

Action on Community Services

This note provides ACT-specific commentary and information on this action area from ACOSS 2019 federal election commitment priorities.

Question: What will you do to support viable and sustainable community services for everyone and improve the experience of ACT services with the Commonwealth Government?

The facts

- Community services make an important contribution to the ACT economy and make up the fastest growing labour market in the ACT. Community and health services are projected to grow by 16.6% through to 2020.¹ Currently these labour markets contribute 24% of jobs growth in the ACT.²
- ACT community services have been through a period of considerable disruption and transition over the last decade. The ACT has been a laboratory for important changes like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). ACT community organisations report relatively negative interactions with the Australian Government.
- The Commonwealth has signalled intent to move in and out of funding for social infrastructure areas like housing, disability, legal services and even volunteering – sometimes within the space of a few months. While this kind of change is not exclusive to the experience of community organisations in the ACT, the region's services have experienced some unique disruptions, such as the early rollout of NDIS here.

1 Department of Employment, *2016 Employment Projections, Regional projections – interactive tool*, Department of Employment, Australian Government, Canberra, 2016, accessed 30 June 2017, <<http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/EmploymentProjections>>.

2 *ibid.*

- Community services report unfavourable interactions with the Australian Government. When invited to comment about relationships with different levels of government in the 2016 State of the Sector Survey³, the ACT community services sector reported:
 - There is scope to improve relationships with the Australian Government around collaborative service delivery, and negotiation of key performance indicators.⁴ For example, 25.0% of the 60 organisations reported that advocacy relationships with the Australian Government were ‘quite poor’ or ‘very poor’, compared to just 8.5% which rated advocacy relationships with the ACT Government in the same way.⁵
 - Only 15.0% agreed that they know enough in advance whether funding will be renewed, while 58.3% disagreed with the statement.
 - More than half of organisations disagreed or strongly disagreed that Australian Government processes for applying for funding were simple (55.0%), while only 20.0% agreed.
 - Only 11.7% said Australian Government funders seek feedback on tendering processes and funding reform, while many more (50.0%) disagreed or strongly disagreed.
- In *Stories of Transition*, ACTCOSS identified key jobs for the Australian Government in supporting service transitions, especially the NDIS. These included: restoring person-centred planning; making deregulation genuine and letting consumers provide the final test of proof; restoring human rights to the centre of person-centred reform; heeding the lessons from the NDIS in changes to housing and aged care; and responding to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples’ expectations for community-controlled NDIS services.⁶

3 N Cortis and M Blaxland, *The State of the Community Service Sector in the Australian Capital Territory, 2016*, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, prepared for ACTCOSS, December 2016, <<https://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/state-community-service-sector-act-2016-report>>.

4 *ibid.*, p. 11.

5 *ibid.*, p. 60.

6 ACTCOSS, *Stories of Transition*, October 2017, p. 6.

Community & lived experience positions

“[Commonwealth] Policy development is only taken from the peak bodies and the larger service providers without seeking input from those who provide the vast majority of support services.”

— *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service.*⁷

“Unlike the ACT government, we have minimal relationship with the Commonwealth Government, they have high staff turnover and we often brief the new rep about what we do, to find we have a new contract manager 6 months later.”

— *Large disability service.*⁸

“... Previous to the national rollout you could have just called. I had the direct number for our case worker... It feels like now I'm this little voice against this big institutional wall struggling to be heard.”

— *Alice, a parent of a child with disability, speaking about the NDIS transition.*⁹

Further reading

- [The State of the Community Service Sector in the ACT, 2016](#)
- [ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026](#), July 2016

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ACTCOSS is committed to reconciliation, acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land and pays respect to elders past and present.

ACTCOSS represents not-for-profit community organisations and advocates for social justice in the ACT.

7 N Cortis, op. cit., p. 60.

8 *ibid.*

9 ACTCOSS, op. cit., p. 6.