

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 contributions 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 and actively encourages collaborations that promote justice, equity 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 - Community Services Directorate.

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

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Snapshot Overview

The 2017-18 ACT Budget delivers on many of the election commitments that ACTCOSS saw as priorities for investment early in the term of government. The community rightly expects election promises to be met, especially those to renew ageing infrastructure no longer fit for purpose, and deliver growth of service provision to match the growth of the population. The investments in health, education, transport, city and suburban renewal and public housing all are welcomed.

We note that even with such significant spending on these items, the community will gain more fit for purpose infrastructure, but is unlikely to see adequate growth in supply needed to match growth in the population.

Securing revenue for public expenditure, and ensuring fees, charges and taxes are imposed progressively, is deeply important to ACTCOSS. This year the increases in fees and charges are modest across most areas of revenue raising. ACTCOSS commends the decision on Lease Variation Charges (ensuring windfall gains from changes to planning rules are shared by developers and the taxpayer) and the introduction of a vacancy tax for investment properties.

The ongoing reduction in stamp duty at the cheaper end of the home purchase market is a useful measure. The balance of revenue raising through this tax reform tips to home owners via increases in rates. ACTCOSS supports this rebalancing, with the proviso that if a home owner experiences significant financial hardship as a result of rates increases (a risk for people on fixed incomes in locations where land values are escalating) then the concessions program should be used to mitigate this hardship. We do note the impact on rental changes as a result of landlords passing through increased costs to tenants.

Red tape reduction relevant to community organisations is welcomed, and we look forward to further reductions via procurement and funding administration reforms identified as priorities by our members.

We welcome funding for the ACT Government to improve the community's involvement in decision making across government through reforms to consultation and communication channels. These reforms should ensure all sectors of the community have the opportunity to express their opinion, shape the consideration of key issues and influence final decisions. Our aim should be to ensure the knowledge and capacity of the people most affected by decisions are better enabled to contribute to decision making. Good practice in one part of government should be adopted across all portfolios, to ensure a consistent, coherent approach.

In an economy that is presented as strong, diversifying and with a sustainable growth trajectory, there should be room to match investment in universal services, and a number of once in a generation infrastructure renewal projects, with investment in essential social services that support people not served well by universal systems and infrastructure. This is exactly what the *Community Shared Statement* of priorities for the 2016-2020 term of government called for.¹ This statement was developed by 20 peak and representative groups covering all demographic groups and relevant across all social and economic policy responsibilities of the ACT Government.

We don't see a plan for guiding investment consistently across transport, housing and urban renewal to match the ambition for renewed infrastructure to contribute to reducing deep disadvantage and growing Canberra's human capital. We don't see a vision to hold back the growth of inequality, reduce costs of living, increase and maintain supply of vital community services as our population grows or improve amenity for people living on low incomes in the

1 ACTCOSS et. al., *Community Shared Statement for the ACT 2016 Election*, ACTCOSS, 2016, viewed 7 June 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/community-shared-statement-act-2016-election>>.

ACT. We don't see respect for our members as first responders to people facing difficult circumstances and adverse life transitions.

We are struck by the invisibility of community services in the community briefing material presented on Budget day. We are the fastest growing labour market in the Territory, a labour market that welcomes diversity and provides 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.

Community and health services are projected to grow by 16.6% through to 2020 at least. Currently these labour markets contribute 24% of jobs growth in the Territory.

There is modest investment in workforce development in parts of community services, but the only substantial business development fund remains that collected via a levy on services during the previous five years. Ceasing of the levy is important. But the lack of investment in planning and renewal of a growing industry is short sighted and potentially compromises the opportunity to grow the export market for community service capability development and provision.

The ACTCOSS Budget submission in December 2016² and our pre-Budget briefing in April 2017 identified growing inequality and significant gaps in core social services as the most critical issues to address in the 2017-18 ACT Budget. It is only when you invest in human capital, starting at the bottom, that you get a sustained, real uplift in long term economic participation and social inclusion.

The foundation for a decent life is affordable, accessible, safe housing with security of tenure. We do not see any measures that will deliver the scale of growth of housing supply needed in the lowest cost end of the market, especially for low income renters not in public housing. This is most unexpected given the strong commitment to an affordable housing strategy, growth of community housing and reducing homelessness during the election.

A number of investments have been made 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 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.

And finally, ACTCOSS members have noted the lack of focus on the wider reform agendas that will continue to disrupt services and shape service delivery and funding changes. After almost a year of deliberations and consultation, the Productivity Commission released its report on expanding competition policy in community service provision. We need timely and well planned engagement and investment to ensure that both the sector and government are ready to respond to the risks and opportunities presented via these reform agendas.

The overall assessment by ACTCOSS is that while the Budget checks off a number of election promises, the investments made do not meet the community's expectations about action for those who face sustained long term cost of living pressures, face difficult circumstances and do not enjoy the benefits of Canberra's prosperity and liveability.

2 ACTCOSS, *ACTCOSS Budget Priorities 2017-18*, ACTCOSS, 2016, viewed 7 June 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/submission-actcoss-budget-priorities-2017-18>>.

Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

In this year's Budget speech, the Chief Minister and Treasurer described the Budget as 'laying down an ambitious agenda for renewing Canberra', noting the aim of ensuring things get better for all Canberrans. ACTCOSS welcomes elements of Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate (CMTEDD) initiatives, but calls for greater ambition to hold back the growth of inequality, improve standards of living, reduce costs of living, increase and maintain supply of vital community services, and improve amenity for people living on low incomes in the ACT.

As noted in the 2017-18 Budget Statements (B, p.1), CMTEDD plays a critical, central role in leading the public sector and working collaboratively within government and with the community to achieve positive outcomes. CMTEDD thus plays a vital role in coordinating efforts to achieve the goal of a better Canberra for all. This directorate has the potential to impact of all of ACTCOSS' goals identified in our Strategic Plan 2014-18:

- Standards of living: All people can meet minimum standards of living as defined by community norms
- Human rights: Our laws, institutions and systems enable people to exercise their rights and live free from discrimination
- Support: All people in Canberra can access the right support at the right time and right intensity and duration
- Meaning, choice & control: All people can live a life that has meaning to them, in which they have choice and control over the circumstances in which they live
- Social inclusion: We are a community in which all people can live with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially
- Equality and fairness: The prosperity of Canberra is shared fairly, and inequality is reduced.

Of the CMTEDD expense initiatives, ACTCOSS welcomes funding to improve the intersex, transgender and gender diverse community's access to services and address barriers to participation in the broader community and to ensure that services meet the needs of LGBTIQ people in the community.

We welcome funding for the ACT Government to improve the community's involvement in decision making across government through reforms to consultation and communication channels, including a pilot deliberative democracy project which will pursue policy reform opportunities through a citizens' jury. ACTCOSS supports the co-development of tailored and fit for purpose consultative mechanisms, including deliberative democracy strategies. This will ensure that the community has a genuine say when developing new legislation or policy proposals (not only when developing major projects). This process needs to be undertaken openly, without government having a predetermined outcome in mind. We need to take lessons from other jurisdictions, especially the need to have a stakeholder or leadership group that walks alongside the deliberative democracy project in its implementation.

ACTCOSS believes that the government should work with people who are already committed to finding better ways to build citizen voice and invest in community development, collective impact, co-design and citizen jury methodologies. These methods should ensure all sectors of the community have the opportunity to express their opinion, shape the consideration of key issues and influence final decisions. Our aim should be to ensure the knowledge and capacity of the entire community to participate in decision making is lifted. ACTCOSS is willing to work

with partners in the community and with government to implement adequately funded and well tailored community consultation methodologies.

ACTCOSS also welcomes measures for more transparent government.

We welcome the commitment to develop and deliver a dedicated strategy to address the low proportion of females in male dominated traditional trades and assist mature age workers to upskill and reskill, so they can take advantage of new employment opportunities. ACTCOSS agrees that it is important to ensure that there are opportunities for women and mature aged workers to upskill, reskill and/or re-enter the workforce. Women and mature age workers who have been carers should be a high priority for upskilling and reskilling.

In recent months, the community sector has raised concerns about increasing delays in staff and volunteers receiving Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) cards. The impact of these delays is that potential volunteers are lost in the waiting period and as a result there are citizens in the community who are not able to access support that would increase their wellbeing. The delays also have implications for new employees who are unable to commence in some positions in the sector, affecting their economic circumstances. In view of this, ACTCOSS welcomes additional support for the Working with Vulnerable People Scheme to ensure that background checks continue to be undertaken in a timely manner. It is to be determined whether the budgeted funding – currently allocated over only one year (2017-18) – is adequate to address the issue over the long term.

Among CMTEDD's Strategic Objectives is 'economic growth and opportunity, social inclusion and an attractive and liveable urban environment' (Budget Statement B, p.6). In the lead up to the 2017-18 ACT Budget, ACTCOSS argued that increased investment in our distinctive and diverse community sector, the ACT Government can simultaneously address its social and economic objectives – namely social inclusion and economic diversification. We are disappointed that this potential is not realised in this year's Budget through targeted investment in the community services sector.

ACTCOSS believes community services are a driver of increased employment opportunities in the ACT and regional economies and should be considered an area of strength. We would encourage the ACT Government to recognise and invest in the growth of the ACT community services sector because not only do these services provide one of the fastest growing parts of the labour market, these services grow human capital in our city and region which also contributes to increased labour market participation and economic activity. The ACT Government recognised the importance of investing in the community services industry when it endorsed the *ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026*.

This sector was notably absent from the Treasurer's list of growth industries in the ACT as presented at the community Budget lockup. The latest ABS Gross State Product (GSP) figures³ show that the health care and social assistance industry grew by 3.5% in the ACT in 2015-16, accounting for 6.4% of our GSP – a significantly higher contribution than construction (4.6%), retail (3.1%), accommodation and food services (3.1%). According to regional projections of employment growth by industry, the health care and social assistance industry is expected to have the highest rate of growth in the ACT to 2020. This workforce is expected to grow by 16.6% from 2015 to 2020 against a projected growth rate of 7.2% for the total ACT workforce.

By 2020, it is expected that employment in the healthcare and social assistance industry will account for 11.7% of the total ACT workforce, contributing a quarter (24.6%) of new jobs in the ACT over the five year period and maintaining its position as the second largest employer behind the public administration and safety industry (which is expected to maintain its current level of just under 30% of the ACT workforce between 2015 and 2020).

3 CMTEDD, *Gross State Product – 2015-16, ABS Cat. No. 5220.0, Brief*, CMTEDD, Canberra, 18 November 2016, viewed 6 June 2017, <http://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/399979/GSP.pdf>_recache>.

While the community and health services sector is growing, investments in business development have not kept pace and we need to ensure that the sector is able to offer good secure jobs as it grows, not precarious and casualised employment.

We make some general observations:

- Healthcare and social assistance now makes up 36,400 jobs or 11.4% of the workforce and this is projected to increase
- There is unmet demand in a range of areas (such as occupational therapists and domiciliary care) as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) rolls out
- There is a growing requirement for staff in community services to hold minimum qualifications (such as early childhood education and care)
- There is a need to invest in the capabilities of the sector as it transitions through shifts in policy settings, jurisdiction responsibilities and responds to increasing community expectations of quality, innovation and accountability
- The sector appears to be under-marketed and not well promoted as an entry level job or a career
- There may be opportunities to market the skills and expertise we hold in the ACT (for instance as a pilot jurisdiction for individualised funding) in our export and other business development programs.

We should be taking the business development needs of a sector which provides work for over 11% of the workforce, as seriously as we take business development in other smaller sectors like construction (7.6%), professional, scientific and technical services (10.5%) and retail trade (7.7%). ACTCOSS recommends that the government's investments in business development include an early focus on business development and work opportunities in the ACT's growing health and community services sector.

As a central agency, CMTEDD plays a key role in procurement reform. Government procurement policies and practices are identified as a key factor impacting on the sustainability of the community services sector in the *ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026* (the Industry Strategy). We note that the government will extend the Smart Modern Strategic Procurement reform program into other areas of government expenditure, including property maintenance, medical goods and services, and ICT systems. ACTCOSS seeks a specific government commitment to improving community services procurement policy and practice through the implementation of the Industry Strategy.

In relation to Infrastructure and Capital Initiatives, ACTCOSS seeks an alignment between the commitment to 'whole of government data storage and analytics capability with the aim of improving services by better linking, sharing and managing data' and the implementation of the Industry Strategy's priority for developing research, planning and evaluation capability in community services. The Industry Strategy seeks that data and information is shared between government, the industry and the community for the purposes of planning and advocacy.

In relation to Revenue Initiatives, ACTCOSS welcomes progressive taxation via the extension of land tax to all residential dwellings that are not the owner's principal place of residence, whether they are rented or not from 1 July 2018 – which is aimed at increasing the number of residential properties available for rent and therefore helping to put downward pressure on living costs.

ACTCOSS is disappointed that the fairer revenue initiatives have not been accompanied by fairer concessions for low income individuals and households in the ACT. Concessions are a

vital part of the tax and transfer system, as recognised in the 2012 *ACT Taxation Review*.⁴ On the eve of the Budget, ACTCOSS released our 2017 *Cost of Living Report*⁵ which showed a persistent and widening gap between income and living costs for low income households in the ACT. The 2017-18 ACT Budget does not address ACTCOSS' recommendation that the concessions scheme offered by the ACT Government needs improvement, including expanded access according to need, not age or source of income.

The gap that ACTCOSS has identified in the current concessions scheme through our cost of living analysis is highlighted in the ACT Government's Cost of Living Statement for the 2017-18 ACT Budget. The first of five household scenarios provides the example of a low income household – Ibrahim, Sadif and their daughter Sareh. This scenario, as reproduced below, shows their transport and utilities costs would increase by almost \$130 (2.7%) from the previous year despite access to ACTION fares and utilities concessions. An additional saving of \$9.17 on their drivers licence under Rewards for Safe Driving Program would be conditional on them having no relevant traffic offences recorded for the previous five years.

4 ACT Government, *ACT Taxation Review*, ACT Government, Canberra, May 2012, viewed 6 June 2017, <http://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/423409/tax-review-may2012.pdf>.

5 J Pilbrow, *ACT Cost of Living Report*, prepared for ACTCOSS, 2017, viewed 7 June 2017, <<http://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/act-cost-living-report-2017>>.

Community Services Directorate and Housing ACT

Community services and housing are critical elements in addressing the social determinants of health and contribute to ACTCOSS' vision of a fair and equitable ACT community and align with the following goals in our Strategic Plan 2014-18:

- Standards of living: All people in Canberra can meet minimum standards of living as defined by community norms
- Support: All people in Canberra can access the right support, at the right time, and right intensity and duration
- Human rights: Our laws, institutions and systems enable people to exercise their rights and live free from discrimination
- Meaning, choice and control: All people can live a life that has meaning to them, in which they have choice and control over the circumstances in which they live
- Social inclusion: We are a community in which all people can live life with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially.

Community Services Measures

ACTCOSS welcomes continued implementation of A Step Up for Our Kids as well as a trial of family group conferencing for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children at risk of ongoing involvement with child and youth protection services. Steps to address the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection and out of home care system are welcome.

Existing resources will be used to support new and emerging Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations through the provision of seed funding grants in recognition of the important role they play in delivering positive outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. This initiative is welcome, but we expect will need sustained and more substantial funding over time.

In the *Community Shared Statement* of priorities for the 2016-2020 term of the ACT Government clear advice was provided regarding initiatives such as this: There is a need to build and sustain independent non-government organisations that enable self-determination and community control. These organisations, especially Aboriginal and/or 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.

ACTCOSS welcomes the establishment of an Office for Disability. ACTCOSS expects that the office will have adequate resources and maximise capacities within government to draw on consumer expertise. A key focus area should be concerted, coordinated activity across government directorates to improve disability access in places and spaces, goods, information and services. This might include community transport, access to public transport (bus and light rail), public events and amenities, shopping centres, health centres, schools and other education settings.

We note the government's intention to highlight these issues through the Disability Reference Group. ACTCOSS would stress that this reference group needs to be constituted according to the expectations of people with disability, and adequately resourced to undertake their role as advisor to the ACT Government as well as provide broader oversight of implementation of the National Disability Strategy in the ACT.

We note the establishment of an Office of Senior Practitioner and work on restrictive practices. All work on restrictive practices should occur within a human rights framework; be developed in consultation with Disabled Peoples Organisations; and work from a presumption of the elimination of restrictive practices in Canberra.

The Disability Justice Strategy is a welcome cross-directorate initiative that recognises that people with disability are overrepresented in the justice system, both as victims and offenders, and face cross cutting barriers in the civil and criminal justice systems. We note the intention to fund from existing resources but the strategy needs to be sustainably funded over time.

The strategy needs to work to address and reduce the overall representation of people with disability in the justice system including setting benchmarks to identify and address the representation of people with cognitive and intellectual disability in justice settings.

We welcome transition funding for SHOUT. However, we note that the government needs to make an ongoing commitment to supporting foundational social infrastructure in our city in a range of areas including: support for self-help groups; information and referral services for people with disability and chronic illness; bespoke aids and equipment and other services which cannot be provided within a National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) model; an Information, Linkages and Capacity-building (ILC) project-based model; or for people who do not have an individualised NDIS funding package.

We note the provision of Disability Access Grants to fund training, increased awareness and infrastructure modifications for community organisations. However, there is need for ongoing sustainable work to ensure that planning for spaces and places around Canberra meet disability access standards. The implementation of this program should be targeted and developed in conjunction with disability voice organisations to ensure that it is effective and impactful.

ACTCOSS welcomes the government's commitment to implement an ACT Carers Strategy but notes the importance of investment into this overarching strategy. Within its Budget submission, Carers ACT reiterated and ACTCOSS supports the following priority areas:

- Increased identification, community awareness and information
- Inclusion as partners in care
- Increased employment and education participation
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Improved evidence base.

ACTCOSS acknowledges the additional funding for the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre, but notes the need for greater investment in ongoing sustainable programs for young people in the centre.

ACTCOSS welcomes the government's commitments to create job support for new refugees and asylum seekers as well as providing English language programs. This should include supporting young people to retain competency in their home language as well as supporting proficiency in English language.

However, this is a modest and narrow investment in improved services for the multicultural community. In the *Community Shared Statement* of priorities for the 2016-2020 term of the ACT Government clear advice was provided regarding multicultural community priorities: defending multiculturalism, build on multicultural celebrations, take action to engage at grass roots, build broad community acceptance with understanding, and address racism and exploitation.

ACTCOSS believes that we need to prioritise investment in community development and community facilities and that investments in community infrastructure are not keeping pace with growth in new suburbs.

A range of reforms and transition processes are also seeing a growth in the scope of work for community development workers without growing their funding or the facilities that the community needs to accommodate them.

Two examples are the under resourcing and under investment in Ramadan Community Radio and the need to restore funding for community meeting facilities at Reid and Oaks Estate.

Investment to reduce unmet demand for care and protection services is vital and supported. There is a need for a review of the progress of the Step Up For our Kids initiative, increased investment in prevention and family support and improving compliance with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principles. A failure to invest in these measures will continue the trend of growing unmet demand and increased tertiary level interventions in child protection and trauma recovery.

Housing Measures

ACTCOSS has called for a funded whole of government housing strategy that would address burgeoning inequality and the drag on the Canberra economy caused by the lack of affordable housing in this city with annual reporting, funding for housing advocacy and action to create affordable and accessible supply (including a \$100 million investment from current government bonds to create an investment fund for community housing), and action on universal design and energy efficiency in rental housing as promised by the government in its *Parliamentary Agreement*.

Calls for a strategy on housing affordability have garnered broad community support including from business, unions, planners and the community sector who issued a communique one week out from the last ACT Election. We were pleased to see agreement from the government to a housing affordability strategy prior to the election. We are disappointed that the ACT Budget does not include significant investments toward the housing affordability strategy.

ACTCOSS welcomes the modest funding increases in homelessness specialist support services, particularly the commitment to professional development and service delivery enhancement to support a trauma informed practice response across the service system. Research by the housing and homelessness policy consortia identified this as a critical need.

We are disappointed that this Budget does not include work to increase the take-up and adoption of universal housing design.

The *Parliamentary Agreement* included a suite of commitments to encourage universal housing design and we are disappointed not to see these addressed in this budget. Universal design is sensible and sustainable to address gaps in supply for people with disability and older Canberrans, to keep people out of acute care and to avoid expensive retrofitting processes later on.

We broadly welcome the planning for a second Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander older persons housing facility and an additional Common Ground facility, but note the need for wider systemic action for housing affordability.

Education Directorate

Education is recognised as one of the key social determinants of health and has a direct influence on a person's employment opportunities, participation in the community and social inclusion.

Reducing the gap in education attainment for students in the ACT remains an important focus area for ACTCOSS, and aligns with the following goals in our Strategic Plan 2014-18:

- Support: All people in Canberra can access the right support, at the right time, and right intensity and duration
- Meaning, choice and control: All people can live a life that has meaning to them, in which they have choice and control over the circumstances in which they live
- Social inclusion: We are a community in which all people can live life with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially
- Equality and fairness: The prosperity of Canberra is shared fairly, and inequality is reduced.

The most significant investment in the 2017-18 ACT Budget in the education portfolio is \$85 million over four years for better infrastructure in local public schools. We understand this will include new learning spaces, toilets and change rooms, and heating and cooling upgrades. The government will also deliver \$5.9 million over two years for refurbishments to Belconnen High School, including technology areas and outdoor learning and teaching environments. Ensuring public school facilities meet students' needs is vital. It is important that students in all areas of Canberra are able to access modern, well serviced schools in their local area.

Schools in Gungahlin will also receive \$24 million over four years to expand their capacity to meet the district's growing population. The area has recently seen rapid population growth, set to increase by 19% by 2020; therefore it is imperative local schools can meet the needs of Gungahlin's students and wider community. We encourage the government to consult local families and communities throughout this process, to ensure the expansion of existing schools and establishment of new schools will effectively meet the needs of all students. We welcome the government's commitment to ensure public school facilities are accessible and valuable to the wider community, and their recognition of schools as community hubs.

This Budget sees the allocation of \$2.36 million over four years for the first five school psychologists to be introduced into Canberra's public school system. ACTCOSS has campaigned extensively on this issue, calling for more school specialised staff who can provide social and emotional wellbeing interventions, in accordance with the recommendation made in *Schools for All Children & Young People: Report of the Expert Panel on Students with Complex Needs and Challenging Behaviour*. However, ACTCOSS is aware that as the psychologists will be employed by Education, they will not be available outside school hours or during school holidays. Supporting access to mental health services for children and young people requires psychologists and counsellors to be integrated into community based settings, not only employed through schools. Although we hope this measure will increase support for students' health and wellbeing, we are disappointed by the failure to deliver on our request for matching funds to non-school based services.

ACTCOSS readily welcomes \$3 million in additional funding to cater for students with a disability. We do note, however, these funds are for only one year. Education equity has been, and continues to be, a central component of ACTCOSS' advocacy. Focusing investment to support disadvantaged students, particularly students with disability, is integral to ensuring our education system is inclusive and enables all students to reach education attainment benchmarks.

We also welcome the commitment of \$546,000 over two years for the Future of Education program, to support a community wide consultation and policy development process to map out an equitable education system. We hope that the government will prioritise community based organisations and services in this process, and we note that it is necessary for the government to invest in community services to increase their capacity to participate. An equitable education system requires substantive, holistic engagement from a range of stakeholders, including those outside the education sector.

The \$400,000 in funding for the Safe Schools program to meet the gap left by the Commonwealth will improve the capacity of schools to provide advice and support to same sex attracted, intersex, and gender diverse students and their families. ACTCOSS strongly believes schools should be supportive environments inclusive of all children and young people, and this program will work to increase student wellbeing. Active inclusion is not only beneficial for LGBTQI students, staff and families; it sends a positive message of inclusion to the wider community.

We also welcome \$16.1 million funding for 66 school assistants in public schools, to support and reduce administrative workload for teachers. We would expect that there is active monitoring of the impact of this measure and to what extent it increases student access to face to face time with teaching staff.

ACTCOSS is again disappointed that the needs of young people aged 8 to 12 showing low educational attainment have not been specifically met in this Budget. Supporting students at this age to successfully transition from primary to high school is a key investment in early identification of barriers to reaching education attainment benchmarks and reducing education disadvantage associated with out of school demands and risks.

We are also disappointed by the lack of specific focus on supporting students from a variety of key equity groups, such as: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students; students from low socioeconomic backgrounds; and students with English as an additional language or dialect. These groups have been attended to in the government's Student Resource Allocation Program, but we have not yet seen whether and how the communities who support these students and the services that work with them outside of school will be funded as partners in addressing their needs in school.

As the government has not adequately invested in educational attainment for students who face disadvantage, ACTCOSS fails to see the necessity of the provisioned \$17.16 million over four years to ensure all public school students in Years 7 and 10 have access to electronic devices. While we note that current practices in some Canberra schools that require children to 'bring their own device' discriminate against low income students, this measure greatly overreaches in providing devices to all students. Resourcing for this measure could have been better used increasing access to devices and data for the smaller group of students who experience disadvantage.

The 2017-18 Budget has delivered substantial funding to the universal programs in education that will benefit all students. There are some targeted investments that are vital and welcomed. ACTCOSS and other groups advocating for equity in education will advocate for the Future of Education program to prioritise more investment and better support for the students who are not meeting education attainment benchmarks, their families and their supports equally within and outside of school settings.

Environment and Planning Directorate

Expense initiatives included in the Environment and Planning Directorate have the capacity to impact on ACTCOSS' goals identified in our Strategic Plan 2014-18:

- Standards of living: All people can meet minimum standards of living as defined by community norms
- Social Inclusion: We are a community in which all people can live with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially
- Equality & fairness: The prosperity of Canberra is shared fairly, and inequality is reduced.

Initiatives in this directorate also have an impact on the quality of the natural environment, on the capacity of the ACT to address, and preferably redress, the impacts of climate change and to reduce the risk of climate change intensifying. While these kinds of environmental issues are not always understood as a concern for people experiencing disadvantage and/or living on low incomes, their impacts are often most keenly felt downstream by people experiencing disadvantage and living on low and fixed incomes.

Therefore ACTCOSS strongly supports the government's increased initiatives to address climate change with community support, tackle environmental issues and improve waste management.

ACTCOSS also supports the ACT taking a leadership role in the nation on creating a just transition to a more sustainable future, including adoption of 100% renewable electricity by 2020 and zero net emissions by 2040.

ACTCOSS welcomes the Budget initiatives to:

- Continue delivering the ACT Climate Change Adaption Strategy
- To promote waste reduction and increased recycling in businesses, schools and at public events
- Implement a community zero emissions grants program for community groups and not-for-profit organisations to deliver projects and initiatives that support the ACT's target of net zero emissions
- Expand and improve existing programs such as Carbon Neutral Government and the Actsmart business energy and water program.

Electricity bills in Canberra are likely to increase by almost \$200 on average over the coming financial year, according to the Independent Competition and Regulatory Commission (ICRC). ACTCOSS supports minimal EER standards for rental properties to ensure that housing is fit for purpose in Canberra's hot summers and cold winters and is environmentally sustainable and cost effective for tenants. We welcome the government's plan to review the ACT Energy Rating Scheme and undertake a series of regulatory impact assessments for options to improve the energy efficiency of residential rental properties.

ACTCOSS welcomes the government's commitment to fund the Environmental Defenders' Office. It is important that the ACT retains its conservation values, natural beauty and urban green spaces for future generations. As part of that, it is critical that environmental advocacy and legal services are retained to ensure that environmental protections can be defended and guaranteed.

We support the expense initiatives to protect and enhance protecting native species, supporting endangered woodlands, sustainably managing forests, eradication of exotic pests and diseases and improving efficiency in biodiversity management.

ACTCOSS is interested in supporting community input into the government's review of Transport for Canberra to guide future transport planning, infrastructure and services that deliver on both environmental and transport disadvantage objectives.

Health

Interventions in the health portfolio make significant contributions to ACTCOSS' advocacy goals and align with the following goals in our Strategic Plan 2014-18:

- Human rights: Our laws, institutions and systems enable people to exercise their rights and live free from discrimination
- Support: All people in Canberra can access the right support at the right time and right intensity and duration
- Meaning, choice and control: All people can live a life that has meaning to them, in which they have choice and control over the circumstances in which they live
- Social inclusion: We are a community in which all people can live life with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially
- Equality and fairness: The prosperity of Canberra is shared fairly, and inequality is reduced.

Health continues to be the largest area of expenditure in the Budget, continuing at \$1.6 billion. Many of the new initiatives are fulfilling election commitments.

Initiatives include growing hospital services, mental health services, walk-in nurse centres, preventative health strategies, the number of nurses, and mobile dental clinics; establishing a new health centre for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, the Office for Mental Health, health screening for high school students, a preventative health funding pool, incentives to expand bulk-billing GP practices; developing plans to expand Northside hospital facilities, expand Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, establish the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) at Canberra Hospital, and expand Hospital in the Home.

There are once in a generation levels of capital expenditure to establish and/or expand hospitals and community facilities. This includes:

- Planning and design over the next two years, for the Surgical Procedures, Interventional Radiology and Emergency Centre (SPIRE) to be built at Canberra Hospital. Construction will be in 2019-20 to 2020-21, and will cost \$230 million. This is a once in a generation infrastructure investment
- Expanding Centenary Hospital. There will be planning work in 2017-18, with \$70 million in capital spending the following three years. Expansions include an adolescent mental health unit, intensive care for children, high-dependency paediatric beds, an adolescent gynaecology service, and child and adolescent sleep labs
- Expanding nurse-led walk in centres. A new nurse-led walk in centre will be established in Gungahlin, the fastest growing region in Canberra. ACTCOSS welcomes this investment and notes funding to design and plan a future centre in Weston Creek and scope one in the inner north. However, ACTCOSS would be interested in further information about plans to replace Civic Community Health Centre, which was previously sold
- Establishing a new health centre for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, \$12 million over four years, to provide culturally appropriate primary health services
- Refurbishment and upgrade of the Acute Aged Care and Oncology wards at Canberra Hospital

- Establishing a new clinical school for nursing, midwifery and allied health at the University of Canberra
- Operational commissioning of the University of Canberra Public Hospital, ahead of opening in 2018, costing \$15 million over two years.

ACTCOSS is deeply concerned that the long process to establish an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community led bush healing farm that includes a residential rehabilitation facility has floundered and we call on the ACT Government to get the bush healing farm back on track.

ACTCOSS welcomes continued investment in mental health services, especially the establishment of the Office for Mental Health. We look forward to further details about the office's role at a time of significant systemic issues for the mental health sector. Other mental health expenditure includes expanding:

- Child counselling services
- Perinatal mental health services
- Headspace's multidisciplinary support and counselling for young people 18-25 years
- Suicide prevention support services including the program and the Black Dog Institute's Lifespan Suicide Way Back Prevention Program.
- The child and adolescent mental health service
- Physical and mental health screening, to be established for high school students in all ACT schools starting mid next year.

However, ACTCOSS has concerns that the majority of new mental health expenditure is funding only seven rehabilitation beds in the Dhulwa Mental Health unit, with \$13.8 million over four years. The lack of corresponding investment in early intervention and community based rehabilitation supports is a lost opportunity and funding for non-government community mental health services continues to be a gap in the Budget. We note that the investments in the Way Back suicide prevention program and Detention Exit Outreach program are for one year only.

ACTCOSS also looks forward to further detail regarding Commonwealth and ACT matched funding from the Federal Budget and what that will target. This is particularly important with significant gaps from community mental health funding arising following implementation of the NDIS, which does not provide the psycho-social rehabilitation services this funding previously covered and has significant barriers for people with psycho-social disability accessing it. The ACT Health funded Community Assistance and Support Program (CASP), established in July 2016, has seen a growing proportion of its clients being people with psycho-social disability, who have difficulties accessing appropriate supports through the NDIS.

Workforce is a critical element of a safe and efficient health system. There are a range of initiatives that demonstrate investment in the ACT workforce, such as the University of Canberra Clinical School and the additional nursing positions. The existing ACT Workforce Plan is for 2013-18 and there is a need to have in place strategies to address the attraction, education, recruitment and retention beyond that date, to reflect the timing of the budget initiatives.

The eHealthy Futures that was announced in the 2010-11 Budget has experienced delays. The intention of this commitment was to ensure our health system was better positioned to meet the needs of the ACT community at the time and into the next decade. The Budget this year says it will be complete by June 2018. The ACT Government needs to evaluate how technology can improve the quality, safety and efficiency of services. This investment will help people have better experiences and outcomes of care and improve the connection between our very fragmented health system.

Other health spending includes:

- Assessment of the Hospital in the Home program, to inform future service design and expansion
- Funding Health Care Consumers Association to develop a framework for patient care navigators, including new and innovative models of care
- Establishment of two mobile dental clinics, with ACTCOSS commending its targeting of schools with disadvantaged students and vulnerable, harder to reach communities
- Establishing a grants funding pool for preventative health initiatives to address smoking, alcohol consumption and obesity. This includes a one-off \$170,000 grant to Heart Foundation ACT
- 32 extra nurses across ACT Health over the next four years, including more graduate nurses, maternal and child health nurses, nurse navigator positions and school nurses
- \$1 million grants pool over three years to incentivise bulk billed GPs in south Canberra. This will help meet a significant need in the community with the ACT having the lowest bulk billing rates of any state or territory in Australia
- Scoping and design of a Drug and Alcohol Court, through the Justice and Community Safety Directorate.

During the community consultation on development of the preventative health agenda, many participants saw a need to invest more in primary prevention that would reduce the health costs and burden of disease associated with mental ill health and gendered violence. Neither of these priorities have been captured in the measures announced for 2017-18.

Justice and Community Safety Directorate and Legal Aid Commission (ACT)

An improved justice system and reduction in the social determinants of crime is a key focus area for ACTCOSS, and relates to the following goals in our Strategic Plan 2014-18:

- Human Rights: Our laws, institutions and systems enable people to exercise their rights and live free from discrimination
- Support: All people in Canberra can access the right support at the right time and right intensity and duration
- Social Inclusion: We are a community in which all people can live life with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially.

ACTCOSS welcomes \$3.1 million over four years to fund implementation of the recommendations outlined in the *Inquiry into the Treatment in Custody of Detainee Steven Freeman* (the Moss Review). We note that Aboriginal leadership is critical to meaningfully improving the safety and wellbeing of people in custody in the Alexander Maconochie Centre, and we stress the need for the government to work with Aboriginal community controlled organisations in implementing the Moss Review recommendations. Significant investment will be needed to ensure ongoing provision of high quality, culturally appropriate, accessible, evidence based services to improve safety of detainees and custodial outcomes. We also welcome the establishment of an Inspectorate of Custodial Services to increase transparency and accountability within ACT detention settings. We encourage further community stakeholder consultation as the Inspectorate role is developed.

ACTCOSS readily welcomes additional funding for Yarrabi Bamirr, the cross-government justice reinvestment trial to reduce Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families coming into contact with the justice system. ACTCOSS is pleased to see the government investing part of \$386,000 in specialised, holistic models to tackle the severe over-representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and families in the ACT justice system. We particularly recognise the importance of the government's partnership with Winnunga Nimmityjah on this initiative, and hope to see more collaboration with Aboriginal community controlled organisations in the future.

The government has committed to reducing repeated contact with the justice system through \$5.34 million of continued funding for the Extended Throughcare program over four years. We welcome ongoing funding for the program, which aims to reduce recidivism, ensures detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre have the opportunity to reintegrate into the community with timely, effective support, and will improve community safety. The program has so far proven both socially and economically beneficial; it has significantly reduced recidivism for many people; and the program cost per participant is significantly lower than the cost of spent on inmates in prison.

ACTCOSS notes that \$477,000 will go towards a Drug and Alcohol Court, in collaboration with the Health Directorate. We support the aim of the court to focus on rehabilitation and diversion from prison for drug and alcohol offenders, and note its success in other jurisdictions. However, we highlight that concerns have been raised by services working in this space. Despite broad support for the court from the drug and alcohol sector, services are already at capacity in many instances. It is crucial the government provides support for services to effectively meet any increase in demand. We encourage the government to collaborate fully with the drug and alcohol service sector in the scoping and design of the court.

We welcome ongoing funding for a number of Community Legal Centres in the ACT. \$2.47 million will continue to fund the important work of Canberra Community Law, the Women's

Legal Centre, and the Street Law program. These services assist some of the most disadvantaged Canberrans, and their ongoing funding is essential to ensuring access to justice. Community Legal Centres and the Street Law program in particular serve many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander clients, people exiting prison and many public housing tenants, who face a range of vulnerabilities. ACTCOSS also welcomes the use of a portion of this funding to provide support for the Environmental Defenders' Office for two years. We also welcome \$1.21 million to continue funding Legal Aid, to increase access to justice for vulnerable and low income people in the ACT.

The government has allocated \$2.18 million over four years to develop, pilot, refine, implement and evaluate a Family Safety Hub within the Office of the Coordinator-General for Family Safety. A significant amount of this funding is offset by previously unused funds from Safer Families initiatives that did not fully utilise their available 2016-17 Budget. The Family Safety Hub is a welcome initiative, particularly for its holistic, whole of government approach to ensuring support and access to justice in family violence matters. ACTCOSS notes the necessity of continuing to engage the community sector in developing the hub, and the need to listen to those who have experienced domestic and family violence, particularly Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, culturally and linguistically diverse women, carers, and women living with disabilities.

ACTCOSS is concerned about the \$2.69 million to equip all ACT police with Tasers over four years, if requested by officers. We note that when compared to the \$3.1 million spent on implementing the Moss Review recommendations, and \$2.4 million spent on funding Community Legal Centres, the TASER measure is a relatively significant financial commitment without long term benefit to our justice system and the ACT community. ACTCOSS stresses the importance of investing in positive societal mechanisms, particularly ones that reduce the determinants of crime and the likelihood of people coming into contact with the justice system.

Finally, we welcome \$2.48 million provided over four years towards the establishment of a bakery industry at the Alexander Maconochie Centre, as a measure to provide employment opportunities for detainees.

Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate

In this Budget the Transport Canberra and City Services Directorate includes initiatives that will impact on the following ACTCOSS strategic goals:

- Standards of living: All people can meet minimum standards of living as defined by community norms
- Support: All people in Canberra can access the right support at the right time and right intensity and duration
- Social inclusion: We are a community in which all people can live with dignity and access the means and opportunity to participate and be included economically and socially.

ACTCOSS is strongly supportive of the Budget initiatives to increase the range, frequency and accessibility of public transport, in particular, we applaud the government's decision to:

- Continue the trial of free off peak travel for seniors and concession MyWay card holders
- Provide Special Needs Transport services for students with a disability
- Trial the expansion of the flexible bus service to Inner North residents and continuing to provide existing services
- Provide essential city services to new communities across Canberra
- Continue the Free City Loop bus service, relaunching Xpresso Routes and the trialling of the Weston City Bus Service.

ACTCOSS also welcomes the government's investment to:

- Continue to plan Light Rail Stage 2 between the City and Woden
- Provide two months free travel on new Green and Black rapid bus routes to encourage passenger use of the service
- Introduce safety measures and school crossing supervisors, at 20 schools to improve road safety and encourage walking and cycling to school.

ACTCOSS supports the six month trial of a flexible bus service to residents of the Inner North, and continuing the work of the Community Transport Coordination Centre to fully realise the potential of the service.

Achieving accessible transport is vital for social inclusion for people with disability, older people with mobility aids and parents with small children. Transport disadvantage, both in terms of accessibility and affordability, affects a significant number of Canberra residents and deeply restricts access to work, education, goods and services, social and community activities.

Funding for school transport for children with a disability is welcome and pleasing.

ACTCOSS would like to see further work and more integrated planning across transport modes/infrastructure and suburban renewal to ensure truly integrated and effectively aligned investments are targeted to support people to overcome barriers to accessibility and affordability of transport services.

Work to revitalise town centres should be harmonised with transport planning to ensure that the outcomes are integrated, accessible, sustainable and truly fit for purpose – including opening up transport routes and group centre usage to people who might otherwise not be able to use these centres. Respectful engagement with local communities should occur in

tandem with consultations with users and most importantly potential users of these precincts and modalities.

ACTCOSS would also like to see coordinated work to improve disability access for older people and people with disability across all transport modalities and to ensure that our investments in these areas align to the needs of people to get to and from housing and transport pick up points.

An integrated understanding of the demand mix, including of the unique value of community transport within the overall transport system, should be prioritised.