

Miss Candice Burch MLA (Chair)  
Cc Ms Bec Cody MLA (Deputy Chair)  
Select Committee on Estimates 2019-2020

Via email: Ms Annemieke Jongsma (Secretary)  
LACommitteeEstimates@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Miss Burch

### **ACTCOSS Submission to the ACT Budget Estimates Process**

I am writing to provide the Select Committee on Estimates for 2019-20 with the questions we would like the committee to ask officials who appear before the hearings.

Issues and estimates questions relating to individual directorates, provided from our analysis and by our members, are at [Attachment A](#).

We are happy to appear before the Committee on these matters – please contact me on 02 6202 7200 or 0448 701 987.

This submission focusses on some key issues and questions ordered by directorate area, but for a complete broad analysis of the Budget, we would also refer you to our 2019-20 ACT Budget Snapshot which is accompanies this submission.

I have summarised below the ACTCOSS response to the 2019-20 Budget.

The Budget invests in responding to a number of recognised risks in the service system and delivers on several commitments made by the ACT Government to residents in the 2016 Election and subsequently. ACTCOSS commends the ACT Government for choosing to be ambitious about investing to meet the needs of a growing city, especially when it comes to health, justice and community facilities. There are a number of important investments in disability services, mental health programs, legal assistance, planning for better schools and community partnerships, transport infrastructure development, transitioning to a more sustainable energy supply, improved residential and commercial energy efficiency and continuing to reduce and respond better to sexual, domestic and family violence.

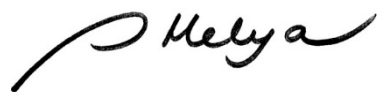
ACTCOSS looks at the Budget through the lens of people who experience exclusion, stigma and discrimination, which can marginalise them from mainstream services and systems and

create vulnerability to poor economic and social outcomes. That is why we consistently call for investment in social infrastructure.

There has been a significant investment in the built environment and government services that are needed in a city with a growing population. ACTCOSS' view is that the ACT has underinvested in growing social infrastructure which includes community support (including support tailored to groups that experience stigma, discrimination and marginalisation), community facilities, arts, culture, sport and recreation (in terms of diversity inclusion, cost of access and opportunity to engage), community development, (municipal level) and public and community transport (in terms of alignment of planning/design, needs analysis). The lack of investment in community development, preventative services, early intervention and addressing cost of living barriers to participation and engagement in the life of the city is a false economy. Increased supply of community facilities, more spaces for neighbourhood social connections and investment in community development that grows social capital are simple and relatively low-cost investments that are transformative because they increase people's ability to participate in their community, contribute to and benefit from strong social networks.

Overall, the Budget contains welcome investments in built infrastructure, justice, education, healthcare and housing. However, it invests primarily in ACT Government delivered services and programs and does not provide a commensurate level of investment in community-led services and policy development. Rebalancing this mix of investment will be a key priority for ACTCOSS advocacy over the next 12 months.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Helyar', written in a cursive style.

Susan Helyar  
Director

Email: [susan.helyar@actcoss.org.au](mailto:susan.helyar@actcoss.org.au)

7 June 2019

Attachment A

**Suggested questions for officials at the ACT Budget Estimates Committee 2019/20 hearings**

Area	Background for the Committee (as needed)	Questions for officials
<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives</b>	Our analysis shows the investment in specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander initiatives is in response to contact with the criminal justice and child protection systems.	When will Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people get access to resources or prevention of and early responses to adversity instead of tertiary level interventions?
<b>Families</b>	On 21 June 2018, the ACT Government announced the commencement of a 12-month trial of the Functional Family Therapy (FFT) program as a partnership between Gugan Gulwan and OzChild. The FFT program complements <i>A Step Up for Our Kids</i> , the ACT Government's five-year reform strategy for out of home care.	Will the Functional Family Therapy program be funded beyond the 12-month trial period? Will the program be continued long term?
<b>Hoarding and squalor programs</b>	WCS auspiced several Capital Health Network funded projects which aimed at building the capacity of the Canberra Living Conditions Network (CLCN) from 2014 - 2016.  Since these programs ceased WCS notes a gap in coordination squalor and hoarding programs and points to the need to provide a community response service for people living with hoarding. This would provide assistance to ACT Government directorates when they need to provide a regulated response to a hoarding crisis, build a supported team of workers and volunteers and collaborate and assist with existing services across Canberra	How does the government propose to fund and support programs assisting people both in private and public housing, who experience significant difficulties with hoarding?
<b>Housing</b>	Late last year ACTCOSS welcomed the announcement in the ACT Housing Strategy of a 15% inclusive zoning requirement in new greenfields and brownfields developments and \$100 million	Will the Minister establish a cross-sector oversight group for the affordable housing strategy to maintain stakeholder dialogue, to co-produce measures of progress, to validate reports or progress and leverage expertise

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	<p>investment in public housing which is now included in the 2019-20 ACT Budget.</p> <p>While this increase is positive, it is important that the ACT Government ensures that public housing stock keeps up with need in the ACT as our population grows and as more land is released for development. When viewed in comparison to the increase in households in the ACT, the current level of investment can be seen as more modest, and possibly as a reduction relative to the extent of land release.</p> <p>In implementing the ACT Housing Strategy, we have identified a need for monitoring capacity to ensure strategy targets are delivered. This includes monitoring progress towards the target of 15% of government land releases for public, community and affordable housing, including infill development and new suburbs. ACTCOSS has called for funding to establish and maintain non-government involvement and oversight via a formal mechanism for community, tenant and industry advice to the Minister for Housing. ACTCOSS has also identified a need for further investment in investigating, designing and implementing measures that will sustain the growth of community housing.</p> <p>While the headline figure of 15% of all future government land releases are for either public housing, affordable rental housing or affordable purchase opportunities is welcome less than 10% (less than 1.5% of the total) of that figure is actually for affordable <i>rental</i> housing.</p>	<p>and generate ideas for maximizing timeliness and cost effectiveness of delivery? If the current developmental Reference Group for the Strategy is to be repurposed to this task how will this group be reactivated and refreshed to be fit for purpose for the Strategy implementation and how will the community be informed and involved in its work?</p> <p>When will the 34 community housing sites targeted for the 2018 financial year, the 20 for the 2019 financial year and the 60 for the 2020 financial be made available to CHPs as none have been made available to date?</p> <p>What will the extent of price discounting or other subsidy be for community housing sites, given that even with access to long term low cost finance through the Federal government's National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation Community Housing Providers cannot develop and retain community housing dwellings for social and/or affordable rent absent a government subsidy?</p> <p>Given the rental affordability crisis within the ACT and Canberra having the highest median rent of any capital city in Australia, why is not a greater share than 1.5% allocated to directly address rental affordability?</p> <p>Why are CHPs not considered on par with other not-for-profit organisations that provide</p>

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		charitable services other than provision of community housing, in terms of being exempt from the requirement to pay rates?
<b>Education</b>	ACTCOSS is concerned that only \$4.19 million over four years has been allocated to delivering reforms associated with the Future of Education Strategy. ACTCOSS has seen some good work as a result of the strategy to date, such as the joint ACT Parents and Citizens Council and Education Directorate workshop on violence in schools. However, more funding is necessary to deliver on the strategy's equity focus. Achieving equity in education means putting in place holistic supports that build greater health and wellbeing for students within and outside the classroom.	<p>Is there money in the future of education rollout to fund community school partnerships so community expertise is used to address support needs of students and teachers can be free to focus on classroom learning?</p> <p>How will progress towards the Future of Education goals be evaluated?</p> <p>What mental health and wellbeing supports will be available outside school hours and school terms?</p> <p>How will teachers and frontline community services in the domestic and family violence space be supported to progress any concerns about family violence in the context of the Safer Families Package?</p>
<b>Alcohol and other Drug Treatment Services</b>	ACTCOSS welcomes approximately \$7.6 million over four years for the delivery of specialist and alcohol and other drug treatment. ACTCOSS notes that 90% of clinical AOD providers are from the NGO sector, including the most intensive interventions, hence would like to see these investments in government services matched by investment in community-managed services that	Giving particular consideration to the ACT Health Directorate's responsibility for developing strategic policy and stewardship of the health system, how will the government

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	<p>could potentially deliver better value for money.</p> <p>Where funding is provided for the Health Directorate we would welcome more detail on plans to enhance delivery capacity, transparency and accountability in the rollout of treatment components.</p> <p>Good community oversight is also important for the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2018-21.</p>	<p>a) Enhance delivery capacity, transparency and accountability, into ACT Health's management of the welcome increase to specialist and other drug treatment funding made available in the 2019/20 Budget?;</p> <p>b) Involve non-government organisations in the rollout of the treatment components of specialist and other drug funding allocated in the 2019/20 Budget?; and going forward</p> <p>c) Facilitate good community oversight into prioritisation of activities, implementation and evaluation of the ACT Drug Strategy Action Plan 2018-21?</p>
<b>Transport</b>	<p>We note that the Budget papers include a further year of funding for the flexible bus service at a cost of \$866,000 in 2019-20 but no funding in the later years. Flexible buses are an important social inclusion and transport option for low-income and vulnerable people who otherwise lack access to transport. We believe that there needs to be ongoing funding for the flexible bus service.</p> <p>ACTCOSS's submissions to the Budget Process have urged the Government to consider adequate funding and resourcing of community transport as part of the ACT mass transit system. We have called the Government to give serious consideration to transport disadvantage issues including developing a business case for making public transport free.</p>	<p>Why is the flexible bus service funded only year by year and why is community transport funded from service delivery rather than from the Transport portfolio?</p> <p>Will the Government consider developing a triple bottom line business case for the provision of free public transport (including community transport) in the ACT?</p> <p>How will the Government ensure community transport continues to be available to all who need of it outside of those eligible for an individualised funding package through Commonwealth initiatives like the NDIS or an aged care package?</p>
<b>Seniors</b>	<p>The only initiatives associated with seniors in the budget are associated with healthcare, palliative care and Seniors Week.</p>	<p>When will government invest in non-acute services and infrastructure that enables</p>

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	Currently the focus is on health services not on the determinants of a good life as people get more constrained incomes, have increased caring responsibilities and become more frail.	people to age well and live a good life in our city as people have less income, pick up additional caring responsibilities, adapt to changes in health and disability status and are at risk of social isolation.?
<b>Legal Assistance Services</b>	Current levels of funding do not allow Community Legal Centres to cover increased costs of operation especially around ERO obligations.	When will Legal assistance services get access to sufficient resources to maintain current service delivery, grow to meet additional demand?
<b>Mental Health Services</b>	ACTCOSS welcomes the investment of \$24.2 million in mental health funding over the next four years. These investments will target known gaps and challenges, however, we highlight that more of the investments in clinical supports should also be complemented by investments in much-needed community-based psycho-social supports. This includes low threshold community-based supports available over a reasonable time period.	What investment will be made to grow the mental health workforce and improve knowledge given significant skills gaps and shortages?
<b>People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds</b>		What resources will be made available to improve pathways to attaining qualifications and getting work for women from CALD backgrounds who face significant barriers to gaining skills and entry to paid work?
<b>Community facilities</b>	The Budget includes investments in a new Community Centre for Woden town centre and three community centres refurbishments	What is the methodology for deciding where community facilities go and how will community expertise be brought into that decision making process earlier? When will municipal level community development investments be strengthened in the ACT?

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<p><b>Energy costs</b></p>	<p>High costs of living are a massive issue in Canberra for people living on incomes in the bottom 40% quintiles. ACTCOSS research has found 25,500 people experience food stress, and people in the bottom 20% income group spend double the proportion of their income on fuel for their car and up to three times the proportion of their income on energy bills.</p> <p>In 2017 following a significant increase in electricity and gas prices both ActewAGL and the ACT Government contributed funds (\$50,000 each) to establish an energy support program, which included offering customers a \$100 voucher off their current bill.</p> <p>In 2018 the funding was continued and the voucher eligibility changed from one off to an annual voucher.</p> <p>The program has been highly successful and the vouchers enormously beneficial to people on modest incomes. Ongoing funding in the Budget is not apparent</p> <p>This year ActewAGL has agreed in principle to continue to fund Care's energy education program. They do however rely on contributions from the ACT Government to continue to offer vouchers. There did not appear to be anything in the budget in relation to this.</p>	<p>Will the ACT Government continue a funding contribution to ActewAGL energy vouchers?</p> <p>What work will be done on energy education to enable consumers to cope with the cost of living?</p> <p>Will community organisations be able to access the energy efficiency subsidies for multiple sites rather than only one subsidy per entity?</p>



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<p><b>People with disabilities</b></p>	<p>The Budget does not include additional resourcing for the National Disability Strategy.</p> <p>The Budget does not include identified funding to progress the actions on Universal housing design identified in the Parliamentary Agreement.</p> <p>While there is considerable investment in the budget in social infrastructure, there is no guarantee that this infrastructure will be designed and built so as to be fully accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.</p> <p>Peak groups have called for a body to co-ordinate consideration of access issues in the planning and approval of new developments as well as a structure for consultation with the disability community on Government developments such as new schools, hospitals and community facilities.</p> <p>The Budget does not contain any initiatives to implement those recommendations of the ACT Legislative Assembly’s inquiry into the employment of people with disabilities which have not been implemented.</p> <p>The NDIS transition Integrated Service Response Program was announced in the 2018-19 ACT Budget. Program funding is continued through ‘Maintaining support for disability services in the transition to the full scheme National Disability Insurance Scheme’ in the 2019-20 ACT Budget.</p> <p>The funding varies across the out years \$10.79 million in 2019/20, \$7,10 million in 20/21 and \$9,86 in 2021/22 and \$12.8 million in 2022/23</p>	<p>How will the Government progress the National Disability Strategy?</p> <p>What mechanisms will the government use to incorporate lived experience from people with accessibility needs into urban planning to address disability access issues?</p> <p>When will the Government progress the action items on Universal Housing Design highlighted in the parliamentary agreement?</p> <p>How will the ACT Public Service Inclusion Employment Program incorporate the recommendations from the Standing Committee on Health, Ageing and Community Services Inquiry into the Employment of People with Disabilities?</p> <p>Why is there less money for the NDIS Intensive Service Response Program in the initial out years? How will access to and spending of these funds be reported?</p>

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<b>Justice</b>	<p>The Budget includes a package of investments in the justice reinvestment area including more supported housing for better justice outcomes – especially for women and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander detainees; improving rehabilitation options for detainees at the Alexander Maconochie Centre; bail support accommodation; staff training; and work to prevent recidivism.</p> <p>The Environmental Defender’s Office (EDO) received \$75,000 to fund core services in 2019-20. This is approximately half of the EDO’s 2018-19 funding levels</p> <p>\$34.3 million has been allocated to over 60 new ACT Policing personnel. This investment is directed towards a new model of policing focused on prevention and reducing recidivism.</p>	<p>When will the new re-integration centre obtain the capacity to include women?</p> <p>Will diversity training be provided to AMC staff especially around working with people with disability?</p> <p>Why has funding to the Environmental Defenders Office been halved when the Government has declared a climate emergency?</p> <p>What input will the community have in designing, implementing and setting evaluation criteria for the new policing model?</p>
<b>Volunteering</b>	<p>According to data released by the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC), there were over 9,300 volunteers supporting over 300 ACT community service charities in 2016.</p>	<p>When can we expect to see funding to implement the ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan 2018-2021 and funding in service contracts to cover costs of volunteer engagement, management and ensuring compliance?</p> <p>Can we ensure that faster processing times for WWV people cards for staff do not increase the waiting times for organisations reliant on volunteers?</p>

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<b>Carer supports</b>	The Budget includes \$39.75 million over four years to support sustainable out of home care (OOHC) placements.	<p>In what ways will this funding address the concerns raised by foster and kinship carers in the 2018 Carer Wellbeing Survey? In particular how will it address the factors which cause stress for carers, increase carers feeling heard and being involved in decisions and how will it increase carer wellbeing, resilience and ability to maintain their caring role and thus increase the stability of placements?</p> <p>What performance indicators will be linked to this funding and how will agencies be accountable to these indicators?</p> <p>What proportion of this funding will go to service delivery and supports for carers and children and young people in care? What proportion will go to administrative costs or overheads? What proportion will go to evaluation and planning?</p> <p>How will this funding stabilize placements in real terms and how will effectiveness be measured?</p>
<b>Rates and hardship</b>	ACTCOSS notes the initiative to strengthen fairness in revenue collection. We urge the ACT Government to ensure that these measures also acknowledge financial hardship and incorporate best practice in relation to identifying people experiencing hardship and providing respectful, effective assistance and support.	What reporting of financial hardship and responses to this will be implemented to build community confidence in our transition to a new tax mix?