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FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

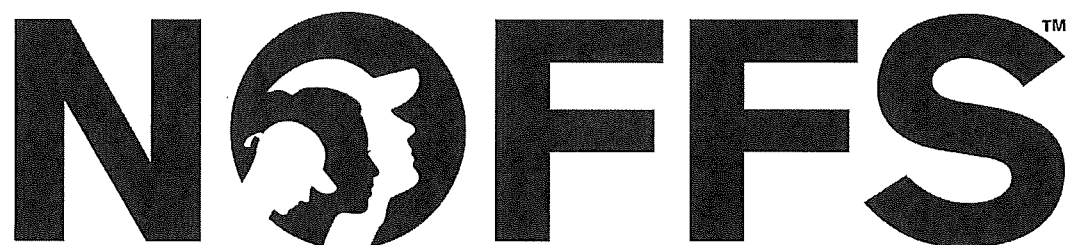
STANDING COMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND COMMUNITY WELLBEING
Mr Johnathan Davis MLA (Chair), Mr James Milligan MLA (Deputy Chair),
Mr Michael Pettersson MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Review of ACT health programs for
children and young people

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Submission to:

**The ACT Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing
Review of ACT health programs for children and young people**

Prepared by:

**Lachlan Dean
ACT Regional Manager
Ted Noffs Foundation**

WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE DO

The Ted Noffs Foundation has been supporting disadvantaged and disconnected youth in the ACT for over 20 years. We have a strong focus on working with young people whose lives are impacted by the effects of alcohol and other drug use. We also support any at-risk young person in the ACT.

Noffs has a range of programs in the ACT that provide specialist services to young people.

1. At our site in Watson, we operate a detoxification and rehabilitation program for young people aged 12 to 18 who have alcohol and other drug related issues. Clients are supported in a therapeutic community and treatment is for up to three months duration. We also provide a dedicated after-care program for these young people that offers ongoing support and case management for up to three years.
2. We have an Outreach Drug and Alcohol Service that operates from the city offering counselling and assistance for young people aged 12 to 25. Aligned with this service is a mentoring program for young people at risk of homelessness. This service matches clients with volunteer mentors and also provides case management and support.
3. The Noffs ACT Street University operates in Civic and is an early intervention and treatment service for young people whose actions may have negative impacts on the community or their own wellbeing and often result in adverse physical and mental health outcomes, involvement in criminal activity, disconnection from family and community and homelessness.
4. We also operate a 6 bed accommodation service that we self-fund for young people who struggle to find accommodation in the homelessness sector.

ISSUES RELEVANT TO THE STANDING COMMITTEE REVIEW

The Ted Noffs Foundation wishes to highlight some key areas for the Standing Committee that are relevant to Term of Reference 1 (d), 'any other relevant matters arising during the Committee's inquiry.'

1. There is a strong need for alcohol and other drug (AOD) education within the ACT school system, especially for early high school students. Currently, all funding contracts for the AOD sector with ACT Health prevent us from providing expert drug education sessions to young people at this critical stage of their development. Education and information are key elements to working under a harm minimisation strategy.

We receive, on average, 10 requests from local schools each term seeking support and information about AOD use for their students and communities. Our contracts only permit us to provide one-on-one counselling for individual young people. We do provide information sessions for teachers and parents, but this is at our own cost.

In order to better support young people and the community around drug use issues, a key step is to make sure that clear, rational, and evidence-based drug information is provided to young people.

2. There is a great need for AOD counselling services for young people in the ACT community. We have two specialist outreach drug and alcohol counsellors who work with young people in the jurisdiction. Our service is extremely effective in supporting young people to not only reduce the effects of substance use in their lives, but also has a significant impact in terms of family functioning and reduction in crime.

However, with only two counsellors across the ACT, we can see roughly 100 young people a year for treatment in an outreach setting. There is a significant need to increase the amount of early intervention counselling we can provide to young people to address their substance use issues.

3. There is a lack of youth services in particular areas of Canberra, with Gungahlin, Tuggeranong and the Molonglo Valley being clear examples. Rather than setting up youth centres in these areas where young people can just 'drop in' and 'hang out' we would suggest something with more focus and purpose like the Street University model we provide in the city. Establishment of Street Universities in these areas will allow young people to access a range of supports and programs and would encourage other youth services to access these hubs to engage with specialist services.
4. There is an urgent need to fund and support already existing mental health services, and access to these, for young people who need acute care and critical support for their mental health issues. The vast bulk of funding has gone to services that provide support for mild to moderate mental health issues. This has left those young people with the most urgent need facing long wait times for assessment and delays in access to crisis intervention.

The Ted Noffs Foundation thanks the Standing Committee for the opportunity to present these matters for its consideration.

Lachlan Dean
ACT Regional Manager

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