



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON COST OF LIVING PRESSURES IN THE ACT
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Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT

Submission Number: 021

Date Authorised for Publication: 21 March 2023

Cost of Living Pressure Inquiry submission - Australian Unemployed Workers Union,
Canberra Branch

In consultation with our members, we have identified several major areas in which the cost of living has gone up. We have also made several recommendations for solutions to these problems.

1. Increased cost of groceries and food

Our members report that grocery costs have risen sharply over the last year, particularly the price of fresh produce. People are lacking access to nutritious food and frequently skipping meals altogether.

Suggestions:

- Ban supermarket/fast food chain food waste in the ACT and create programs to distribute donated food to people on low or fixed incomes, including a guarantee of free hot meals to anyone who needs them
- Creation of urban farms, community vegetable gardens and food forests to increase the amount of food produced within the ACT
- Free breakfast/lunch programs at ACT schools to make sure students are getting enough to eat.

2. Increased rent and housing costs

Rents are rising out of proportion with income, and particularly with welfare payments.

Suggestions:

- Guaranteed public housing to everyone on the waiting list
- Create a strict cap on rental increases, including when a property is vacated and rented out again, to deter landlords and agents from evicting tenants in order to increase rent
- Build affordable public housing along major public transport routes. Build more student housing. Build housing cooperatives like the ANU Student Co-op.
- More emergency/short term housing for people in crisis

3. Medical costs

There are very few bulk-billing doctors in the ACT. Our members usually cannot cover the upfront payment before the medicare rebate, which also rarely covers the whole fee. Medication costs have also increased. GP visits are often not affordable, let alone specialists or allied health professionals like dentists, psychologists and physiotherapists.

Suggestions:

- Create more bulk-billing medical centres within 10km of every suburb in Canberra, including free medical specialist/allied health professional centres, for people on low incomes.
- Apply pressure to federal government to add more medications to PBS

4. Education costs

Course fees, as well as the costs of resources and equipment, make it difficult to access qualifications needed to work.

Suggestions:

- Add more courses to the free CIT course list, including short qualifications and certifications like RSA, RCG, WWVP and white card
- Provide training materials, uniforms and gear free of charge

5. Fuel/transport costs

Canberra is a heavily car-dependent city and fuel costs have increased dramatically, making it hard for many people to get around

Suggestions:

- Free public transport for people on low incomes
- Increased bus routes
- A scheme to buy and resell second hand electric vehicles with interest-free loans for people on low incomes

6. Energy costs

Homeowners have more capacity to make changes to their homes to make them more energy-efficient and to keep energy costs down. Renters do not have that same choice and are often faced with higher energy bills.

Suggestions:

- Minimum standards for energy efficiency on any rental property regardless of age
- Fines for landlords who do not comply

7. Income support to ACT Residents

The rate of income support payments to ACT residents is far below the poverty line. Most of our members are on a fixed income from Centrelink (jobseeker, DSP or youth allowance), and payments are currently sitting at around \$50 per day, which is 57% of the current Henderson Poverty Line of \$88 a day. This was already woefully inadequate and as such, our members are experiencing dire financial hardship due to the increased cost of living.

Suggestions:

- Supplementary payments to ACT residents to raise their income
- Job creation programs (not Work For The Dole) that actively recruit unemployed/low income workers and pay them a living wage, for example, climate and natural disaster emergency response training