



Submission:

ACTCOSS Budget Priorities 2020-21

Delivering on unmet needs from 2016-19

October 2019

About ACTCOSS

ACTCOSS acknowledges Canberra has been built on the land of the Ngunnawal people. We pay respects to their Elders and recognise the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contribution to the ACT community.

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (ACTCOSS) advocates for social justice and represents not-for-profit community organisations in the ACT.

ACTCOSS is a member of the nationwide COSS Network, made up of each of the state and territory Councils and the national body, the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS).

ACTCOSS' vision is for Canberra to be a just, safe and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services.

The membership of the Council includes the majority of community-based service providers in the social welfare area, a range of community associations and networks, self-help and consumer groups and interested individuals.

ACTCOSS advises that this document may be publicly distributed, including by placing a copy on our website.

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Acronyms

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTCOSS	ACT Council of Social Service Inc.
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMC	Alexander Maconochie Centre
AOD	alcohol and other drugs
ERO	Equal Remuneration Order
CASP	Community Assistance and Support Program
HCCA	Health Care Consumers' Association
ICT	information and communications technology
NDIA	National Disability Insurance Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
SDFVS	sexual, domestic and family violence support

Introduction

The 2020-21 ACT Budget is an important one for the ACT.

It will be the last Budget prior to the next ACT election, meaning that there is an expectation and opportunity to finalise policy commitments made in the last 12 months, to realise a range of ambitions set at the beginning of the 9th Assembly for the ACT and to chart a responsible, progressive and forward-looking foundation for the future.

ACTCOSS expects that the coming Budget will:

- Match investments in government-provided service delivery with an ambition and focus for developing, enhancing and improving resources for service delivery by non-government organisations
- Focus on investing in prevention and early intervention
- Finalise the delivery and completion of unfinished, partially implemented or non-implemented commitments by the ALP during the 2016 election and commitments included in the 2016-20 Parliamentary Agreement
- Begin work to reset the relationship as a reliable partner to the community sector by committing to investment in the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026.

This submission provides a recap of the community sector's asks and responses from the 2019-20 ACT Budget.

This submission outlines priority investments that can be made in 2020-21 to deliver on commitments from this term of government and that will lay important groundwork to respond effectively to the causes and consequences of deprivation and exclusion experienced by people in Canberra now, to prevent these harms in the future and grow wellbeing for all people who live in the ACT.

Overview

ACTCOSS acknowledges that the ACT Government has delivered on a number of 2016 election promises. Over several Budgets, ACTCOSS has commended 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 urban development.

The ACT Government delivered on ACTCOSS's call for \$100 million to be invested in public housing and for increased supply of affordable housing in all developments. Important investments have been made 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. Some of these investments have grown resourcing to non-government organisations that provide services. On balance, there has been a larger growth in resourcing to ACT Government provided services.

Near the end of the 2016-20 term, it is appropriate to undertake a review of whether the ACT Government has delivered on community expectations regarding delivery of election and Parliamentary Agreement commitments, to highlight where focus is needed to more fully meet community expectations and to identify key areas of unfinished business.

During this term of government there has been better recognition of the value of the community sector as a driver of human capital development, jobs growth and economic activity. But the government has not provided any investment in the implementation of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026. This strategy includes commitments to improving the infrastructure available to the community sector (including buildings, fleet and ICT), but the recently announced ACT Infrastructure Plan (<https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/act-infrastructure-plan>) does not mention the strategy and there are no infrastructure investment commitments specific to non-government community service provision.

List of recommendations

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander self-determination

Recommendation 1: Fund housing provision by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation.

Recommendation 2: Fund Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led policy and service development.

Recommendation 3: Fund establishment of a Ngunnawal Language Centre to revive and teach Ngunnawal language.

Recommendation 4: Fund development of a Ngunnawal Youth Culture Program.

Recommendation 5: Invest in a specialist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service for women escaping and recovering from sexual, domestic and/or family violence.

Adequate funding for non-government provided community services

Recommendation 6: Include ERO supplementation funding in base funding of all funding agreements, from July 2020 onwards.

Recommendation 7: Increase funding to non-government delivered services to fully cover the costs of award wages, workforce development requirements, fit-for-purpose facilities, fleet and ICT infrastructure and provision for ongoing investment in organisation and workforce development that enables high quality, effective, accountable service provision.

Community facilities and community development

Recommendation 8: Fund an in-depth community needs assessment for both built infrastructure and community development services targeting specific communities, that would be tailored to demographic characteristics of every region including levels of disadvantage and the current availability and distribution of facilities and services.

ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026

Recommendation 9: Invest \$600,000 in the implementation of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026.

Disability

Recommendation 10: Invest in mental health service availability and infrastructure within and beyond the NDIS including maintaining the Integrated Service Response and increase access to complaints resolution for people with psychosocial disability navigating the NDIS.

Recommendation 11: Invest in measures to provide continuity in certain circumstances for people with NDIS inactive plans including where there is a dispute between an ACT participant and the NDIA regarding plan continuation.

Recommendation 12: Invest in implementation of commitments made by the ACT Government in the National Disability Strategy including tangible measures on Universal Housing Design, improved health service responses and implementation of the recommendations of the inquiry into employment of people with disabilities.

Recommendation 13: Fund an access taskforce that will ensure development of housing, transport, social and community infrastructure is accessible to people with a range of physical and cognitive disabilities and is tested by lived experience.

Recommendation 14: Fund recommendations in the People With Disabilities ACT submission to the 2020-21 Budget related to energy costs, transport provision gaps, social inclusion and service gaps for young people.

Education

Recommendation 15: Fund implementation of key recommendations from the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs' report on the Management and Minimisation of Bullying and Violence in ACT Schools.

Recommendation 16: Invest in community-based services that can offer and sustain support to students within schools, outside the school gates and outside school terms.

Environment

Recommendation 17: Invest in protection and enhancement of biodiversity, natural habitat protection and high amenity green spaces.

Recommendation 18: Fund community advocates who provide support for low-income, small business and community organisation customers to participate in energy policy and regulatory decisions, and to contribute to development and implementation of the ACT Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and Action Plans.

Recommendation 19: Fund workers representative organisations to lead and contribute to consultation and transition for workers in industries affected by a transition away from carbon polluting production and related services.

Family and children's services

Recommendation 20: Increase investment in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations so they can increase resources to continue their work with families, including extended families, to prevent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people from entering the out-of-home care system.

Recommendation 21: Increase funding for advocacy for children, young people and families.

Recommendation 22: Extend funding for out-of-home care to the age of 21 and invest in after-care support that provides support to young people once an out-of-home care order has ended.

Recommendation 23: Invest in improved supply of and support for carers in the out-of-home care system.

Health

Recommendation 24: Invest in non-government provided clinical health care services and community support services that improve health status, increase access to health services and reduce unnecessary contact with tertiary level health services.

Recommendation 25: Invest in the development and implementation of a disability and health strategy.

Recommendation 26: Invest in addressing gaps once post-hospital support falls away, especially for those in the pre-assessment period for a My Aged Care package.

Housing and homelessness

Recommendation 27: Fund development of Housing First/rapid rehousing models for people who are experiencing homelessness, invest in a specialist youth homelessness service and increase funding to address the unmet housing needs of groups identified in the Cohort Study.

Recommendation 28: Grow funding to the community housing sector.

Recommendation 29: Invest in specialist homelessness services.

Recommendation 30: Fund human rights compliant mental health specific supported housing.

Recommendation 31: Fund, establish and maintain non-government involvement and oversight of implementation of the ACT Housing Strategy via a formal mechanism for community, tenant and industry advice to the Minister for Housing.

Justice

Recommendation 32: Expand funding for justice-focused programs that improve community safety by preventing offending and reducing reoffending by investing in employment, health, disability support, legal assistance and financial literacy programs for people who are at risk of or have had contact with the criminal justice system.

Recommendation 33: Fund a community-based justice reform advocacy service that can engage with key stakeholders, analyse and synthesise the evidence base relevant to justice, law and corrections system reform, address gaps in the ACT evidence base via consultation and research, and share insights from practitioners outside of government with government advisors and decision makers.

Recommendation 34: Invest in measures and oversight frameworks to deliver on the targets to reduce recidivism.

Mediation and conflict resolution services

Recommendation 35: Invest in prevention and early intervention via conflict resolution and generalist counselling services to promote community cohesion, safety, restorative practices and individual, family and community wellbeing.

Mental health

Recommendation 36: Invest in mental health prevention and early intervention services, and non-government provided services that promote recovery and wellbeing for people who experience mental ill health.

Responding to financial hardship

Recommendation 37: Provide ongoing certainty of funding for reducing financial hardship for low-income households beyond those already eligible for Centrelink-defined concession.

Recommendation 38: Increase funding to financial counselling services to meet demand.

Recommendation 39: Introduce an income-based approach to charging ACT Government fines, fees and other charges.

Transport

Recommendation 40: Invest in community transport at sustainable levels with long-term funding continuity so that providers can upgrade, renew and replace vehicle stock and plan across a multi-year timeframe.

Recommendation 41: Provide sufficient funding to ensure community transport is available to all who need of it, which includes: people eligible for an individualised funding package through Commonwealth initiatives like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or an aged care package; women with young children or family members needing mobility assistance, who are primary carers and do not own a private vehicle; or people who do not have a driver's licence and/or own a private vehicle or who are unable to use public transport because of mental health issues.

Recommendation 42: Fund a comprehensive community needs assessment ensure transport design, planning, integration and implementation addresses the needs of those with transport disadvantage across both on-demand and mass transit systems. This work should ensure that transport investments keep up with urban infill, growth and group centre redesign and that this is done with lived experience input from those with the greatest level of transport disadvantage.

Recommendation 43: Fund proactive lived experience testing to be routinely included in transport redesign processes.

Recommendation 44: Improve the fairness and adequacy of transport related concessions by extending concessions to learner, probationary and restricted driver's licences, aligning the discount on licence fees for Health Care Card holders (currently 50% of costs) with Pension Card Holders (100%).

Volunteering

Recommendation 45: Fund implementation of the ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan 2018-2021 and elements of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026 that relate to volunteering, and ensure funding of service delivery contracts between the ACT Government and non-government organisations includes provision for costs of volunteer engagement, management and ensuring compliance with regulatory and quality requirements.

Women

Recommendation 46: Invest in a specialist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service for women escaping and recovering from sexual, domestic and/or family violence.

Recommendation 47: Fund primary prevention and consent education tailored to diverse populations, including Respectful Relationships education in early childhood, primary, secondary and college education settings for all staff and students. These should be implemented at a minimum standard across the ACT, and community organisations should be adequately resourced to deliver these programs.

Recommendation 48: Secure additional funding to implement recommendations from the 2019 ACT Women's Summit. ACTCOSS supports the YWCA Canberra recommendations on investment needs in their submission to the 2020-21 ACT Budget.

Recommendation 49: Increase investment in reducing and responding more effectively to sexual, domestic and family violence beyond the investment in the Safer Families Levy.

Recommendation 50: Fund provision of community sector workforce learning and development regarding domestic and family violence and trauma-informed models of care and practice, that is consistent with the investment in ACT Government worker learning and development on these topics.

Delivery on priorities from community sector Budget submissions in 2016-19

Our 2019-20 ACT Budget Priorities identified the need for new investment in areas across all ACT Government portfolios. The 2019-20 ACT Budget responded to a number of recognised risks in the service system and delivered 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 housing, health, justice and urban development.

Our members appreciate that government has difficult trade-offs and choices and has made decisions that include revenue raising and the placement of the ACT Government balance sheet into temporary deficit in order to fund improvements in social infrastructure and some service priorities. For continued community trust to be maintained through these trade-offs, ACTCOSS members are keen to see evidence of adequate resourcing for community-based, non-government delivered services.

We outline below where the 2020-21 ACT Budget should prioritise investment that will deliver on community sector priorities.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander self-determination

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, we welcomed 15 new initiatives to meet the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, we noted that 12 of them are linked to contact with the criminal justice or care and protection systems.

We welcomed children, youth and families investments including \$1.74 million over four years to strengthen services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

We welcomed investment of \$1.1 million over the next four years to implement the ACT Strategic Priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2019-2028. We also welcomed \$300,000 in 2019-20 to co-design and plan the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Drug Residential Rehabilitation Facility, to complement existing services including the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm.

There remains a need for greater investment that supports Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander self-determination in the ACT. Broader investment in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander housing must be a priority given the significant over-representation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT experiencing or at risk of homelessness and living in households experiencing over-crowding and housing stress.

Recommendation 1 – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander controlled community housing provision

Fund housing provision by an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation.

This funding should include specialist supported housing for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women, men, and families in the ACT. There is a specific and urgent need to provide specialist supported housing for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women in the ACT aligned with the model of care developed by Beryl Women Inc. This investment in a specialist supported housing model would also incorporate supported accommodation for male and female Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) detainees to transition back into the ACT community.

Recommendation 2 – Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led policy and service development

Fund Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led policy and service development.

This funding should include:

- A 'single point' of planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander policy and coordination within the ACT Government, with authority and resources to work across all portfolios
- Consulting with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations on how to make the AMC human rights compliant in accordance with its original vision
- Continuing and bolstering funding for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community controlled autonomous, holistic health and wellbeing services at the AMC
- Adequate funding and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community control of community facilities
- Adequate funding and community control of the social health and community programs, policy development, research and advocacy, training and community events.

Recommendation 3 – Ngunnawal Language Centre

Fund establishment of a Ngunnawal Language Centre to revive and teach Ngunnawal language.

This investment would support Ngunnawal Elders to revive, learn, and teach Ngunnawal language by providing sufficient resources for the engagement of linguists and teaching staff, undertaking research, developing teaching resources, providing dedicated facilities, and providing support for people wanting to learn Ngunnawal language.

Recommendation 4 – Ngunnawal Youth Culture Program

Fund development of a Ngunnawal Youth Culture Program.

This investment would support Ngunnawal Elders to develop, implement and oversee a program to bring young Ngunnawal people together to develop and learn a Ngunnawal corroboree (performance dance).

The investment would provide for the cost of a program coordinator and choreographer, support for Elder and youth involvement, as well as access to facilities. This program would seek to promote healing as well as develop young Ngunnawal leaders.

The program would involve a major, annual performance event or gathering that would promote reconciliation and healing between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people. The Ngunnawal Youth Cultural Program would also include a social enterprise element, whereby Ngunnawal dancers would receive payment for performing at the annual event as well as at other events throughout the year.

We also note the need to invest in specialist responses for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service for women escaping and recovering from sexual, domestic and/or family violence.

Recommendation 5 – Specialist SDFVS service

Invest in a specialist Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service for women escaping and recovering from sexual, domestic and/or family violence.

Adequate funding for non-government provided community services

The economic and population data guiding the 2019-20 Budget projected population growth of 1.75% per annum from 2019-20 to 2022-23¹, gross state product growth between 3.0% to 3.5% per annum², and wages growth between 2.5% to 3.0% per annum³.

These figures do not accurately reflect the growth experienced in the community sector which has absorbed cumulative wages growth of between 23% and 45% which has led to an estimated gap of around 27% between funding increases and wages increases driven by the Equal Remuneration Order (ERO), the national wage case each year and a shift to a workforce with higher qualifications⁴.

The funding gap will become even greater if the supplementation funding provided to some organisations during the transition period for the ERO is not included in base funding in 2020-21.

Recommendation 6 – ERO supplementation funding

Include ERO supplementation funding in base funding of all funding agreements, from July 2020 onwards.

Recommendation 7 – Funding to fully cover costs

Increase funding to non-government delivered services to fully cover the costs of award wages, workforce development requirements, fit-for-purpose facilities, fleet and ICT infrastructure and provision for ongoing investment in organisation and workforce development that enables high quality, effective, accountable service provision.

- 1 ACT Government, *ACT Budget 2019-2020, Budget Outlook, Budget Paper No. 3*, Canberra, June 2019, p.16, viewed 14 November 2019
<https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1369831/Budget-Paper-3-Budget-Outlook-2019-20.pdf>.
- 2 ACT Government, *ACT Budget 2019-2020, Budget Outlook, Budget Paper No. 3*, Canberra, June 2019, p.12, viewed 14 November 2019,
<https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1369831/Budget-Paper-3-Budget-Outlook-2019-20.pdf>.
- 3 ACT Government, *ACT Budget 2019-2020, Budget Outlook, Budget Paper No. 3*, Canberra, June 2019, pp.14-15, viewed 14 November 2019,
<https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1369831/Budget-Paper-3-Budget-Outlook-2019-20.pdf>.
- 4 These figures are calculated based on the published increases of the ERO at two levels (SCHADS 4.1 and SCHADS 6.1) added to the wage index from Fair Work and compared to the published increases of community sector funding indexation.

Community facilities and community development

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, we welcomed investment in: community facilities; arts, culture, sport and recreation; the redesign of group centres to prioritise renewal of social infrastructure; and the Community Development Network ACT (CDNet). This included funding to start work on a new community centre for Woden and deliver upgrades to three other local community centres.

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 and contribute to and benefit from strong social networks. We have emphasised that planning for a smart city should focus on interventions that support those who need the most support to participate and should join up urban renewal, community facilities planning, transport and digital infrastructure.

While the investments in 2016-19 – and the prioritisation of community facilities in the narrative about infrastructure development – are very welcome, going forward we need to grow the funding of community development workers alongside physical infrastructure so that communities can grow and sustain themselves with good levels of resilience, wellbeing and neighbourhood voice.

Recommendation 8 – In-depth community needs assessment

Fund an in-depth community needs assessment for both built infrastructure and community development services targeting specific communities, that would be tailored to demographic characteristics of every region including levels of disadvantage and the current availability and distribution of facilities and services.

This needs analysis would inform the quantum, forms and sequencing of investment in 2020-24 in:

- Municipal government-style community development available across the city and consistently over time, building on the successful (but time and scope limited) work by the Linking into New Communities Taskforce and Mingle Program. This could be achieved via establishment of dedicated teams in every region of Canberra of community development coordinators and workers. These workers would be based within community organisations who could work in partnership with ACT Government agencies and officials to improve community amenity, engagement and cohesion
- Requirements/incentives for developers to build community infrastructure into new developments, especially in medium density settings
- Involving community development workers and volunteers, residents, community councils and community organisations representing

communities of interest (e.g. newly arrived communities and language communities) in the development of a policy framework and investment model for long-term provision of fit-for-purpose community facilities across the city. This would include community leaders and the ACT Government agreeing on the priorities for community facilities and service development. These priorities would guide Directorates leading urban planning and those leading service planning and ensure a coordinated, strategic approach to long-term planning and short-term development of facilities and services

- Dedicated policy capacity and resources within ACT Government, such as a community development coordinator who could work with both ACT Government and community stakeholders to collaborate on social planning activities (e.g. group centre or master plans) and foster community development assets within ACT Government (e.g. via public libraries).

ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026

ACTCOSS worked in partnership with the ACT Government to engage the sector to develop the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026. Valuable work has been undertaken in the partial implementation of the ACT Community Services Industry Workforce Plan 2017-2021. ACTCOSS has welcomed the work of ACT Government through the Early Support initiative and its engagement with the sector on Commissioning for Social Impact. However, the 2019-20 Budget prioritised investment in public administration and industries other than community services.

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, the ACT Government prioritised diversification of the economy. While noting the health care and social assistance industry is the second largest industry for employment in the ACT, with the highest expected rate of growth, the government did not invest in community services industry development. The community services industry is part of the health care and social assistance industry and provides vital services to the Canberra community. It contributes to development of human capital (within the workforce and also by providing services that address disadvantage and exclusion, overcoming barriers to economic participation and productivity) in addition to improving social wellbeing in the ACT.

In 2020-21, ACTCOSS wants to see the beginning of a multi-year commitment to investment in community services industry development via an initial allocation of \$600,000 by the ACT Government to implement commitments made when signing on to the Industry Strategy in 2016.

Recommendation 9 – ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026

Invest \$600,000 in the implementation of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026.

Disability

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, ACTCOSS welcomed the investment of an additional \$40.57 million over four years to support people with disability by maintaining the:

- Children and Young People's Equipment Loan Scheme
- Child Development Service
- ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme
- Rehabilitation, Aged and Community Care
- Integrated Service Response Program.

Recommendation 10 – Mental health service availability and infrastructure

Invest in mental health service availability and infrastructure within and beyond the NDIS including maintaining the Integrated Service Response and increase access to complaints resolution for people with psychosocial disability navigating the NDIS.

Recommendation 11 – Continuity supports for people with inactive NDIS plans in certain circumstances

Invest in measures to provide continuity in certain circumstances for people with NDIS inactive plans including where there is a dispute between an ACT participant and the NDIA regarding plan continuation.

This investment would:

- Ensure that people with disability continue to receive key disability supports as well as advocacy during a plan review period
- Improve information flows about inactive plans and gap supports to advocacy agencies and appropriately resource responses.

Recommendation 12 – Invest in National Disability Strategy implementation

Invest in implementation of commitments made by the ACT Government in the National Disability Strategy including tangible measures on Universal Housing Design, improved health service responses and implementation of the recommendations of the inquiry into employment of people with disabilities.

Recommendation 13 – Access taskforce for urban planning and development

Fund an access taskforce that will ensure development of housing, transport, social and community infrastructure is accessible to people with a range of physical and cognitive disabilities and is tested by lived experience.

Recommendation 14 – Costs, transport, inclusion and service gaps

Fund recommendations in the People With Disabilities ACT submission to the 2020-21 ACT Budget related to energy costs, transport provision gaps, social inclusion and service gaps for young people.

Education

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, ACTCOSS was pleased to see increased investment in school and early childhood services as our population grows. We welcomed expenditure dedicated to delivering new schools and expanding those that are currently overstretched.

We welcomed the \$1.7 million committed over two years to funding the first phase of the ACT Early Childhood Strategy.

We acknowledged the significant investment of \$41.58 million funding over four years for greater support to meet individual student needs, supporting 92 full-time learning professionals and support staff to assist students with additional needs such as students with a disability.

Our concern is that students should have access to mental health and wellbeing supports outside school hours and school terms. We would like to see funding for student mental health care that is not tied to individual schools and which can therefore support students at challenging times throughout their education journey, such as during transitions from primary to high school or high school to college.

Recommendation 15 – Bullying and violence in schools

Fund implementation of key recommendations from the Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs' report on the Management and Minimisation of Bullying and Violence in ACT Schools.

This investment would fund:

- The ACT Government to partner with community agencies to provide independent support and guidance to students and their families when preparing for a formal restorative conference following incidents of bullying or violence
- The ACT Government to employ fulltime social workers and youth workers in every ACT school
- The ACT Government to continue to recruit additional school psychologists and provide psychological support services outside school hours and in school holidays.

Recommendation 16 – Community based services to support students in schools

Invest in community-based services that can offer and sustain support to students within schools, outside the school gates and outside school terms.

This investment would fund:

- Adequately resourcing community organisations to work effectively within schools – rather than only funding engagement officers within the school gate
- More effectively working with other Directorates, particularly Justice and Community Safety, to better contribute to early intervention and prevention work from a whole-of-family community justice perspective
- Extend the Schools Climate and Satisfaction Survey to year 4 and add additional issues to spark early intervention approaches and address issues before they become entrenched, through early intervention and well before the age of 14. ACTCOSS supports the Families ACT submission's detailed recommendation on this matter.

Environment

Recommendation 17 – Invest in habitat, biodiversity and green space

Invest in protection and enhancement of biodiversity, natural habitat protection and high amenity green spaces.

This investment would fund:

- A long-term plan for sustaining biodiversity and protecting ecological values in addition to emissions reduction and climate change adaptation measures
- A long-term, integrated, Territory-wide plan for controlling weeds and invasive species, and for effective stewardship over time
- Maintaining and extending high value shared green spaces in urban renewal and suburban development, beyond current parks and playgrounds
- Appropriately recognising and resourcing the role of environmental workers, rangers and researchers. Additional rangers are required due to policies around biodiversity offsets, which are stretching their capacity. Reserve areas are growing due to these kinds of policies, but the capability is not.

Recommendation 18 – Fund community advocacy for climate mitigation

Fund community advocates who provide support to low-income, small business and community organisation customers to participate in energy policy and regulatory decisions, and contribute to development and implementation of the ACT Climate Change Mitigation Strategy and Action Plans

Recommendation 19 – Fund workers representatives to support transition

Fund workers representative organisations to lead and contribute to consultation and transition for workers in industries affected by a transition away from carbon polluting production and related services.

Family and children's services

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, we welcomed the investment in improving frontline services through the Safer Families Levy by:

- Delivering family-centred responses for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families impacted by family violence
- Extending the Family Safety Hub legal services pilot
- Extending the Room4Change program to help prevent family violence

- Reducing the risk of deaths from family violence
- Training ACT Government frontline workers to respond to family violence.

We welcomed children, youth and families investments including \$1.74 million over four years to strengthen services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people. We were pleased to see that this investment went towards continuing to implement the Our Booris, Our Way review and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principles within policy, practice and training. We also welcomed the significant investment of \$39.75 million over four years to support sustainable out of home care (OOHC) placements.

Recommendation 20 – Increase investment to prevent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people entering out-of-home care

Increase investment in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait community controlled organisations so they can increase resources to continue their work with families, including extended families, to prevent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people from entering the out-of-home care system.

This investment would fund:

- Developing the capacity of non-Indigenous carers to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in their care to have cultural support. This may be in the form of an Indigenous Foster Care Support Program that supports non-Indigenous carers to access and/or provide cultural supports for children and young people in their care
- Providing culture camps for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children and young people in out-of-home care that would address the need for both cultural connection for kids and respite for carers. The programs would be built on a strengths-based approach and be delivered by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations
- Increasing staffing and professional development support to reduce the overloading of caseworkers and burnout of staff.

Recommendation 21 – Advocacy for children, young people and families

Increase funding for advocacy for children, young people and families.

This investment would fund:

- Advocacy by services delivered by non-government organisations including peak bodies and community service providers
- The Children and Young People Commissioner and Public Advocate to provide advocacy, safeguards and protection for children and young people in and exiting out-of-home care.

Recommendation 22 – Out-of-home care and after-care support

Extend funding for out-of-home care to the age of 21 and invest in after-care support that provides support to young people once an out-of-home care order has ended.

This investment would fund:

- Consultation with young people to inform development of the ACT after-care policy
- Young people in care, in consultation with their foster parents, provided the option to voluntarily remain in their care until age 21
- A personal case worker/mentor to help link them with education, training and job opportunities and to support their health and wellbeing
- Safe, secure and supported independent living for young people leaving care, especially those exiting residential care, who cannot or choose not to take the voluntary extension of foster care supports.

Recommendation 23 – Carers and out-of-home care support

Invest in improved supply of and support for carers in the out-of-home care system.

This investment would fund:

- Addressing challenges to the recruitment of carers, and the need for greater support for current and new carers
- Being more responsive to the needs of carers, particularly kinship carers including via increased access to respite for carers
- Increasing access to training and financial support for carers.

Health

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, we welcomed a number of investments in hospitals, walk-in centres, and a range of population health initiatives – these

included initiatives for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health, LGBTIQ+ health, palliative care, perinatal services and mental health.

Recommendation 24 – Clinical health and community support

Invest in non-government provided clinical health care services and community support services that improve health status, increase access to health services and reduce unnecessary contact with tertiary level health services.

This investment would fund:

- Responding better to the non-clinical needs of people with poor social determinants of health and lower health status than the average in the ACT, including through the Community Assistance and Support Program (CASP)
- Preventative health interventions that improve the social determinants of health, for example, food security
- Trauma-informed practice and service design training for government and non-government workers, especially in the community-based mental health sector, and with health professionals working in Canberra's emergency departments and hospital-based mental health services. This is not approaching completion and needs prioritisation, as does the Safe Wards implementation
- Reproductive health – affordability and availability of contraception continues to be an issue, and access to services such as abortion can be out of reach despite legality
- Infrastructure, financial and workforce resources in community-based, publicly available sexual health services – now that these are based in the hospital, we need a focus on outreach to regions such as Belconnen
- National Code of Conduct for health care workers – both users of health services and the health professionals that fall under the new code need to be educated about their rights and responsibilities
- Publicly available pain management services – including financial resources and workforce development. The ACT should commit to the National Pain Action Plan
- The recommendations from the Health Care Consumers' Association (HCCA) submission for the establishment of a dedicated palliative care ward at the Canberra Hospital and the Palliative Care Clinical Network's plan to establish an ACT-wide palliative care service with a single point of entry, including a single patient record. More ACT health professionals should be trained in the palliative care approach

- Improving the quality of support and management of chronic conditions – HCCA recommends a patient navigation service to address some barriers faced by people with chronic and complex conditions and meet the priority needs of consumers.

Recommendation 25 – Disability and health strategy

Invest in development and implementation of a disability and health strategy.

This investment would fund:

- Health services for people with disabilities, including a once a year free extended consultation with a general practitioner and better support to navigate the interface between health and disability service systems
- Improved access to information about health conditions, screening, prevention, early intervention, treatment options and recovery support
- Auditing and improving health infrastructure to make it more fit for purpose for people with disabilities
- Services: establishing specialist centres of excellence for diagnostic disabilities with wrapped-around services
- Workforce development: providing a range of training, disability confidence and skills development work led by people with disability to a range of people including practitioners, health and wellness services outside the formal system and, specifically, to doctors doing Centrelink assessments.

ACTCOSS also notes the need for responses that address the needs of older people in a number of areas.

Recommendation 26 – Health care needs of older people

Invest in improved responses to the health care needs of older people including gaps in services for daily living once post hospital support ceases and in the pre-assessment and waiting period for a My Aged Care Package.

This investment would fund:

- Home-based care and assistance with activities of daily living not able to be independently managed during recovery from time in hospital
- Skills development support for practitioners working with people with aged-associated conditions including cognition and sensory disability
- Information provision to older people about health supports, especially those without digital connections and/or family supports.

Housing and homelessness

In late 2018, ACTCOSS welcomed the announcement in the ACT Housing Strategy of a 15% inclusive zoning requirement in new greenfields and brownfields developments and provision in the 2019-20 ACT Budget of \$100 million investment in public housing. We welcomed the investment of \$3.04 million in the delivery of a second Common Ground community housing complex in Dickson and the investment of \$5.90 million in the Justice Housing Program.

Recommendation 27 – Housing First for homelessness

Fund development of Housing First/rapid rehousing models for people who are experiencing homelessness, invest in a specialist youth homelessness service and increase funding to address the unmet housing needs of groups identified in the Cohort Study.⁵

ACTCOSS supports the ACT Shelter ask for the ACT Government to commit to recurrent investment in housing-led solutions to homelessness that rapidly rehouses people, monitors evictions and emphasises prevention with increased funding to specialist homelessness services that help maintain tenancies in private and social housing.

There must be early intervention initiatives with measurable targets required in all program reforms to establish responsibilities for prevention within mental health, drug and alcohol, domestic violence, out-of-home care and justice, with a focus on preventing homelessness. This work should be whole of government.

ACTCOSS supports the forthcoming submission from the Youth Coalition of the ACT to allocate new funding towards the continuation and expansion of the Safe and Connected Youth Project, which aims to support children and young people aged 8-15 who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and their families.

Recommendation 28 – Community housing

Grow funding to the community housing sector.

5 C Parsell, A Clarke, M Vorsina & C Ambrey, *Support requirements and accommodation options for people in the ACT with high and complex service needs*, Final report, prepared for the Australian Capital Territory Government, Community Services Directorate, Institute for Social Science Research, University of Queensland, Indooroopilly, August 2018, viewed 30 October 2019, <https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0004/1393267/Cohort-Study-Final-Report.pdf>.

Recommendation 29 – Specialist housing services

Invest in specialist homelessness services.

This funding would:

- Grow the community housing sector through the provision of 151 dwellings across different sites including funding to build and maintain sector capacity (noting 60 dwellings in 2019-20 and Lease Various Charge remission of 25%)
- Enable investigating, designing and implementing measures that will support the growth of community housing dwellings owned by community housing providers by 100 dwellings per year from 2020-21. This should prioritise commercial arrangements that enable community housing providers to debt finance development leveraging discounted financing via the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation, and enable the retention of developed properties when used for social or affordable rental to be cashflow positive.

Recommendation 30 – Mental health specific supported housing

Fund human rights compliant mental health specific supported housing.

Recommendation 31 – ACT Housing Strategy oversight mechanism

Fund, establish and maintain non-government involvement and oversight of implementation of the ACT Housing Strategy via a formal mechanism for community, tenant and industry advice to the Minister for Housing.

Justice

The 2019-20 ACT Budget presented a strong Justice and Community Safety budget that delivers on the government's commitment to justice reinvestment in the ACT. We welcomed the announcement of the ACT's justice reinvestment program 'Building Communities, Not Prisons' securing funding for several community and in-prison programs. ACTCOSS was pleased to see a \$5.91 million investment over the next three years for housing for women and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people involved with the criminal justice system, in addition to the \$6.8 million announcement earlier in 2019 for a Bail Accommodation Transition Support Service.

Recommendation 32 – Expand justice support focused programs

Expand funding for justice focused programs that improve community safety by preventing offending and reducing reoffending by investing in employment, health, disability support, legal assistance and financial literacy programs for people who are at risk of or have had contact with the criminal justice system.

This investment would fund:

- Introducing ACT Government employment targets for people who have been in prison
- A needle and syringe program in the AMC
- The AOD sector, with a focus on increasing availability of treatment services and access to community-based and peer-led support for rehabilitation, recovery and relapse prevention
- Community legal services to improve access to justice and timely intervention in the ACT, particularly for low-socioeconomic Canberrans, those from marginalised backgrounds, and people living in public housing (beyond 2019-20)
- Adequate resourcing for the sector to participate in development of the Disability Justice Strategy
- A 'Budgeting for Life Work Development Program' to provide regular financial literacy sessions for people in the community as part of the ACT Government's Work Development Order offering
- A policy resource for the community services and legal sectors to improve the quality and quantity of input provided to ACT Government decisions regarding the intersection of human rights, social and economic disadvantage, ACT Government-funded community service provision, and law and justice issues. This policy resource should be based in a community organisation and will ensure improved capability and engagement of community organisations (in the community services, health and legal assistance sectors) to contribute to law reform, consideration of human rights issues, reform in the criminal justice system (including courts, law enforcement and corrections systems), legislative reform in the justice and community safety portfolio and improving access to civil and criminal justice. These contributions are sought regularly, but there is no specific funding to facilitate collection, analysis and presentation of insights from community legal services or from non-legal services working with people who are over-represented as victims and perpetrators of crime.

Recommendation 33 – Community-based justice reform advocacy

Fund a community-based justice reform advocacy service that can engage with key stakeholders, analyse and synthesise the evidence base relevant to justice, law and corrections system reform, address gaps in the ACT evidence base via consultation and research, and share insights from community service practitioners outside of government with government advisors and decision makers.

ACTCOSS welcomes the policy intent of the ACT Government in its goal to reduce recidivism in the ACT by 25% by 2025. The strategy needs to be bolstered with an implementation plan that includes funded whole-of-government investments with buy-in from all portfolios including Health. There also needs to be adequately resourced community oversight mechanisms.

Recommendation 34 – Investments and oversight for recidivism

Invest in measures and oversight frameworks to deliver on the targets to reduce recidivism.

Mediation and conflict resolution services

As noted above, the 2019-20 ACT Budget included one year of funding for legal assistance to women experiencing family violence or financial abuse. There was also some investment in counselling services to provide whole-of-family supports and case management through the Safer Families Levy initiatives.

Recommendation 35 – Mediation and conflict resolution

Invest in prevention and early intervention via conflict resolution and generalist counselling services to promote community cohesion, safety, restorative practices and individual, family and community wellbeing.

This investment would fund:

- Growing access to mediation and conflict resolution services
- Increased investment in counselling services to provide whole-of-family supports and case management. This requires greater resources, but working with a whole-of-family lens is the most effective way of supporting people and resolving issues (consistent with measures funded by the Safer Families Levy in 2019-20)

- Investment in counselling services for middle-income earners – the ‘missing middle’ who are often unable to pay for services but are missed by current funding targeted at low-income earners.

Mental health

In the 2019-20 Budget, ACTCOSS welcomed the investment of \$24.2 million in mental health funding. The mental health funding initiatives included:

- \$1.8 million infrastructure spending in 2019-20 and \$5.1 million over four years for a dedicated electroconvulsive therapy service for The Canberra Hospital’s adult mental health unit
- \$6.9 million over the next four years to boost allied health and nursing staff in the Adult Mental Health Unit
- \$4.5 million over the next four years to expand the Mental Health Consultation Liaison service to operate at The Canberra Hospital 7 days a week
- \$3 million over the next four years to expand the Mental Health Justice Health and Alcohol and Drug Service
- \$323,000 in 2019-20 to undertake planning and design work for a Police, Ambulance and Clinician Early Response model which can provide better integrated support for people experiencing acute mental health incidents
- \$2.2 million over the next four years to establish an Eating Disorders Specialist Clinical Hub and a community-based intervention support service
- \$457,000 over the next two years to recruit two Carer Engagement Clinicians to pilot a range of support and psycho-social education activities to build capacity for the families and carers of people with mental health conditions.

While these initiatives are welcome, there was not a similar level of investment in community-based mental health services to that provided for ACT Government delivered services. We acknowledge the need for investment in critical and high-end services, but in the longer term we need to invest more effort in diverting people away critical services.

Recommendation 36 – Prevention and early intervention for mental health

Invest in mental health prevention and early intervention services, and non-government provided services that promote recovery and wellbeing for people who experience mental ill health.

This investment would fund:

- Boosting the capacity of community-based mental health services to respond to the missing middle who do not fit into NDIS and acute systems but need more assistance than general practitioner services can provide
- Increasing the evidence base around community mental health needs and non-government sector workforce development needs
- Addressing the fragmentation of funding, reporting and methodological approaches coming out of various parts of government and impacting on the sector's capacity to deliver well
- Maintaining and increasing the quantum of services provided as part of the Integrated Response Service which provides support to people who experience gaps inside and outside of the NDIS.

Responding to financial hardship

Following the 2019-20 ACT Budget, ACTCOSS welcomed the increase in the utilities concession and funding for Care Financial (Consumer Law Centre), and the Women's Legal Centre received additional funding from the ACT Government (Justice and Community Safety) to maintain current service levels in 2019-20. However, no funding was allocated beyond 2019-20.

Recommendation 37 – Concessions and financial hardship

Provide ongoing certainty of funding for reducing financial hardship for low-income households beyond those already eligible for Centrelink-defined concession.

This investment would fund:

- Improving the concessions scheme, and other fee and charging regimes operated by the ACT Government, to expand access according to need, not age or source of income, in view of persistent and widening cost of living pressures for low-income households in the ACT
- Increases to financial counselling services to keep pace with demand
- Ongoing funding for financial counselling workers with a focus on family violence and financial abuse. This role should dually raise awareness of financial abuse and offer support to women with debts or other financial struggles as a result of abusive relationships
- Increase investment to allow financial counselling services to offer services to detainees while they are in the AMC.

We note specific asks around funding for financial counselling services from Care Financial Counselling Inc.

Recommendation 38 – Financial counselling services

Increase funding to financial counselling services to meet demand.

We support an income-based approach to fines, fees and other charges.

Recommendation 39 – Income based fines

Introduce an income-based approach to charging ACT Government fines, fees and other charges.

Transport

In 2019, ACTCOSS has welcomed dialogue between Transport Canberra and the community sector, especially around the development of the ACT Government's Integrated Transport Strategy. While there were welcome transport investments in the 2019-20 ACT Budget, we are keen to see future investments informed by a comprehensive community needs assessment that can inform policy, design and planning work to ensure transport design, planning, integration and implementation address the needs of those with transport disadvantage across both on-demand and mass transit systems. This work should ensure that transport investments keep up with urban infill, growth and group centre redesign and that this is done with lived experience input from those with the greatest level of transport disadvantage.

Recommendation 40 – Community transport continuity

Invest in community transport at sustainable levels with long-term funding continuity so that providers can upgrade, renew and replace vehicle stock and plan across a multi-year timeframe.

Recommendation 41 – Community transport sufficiency

Provide sufficient funding to ensure community transport is available to all who need of it, which includes people eligible for an individualised funding package through Commonwealth initiatives like the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or an aged care package; women with young children or family members needing mobility assistance, who are primary carers and do not own a private vehicle; or people who do not have a driver's licence and/or own a private vehicle or who are unable to use public transport because of mental health issues.

Recommendation 42 – Transport planning needs assessment

Fund a comprehensive community needs assessment to ensure transport design, planning, integration and implementation addresses the needs of those with transport disadvantage across both on-demand and mass transit systems. This work should ensure that transport investments keep up with urban infill, growth and group centre redesign and that this is done with lived experience input from those with the greatest level of transport disadvantage.

This needs assessment would:

- Investigate transport gaps for people experiencing social disadvantage and fund any improvements in transport coverage and frequency required to meet the needs identified
- Evaluate accessibility of existing public transport infrastructure (vehicles and fixed infrastructure) for people with disabilities and other mobility issues and fund improvements to meet accessibility standards
- Study transport costs to examine how individuals on low and fixed incomes meet costs of vehicle operation and maintenance and if and to what extent this involves reliance on sub-prime loans. Measures should then be developed to address findings on the broader relationship between transport costs, indebtedness and infringements (e.g. driving unregistered) for people on low and moderate incomes.

Recommendation 43 – Transport planning lived experience testing

Fund proactive lived experience testing to be routinely included in transport redesign processes.

Recommendation 44 – Transport concessions

Improve the fairness and adequacy of transport-related concessions by extending concessions to learner, probationary and restricted driver's licences, aligning the discount on licence fees for Health Care Card holders (currently 50% of costs) with Pension Card Holders (100%).

Volunteering

ACTCOSS welcomed the ACT Government's ACT Volunteering Statement and Action Plan 2018-2021. We now seek resourcing for full implementation and delivery of the policy intent.

Recommendation 45 – Volunteering Action Plan

Fund implementation of the ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan 2018-2021 and those elements of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy 2016-2026 that relate to volunteering.

Recommendation 46 – Volunteering costs and compliance

Ensure funding of service delivery contracts between the ACT Government and non-government organisations includes provision for costs of volunteer engagement, management and compliance with volunteering regulatory and quality requirements.

Women

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, we welcomed several initiatives supporting women's services, particularly in relation to women's health and domestic and family violence, including financial abuse.

Recommendation 47 – Primary prevention and consent education

Fund primary prevention and consent education tailored to diverse populations, including Respectful Relationships education in early childhood, primary, secondary and college education settings for all staff and students. These should be implemented at a minimum standard across the ACT, and community organisations should be adequately resourced to deliver these programs.

Recommendation 48 – Investments for women

Secure additional funding to implement recommendations from the 2019 ACT Women's Summit. ACTCOSS supports the YWCA Canberra recommendations on investment needs in their submission to the 2020-21 ACT Budget.

In the 2019-20 ACT Budget, we welcomed the investment in improving frontline services through the Safer Families Levy by:

- Delivering family-centred responses for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families impacted by family violence
- Extending the Family Safety Hub legal services pilot
- Extending the Room4Change program to help prevent family violence
- Reducing the risk of deaths from family violence
- Training ACT Government frontline workers to respond to family violence.

Recommendation 49 – Investments for women in SDFVS

Increase investment in reducing and responding more effectively to sexual, domestic and family violence beyond the investment in the Safer Families Levy.

This investment would:

- Increase funding for women's crisis support services
- Increase funding for addressing the needs of children who have been exposed to sexual, domestic or family violence
- Enable more research into specialised and evidence-based programs for sexual, domestic and family violence support, to reduce the need for services at the crisis point.

Recommendation 50 – Community sector workforce learning and development

Fund provision of community sector workforce learning and development regarding domestic and family violence and trauma-informed models of care and practice, that is consistent with the investment in ACT Government worker learning and development on these topics.