



ACTCOSS 2020 ACT Election Issue Brief

Supporting the community services sector

For a just and fair Canberra, the next ACT Government must:

- Conduct a full needs analysis to understand Canberra's demographic changes, increasing complexity of needs (including an aging population; growing number of births; greater diversity) and the changed Canberra geography
- Conduct a full cost analysis to accurately assess the cost of delivering community services to include: the cost of the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO); increased levels of regulation; and increasing costs of operations
- Commit to revitalising the commissioning, procurement and contract management process across the ACT Government in partnership with the community sector
- Support capital investments including zero emissions vehicles and ICT infrastructure for the community sector
- Fund Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led policy and services
- Renew its commitment to the [ACT Social Compact](#)
- Ensure proper resourcing of strategies, such as the Carers Strategy and fund the implementation of new legislation such as Crimes (Offences Against Vulnerable People) Legislation Amendment Bill 2020
- Commit to properly fund peaks and organisations representing community voices including changes to legislation to cover peaks under the ACT's Portable Long Service Leave Scheme.

The details

We need a full needs analysis and full cost analysis because Canberra's population, economy and social fabric have significantly changed.

But funding for community services has remained static. There is a perfect storm of pressures facing our sector – rising demand, rising costs while base funding levels remain the same. That is why we need to **assess the cost of delivering community services** to account for increases to wages, additional regulations and increased operating costs as well as **capital investments** in fit-for-purpose facilities, safe and energy efficient vehicles, accessible infrastructure and critical ICT to ensure staff and consumers are safe and supported. Funding for community organisations needs an evidence-based approach that plans for and responds to community need.

Funding must cover the additional costs of the ERO. The ERO lifted the wages of workers in the sector in recognition that their work was undervalued. 80% of the community sector workforce are female.

We need a commitment to a revitalised commissioning, procurement and contract management process to deliver better outcomes for Canberrans and enable community sector organisations to be sustainable and successful. Commissioning needs to recognise that thin markets and highly complex consumers mean that transactional and market-led approaches do not yield good outcomes as evidenced by the [Job Services Sector and the VET sector](#).

We need more **investment in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander self-determination**. In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, 12 out of 15 new initiatives to meet the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders were criminal justice or care and protection system related. We welcome those initiatives but need more investment in community-controlled health, housing and education activities and support for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures.

A commitment to the ACT Social Compact will ensure:

- No strategy, legislation or program is launched without proper funding for implementation and review
- Improved consultation with community including earlier engagement, more co-design work and reasonable timeframes
- Increased transparency of ACT Government decisions and actions.

A commitment to the ACT Social Compact will also ensure properly funded peaks and organisations representing community voices remain a key component of local democracy. Peak bodies and representative organisations aggregate and synthesise community feedback and are essential for good public decision making. They amplify the voices of vulnerable and marginalised people who would otherwise rarely be heard. Most peak and community voice bodies have not received real funding increases for many years despite tectonic shifts in policy reform, social challenges and demography of Canberra.

Supporting peaks also requires a change to legislation to ensure that employees of peak bodies can access the ACT's Portable Long Service Leave Scheme now denied to them by the 2019 Federal Court decision that found employees of organisations whose principle goal was advocacy are excluded from the scheme.

The evidence

- The community sector provides vital support in times of crisis such as the recent bushfire emergency and COVID-19.
- As the ACT's population continues to grow, older Canberrans make up an increasing percentage of the ACT's population and the number of births is also increasing.¹ All these factors lead to higher demand for community services.
- An anticipated increase in service users and communities with more complex needs² means we need active strategies to recruit and retain staff: improved pay and conditions, and a strategic approach to skills, qualifications and professional development.³
- Between July 2012 and December 2019, the cumulative increase in community sector wage costs, compared to increases in ACT Government indexation, was 27.3% more at SCHADS level 4.1, and 35.1% more at SCHADS level 6.1.⁴
- Australia's gender pay gap currently sits at 13.9%. The ERO supplementation is one of the most effective steps government can take to address the gap. ABS 2015 data shows women are 78% of the industry workforce,⁵ many with children.⁶
- The ACT has the fastest growing population who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; from 1.3% in 2006 to 2.4% by 2026.^{7,8}
- Community services are seen as something 'other' people need, but 'not me'. The current health and economic crises show that *all* of us can experience vulnerability as circumstances change.

1 ABS, 3105.0.65.001 - Australian Historical Population Statistics, 2016:

<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3105.0.65.0012016?OpenDocument>

2 *ACT Community Services Industry – Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis* (p. 16):

<https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/Workforce%20Data%20and%20Community%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20April%202019.pdf.pdf>

3 *ACT Community Services Industry – Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis* (p. 3):

<https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/Workforce%20Data%20and%20Community%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20April%202019.pdf.pdf>

4 ERO and CPI rates – ACT version (Table 1.1 for Briefing).

5 Cited in the Industry Strategy 2016-2026: <https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/community-sector-reform/industry-strategy-2016-2026>

6 *ACT Community Services Industry – Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis* (p. 16):

<https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/Workforce%20Data%20and%20Community%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20April%202019.pdf.pdf>

7 *ACT Community Services Industry – Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis* (p. 16):

<https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/Workforce%20Data%20and%20Community%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20April%202019.pdf.pdf>

8 *ACT Community Services Industry – Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis – Attachment C* (p. 19):

<https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/Workforce%20Data%20and%20Community%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20Attachment%20C.pdf>

Key findings for the ACT in 2019 from the national survey of community sector workers⁹:

- 58% reported that poverty and disadvantage increased among the people accessing their services
- 84% reported demand in the community either ‘increased’ (60%) or ‘increased significantly’ (a further 24%). Less than 4% reported that they were completely able to meet demand
- Just over half of organisational leaders said they need to be cautious about engaging in systemic advocacy because of their funding arrangements
- More than 40% of organisational leaders said funding arrangements did not support collaboration
- 56% observed an increase in competition for funding, with less than 1% reporting a decrease.

Testimonials

“If the federal government does not commit to renewing this [ERO] funding, the combined risks of widening the gender pay gap and the impact on service delivery to vulnerable community members will be substantial” – Dr Emma Campbell, ACTCOSS

“We are grateful for the funding we receive but the reality is without the ERO support funding we could not afford pay increases for staff as indexation is swallowed by increases in the costs of compliance. On top of this, the Supreme Court ruling denying some peaks portable long service leave will make attraction, recruitment and retention really tough for advice and advocacy services in the ACT...” – Travis Gilbert, ACT Shelter

“Government is a vehicle of the people and is made stronger with the involvement of people at all levels. Strong engagement and consultation of people in policy, decision making, resource allocation and service planning is vital to ensuring that we are responsive to needs and responsible in the use of funds. Good governance is built on strong participation and engagement of a diverse group of people. Carers, consumers, service users, citizens should be involved, consulted and at the centre of all decision making” – Lisa Kelly, Carers ACT

“Dealing with the risks and opportunities facing the ACT in the coming years requires participatory processes that are not just ways for the loudest and most well resourced voices to have their say. All groups – particularly those most affected who often have the least voice – need to be involved and at an early stage. Too often involvement has been too narrow and too late in the policy cycle. In the ACT there is an opportunity to build on the successful citizen participation projects conducted in 2017-18” – Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy (CAPaD)

“Increased infrastructure funding and the continuation of the ERO are fundamental financial supports community sectors require. The pandemic has highlighted the vital role the

⁹ Disaggregated ACT data provided to ACTCOSS by ACOSS from national survey. National data available in *The profile & pulse of the sector: Findings from the 2019 Australian Community Sector Survey*: <https://www.acoss.org.au/community-sector-policy-publications/>.

community sector plays in Canberra. However, this is often carried out in ageing buildings, tight budgets and with inadequate corporate infrastructure. The ERO is a key way to attract and retain staff in an environment where we are constantly up against losing workers to the government sector” – Jenny Kitchin, Woden Community Service