

SUBMISSION TO THE 2008-9 ACT BUDGET

The National Council of Women of ACT Inc represents a number of women's groups in the ACT and seeks to present to Government views and opinions on a wide range of issues. They particularly focus on the needs of women and children in the community.

With this focus in mind the National Council of Women presents this submission. The issues raised are no particular order of priority.

The major issues identified by the Council were:

1. The urgent need for a secure mental facility.

This was identified last year with the provision of additional Commonwealth funding for mental health facilities to cater for the members of the community who need help in managing their condition and should not be sent to prison as the only option. We look forward to hearing proposals for this facility in the 2007-2008 Budget.

2. Refurbishment of the Albert Hall and its retention for community use.

There has been concern expressed that the only option proposed by the ACT government seem to be private ownership and control with no community use.

3. The re-introduction of the School Dental Service.

Current pressures on the public dental service in the Act can only get worse unless there is more funding provided. Introduction of a school dental service would look towards prevention and in future years obviate large waiting lists of people who have neglected their teeth because of the enormous cost of private dentistry.

4. Provision of a government funded centre for the many women's groups and NGO's in the Act who exist on minimal income and often find it hard to find suitable meeting rooms and storage facilities for records.

The Act government has seen fit to fund a Multicultural Centre and it is considered appropriate that the ACT also make available suitable premises for the many women's organizations in the Territory who need photocopying and meeting facilities but because of their size are unable to fund these premises on an individual basis.

5. Funding for the Goyder Street Library in Narrabundah

This library, established and run by volunteers, fills the gap left by the closure of the Griffith Library. The library is located on the Boomanulla Oval and has received enormous support from the indigenous community. The library has now been in existence for four months and is a thriving community centre. However it receives no funding whatsoever and depends on small membership subscriptions

and donations from the community. They are worthy of support if only to prove that Canberra indeed has a heart.

6. Reduction of poker machines in clubs and support for problem gamblers

The poker machines in the ACT are at the highest level per head of population in Australia. Problem gamblers are said to represent 2.9 per cent of the population i.e 950 odd people – a fairly significant number in a comparatively small community. The enormous amount of money spent on these machines has to come from somewhere and while only a “small number” of problem gamblers have been identified, there must be a large number who are putting fairly large sums of money through these machines. Certainly the clubs are obliged by law to give a proportion of their profits back to the community but this is only a small part of the total earnings. Other states survive without this income and it behoves the ACT Government to look fairly carefully at the damage done by these so-called innocuous and fun providing machines.

7. Additional funds for school remedial learning programs.

While these programs exist, a number of children miss out on places because the programs are small and cannot cope with all the demands made upon it.

8. Reduction of Third Party Insurance fees to the level of those in other states.

The ACT fees are approximately \$200 higher than those in other states. It is understood that the ACT fees are set by the NRMA in consultation with the ACT Government and that a reduction of \$20 is proposed for this year. The amount charged is excessive. The NRMA has made statements that higher fees are necessary because of the higher claims for damages awarded in the ACT. This should not be a reason for higher charges as TPI fees in NSW and ACT could be pooled and averaged across the board to make it more equitable.

9. Green waste pickup to a maximum of four times per annum.

Green waste is a problem for the many older people in the community who have no transport but need help in removing large green waste and getting it to the tip for recycling. Other jurisdictions offer this service as part of their normal waste pickup and it would not be difficult to arrange this service on demand for those who need assistance. The answer is not always a trash pack – they don't offer a “one off” service but require that you commit to and pay for a fixed term for their packs (usually six months).

10. Greater security at bus interchanges

The bus interchanges are dangerous for both young and old people. They are often frequented by gangs of youths and long waits for buses leave people vulnerable and exposed to danger. Security patrols and a regular police presence would help to make them a safer place.

11. Redevelopment and improvement of the buildings on the south side of Bunda Street opposite the new Canberra Centre

These buildings are in a poor state of repair and the access lanes at the back full of rubbish and graffiti. It is the ugly side of the city and needs improving to complement the new developments elsewhere.

12. Repair the Tharwa Bridge immediately.

The bridge was built in such a manner as to allow repairs to different sections without rebuilding the whole bridge. It needs an independent assessment by a specialized bridge repairer familiar with the design of this particular bridge and the imperative to go ahead. The proposed concrete bridge will do nothing to improve the aesthetic appearance of the area and there is nothing wrong with the existing bridge that can't be fixed. Just closing it and leaving it has done nothing to help the people of Tharwa with scant consideration being given to the extra travel time and cost of the long distance they need to travel to get to Canberra.

13. Consideration to allowing pensioner concession fares for seniors on Action buses be extended to cover the full day.

The current restrictions mean that appointments have to be scheduled for a limited period during the day and often when the bus services are at a minimum with long waiting times between connections. It should not affect many people and won't add greatly to the numbers on the buses at peak periods.

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