent of each individual program. Program evaluations must be considered on a case-by-case basis; and appropriate outcome measures used. Contemporary and best practice evaluative approaches capture and report unintended consequences of programs.</p> <p>It is important that nutritional education and physical activity programs for children focus on the broader context of promoting overall physical and mental wellbeing. Disordered eating and eating disorders as an evaluation outcome could be considered on an individual program basis.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 6</b></p> <p>The Committee recommends that the ACT Government support and fund a suitable multi-disciplinary health care service for children from birth to 18 years old with atypical weight gain, disordered eating behaviour and associated health issues.</p>	<p><b>AGREED IN PRINCIPLE</b></p> <p>Creation of a suitable multi-disciplinary health care service for children from birth to 18 years of age with atypical weight gain, disordered eating behaviour and associated health issues will require significant funding and is dependent on a future budget process.</p> <p>In the 2023-24 budget Canberra Health Services received funding for a limited expansion of the existing weight management service - the School Kids Intervention Program (SKIP). This enables improved access and quality of care to the existing SKIP cohort of patients from 4 - 12 years of age.</p> <p>The current expansion aligns with the <a href="#">Government response</a> to the <a href="#">Auditor-General's Report No 7/2022</a> and existing policy initiatives including the ACT Best Start Strategy and the Child and Adolescent Clinical Services Plan.</p> <p>The Territory-wide Model of Care for Eating Disorders helps to ensure the best possible care for Canberrans receiving treatment in the ACT public health system. The new model of care brings together the range of eating disorder services available across the public health system, including the clinical hub, inpatient care and the upcoming residential treatment centre at Coombs. The centre will offer a home-like environment for people with eating disorders to live while they receive the support they need to recover and a therapeutic service that includes specialist, intensive nutritional and psychological treatment in a residential setting. The establishment of the centre is supported by a Commonwealth Government commitment of \$13.5 million over three years.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation 7</b></p> <p>The Committee recommends that the ACT Government adopt positive body image programs within all ACT government schools and</p>	<p><b>NOTED</b></p> <p>Supporting a young person to have a positive relationship with their body promotes good outcomes for both mental and physical health.</p>

<p>promote such programs within all ACT secondary schools.</p>	<p>The Education Directorate provides all ACT public school teachers with access to best practice resources, professional learning opportunities and research through the Education Directorate's intranet page.</p> <p>The Education Directorate recognises the pivotal role of teachers in health promotion. Teachers are often the first point of call for students in recommending programs, support networks and materials. Within their scope of practice, teachers provide students with valuable evidence-based resources and information on a variety of health topics including mental health, physical activity, body image and nutrition.</p>
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