

Appendix F

Additional comments – Ms Nicole Lawder MLA

Introduction

The Committee inquired into Cost of Living Pressures in the ACT and I am providing my additional comments and recommendations as noted below. I would also like to add my appreciation to those stakeholders who made a submission to the Inquiry, and appeared as witnesses.

Below I detail my addition comments because there were several important matters on which we could not find consensus, in some cases, this was despite evidence submitted on the matter. It is worthwhile to note, however, that there was consensus on the majority of recommendations for the committee.

Recommendation 1: That certain General Practice be exempt from the recent extension of payroll tax, to reduce costs for GPs and avoid even higher out of pocket expenses for patients to visit a GP. The Committee heard from a number of witnesses about the lack of affordable healthcare in the ACT, for example ACTCOSS¹ and Health Care Consumers' Association.²

The ACT has the lowest rate of bulk billing GPs in the country³, and the ACT also has the highest out of pocket expenses in the country for GP, specialist and allied health appointments⁴.

In addition to out-of-pocket costs to consumers for business hours GP consultations, after hours consultations generally attract an even higher out-of-pocket cost.⁵

This means that the federal electorates of Bean and Canberra have the second and third highest out of pocket expenses in the country.

In 2020-21, 4.7 % of people in the ACT avoided seeing a GP due to cost, which was double the national average.

Despite these high out of pocket expenses and the impact on cost of living for ACT residents, the majority of the Committee could not agree that the decision of the ACT, following a NSW Supreme Court decision to extend ACT payroll tax to the incomes of doctors contracted to ACT medical practices, which the President of the RACGP described as a "sick tax" would add around \$15 per consult and would put more pressure on hospitals, worsen the health system crisis, and undermine the Federal Government's Medicare reforms.

Recommendation 2: I recommend that ACT Labor cease profiting from poker machine revenue through donations from the 1973 Foundation, which is an outrageous conflict of interest and is hypocritical in the extreme. As evidenced by submissions from Care⁶, Advocacy for Inclusion⁷, and

¹ ACTCOSS, *Submission* p3.

² Health Care Consumers' Association, *Submission 32*, p 8.

³ Australian Unemployed Workers Union *Submission 21*

⁴ ACTCOSS, *Submission*, p3.

⁵ Health Care Consumers' Association, *Submission 32*, p 5.

⁶ Ms Carmel Franklin, Chief Executive Officer, Care, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2023, p 66.

⁷ Mr Craig Wallace, Head of Policy, Advocacy for Inclusion, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, p 198.

jointly from a Financial Counselling Australia and Suicide Prevention Australia report⁸ there are serious issues that can be caused by problem gambling especially on the most vulnerable people in our community and I believe that ACT Labor is contributing to this harm through benefitting from poker machine revenue.

Recommendation 3: I recommend that the ACT Government cease its endless and exponential increases of rates and land tax which is contributing to housing unaffordability and cost of living pressures. The Committee heard evidence that housing is in undersupply and is unaffordable for example YWCA Canberra,⁹ and it would seem that the ACT Government should assess its own fees, taxes, rates and charges to ensure they are not contributing to higher costs for landlords which then manifest as rent increases. In the public hearing on 13 April 2023, ACTCOSS provided the confronting advice that Canberra 'continues to have the most expensive overall median rent prices and is the least affordable jurisdiction in the country for people on low incomes'.^{10 11}

Some submitters detailed their concerns about rates and land tax including Multicultural Association of Canberra¹² and others^{13 14 15}.

Recommendation 4: I recommend that the Government stop its continued over regulation of the rental market which is contributing to rental unaffordability. The high cost of renting is exacerbated by the shortage of social housing properties, with the average wait time for social housing 4.9 years¹⁶.

Continually bringing in new regulation which costs landlords money to implement is not helping our unaffordable rents. For example ACTCOSS points out that the ACT has the most expensive overall median rent prices and is the least affordable jurisdiction in the country for people on low incomes.

Recommendation 5: I recommend that the Government release more blocks of land for housing to address high demand, which in turn leads to higher prices. For example YWCA noted that:

Given the unique land pressures in the ACT, increasing supply requires innovative approaches to land supply and infill development.¹⁷

Conclusion

The inquiry heard evidence about many cost of living issues facing Canberrans. Unfortunately, in my opinion, there was not much evidence relating to cost of living pressures impacting on older Canberrans, which is a shame as anecdotally this appears to be an issue.

I would also like to express my thanks to the Committee secretariat and my appreciation to other members of the Committee for working together to achieve a large degree of consensus, despite the difficult timeframes.

⁸ Financial Counselling Australia and Suicide Prevention Australia, Report, *Gambling and Suicide Prevention: A roadmap for change*, January 2022.

⁹ Ms Frances Crimmins, Chief Executive Officer, YWCA Canberra, *Proof Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2023, p29.

¹⁰ ACTCOSS, *Submission 26*, p 2.

¹¹ W. Brooker *Submission 13*

¹² MAC *Submission 5*

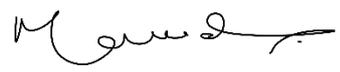
¹³ A. Olah *Submission 1*

¹⁴ T. Firth *Submission 3*

¹⁵ Weston Creek Community Council *Submission 18*

¹⁶ ACTCOSS, *Submission 26*, p.2.

¹⁷ YWCA Canberra, *Submission 25*, p6.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicole Lawder', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Nicole Lawder MLA

10 May 2023