



ACT Council of Social Service Federal Election Priorities 2022

Policy Priorities

The ACT Council of Social Service (ACTCOSS) advocates for social justice in the ACT and represents not-for-profit community organisations. ACTCOSS's vision for Canberra is a just, safe, and sustainable community in which everyone has the opportunity for self-determination and a fair share of resources and services.

ACTCOSS advocates for policies that will give people on low incomes and those disadvantaged by current systems a fair go. ACTCOSS has reviewed national analysis and ACT research to identify six policy priorities. Addressing these priorities will benefit the whole ACT and Australian community by ensuring that no-one is left behind and all can contribute equitably to society and the economy. These are the issues that those elected to the federal parliament must include as a priority.

1. Income support

In December 2021, there were 37% more Canberrans receiving working age payments compared with before the pandemic. That means that more people than ever are finding it impossible to afford rent, food, keep a car on the road, and pay for other essentials like utilities. The current rate of JobSeeker forces individuals and families – including children – into poverty.

Through the [Raise the Rate for Good campaign](#), ACTCOSS is calling on the Australian Government to increase the base rate of JobSeeker Payment from \$46 to at least \$70 a day, with additional supplementation for people with additional living costs (including people with disability and single parents) and to index payments in line with wage movements at least twice per year.

This is essential so that everyone can cover the cost of the basics. Our annual [ACT Cost of Living Reports](#) show that indexation of income support payments to CPI only has seen them fall further behind the true cost of living. Living costs for low-income households have increased disproportionately because more of their income is spent on essential goods and services, and the prices of these essentials have risen at a higher rate than for discretionary items.

A decent safety net allows people to build confidence to begin new careers, retrain and look for paid work.

Key ask: Increase the rate of JobSeeker, Youth Allowance, and other income support payments to at least \$70 a day, further supplement the incomes of people with disability and single parents and index to CPI and wages.

2. Housing security

In the past two years, we were asked to stay at home to protect the health of our community – and the importance of a safe and stable home became more apparent than ever.

Yet a growing number of people in the ACT do not have a home or are facing housing insecurity. Housing stress remains acute, social housing waiting lists are getting longer and rents have soared. That's why we need an immediate investment in social housing to ensure everyone has a safe home. The [Everybody's Home campaign](#) calls for an additional 25,000 homes per year to be built across Australia.

Social (public and community) housing in the ACT [fell from 7.6% in 2014 to 6.7% of the housing stock by 2020](#). The average wait time for standard housing in the ACT is now [over 4.3 years \(1,585 days\)](#). There are also 1,600 people in the ACT who are homeless according to data compiled by Everybody's Home in early 2021, and community workers on the ground report that the number of rough sleepers in Civic is growing.

[Recent modelling](#) by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute (AHURI) found a current shortfall of 3,100 social housing dwellings in the ACT, with 8,500 additional social housing dwellings required between 2016-2036 to meet our current and projected need. That would mean building 425 new dwellings per year over 20 years, significantly more than current commitments, and doing so will require shared investment by both federal and ACT governments. The same modelling also shows that at least 3,400 more dwellings for affordable renting are also needed.

Key ask: Increase national social housing stock by 25,000 homes per year and build at least 425 new social housing dwellings per year in Canberra.

3. Quality community services

Community services are often the first port of call for people during times of great need such as when they're escaping domestic violence, facing homelessness, or struggling with their mental health.

And during the pandemic, they've stepped up to provide support at an unprecedented rate. In the ACT the community sector enabled the COVID response to reach vulnerable groups including people with disability, people with lived experienced of mental ill health, people experiencing homelessness and people with alcohol and/or drug dependence. This has included government and NGO coordination on in-reach vaccination, testing and supporting people to stay home during quarantine.

The shadow of COVID is likely to be long, and community services must be recognised and resourced as part of our national COVID-19 recovery plan. Stronger services mean more resilient communities.

Key ask: Adequate federal funding for services provided by the community sector, including aged care, disability, homelessness, and domestic violence services,

ensuring appropriate remuneration of the community sector workforce at rates which are regularly and adequately indexed.

4. Fair, fast, inclusive climate action

Rapidly worsening climate change is hurting our ACT community through extreme weather and bushfires. People with the least are impacted by climate change the most but have fewer resources to cope with climate impacts or benefit fully in the energy transition.

An inclusive plan to address climate change can improve the lives of people facing disadvantage. It creates opportunities for more affordable and healthier energy, housing, and transport, and has the potential to create jobs in the new energy economy.

The energy efficiency of many ACT homes is so poor that Canberrans on low incomes are getting sick or dying because they cannot afford energy bills and are unable to make their home warm in winter and cool in summer. The federal government must work with the territory government to invest in improving energy efficiency and/or installing rooftop solar in low-income homes. We call on candidates to back support to 1.8 million low-income homes via a [National Low-income Energy Productivity Program](#) (NLEPP).

Key ask: Commit to reducing carbon pollution 75% by 2030 (on 2005 level) and net zero by 2035 by implementing a fair and inclusive plan to achieve the targets.

5. Self-determination for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT and across Australia experience some of the worst disadvantage in the world. Indigenous people experience significantly worse outcomes than non-Indigenous people in relation to health, education, employment, child protection and the justice system.

Addressing the serious harm that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face in this country should be a priority across all government work.

We are a strong supporter of several Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-led campaigns and coalitions including:

- [SNAICC – National Voice for our Children](#)
- [Change the Record](#)
- [The Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT [are incarcerated at 19 times](#) the rate of non-Indigenous people, and 91% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander detainees have experienced prior imprisonment. Aboriginal children in the ACT are [13 times more likely to be in out-of-home care](#) than non-Indigenous children, and 16 times more likely to be in youth detention. First Nations people represent [17% of specialist homelessness service clients](#) in the ACT, despite making up less than 2% of the population.

Key asks: Begin to address deep and ongoing wrongs inflicted against First Nations people, through commitment to the implementation of all recommendations of the

Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody; a constitutionally guaranteed Voice to Parliament; and a commitment to Closing the Gap.

Raise the minimum age of criminal responsibility to 14 nationally as the ACT Government has already committed to doing.

6. Revenue

At the start of 2020, Australia was reeling, caught in a series of unprecedented disasters. The last bushfire had barely been put out when we became aware of the first cases of COVID-19. As jobs evaporated, and the snaking Centrelink queues grew longer every day, it soon became clear that we would all do better if we worked together.

For a precious six months we were a nation transformed. We prioritised health for all, reduced poverty through the introduction of the COVID supplement, saved over 700,000 jobs, ensured childcare was affordable, and found safe accommodation for people sleeping on the streets.

Australia faces major challenges in the years ahead as outlined in the five priorities above. We cannot afford a small or inactive government who provides unaffordable tax cuts for people on higher incomes.

We need a government that raises the resources needed to meet the big challenges and properly fund essential services and income supports rather than cutting them back.

Key ask: Rescind unaffordable tax cuts for people on higher incomes to invest in public services and support for the people who have the least.

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

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