



Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Economy and
Gender and Economic Equality

Inquiry into unpaid work

Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory
Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality

Approved for publication

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About the committee

Establishing resolution

The Assembly established the Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality on 2 December 2020.

The Committee is responsible for the following areas:

- Chief Minister’s responsibilities
- Economic development and diversification
- Tourism
- Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety
- Social impacts and outcomes of economic policies including gender considerations (excluding Office for Women)
- Minister of State Responsibilities (excluding Justice and Community Safety Directorate reporting areas)
- Business and Better Regulation
- Arts

You can read the full establishing resolution [on our website](#).

Committee members

Mr James Milligan MLA, Chair

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA, Deputy Chair

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Secretariat

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About this inquiry

Under Standing Order 216, standing committees can self-initiate an inquiry into any subject area it is given responsibility for by the establishing resolution. The Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality resolved to conduct an inquiry into unpaid work on 27 March 2024.

The Committee informed the Assembly of its intention to conduct this inquiry on 3 April 2024.

Terms of Reference

The Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality will inquire into and report on matters relating to the economic and wellbeing-related impact of unpaid work in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT), with particular reference to:

1. the economic contribution of unpaid work including but not limited to:
 - a. parental and familial work;
 - b. unpaid caring work;
 - c. unpaid placements and traineeships; and
 - d. volunteering;
2. how non-paid work is captured under the ACT Government's wellbeing framework;
3. the dynamic between unpaid and paid work, including:
 - a. how participation in one affects the other;
 - b. whether opportunities for both are equitable; and
 - c. demographic differences between participants in unpaid and paid work;
4. opportunities to support and recognise unpaid work in the ACT, including through the ACT Government's:
 - a. enterprise arrangements;
 - b. economic development; and
 - c. economic policies;
5. challenges faced by unpaid workers in the ACT, including those faced by individuals and communities as they relate to:
 - a. people from a culturally and linguistically diverse background;
 - b. people with a disability;
 - c. trans- and gender diverse people;
 - d. women;
 - e. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
 - f. people living on a low income; and
6. any other related matters.

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Acronyms & Abbreviations

Acronym or Abbreviation	Long form
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ANU	Australian National University
CARAT	University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019, caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV-2
CPP	Commonwealth Prac Payment
JACS	Justice and Community Safety Directorate
MLA	Member of the Legislative Assembly
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
SES	State Emergency Services
SESVA	ACT State Emergency Services Volunteer Association
UCSRC	University of Canberra Student Representative Council

Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government clearly differentiate volunteering from unpaid work when developing policies.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a streamlined, user-friendly online submission portal for not-for-profit incorporated and cooperative registrations, and charitable collections organisations licences.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop online resources on the Access Canberra website to support all volunteer and not-for-profit organisations in complying with regulations and requirements.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government seek to better understand the costs internalised by volunteers and seek to address the barriers to volunteering that these may present.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Education Directorate provide more targeted support to ACT Parents and Citizens Associations to attract and retain more active volunteer members.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to work with and advocate to the Federal Government to address the ongoing needs of ACT students undertaking mandatory unpaid placements.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider introducing a carers recognition card to promote understanding and recognition of carers within the ACT and enable them to access priority services with ACT Government agencies and services.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government seek to better understand the unique challenges faced by carers and look to overcome these barriers by providing targeted support to them. This support could include, for example:

- funding for additional respite resources for carers to access on an ad hoc basis;
- flexible models of respite for recipients with complex needs or behaviours, in partnership with the community sector;
- additional funding to support mental health activities; and
- cost-free access to bereavement counselling for carers who suffer loss in their lives.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide funding for Carers ACT to develop and deliver a mentoring program for young carers.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government enhance public education enrolment and student engagement policies and practices for young carers to enable targeted education and employment supports or referrals to external young carer programs.

1. Introduction

Conduct of the inquiry

- 1.1. The Committee received 23 submissions to the inquiry, one of which was confidential. The remaining submissions were published on the inquiry webpage and are listed in **Appendix A**.
- 1.2. The Committee resolved to adopt seven exhibits as part of the inquiry. Exhibits 1, 3, 4 and 5 relate to the economic contribution of breastfeeding, Exhibit 2 relates to impacts of work-from-home, Exhibit 6 is Volunteering ACT's report *The State of Volunteering in the ACT 2024*, and Exhibit 7 is a report for Carers Australia on economic impacts on carers. All are available on the [inquiry website](#).
- 1.3. The Committee held public hearings on 3 and 10 July 2024, hearing from several organisations and academics as well as the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety and the Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans. A list of witnesses is available in **Appendix B**. Transcripts and video recordings of the hearings are available on the Legislative Assembly [website](#).
- 1.4. One question was taken on notice at the hearings. The answer to this question is provided in **Appendix C**.
- 1.5. Statistics on the gender of witnesses, collected in response to an audit by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, are at **Appendix D**. The information is collected to determine whether committee inquiries are meeting the needs, and allowing the participation of, a range of genders in the community. Participation is voluntary and there are no set responses.

Definitions of unpaid work

- 1.6. Many submitters and witnesses to this inquiry held differing opinions on the use of the term unpaid work.¹
- 1.7. An academic paper provided by Professor Julie Smith of the Australian National University (ANU) categorised time use according to whether the activity was employment-related, unpaid work, personal care, or free time:

Most quantitative time use studies categorise the hours/minutes spent according to whether the activity is *contracted* (employment and related travel) or *committed* (caregiving, unpaid or domestic work) or *necessary* (personal care,

¹ See, for example: Jan Skorich, *Submission 1*, p 1; Amy Blain, *Submission 11*, p 1; ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 15*; Ms Jean Giese, Chief Executive Officer, Volunteering ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 1; Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 55; Mr Mick Gentleman MLA, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 July 2024, pp 68–69; Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, University of Canberra, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 35–36.

sleep and eating) activities. The balance is considered discretionary or free time, such as for recreation and leisure or social activities.²

- 1.8. VolunteeringACT said they were ‘delighted’ that volunteering was included as unpaid work in this inquiry.³ Caring ACT were of the opinion that volunteering was unpaid work because it was done by choice:

The point I really want to make is that we need to differentiate between unpaid work and care. Unpaid work is a choice that people often make. It is about choosing to volunteer.⁴

- 1.9. However, the Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, referring to State Emergency Services volunteers, told the Committee:

They were of a very firm mind that the volunteer work that they do should not be considered as unpaid work. They said that they do this to give back to their community. They do not consider it as work in such a sense.⁵

- 1.10. Jan Skorich, who submitted to the inquiry in a personal capacity, described their volunteer work in the elder care sector as taking up most of their time, outside of the time they spent caregiving for family members. They did not appear to consider their caregiving as unpaid work.⁶

- 1.11. The submission from the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations focused on the volunteer contributions of parents in schools and did not address parenting as ‘work’.⁷ Conversely, Amy Blain included parenting as well as volunteering and advocacy – such as participating in Legislative Assembly committee inquiries – in a summary of unpaid work.⁸

- 1.12. The University of Canberra argued that unpaid student placements were not work but learning, although they went on to say that students ‘may do some work and will do some work while they are on placement.’⁹

- 1.13. The terms of reference for this inquiry specify that unpaid work includes but is not limited to:

- a. parental and familial work;
- b. unpaid caring work;
- c. unpaid placements and traineeships; and
- d. volunteering.

² Julie Smith and Robert Forrester, *Exhibit 5: Association between breastfeeding and new mothers’ sleep: a unique Australian time use study*, p 4.

³ Ms Jean Giese, Chief Executive Officer, Volunteering ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 1.

⁴ Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 55.

⁵ Mr Mick Gentleman MLA, Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 July 2024, pp 68–69.

⁶ Jan Skorich, *Submission 1*, p 1.

⁷ ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 15*.

⁸ Amy Blain, *Submission 11*, p 1.

⁹ Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, University of Canberra, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 35–36.

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government clearly differentiate volunteering from unpaid work when developing policies.

2. Issues raised in evidence

Economic contribution of unpaid work

- 2.1. The ACT Government's Wellbeing Framework acknowledges that '[m]easuring unpaid work helps to value everyone's contributions to their community and the economy.' However, there is no data on unpaid work available on the online wellbeing dashboard. The website does display a statement that the ACT Government is working with research partners to develop long term measures of the time spent by Canberrans 'doing unpaid work and caring'.¹⁰
- 2.2. The Australian Bureau of Statistics told the Committee that it was in the early stages of developing a method for estimating the annual value of unpaid care. Estimates would be provided at the national level, with state and territory breakdowns a 'potential avenue for expansion'.¹¹
- 2.3. In VolunteeringACT's report *The State of Volunteering in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) 2024*, the economic value of volunteering in the ACT was estimated at \$3.3 billion for replacement of labour, with a \$5.40 return for every dollar invested. VolunteeringACT estimated that volunteers enabled about \$14.1 billion of benefits across commercial, civic and personal spheres in 2023.¹²

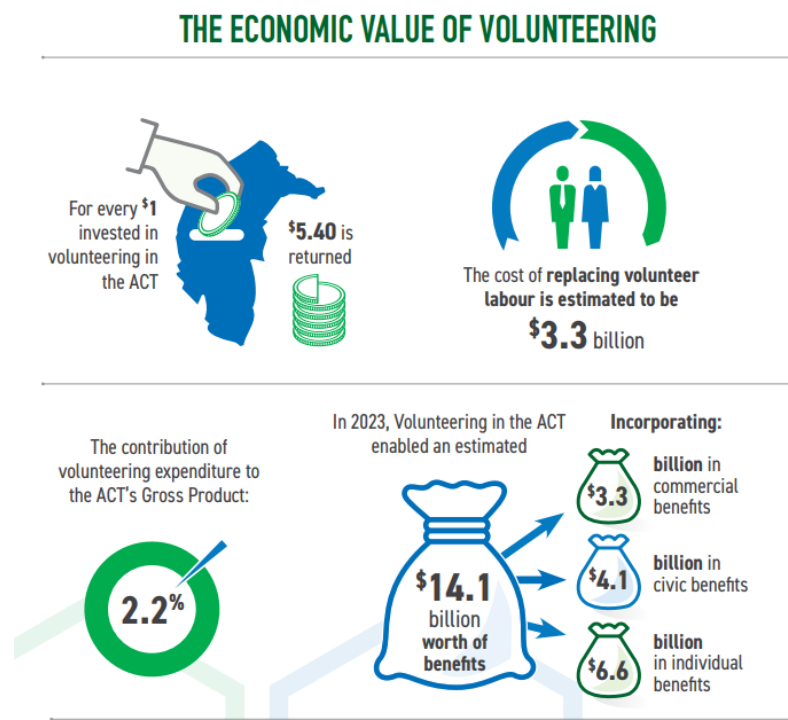


Figure 1: The Economic Value of Volunteering. Source: VolunteeringACT, *The State of Volunteering in the ACT 2024*, p 2.

¹⁰ ACT Government, *Wellbeing Framework: Unpaid work including caring*, [Unpaid work including caring - ACT Wellbeing Framework](#) (accessed 28 August 2024).

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Submission 22*, p 2.

¹² VolunteeringACT, *Exhibit 6*, p 2.0

- 2.4. A 2020 report by Deloitte, commissioned by Carers Australia, estimated the cost of replacing unpaid care with paid care in Australia at \$77.9 billion for 2020. The national opportunity cost of unpaid care, a measure of paid workforce productivity loss, was estimated in the report to be \$15.2 billion, or 0.8 percent of gross domestic product and 10.6 percent of the value of formal health care.¹³
- 2.5. In their submission, the University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation (CARAT) outlined rates of volunteering and caring undertaken by older people, including by those in paid employment. Their analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2021 census data showed that 17 to 19 percent of people aged from 60 to 84 volunteered in some capacity. Caring activities, whether child care or for a person with disability, were higher in the 60-69 year-old age groups at 16-19 percent, and declined with age. In the 80-84 year-old age group, 12 percent of people were caring for a person with disability and three percent were providing child care.¹⁴

Table 1 Percentage of persons 60 and over engaged in various activities 2021

	% employed	% volunteers	% caring for person with disability	% providing child care
60-64 years	59%	17%	19%	17%
65-69 years	31%	19%	16%	19%
70-74 years	14%	19%	14%	14%
75-79 years	4%*	18%	13%	8%
80-84 years	N/A	17%	12%	3%
85 yrs and over	N/A	7%	8%	1%

Note: Author's analysis of ABS 2021 census

*Employment group includes 75 years and over

Figure 2 Percentage of persons 60 and over engaged in various activities 2021. Source: University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation, *Submission 19*, p 1.

- 2.6. CARAT noted, however, that rates of volunteering in all age groups had declined from 2016 to 2021, and considered it likely that the COVID-19 pandemic response had had an effect on these rates. They said that while it was difficult to ascertain whether this trend would continue, older people were and would remain a 'critical pool of volunteers for the ACT'.¹⁵
- 2.7. In their submission, the Inner South Canberra Community Council also noted a 'prevalence of older people in community organisations' and observed that older Australians often had strong community and family links as well as time to devote to volunteering activity.¹⁶
- 2.8. During the public hearing on 3 July 2024, Professor Lynn Strazdins told the Committee that, although care work was undoubtedly valuable, changing unpaid caring to paid work would be 'complicated':

¹³ Deloitte Access Economics, The value of informal care in 2020, [The value of informal care in 2020 | Deloitte Australia](#), May 2020 (accessed 27 August 2024), pp iii-iv.

¹⁴ University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation, *Submission 19*, pp 1-2.

¹⁵ University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation, *Submission 19*, p 2.

¹⁶ Inner South Canberra Community Council, *Submission 6*, p 4.

My first response is: absolutely, we should value the work that keeps the whole society running. It gives us our future, through children, and looks after us when we are sick or unwell and older—all those things. There is no economy without that work. Then there are the numerous kinds of efforts and care put into building community. Again, there is no economy without community ...

I think, personally, that there are some things people do not want to commodify. It becomes complicated when you start commodifying things like gifts of love.¹⁷

Committee comment

- 2.9. The Committee considers that volunteering, caring and other unpaid work has significant economic value, and the ACT Government should to continue to work with the Australian Bureau of Statistics and other organisations to develop and capture appropriate metrics to capture and recognise the contribution of these activities.
- 2.10. The Committee received evidence from a broad range of volunteer organisations including environmental organisations, community councils, community support organisations, and volunteer first responders.
- 2.11. Community Sports ACT, for example, proposed that assessing the value of volunteering would promote a greater understanding of its contributions:

Quantifying the economic and social value of unpaid volunteer work in the community sport and recreation sector would be invaluable for the sector. It can then better understand its contributions to the cohesion of the ACT community and its impetus to the ACT economy.¹⁸

- 2.12. The Committee is of the view that there would be benefit in recognising and measuring the scope of work undertaken by volunteers in the ACT and encourages the ACT Government to include an estimated value of volunteer work in the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

Volunteer work

Volunteers do not dedicate hours of their week to service to their community in order to obtain accolades. Rather, they volunteer their time to making a positive contribution in the lives of those less fortunate.¹⁹

Volunteering is a recognised indicator of social cohesion, a significant and powerful contributor to social connectedness and it has a dual impact of improving the wellbeing of people undertaking volunteering as well as volunteering activities themselves contributing to enhancing the wellbeing of others.²⁰

¹⁷ Professor Lynn Strazdins, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 62.

¹⁸ Community Sports ACT, *Submission 23*, p 3.

¹⁹ Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners, *Submission 4*, p 9.

²⁰ Ms Jean Giese, Chief Executive Officer, VolunteeringACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 2.

ACT Volunteering Strategy 2024-34

- 2.13. The *ACT Volunteering Strategy 2024-34* was tabled in the Legislative Assembly on 29 August 2024.²¹
- 2.14. VolunteeringACT told the Committee that the strategy had been ‘co-designed with the volunteering sector’ and expressed strong support for the document.²²
- 2.15. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations noted that they had ‘heard’ that the strategy was being developed, but had ‘not had the opportunity to engage in the development of that strategy’. They were of the view that a separate strategy to support volunteering in schools would be helpful.²³
- 2.16. In a panel discussion with a variety of volunteer organisations during the public hearing on 3 July 2024, the Committee heard that consultation on the strategy had not reached some groups. St Vincent de Paul Canberra Goulburn had been part of the Volunteer Strategic Advisory Group and the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services had ‘been aware’ of the strategy, but neither Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners nor SEE Change had provided any input. The panel observed that many environmental and smaller volunteer organisations were not members of VolunteeringACT, often due to lack of time and financial resources.²⁴
- 2.17. In their submission, the ACT State Emergency Services Volunteer Association (SESVA) highlighted a perceived ‘a lack of equity and forward planning in funding for resources and facilities’ for State Emergency Services and Rural Fire Service volunteers.²⁵ SESVA noted that the State Emergency Services budget had increased by less than two percent over the past decade, despite an increase in volunteer numbers and a recognition by both the ACT Government and the wider community of the need for more volunteer commitment:
- The issue, over the past years, seems always to be insufficient attention or even understanding of what such volunteer services need or what an adequate funding of volunteers should look like to achieve the community’s needs.²⁶
- 2.18. During the public hearing, the Committee heard that the SESVA had not had input to the development of the new volunteering strategy.²⁷

²¹ ACT Legislative Assembly, *Minutes of Proceedings, No 130*, 29 August 2024, p 2045.

²² Ms Jean Giese, Chief Executive Officer, VolunteeringACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 2.

²³ Ms Veronica Elliott, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 9.

²⁴ Ms Brittany Campbell, Volunteer Services Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra Goulburn, Mrs Sonia Di Mezza, Chief Executive Officer, Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, Miss Tara Pullen, Immediate Past President, Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners, Ms Paula Mance, Executive Director, SEE Change, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 20–21.

²⁵ ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association, *Submission 9*, p 4.

²⁶ ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association, *Submission 9*, p 8.

²⁷ Mr John Dowling, Treasurer and Board Member, ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 24.

Committee comment

- 2.19. While the Committee is pleased that the *ACT Volunteering Strategy 2024-34* has been prepared in collaboration with, and met with strong support from, larger volunteer organisations, the Committee is of the opinion that the breadth and depth of volunteer-using organisations across the ACT has not been fully engaged in its development. The Committee encourages the ACT Government to consult widely, including with groups such as the State Emergency Service and Parents and Citizens Associations, when developing future ACT Volunteering Strategies and Action Plans.

Regulatory burden

- 2.20. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations noted in their submission that, as incorporated associations, their member bodies were subject to regulatory requirements under the *Association Incorporation Act 1991*. Dealing with Access Canberra to meet these obligations was sometimes difficult for volunteers, as it required documents to be lodged in person during business hours.²⁸
- 2.21. The council elaborated on this during the public hearing, saying that Access Canberra's processes were very paper-based, requiring forms to be printed out and then lodged in hard copy and relying on written letters sent through the postal system. The council considered that electronic communication and online submission systems would be more efficient. Every Parents and Citizens Association was individually required to print and submit its constitution to Access Canberra, rather than through the council as a peak body.²⁹
- 2.22. The Committee also heard that online information from Access Canberra simply stated regulations, without information on how to comply with them. Volunteers then had to 'figure out' what was required and to what standard for compliance.³⁰ The council suggested in their submission that Access Canberra could also be proactive in supporting associations to meet their obligations, 'instead of taking a punitive approach to compliance'.³¹

Committee comment

- 2.23. The Committee is of the view that better online information resources, with digital methods for submitting documentation and communicating with public officers, would assist not-for-profit organisations to meet their regulatory obligations, relieve a time burden on volunteers, and result in greater efficiency for Access Canberra as well as the applicant organisations.

²⁸ ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 15*, pp 6–7.

²⁹ Ms Julie McLean, Policy Officer, and Ms Veronica Elliot, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 7–8.

³⁰ Ms Veronica Elliott, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 8.

³¹ ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 15*, pp 6–7.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop a streamlined, user-friendly online submission portal for not-for-profit incorporated and cooperative registrations, and charitable collections organisations licences.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government develop online resources on the Access Canberra website to support all volunteer and not-for-profit organisations in complying with regulations and requirements.

Costs of volunteering

- 2.24. In their submission, SEE Change noted that volunteering required structures and systems to be in place for administration, governance and 'back-office support'. This included ensuring adequate and appropriate insurance was in place and that policies and procedures met workplace and organisational standards such as work health and safety requirements.³²
- 2.25. SEE Change drew a direct link between operational funding for the organisation and volunteering outcomes. SEE Change's central office with four part-time staff supported 14 volunteer groups comprising 150 volunteers, and was responsible for administration such as banking, insurance, ticketing and promotional activities. SEE Change reported that it had had to turn away potential volunteers due to lack of funding:

There is a direct impact between our operational funding and the amount we can achieve through our volunteers. Currently, SEE Change turns away volunteers due to insufficient resourcing to be able to manage everyone that wants to contribute. This is a lost economic and social opportunity to the ACT.³³

- 2.26. During the public hearing on 3 July 2024, the Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services told the Committee that organisations needed funding to ethically support their volunteers:

I think we are always chasing the funds, are we not? We always welcome more funds. I completely agree with Paula in terms of ethical support of volunteers. People sometimes think it is just free work and you do not have to pay for it. But there is a lot that the organisation, I believe, must do to properly support volunteers. That comes from the infrastructure of the organisation—not just training but also being really clear about what you want the volunteer to do and for them to be clear and to feel that they are learning ... But you do need proper infrastructure to support engaging volunteers.³⁴

³² SEE Change, *Submission 3*, p 4.

³³ SEE Change, *Submission 3*, p 4.

³⁴ Mrs Sonia Di Mezza, Chief Executive Officer, Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 17.

- 2.27. Likewise, VolunteeringACT observed that, while volunteers give their time for free, volunteer programs have operational costs and require adequate funding to remain viable. VolunteeringACT argued that funding for volunteering organisations should increase with population growth:

With a steadily rising Canberra population year on year, resourcing needs to keep pace with those population level increases, as there is a direct relationship between population numbers and a) increasing numbers of volunteers and b) rising service demand in all the key program areas volunteers help to support and staff.³⁵

- 2.28. During the public hearing, VolunteeringACT referenced the 2021 ACT Council of Social Service report *Counting the Costs: Sustainable funding for the ACT community services sector*. That report stated that only a quarter of organisations surveyed said they were adequately funded to manage volunteers.³⁶ VolunteeringACT described funding in the community sector as a ‘starvation cycle’ with organisations falling ‘further and further behind every year in terms of being able to run services’.³⁷
- 2.29. VolunteeringACT also noted that the *ACT Volunteering Strategy 2024-34*, published in August 2024, had been designed and developed in a cross-government approach, in line with an objective of Volunteering Australia’s *National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033*. They argued that positioning volunteering as a cross-portfolio issue was ‘critical’ to safeguard and elevate volunteering in the ACT.³⁸

Committee comment

- 2.30. The Committee is of the view that, given the vital contribution of volunteering to the ACT’s economy and wellbeing, support for volunteer work should be a whole of government responsibility and adequate, sustained funding should be provided to organisations to support their volunteers.
- 2.31. The Committee encourages the ACT Government ensure that volunteering is repositioned as a cross-government responsibility and that the full cost of volunteer programs is adequately and sustainably resourced.

Impacts of costs of volunteering

- 2.32. The ACT Government observed in its submission that people in high income households were more likely to volunteer than those in middle or low income households. However,

³⁵ VolunteeringACT, *Submission 7*, p 10.

³⁶ ACT Council of Social Service, *Counting the Costs: Sustainable funding for the ACT community services sector*, December 2021, p 1.

³⁷ Ms Jean Giese, Chief Executive Officer, VolunteeringACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 3.

³⁸ VolunteeringACT, *Submission 7*, p 11.

people in part-time paid employment or not in paid employment were more likely to volunteer than those in full-time paid work.³⁹

- 2.33. According to VolunteeringACT's report *The State of Volunteering in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) 2024*, most of the cost of volunteering is borne by volunteers themselves.⁴⁰



Figure 3 Source: VolunteeringACT, *The State of Volunteering in the ACT 2024*, p 2.

- 2.34. The Committee heard that out-of-pocket expenses for volunteers posed a barrier to engagement:

It depends on the volunteering role, but it is everything from training costs to petrol costs to uniforms. It is all the things that volunteers need to be able to undertake the volunteering roles that are out-of-pocket expenses for them. The more expensive it is for people to volunteer, the less likely they are to turn up.⁴¹

- 2.35. Jan Skorich, who described volunteering as taking most of their time outside of time spent caring for their disabled partner and their grandchildren, submitted that assistance with volunteering-related expenses such as travel would be helpful:

Volunteering actually costs us, and at this time of our life, living on a very minimal amount, it can make life difficult.⁴²

- 2.36. The St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra Goulburn told the Committee that volunteers' expenses were often not reimbursed:

Reimbursements do not necessarily happen. I think 26 per cent of the total out-of-pocket expenses are reimbursed for volunteers.⁴³

³⁹ ACT Government, *Submission 13*, p 5.

⁴⁰ VolunteeringACT, *Exhibit 6*, p 2.

⁴¹ Ms Jean Giese, Chief Executive Officer, VolunteeringACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 4.

⁴² Jan Skorich, *Submission 1*, p 1.

⁴³ Ms Brittany Campbell, Volunteer Services Manager, St Vincent de Paul Society Canberra Goulburn, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 18.

- 2.37. Volunteer organisations also reported a decline in volunteer numbers, with the Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners, which also encompasses parts of New South Wales, reporting a loss of over 1,000 members in the past two years.⁴⁴
- 2.38. In its submission, the ACT Government observed that volunteering had been affected by the COVID-19 health emergency, but that an overall decline in participation rates had extended beyond the impact of the pandemic.⁴⁵
- 2.39. The Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans told the Committee during the public hearing on 10 July 2024 that the decline in volunteering numbers was partly due to cost-of-living pressures:

We know that the cost-of-living crisis that people are facing is putting pressure on people to spend more of their time in paid work and that they have less capacity for unpaid volunteering work.⁴⁶

Committee Comment

- 2.40. The Committee is of the view that volunteering, defined as ‘time willingly given without financial gain’, should also so as far as possible be without financial penalty. By addressing the financial impacts of volunteering, the ACT Government would make it possible for more Canberrans to engage in volunteering, more often, and to a greater extent, with economic and well-being benefits for the whole community.

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government seek to better understand the costs internalised by volunteers and seek to address the barriers to volunteering that these may present.

Volunteering in schools

- 2.41. According to the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, volunteering in schools helped families to understand the school system and provided connection within local communities. They reported that families had felt disconnected ‘mainly as a result of the pandemic’.⁴⁷
- 2.42. While employers might offer volunteering leave days to employees, volunteering in schools often required smaller, more frequent blocks. This meant that people did not feel they could take time away from work to volunteer:

⁴⁴ Miss Tara Pullen, Immediate Past President, Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 11–12.

⁴⁵ ACT Government, *Submission 13*, p 2.

⁴⁶ Ms Emma Davidson MLA, Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 July 2024, p 84.

⁴⁷ Ms Veronica Elliot, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 9.

Parents might want to volunteer by, for example, reading in a classroom for an hour per week before work. Having flexibility to take an hour as volunteering leave every week rather than doing a volunteer day would be beneficial because parents, when they volunteer in school, often do it in small blocks.⁴⁸

- 2.43. The ACT Government told the Committee in the public hearing that ACT Public Service enterprise agreements had ‘a smorgasbord of options’ for flexible work arrangements which could include job-sharing, part-time work, or ‘leaving at three o’clock on Tuesdays to take the kids to band practice or whatever it might be’.⁴⁹
- 2.44. In their submission, the council highlighted that Parents and Citizens Associations volunteers were finding it increasingly difficult to attract volunteers due to work commitments and time poverty. The council called for a strategy to boost volunteering in schools.⁵⁰

Committee comment

- 2.45. The Committee considers that volunteering in schools offers considerable benefit to families and the community, fostering a sense of connectedness and belonging, and promoting parents’ involvement in education.
- 2.46. The Committee is of the view that the ACT Education Directorate should continue to work with the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations to attract and support volunteers to work in schools.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the ACT Education Directorate provide more targeted support to ACT Parents and Citizens Associations to attract and retain more active volunteer members.

Time poverty and gender disparities

- 2.47. In their submission, the ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations noted that their volunteers were predominantly women and were often ‘juggling’ child raising, volunteering and paid employment. A survey of their members had revealed that nearly half of respondents would like to volunteer more often, and the most-commonly cited reasons for not volunteering were family commitments and (paid) work commitments.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ms Julie McLean, Policy Officer, and Ms Veronica Elliot, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 10.

⁴⁹ Mr Russell Noud, Executive Group Manager, Public Sector Employment Group, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 10 July 2024, p 70.

⁵⁰ ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 15*, p 4.

⁵¹ ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 15*, p 3.

- 2.48. The council reported that Parents and Citizens Associations had recently found it increasingly difficult to recruit volunteers due to parents' work commitments and 'a lack of time generally':⁵²

Mostly, we find that people do not feel able to take time out of the workplace to volunteer. That is one of the barriers that they identify: they cannot step away from their job or family and caring commitments to engage more in the volunteer space.⁵³

- 2.49. One submitter with significant caring responsibilities observed that support from their employer to work flexible hours and work from home had been 'critical' in maintaining paid employment and pursuing career progression. Nonetheless, the submitter found that the impact of their caring role affected their availability for certain paid roles and work-related travel, and so had 'significantly impacted' their career progression.⁵⁴
- 2.50. Professor Lyndall Strazdins submitted that a full-time working week was a barrier to gender equality and impacted family relationships:

Our research shows that such long hours are impossible to combine with care, placing long hour jobs out of the reach of most Australian women. They also constrain many Australian men from being the fathers they wish to be.⁵⁵

- 2.51. Professor Strazdins argued that a shorter working week would have social, economic and health benefits, supporting more physical activity and healthy food preparation, as well as the ability to share unpaid and domestic workloads:

Capping long full-time work hours in the ACT at 38 hours is a feasible, first step towards achieving working week reductions. This could be a catalyst for enabling time for men's to care and do unpaid work, and women's to enter employment and increase work hours. There is an strong economic argument to such a step, along with the social, economic and health benefits of equality of opportunity at work and home and wellbeing improvements across multiple domains.⁵⁶

- 2.52. The ACT Government advised in its submission that the *ACT Public Sector Administrative and Related Classifications Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026* included 'measures to prevent and eliminate discrimination based on ... status as a parent or carer' and supported flexible working arrangements. Public sector employees could also take up to three days paid voluntary community service leave each year for a 'recognised' activity.⁵⁷
- 2.53. The ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations said that, while they had been unaware of those specific provisions in the enterprise agreement, they supported measures to enable and recognise volunteering:

⁵² ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Submission 15*, p 4.

⁵³ Ms Veronica Elliot, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 10.

⁵⁴ Name withheld, *Submission 10*, pp 2–3.

⁵⁵ Professor Lyndall Strazdins, *Submission 20*, p 3.

⁵⁶ Professor Lyndall Strazdins, *Submission 20*, p 5.

⁵⁷ ACT Government, *Submission 13*, p 6.

It is really important that the government shows other employers how important volunteering is by leading the way and saying, “This is how we will support our staff to support their communities.”⁵⁸

Unpaid student placements

2.54. A new Commonwealth Prac Payment (CPP) was announced in the Australian Government’s Budget 2024-25. This initiative will provide a payment of \$319.50 per week to teaching, nursing and midwifery, and social work students undertaking mandatory practicum placements for Bachelor or Masters qualifications. This payment will be means-tested, indexed to the single Austudy rate, and available from July 2025. It will operate alongside any support provided by states and territories.⁵⁹

2.55. When announcing the CPP, the Australian Government said that its intention was to relieve cost of living pressures and students, and to invest in critical workforces. The Australian Government noted students’ ‘very real concerns about placement poverty’ and remarked that the targeted qualifications predominantly comprise women with a high participation rate from students with lower socioeconomic backgrounds and First Nations students, who were more likely to suffer financial stress:

Many students in these cohorts also juggle full-time or part-time study with paid work as well as caring and parental responsibilities.⁶⁰

2.56. In their submission, the University of Canberra Student Representative Council (UCSRC) elaborated on the hardships faced by some students required to undertake practicum placements as part of their studies. These included impacts on family relationships and social connection, financial sacrifices including skipping meals and challenges with housing, and impacts on academic performance.⁶¹

2.57. The UCSRC told the Committee that the emotional toll on students was also high:

The emotional strain is also quite significant. Students have mentioned experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety, as well as uncertainty about their academic and career paths.⁶²

2.58. The Committee heard that, due to a shortage of placement opportunities within the ACT, many students were forced to find internships and placements interstate, which exposed them to increased transport costs and housing stress.⁶³ Students often had to pay rent in two places while on placement, and this had led to some students considering living in their car:

⁵⁸ Ms Veronica Elliot, Executive Officer, ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 10.

⁵⁹ Australian Government, *2024-25 Budget: New Commonwealth Prac Payment fact sheet*, 14 May 2024, pp 1–2.

⁶⁰ Australian Government, *2024-25 Budget: New Commonwealth Prac Payment fact sheet*, 14 May 2024, pp 1–2.

⁶¹ University of Canberra Student Representative Council, Submission 18, pp 2–4.

⁶² Miss Angela Kacugia, Treasurer, University of Canberra Student Representative Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 28.

⁶³ Ms Mushtaha Ahmed, President, University of Canberra Student Representative Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 28–29.

Quite a few also mentioned having to explore the option of living in their cars, especially if they are doing a placement outside of the ACT, because the cost of paying for rent at both their existing home and a new place is simply not possible for them. That is a huge cry for help, especially during winter.⁶⁴

2.59. While the UCSRC agreed that the CPP would alleviate some financial stress, they noted that that it was not available to all students undertaking compulsory placements, with pharmacy, optometry, psychology, and speech pathology students among those excluded from the scheme.⁶⁵

2.60. Furthermore, means testing of the payment tended to exclude mature students and those returning to study:

I am not what one would call a generic student. I was a public servant before I decided to go back to study. I have a mortgage and the big bills that come with that, so I automatically means-test out. I have too many assets and my earning capacity is too high to get any payments.⁶⁶

2.61. The Committee heard that some students paused their studies or moved to part-time study to alleviate the financial stress of undertaking placements. This could extend the time taken to complete a qualification by several years, with a corresponding impact on both mental health and long-term financial security.⁶⁷

2.62. The UCSRC told the Committee that impacts on international students were especially harsh, because pausing or extending their studies might mean that they had to renegotiate their visa terms, which incurred further costs and anxiety:

It almost feels like an impossible hill to climb. They keep struggling and feel that they are going to lose or lose their life.⁶⁸

2.63. The University of Canberra also expressed concern about financial pressures on international students. The university observed that hours spent on elective placements fell under a 48-hour work cap for international students, meaning that they often could not undertake their ordinary paid work while on such placements.⁶⁹

2.64. Other financial support available to students includes the Youth Allowance, Austudy, ABSTUDY for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Education Entry Payment, Tertiary Access Payment, and Rent Assistance through Services Australia.⁷⁰ The federal Higher Education Loan Program provides assistance for eligible students to pay student

⁶⁴ Ms Mushtaha Ahmed, President, University of Canberra Student Representative Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 31.

⁶⁵ Ms Mushtaha Ahmed, President, University of Canberra Student Representative Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 30.

⁶⁶ Miss Taylor Geoffroy, President, University of Canberra Psychology Society, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 31.

⁶⁷ Miss Angela Kacugia, Treasurer, University of Canberra Student Representative Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 31–32.

⁶⁸ Ms Mushtaha Ahmed, President, University of Canberra Student Representative Council, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 32.

⁶⁹ University of Canberra, *Submission 21*, p 3.

⁷⁰ Services Australia, Payments you can get for higher education, [Payments you can get for higher education - Higher education - Services Australia](#), (accessed 23 August 2024).

contributions, tuition fees, overseas study expenses, or student service and amenities fees.⁷¹

- 2.65. The ACT Government offers stipends and grants for nursing, midwifery and allied health students, including Placement Support Grants of up to \$1,000 per clinical placement.⁷²
- 2.66. Universities also offer a range of grants and scholarship programs; the University of Canberra advised the Committee that it had a placement support fund available to ‘a restricted range of students in courses where there is workforce need’ and also provided lost-cost accommodation for students on placement in a number of regional locations.⁷³

Committee comment

- 2.67. The Committee notes that students on placement assignments must usually cease their regular working commitments and often relocate for the period of the placement, exposing them to additional costs while simultaneously losing income opportunities.
- 2.68. The Committee acknowledges that, while there are a range of supports available to students, including the introduction of the CPP for some students in 2025, it heard compelling evidence that these are insufficient to meet the double financial impacts of mandatory placements.
- 2.69. In addition, the Committee heard compelling evidence that existing student stipends and support provided by respective governments and the university sector are insufficient in scale and scope to support ACT students who are undertaking mandatory unpaid placements with their living expenses. The Committee is of the view that the ACT Government should continue to work with the Federal Government and the tertiary education sector to address these issues.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to work with and advocate to the Federal Government to address the ongoing needs of ACT students undertaking mandatory unpaid placements.

- 2.70. The University of Canberra told the Committee that some placements were required to be unpaid. Reasons for this included the different relationships between employees and employers versus students and supervisors, and insurance implications. Another factor for health students was the inability to claim Medicare for services delivered by students, meaning that their services generated no income for the host organisation.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Department of Education, Australian Government, *Higher Education Loan Program (HELP)*, [Higher Education Loan Program \(HELP\) - Department of Education, Australian Government](#) (accessed 23 August 2024).

⁷² University of Canberra, *Submission 21*, p 2.

⁷³ Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, University of Canberra, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 35.

⁷⁴ Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, University of Canberra, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 39.

- 2.71. The Committee heard that ‘a small percentage’ of placements for the University of Canberra were paid, usually in private industry. The university required that such placements paid the equivalent of minimum wage as a ‘starting point’.⁷⁵
- 2.72. In their submission, the University of Canberra advised that such payments were a stipend provided at the host organisation’s discretion, and not a wage:

Some host organisations may choose to pay the student a stipend to assist them with any out-of-pocket expenses associated with the WIL [work-integrated learning] experience, such as travel or accommodation. This is at the host organisations discretion and does not represent a wage.⁷⁶

Committee comment

- 2.73. The Committee considers that while students are unable to undertake paid work because they are on a placement, and are unable to be paid for the work they undertake as part of that placement, they should receive a stipend equivalent to the minimum wage to support them through that period.

Caregiving

- 2.74. Several submitters noted that caregiving, while often rewarding, was not necessarily a chosen activity, and had a significant impact on a caregiver’s life.⁷⁷
- 2.75. The University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation cautioned that stereotypes and incorrect assumptions could affect the development of good policy. For example, while there might be a perception that most unpaid care of the elderly was undertaken by children caring for parents, and mostly by women, in reality 43 percent of carers were spouses, with about half of carer-spouses over the age of 60 being men.⁷⁸ Furthermore, approximately a third of unpaid carers had a disability, with seven to eight percent of carers having ‘a profound or severe’ disability. These aspects were important to consider when supporting carers.⁷⁹

ACT Carers Strategy and Carers Recognition Act 2021

- 2.76. Carers ACT submitted that the ACT Government should ‘lead by example’ in recognising and supporting carers by aligning economic policy and public service enterprise agreements with the *Carers Recognition Act 2021* and the *ACT Carers Strategy*.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Professor Michelle Lincoln, Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic, University of Canberra, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 39.

⁷⁶ University of Canberra, *Submission 21*, p 2.

⁷⁷ See, for example: Jan Skorich, *Submission 1*, p1; Carers ACT, *Submission 5*, pp 5–9; Name withheld, *Submission 10*; Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute, *Submission 12*; ACT Government, *Submission 13*, pp 3–4; Professor Lyndall Strazdins, *Submission 20*, p 5.

⁷⁸ Professor Kasia Bail, Workforce Lead, and Professor Diane Gibson, Director, University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 42.

⁷⁹ Professor Diane Gibson, Director, University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 43.

⁸⁰ Carers ACT, *Submission 5*, p 10.

- 2.77. Such support could include ‘carer awareness training’ for colleagues and managers, flexible work arrangements, promotion of carer support services and events, and monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.⁸¹
- 2.78. The ACT Government noted in its submission that the *ACT Public Sector Administrative and Related Classifications Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026* supported flexible working arrangements where an employee had caring responsibilities for a school-aged or younger child, or in cases of family violence.⁸²
- 2.79. The Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans told the Committee that the Carers Recognition Act was a ‘helpful tool’ for the ACT Government as an employer and for the community in general to be mindful of their responsibilities in interacting with carers, and of the need for flexibility:

It is actually really important that we think about what we are asking people to do when we ask them to move appointments around, change working hours or change where and when they complete their studies—how that impacts on their unpaid caring responsibilities. It might make it very hard for them if we cannot give them a little bit more flexibility.⁸³

Committee comment

- 2.80. The Committee notes that the aims of the *ACT Carers Strategy* include:
- improving community awareness of the value and contribution of carers;
 - recognising carers’ skills and knowledge;
 - enabling carers to take better care of themselves through the provision of more support services, including physical and mental health; and
 - increased awareness and skills within government agencies.⁸⁴
- 2.81. The Committee is of the view that the ACT Government should integrate the objectives of the *ACT Carers Strategy* into government policies and programs, ensuring that carers receive the recognition and support they need, both in their personal and professional lives.

Carer recognition

- 2.82. The *Carers Recognition Act 2021* stipulates that a carer should, among other things, be respected and recognised both as a carer and as an individual with their own needs, should be supported as an individual and a carer, be recognised for their efforts and dedication,

⁸¹ Carers ACT, *Submission 5*, p 10.

⁸² ACT Government, *Submission 13*, pp 5–6.

⁸³ Ms Emma Davidson MLA, Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans, Proof Committee Hansard, 10 July 2024, pp 77–78.

⁸⁴ ACT Government, *ACT Carers Strategy – Vision, Outcomes and Priorities Statement*, [ACT Carers Strategy - ACT Government](#) (accessed 30 August 2024).

and be provided with support that is timely, responsive, appropriate, respectful and accessible.⁸⁵

- 2.83. During the public hearing, Carers ACT advocated for ‘meaningful recognition and acknowledgement’ for carers and suggested that a ‘carer recognition card’ could help carers feel valued and supported. Such a card would not offer financial benefits, but could give priority at ACT Government agencies such as Access Canberra, or provide evidence of carer status to health support workers:

It also about feeling like we are part of a club and that we are not alone—that we are not doing this on our own—and I have this card that shows me that government values who I am, what I do and what I contribute ...⁸⁶

Committee comment

- 2.84. The Committee is of the view that a carers recognition card could help carers to feel recognised and valued, and assist them in interacting smoothly with ACT Government agencies and services.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government consider introducing a carers recognition card to promote understanding and recognition of carers within the ACT and enable them to access priority services with ACT Government agencies and services.

First Nations caring

- 2.85. The Committee heard that First Nations people, especially women, undertake a large amount of caring activity, much of which is poorly recognised by non-Indigenous policy. First Nations caring includes care for kin, for community, and for Country:

If you look at the ABS census, ... you will see that First Nations women, as a group, do more care across the course of their life than non-Indigenous women and non-Indigenous men ... care is much more broadly defined than you often see in non-Indigenous policy. Over and over again, care of country, care of culture and care of community were also understood as care, on top of the more non-Indigenous ways in which we care, such as care of house, care of kids, care of people with disability and care of elders.⁸⁷

- 2.86. In its submission, the ACT Government acknowledged that activities otherwise thought of as volunteer work could be considered through a First Nations lens as caring for community and for Country:

⁸⁵ *Carers Recognition Act 2021*, s 8.

⁸⁶ Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 52.

⁸⁷ Associate Professor Elise Klein OAM, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 57.

Volunteering itself is not a First Nations concept but is understood more along the lines of ‘cultural obligation’, ‘reciprocity’ and ‘community giving’.⁸⁸

- 2.87. Associate Professor Elise Klein OAM told the Committee that it was important to ensure that care work by First Nations people was recognised:

One of the pieces that came from our research is the need for policy to be more inclusive. We probably need to rethink the ways in which care is talked about to make sure that the ideas of First Nations women around care are not overlooked. If you are not even talking about them then you are not measuring them and you are not seeing them. Policy is completely missing a huge amount of unpaid care work that is being done, because of the complete mismatch in how we understand care.⁸⁹

- 2.88. The Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice submitted that participants in a study by the Australian National University⁹⁰ largely saw their paid work as part of their broader caring responsibilities:

... most of the women in paid employment in the study had roles in the community sector which put them at the frontline of caring for community. They saw this work as part of their broader commitment to supporting their families, communities and advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is therefore hard to draw a line for these women between paid and unpaid work.⁹¹

- 2.89. During the public hearing, Professor Klein also noted the additional cultural burden often placed on First Nations people by employers, and extra support sought by communities from those employed in paid community care roles, ‘blurring’ the distinction between paid and unpaid work.⁹²

- 2.90. In their submission, the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute argued that the ACT’s Wellbeing Framework should include expanded definitions of wellbeing and ‘an understanding of care as articulated through a First Nations gendered lens’. They considered that evaluation methods used in their *Change Agenda*⁹³ framework document would suit the ‘subjective measures’ under the Wellbeing Framework.⁹⁴

Committee comment

- 2.91. The Committee is of the view that engagement on policy development with the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute at the Australian National University and similar organisations would

⁸⁸ ACT Government, *Submission 13*, p 5.

⁸⁹ Associate Professor Elise Klein OAM, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, pp 57–58.

⁹⁰ E. Klein, J. Hunt, Z. Staines et al, Australian National University, *Caring about Care*, February 2024.

⁹¹ Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute, *Submission 12*, p 5.

⁹² Associate Professor Elise Klein OAM, Crawford School of Public Policy, Australian National University, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 60.

⁹³ Wiyi Yani U Thangani, *Change Agenda for First Nations Gender Justice*, 2024.

⁹⁴ Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute, *Submission 12*, p 10.

provide the ACT Government with valuable perspectives and a broader understanding of First Nations cultural engagement.

- 2.92. The Committee encourages the ACT Government to meaningfully engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and advocacy organisations to better understand, support and resource First Nations-led care.

Disability

- 2.93. In their submission, Women with Disabilities ACT advised that women with disabilities were themselves carers for someone with a disability at more than twice the rate of women without disabilities.⁹⁵

- 2.94. They further noted that people with disabilities were often required to undertake ‘significant’ unpaid labour to manage their own wellbeing and navigate complex healthcare, education, welfare systems and the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), but that this labour was unrecognised:

We hear from our members that ‘managing disability is a full time job’ – but whilst primary care work is well recognised in discussions around unpaid labour, the self-care and self-management required of people with disabilities is rarely discussed.⁹⁶

- 2.95. During the public hearing, Women with Disabilities ACT told the Committee that a lack of resourcing in the ACT often resulted in support coordinators doing extra hours above their allocation and that support coordination was ‘not always fit for purpose for everybody’:

... there is not quite enough resourcing in support coordination in the ACT for everything to work effectively, and that results in unpaid labour, both on the part of support coordinators and on the part of the participants in the NDIS.⁹⁷

- 2.96. Similarly, one submitter providing care for a disabled child described putting ‘hundreds of hours of work’ into establishing and maintaining an NDIS support plan.⁹⁸

- 2.97. Women with Disabilities ACT had surveyed members in 2023, before a review of the NDIS, and heard that they had difficulty managing their own supports and often felt that they had been put in the role of an employer, ‘coordinating their own support workers and ... being responsible for the hiring and firing of these people’. Having a support coordinator was seen as a trade-off for autonomy and choice in support provider.⁹⁹

Committee comment

- 2.98. The Committee considers that the ACT Government should continue to work with people with disabilities to ensure that they have adequate support to manage and coordinate

⁹⁵ Women with Disabilities ACT, *Submission 17*, p 1.

⁹⁶ Women with Disabilities ACT, *Submission 17*, p 2.

⁹⁷ Mx Pippa Newman, Senior Policy Officer, Women with Disabilities ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 47.

⁹⁸ Name withheld, *Submission 10*, p 2.

⁹⁹ Mx Pippa Newman, Senior Policy Officer, Women with Disabilities ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 47.

their care requirements without impinging on their autonomy or relying on pro bono work by support coordinators.

Respite and mental health support

- 2.99. Carers ACT raised a lack of respite options available for carers and people needing care in the ACT, submitting that carers had found only one provider willing to offer respite care to a person requiring ‘any degree of specialist treatment’ and that even this care was strictly limited. This left carers still performing the ‘most consuming roles’ without real respite. Carers ACT added that there were ‘almost no options in the ACT’ offering respite for carers of people with mental ill health or psychosocial disability.¹⁰⁰
- 2.100. Another submitter described a lack of access to out-of-school-hours care for their disabled child as the ‘most impactful and challenging’ barrier to their ability to engage in paid work. They had found that after-school programs were not able to manage challenging behavioural presentations and did not allow a professional support worker to be present to assist their child at the program.¹⁰¹
- 2.101. Carers ACT told the Committee that respite for carers should include time in the day to look after their own health and wellbeing in a manner of their choosing, and that funding for respite care should include funding for carers to participate in other activities:

We get requests for a broad range of things, such as: ‘Can I have some money to buy \$100 worth of wool, because what I enjoy doing is sitting and knitting?’ or ‘Can I have a Netflix subscription, because when I get free time what I really like to do is watch trashy TV?’¹⁰²

- 2.102. The ACT Government observed in its submission that carers report ‘persistently lower’ rates of wellbeing than the general population, especially when they are providing more than 15 hours of care per week.¹⁰³

Committee comment

- 2.103. The Committee considers that respite for carers and those they care for is essential to maintaining their wellbeing. The Committee recognises that the right to rest and leisure is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,¹⁰⁴ and is of the view that additional respite options and resources are needed in the ACT to provide this for carers.
- 2.104. Carers ACT also advocated for increased bereavement counselling services for carers. They described caring as ‘coming with a thousand cuts of grief’ and said that caring-associated grief was often not recognised in mainstream support services.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁰ Carers ACT, *Submission 5*, p 7.

¹⁰¹ Name withheld, *Submission 10*, p 3.

¹⁰² Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 52.

¹⁰³ ACT Government, *Submission 13*, p 2.

¹⁰⁴ United Nations, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, [Universal Declaration of Human Rights | United Nations](#) (accessed 30 August 2024).

¹⁰⁵ Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 53.

- 2.105. The Committee recognises that caring is often not a choice, and can have a negative impact on a person’s health and wellbeing through losses including paid employment opportunities, financial security, and free time. The Committee considers that the ACT Government should recognise this impact on carers and provide access to appropriate counselling and support services.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government seek to better understand the unique challenges faced by carers and look to overcome these barriers by providing targeted support to them. This support could include, for example:

- funding for additional respite resources for carers to access on an ad hoc basis;
- flexible models of respite for recipients with complex needs or behaviours, in partnership with the community sector;
- additional funding to support mental health activities; and
- cost-free access to bereavement counselling for carers who suffer loss in their lives.

Young carers

- 2.106. In their submission, Carers ACT observed that young carers were often unrecognised because of their age and societal expectations of the care that a young person could or should be responsible for. Caring responsibilities could hinder young people’s ability to attend and engage in schooling, and consequently impact their ability to seek paid work in future.¹⁰⁶
- 2.107. During the public hearing, Carers ACT advocated for a mentoring program for young carers, noting that they often did not have an adult in their lives with the capability or capacity to support them in activities such as learning to drive or getting to sports or other activities.¹⁰⁷
- 2.108. Carers ACT also reported that young carers’ reduced capacity to engage in extra-curricular activities and sport or volunteering was reflected in their resumes, which added to challenges in securing employment. Furthermore, young carers in employment reported being labelled as ‘unreliable’ when they needed to cancel shifts or leave work early due to caring responsibilities. This could have long-term consequences on their employment prospects:

This can result in young carers losing casual shifts, positive references or their employment, preventing them from progressing alongside their non-carer peers and placing them at risk of becoming reliant on government pensions long-term.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Carers ACT, *Submission 5*, p 8.

¹⁰⁷ Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 53.

¹⁰⁸ Carers ACT, *Submission 5*, pp 8–9.

2.109. Carers ACT noted that public school enrolment in the ACT included a tick box to identify young carer status, but said that there was no policy in place directing schools how to use this information. This was a missed opportunity to provide targeted support.¹⁰⁹

2.110. During the public hearing, Carers ACT told the Committee that a community campaign encouraging recognition and self-recognition of young carers was unlikely to increase young people’s connection with support, and that targeted outreach would be more successful:

We continue to say that what we need young people to do is reach out for help; yet it is against the nature of a young person to do that. What we are not doing is saying, ‘Actually, we can see you and we are going to be the adult here and come and offer you help and support.’¹¹⁰

2.111. The Committee heard that young carers had adult responsibilities, and while they often needed assistance and support with practicalities such as school absentee records or homework accommodations, they also needed time where they could ‘just be a kid’:

It is about somebody else saying, ‘How about I do the shopping list for Mum,’ or ‘Can I help pay the bill’—not with the money but just the actual act of paying the bill—‘so that you can go and have your lunch with your mates?’¹¹¹

Committee comment

2.112. The Committee notes that the *Education Amendment Act 2024* introduced a new section 2AAA to the *Education Regulation 2005*. This new section outlines a number of circumstances which constitute a ‘reasonable excuse’ for non-attendance at school. This includes ‘any other circumstance that the principal is satisfied is reasonable to excuse a child’s attendance at the child’s school or an activity of the school’.¹¹²

2.113. While the ability to explain absences is only a small part of ensuring reasonable accommodations for young carers in a school setting, the Committee hopes this provision will better accommodate for the needs of young carers.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government provide funding for Carers ACT to develop and deliver a mentoring program for young carers.

¹⁰⁹ Carers ACT, *Submission 5*, p 9.

¹¹⁰ Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 54.

¹¹¹ Ms Lisa Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, Carers ACT, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 3 July 2024, p 55.

¹¹² *Education Amendment Act 2024*, s 56.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the ACT Government enhance public education enrolment and student engagement policies and practices for young carers to enable targeted education and employment supports or referrals to external young carer programs.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1. The Committee would like to thank everyone who contributed their time, expertise and experience to this inquiry, including submitters, witnesses, Ministers, and directorate staff.
- 3.2. The Committee makes 10 recommendations.

Mr James Milligan MLA
Chair, Standing Committee on Economy and Gender and Economic Equality
September 2024

Appendix A: Submissions

No.	Submission by	Received	Published
1	Jan Skorich	05/05/24	22/05/24
2	University of Canberra Psychology Society	07/05/24	22/05/24
3	SEE Change	09/05/24	22/05/24
4	Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners	14/05/24	22/05/24
5	Carers ACT	15/05/24	22/05/24
6	Inner South Canberra Community Council	15/05/24	22/05/24
7	VolunteeringACT	16/05/24	22/05/24
8	St Vincent de Paul Canberra-Goulburn	17/05/24	22/05/24
9	ACT SES Volunteers Association	17/05/24	22/05/24
10	Name withheld	17/05/24	22/05/24
11	Amy Blain	17/05/24	22/05/24
12	Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute	18/05/24	22/05/24
13	ACT Government	21/05/24	22/05/24
14	Migrant and Refugee Services	24/05/24	12/06/24
15	ACT Council of Parents and Citizens Associations	29/05/24	12/06/24
16	CONFIDENTIAL	31/05/24	-
17	Women with Disabilities ACT	31/05/24	12/06/24
18	University of Canberra Student Representative Council	31/05/24	12/06/24
19	University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation	31/05/24	12/06/24
20	Professor Lyndall Strazdins	03/06/24	12/06/24
21	University of Canberra	12/06/24	12/06/24
22	Australian Bureau of Statistics	13/06/24	17/06/24
23	Community Sport ACT	01/07/24	03/07/24

Appendix B: Witnesses

Wednesday, 3 July 2024

VolunteeringACT

- **Ms Jean Giese**, Chief Executive Officer

ACT Council of Parents & Citizens Associations

- **Ms Veronica Elliott**, Executive Officer
- **Ms Julie McLean**, Policy Officer

SEE Change

- **Ms Paula Mance**, Executive Director

St Vincent de Paul Canberra-Goulburn

- **Mr Michael Rennick**, Director, People and Culture
- **Ms Brittany Campbell**, Volunteer Services Manager

Migrant and Refugee Settlement Services

- **Mrs Sonia di Mezza**, Chief Executive Officer

Rotary Club of Canberra Sundowners

- **Miss Tara Pullen**, Immediate Past President

ACT State Emergency Service Volunteers Association Incorporated

- **Mrs Doreen McEncroe**, President
- **Mr John Dowling**, Treasurer and Board Member

University of Canberra Student Representative Council

- **Ms Mushtaha Ahmed**, President
- **Miss Angela Kagucia**, Post Graduate Representative to the Academic Board and Treasurer

University of Canberra Psychology Society

- **Miss Taylor Geoffroy**, President

University of Canberra

- **Professor Michelle Lincoln**, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic

University of Canberra Centre for Ageing Research and Translation

- **Professor Kasia Bail**, Workforce Lead
- **Professor Diane Gibson**, Director

Women with Disabilities

- **Mx Kat Reed**, Chief Executive Officer
- **Mx Pippa Newman**, Senior Policy Officer

Carers ACT

- **Ms Lisa Kelly**, Chief Executive Officer
- **Miss Jessica Johnson**, Policy Officer

Associate Professor Elise Klein OAM

Professor Lyndall Strazdins

Wednesday, 10 July 2024

Minister for Industrial Relations and Workplace Safety

Mr Mick Gentleman MLA

- **Mr Russell Noud**, Executive Group Manager, Public Sector Employment Group, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate
- **Ms Ellen Lukins**, Executive Branch Manager, Work Safety Group, Office of Industrial Relations and Workforce Strategy, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate

Minister for Community Services, Seniors and Veterans

Ms Emma Davidson MLA

- **Mr Nick Stathis**, Executive Branch Manager, Disability Seniors Veterans and Social Recovery, Community Services Directorate

Appendix C: Question Taken on Notice

Question Taken on Notice

No.	Date	Asked of	Subject	Response received
1	03/07/24	University of Canberra	Demand for financial support for placement at University of Canberra	12/07/24

Appendix D: Gender distribution of witnesses

Beginning in April 2023, in response to an audit by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Committees are collecting information on the gender of witnesses. The aim is to determine whether committee inquiries are meeting the needs, and allowing the participation of, a range of genders in the community. Participation is voluntary and there are no set responses.

Gender indication	Total
Female	20
Male	5
No data	2