Demand for ACT community services

Findings from the 2025 State of the ACT Community Sector Survey

In March 2025 ACTCOSS sought feedback from 129 respondents from ACT community organisations through the 2025 State of the ACT Community Sector Survey. This fact sheet highlights the key findings about the demand for their services and factors driving demand.

Demand for community services continues to increase

Service demand across the ACT community sector has risen sharply. During 2024, 83% of community organisations reported an increase in demand in the community from the previous year – up significantly from 67% in 2022 and compounding a long-term trend.

Many community organisations were unable to keep up with this demand. 52% reported increases in the number of clients their service could not support during 2024, up from 47% in 2022.

Over half (51%) of community organisations reported longer waiting times during 2024, up from 43% in 2022. At the same time, 16% reported closing their waiting lists during 2024 because they were too long, up slightly from 15% in 2022.

During 2024, some organisations (27%) had to turn people away due to capacity constraints and a third (33%) had to refer clients to other organisations. In the same period, almost one in three (29%) received urgent referrals from government agencies/services outside of normal business hours.

These results demonstate strong and continuing growth in demand and reinforce the essential role of the community sector in responding to people's needs in the ACT.

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Poverty, disadvantage and other key drivers of increased demand

The key drivers of increased demand identified in the survey were:

- cost of living pressures (84%)
- access to affordable housing/homelessness (81%)
- lack of mental health support (73%)
- unsafe home environments (70%)
- social isolation (70%)
- sickness and/or chronic conditions (58%); and
- lack of health services (54%).

In addition to the above identified drivers, community organisations are now seeing a deeply alarming surge in poverty and disadvantage across the ACT – rising from 56% of respondents observing an increase in levels of poverty and disadvantage in 2022 to a staggering 82% in 2024. This sharp escalation signals a critical need for urgent, coordinated action.

Further evidence that increased poverty is driving demand is that difficulty paying bills was one of the most commonly reported issues by clients accessing ACT community organisations.

Respondents who deliver client services and programs reported that at their main service or program:

- 38% supported clients struggling to pay bills or facing other financial difficulties daily
- 24% supported these clients weekly; and
- 28% supported these clients sometimes, but not every week.

This survey's findings highlight the long-term worsening of socioeconomic conditions facing many Canberrans, with community organisations playing a critical role in responding to basic community needs.

The top 3 drivers of demand are:

Community organisations have also seen a surge in poverty and disadvantage in the ACT – rising from 56% in 2022 to 82% in 2024.

More clients are presenting with complex needs

Community organisations are not only managing higher overall demand but are also engaging with more intensive and challenging client issues.

In 2024, 76% reported a rise in client complexity compared to the previous year – a notable increase from 69% in 2022 and highlighting a continuing and accelerating upwards trend.

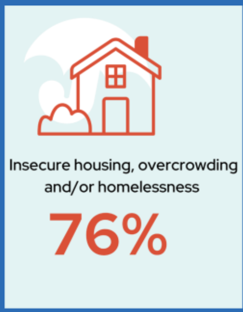
The top five changes identified contributing to driving this rise in complexity was the increase in:

- mental health conditions (79%)
- insecure housing overcrowding and/or homelessness (76%)
- poverty (70%)
- family and domestic violence (65%); and
- difficulty accessing government supports (63%).

The survey results suggest that client complexity is now a consistently rising pressure for the ACT community sector.

A majority (76%) of community organisations reported a rise in client complexity.

The top 3 contributing factors driving the rise in complexity are:



For more information

The survey responses offer a snapshot of the ACT community sector, reflecting a diverse mix of organisation sizes, funding levels, and service types. This broad representation means the findings provide strong and reliable insights into the current state of the sector. The comparison data has been taken from [At the precipice: Australia's community sector through the cost of living crisis] by ACOSS (April 2023).

The full State of the Community Sector Report will be available on [our website] in the final quarter of 2025. For more information contact us at actcoss@actcoss.org.au