



ACTCOSS 2020 ACT Election Issue Brief

Older Canberrans and Aged Care

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

- Invest in social housing and community transport to meet community need, including for older Canberrans
- Commit to all new residential properties in the ACT built to meet Universal Design standards making them accessible to all people regardless of age, disability or other factors
- Provide a range of targeted supports and assistance points across the city for older Canberrans, including seniors hubs in the southern suburbs of the ACT (Tuggeranong) and in a northern suburb of Canberra
- Ensure footpaths in Canberra are suitable for people who are aged and enable independent community participation and support independence
- Commit to ending restrictive practices and ensure Australia's Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture (OPCAT) obligations apply to all congregate living situations in the ACT, including aged care facilities
- Reduce violence and institutionalisation and fully fund the implementation of the *Crimes (Offences Against Vulnerable People) Legislation Amendment Act 2020*
- Ensure adequate levels of both wellbeing and mental health supports are available to Canberra's older people and their carers
- Improve access to justice for older people engaged with the justice system by expanding individual advocacy supports
- Support respite opportunities including for carers and palliative care patients and their carers.

The issue

The ACT population is getting older and many people with disability face barriers to finding appropriate housing because of poor building design. The lack of adaptable and visitable housing results in social isolation and premature entry into nursing care for too many ageing Canberrans as well as people with a disability. ACTCOSS is calling for **all new residential properties in the ACT built to meet Universal Design standards** to make them able to be adapted and accessible to all people regardless of age, disability or other factors, and support for reforms of the National Construction Code.

Demographic change means **an audit and stocktake of community needs including community facilities, community services and transport** is urgent and overdue. An audit would acknowledge the changing demographic characteristics of each ACT region, levels of disadvantage and the respective requirement for new and / or improved facilities and services.

Transport investments need to meet actual community need, not only mass transit requirements. This includes those most at risk of social disconnection, such as older Canberrans. **Investment in community transport is needed** at sustainable levels with long-term commitments so that providers can renew vehicle stock and plan across a multi-year timeframe. There should be a specific community needs analysis for community transport.

Poor access to legal assistance means that many Canberrans do not receive equality before the law. Unequal access to legal services drives poverty and disadvantage for Canberrans unable to enforce their legal rights in family, criminal, social security, financial, housing, employment and other matters. We need **more funding for legal services, including for the ACT's community legal centres, that serve those facing legal disadvantage.**

ACTCOSS is calling for a demonstration of **a full commitment to the rights of people in aged care facilities under the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture by ending restrictive practices in the ACT.**

ACTCOSS welcomed the passing of the *Crimes (Offences Against Vulnerable People) Legislation Amendment Act 2020* and calls on an incoming ACT Government to **commit to the full funding and implementation of this important legislation.**

Continuing gaps in aged care services must be met through ACT Government-funded services or advocacy by the ACT Government to the Commonwealth. A new ACT Government must ensure there are adequate opportunities for respite for carers and for palliative care patients and carers.

There needs to be an expansion of palliative care including the establishment of a dedicated palliative care ward at the Canberra Hospital; implementation of the Palliative Care Clinical Network's plan to establish an ACT-wide palliative care service; and more ACT health professionals trained in palliative care.

ACTCOSS supports Carers ACT call for the ACT Government to provide its staff with up to **two years leave without pay for people caring for aged parents under the ACT Public Service Enterprise Agreement.**

The evidence

- The ACT is expected to experience a significant ageing of our population. The number of Canberrans aged 85 years and over is expected to increase by 509%, reaching a total of 22,500 persons in 2056.¹
- In August 2020, only four out of 768 private rental properties in the ACT were affordable for a couple on the age pension, while none were affordable for a single person on the age pension.²
- Older women – those aged 55 and over – was the fastest growing cohort of homeless Australians between 2011 and 2016, increasing by 31%. It is likely this trend will continue given the ongoing shortage of affordable housing, the ageing population and the significant gap in wealth accumulation between men and women across their lifetimes.³
- Older people are among those demographic groups who are more likely to experience transport disadvantage than others.⁴
- The ACT Government’s Wellbeing Framework Indicator for Access and Connectivity requires that ‘our planning, mobility and service systems allow us to move around our liveable city and access the types of places and services we need, when we need them. Those who require additional support to gain independence can access responsive, tailored services’.⁵
- It is likely that between 2% and 14% of older Australians experience elder abuse in any given year, with the prevalence of neglect possibly higher.⁶

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- 1 ACT Government, *Population Ageing in the ACT: Issues and Analysis*, ACT Government, 2010, http://www.cmd.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/154162/population-ageing-ACT.pdf.
 - 2 Anglicare Australia, *Rental Affordability Snapshot – Special update: August 2020*, unpublished ACT data, Anglicare Australia, Canberra, 2020, <https://anglicareras.files.wordpress.com/2020/08/rental-affordability-update.pdf>; C Cassidy & R Ritchie, ‘Kicked to the kerb: ACT rental market failing pensioners’, *Anglicare research finds*, The Canberra Times, 6 September 2020, <https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6909949/kicked-to-the-kerb-act-rental-market-failing-older-canberrans/>.
 - 3 K Patterson, K Proft & J Maxwell, *Older Women’s Risk of Homelessness: Background Paper - Exploring a growing problem*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney, April 2019, <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/age-discrimination/publications/older-womens-risk-homelessness-background-paper-2019>.
 - 4 K Rosier and M McDonald, *The relationship between transport and disadvantage in Australia*, Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2011, <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/relationship-between-transport-and-disadvantage-austr>.
 - 5 ACT Government, *ACT Wellbeing Framework*, Domains and indicators: Access and connectivity, ACT Government, Canberra, 2020, <https://www.act.gov.au/wellbeing/domains-and-indicators/access-and-connectivity>.
 - 6 Australian Institute of Family Studies, *Elder Abuse*, AIFS, Melbourne 2020, <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/elder-abuse/export>.

Testimonials

“As we enter a decade that will be focused on the way we care for and value our ageing population it is vital that we recognise the role family carers will make in supporting health, wellbeing, independence and in-home care. Family and friend carers are essential to ensuring the choices of aged people are respected and care is provided in ways that respect dignity. To support our ageing population, it is essential that we support family carers through the provision of respite and wellbeing activities” – Lisa Kelly, CEO, Carers ACT.

“The next ACT Government must focus on preparedness for COVID-19 and it should follow the recommendations coming out of the Aged Care Royal Commission. Alongside this, we support a focus on housing suitability for the older population, and the need to proactively support the mental health of older people living in aged care, both residential and at home.

“In addition to the building of all new housing in the ACT to universal design standards the ACT Government must ensure there are viable programs in place to ensure that existing housing can be modified to meet the needs of the growing numbers of people who wish to age in place. Commonwealth aged care funding has not yet identified the optimal way in which to fund modifications to the extent that they are needed, and this will result in people being prematurely admitted to residential care, against their wishes, because they do not have access to the funds to make their homes accessible and adapted to their needs” – Michael Bleasdale, CEO, ACT Disability Aged and Carer Advocacy Service (ADACAS).

“Canberra needs a plan for dedicated affordable rental accommodation for seniors. There is a growing number of senior Canberrans who are facing a real risk of homelessness due to their long-term rental properties being sold, or through unexpected life events. There is no emergency accommodation suitable for seniors and nothing where they can remain together as couples – this is vital where one is the carer for the other.

“Canberra has an increasing number of senior residents who have modest retirement income or savings but are falling into a gap in the system. This group has insufficient funds to buy or rent on the private market but too much to meet public or social housing eligibility criteria. Self-funded retirees can be penalised further by not having access to benefits available to pensioners even though their actual incomes may be similar. Those who do meet the eligibility criteria for public and social housing still face months or years of uncertainty on long waiting lists.

“Other states have facilities where seniors can live independently in retirement village style communities without the high upfront buy-in costs but paying rent. Mostly these are owned and run by not-for-profit organisations with a mission to support affordable housing but the lack of availability and high cost of land in Canberra has prevented this from happening here. There is a need for affordable rental accommodation and these small communities create a support network for the residents allowing them to remain relatively independent and active for longer” – Jenny Mobbs, CEO, Council on the Ageing ACT (COTA ACT).

“The need for adequate community transport is the backbone to supporting vulnerable people in our community to access essential services. If we had the additional funds to do so, we could transport so many more people for their medical, social and educational needs” – Jenny Kitchin, CEO, Woden Community Service.