## Supporting the community services sector requires:

* Increasing sector funding to cover all costs including staffing, engagement in commissioning and policy process and monitoring and evaluation
* Ensuring commissioning processes work with the community sector to design and implement methodologically sound needs analyses to respond to increased demand and complexity of need across all directorates
* Properly funding ACT Government strategies & ensure fair division of investment between public service and community sector
* Responding to immediate funding gaps in mental health, community legal services, housing and homelessness services and disability advocacy
* Implement the outcomes of the *Community Sector Service Costing* project
* Support capital investments including zero emissions vehicles, solar panels and ICT infrastructure for the community sector
* Appropriately fund Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and support community-controlled approaches in other sectors
* Commit to properly fund peaks and organisations representing community voices as a critical institutional component of our democracy
* Review and address ageing community facilities to allow delivery and continuity of services with dignity to vulnerable clients
* Ensure annually renewed contracts are indexed adequately
* Work with the community sector through the Industry Strategy Steering Group to implement the Industry Strategy and contribute to the implementation of the Sector Sustainability Program
* Ensure indexation increases cover all funding agreements and advocate for indexation to cover Commonwealth funded programs
* Commit to funding the cost of a renegotiated ACT Community Sector Multiple Employer Agreement on wages and conditions for community sector employees
* Ensure the ACT’s Wellbeing Framework considers commitments to the community sector articulated in the [ACT Social Compact](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/open_government/inform/key-reports-on-joint-community-government-work)
* Increase funding to facilitate community connection initiatives and employ dedicated community development staffing across all regions

## The Justification

* Key findings for the ACT from the [Australian Community sector Survey (ACSS) 2022](https://www.acoss.org.au/australian-community-sector-survey/)  and the [At the precipice: Australia's community sector through the cost of living crisis - ACOSS Report](https://www.acoss.org.au/acss-april-2023/) include:[[1]](#footnote-2)
  + 56% of ACT community sector survey staff reported that in 2022 levels of poverty and disadvantage had increased among the groups they support.
  + Cost-of-living pressures (66%), housing and homelessness (61%) and lack of mental health support (60%) were among the top challenges affecting the people and communities ACT community organisations support.
  + 67% of participants reported that levels of demand for their main service increased and that there was growing complexity of need among service users (69%) during 2022.
  + Only 4% of organisations were always able to meet the level of demand, and almost half of participants.
  + 47% of organisations noted an increase in the number of clients that they could not support in their services.
  + 43% of organisations experienced increased wait times over the last year.
  + A staggering 84% of community sector organisations in the ACT have indicated that their current funding is not sufficient to adequately respond to increasing demand for their services.
  + More than two thirds (67%) of organisations report that they found it more difficult to attract and retain staff in 2022.
  + More than 80% of CEOs and Senior Managers said they received insufficient funding to employ enough staff and no organisations were funded for backfilling staff absences.
* The Service Costing Survey, completed by leaders of 88 ACT community organisations, showed that major streams of ACT funding are leaving essential employment costs unfunded:[[2]](#footnote-3)
  + Only 12% of organisational leaders said their funding stream adequately covers backfilling, which ensures service continuity when a staff is absent
  + Only 17% said they were adequately funded to cover costs of staff supervision
  + Only 22% said they were adequately funded to employ enough staff
  + Only 25% were adequately funded to manage volunteers
* Australia’s gender pay gap currently sits at 13.3%[[3]](#footnote-4). ABS 2015 data shows women are 78% of the community sector workforce,[[4]](#footnote-5) many with children.[[5]](#footnote-6)
* The ACT has the fastest growing population who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; from 1.3% in 2006 to 2.1% in 2021.[[6]](#footnote-7)

## The Issues

* Cost-of-living pressures and the ongoing, underlying COVID pandemic has seen a reported rise in demand for services and an increase in the complexity of cases[[7]](#footnote-8). These rising demands have coincided with the Government’s reform agenda of [Commissioning](https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/commissioning/approach/ground-commissioning-in-the-shared-principles) for Outcomes which, along with ongoing inadequate funding, impacts on the ability of the sector to effectively and efficiently implement their programs
* Inadequate resources to employ and support staff reduces organisational capacity. Underfunding has contributed to unpaid/underpaid work, loss of staff, and over-reliance on volunteers. This also affects quality and outcomes for clients and communities
* Organisations cannot sustain activities without sufficient support. Activities like consulting with government and participating in policy reform processes are integral capabilities for a collaborative commissioning approach and should be explicitly recognised in contracts and funding arrangements
* Lack of funds to support monitoring and evaluation of programs. While some organisations can fund evaluation from private sources, only 13% said that the funding received from the ACT government adequately covers evaluation. This results in sub-optimal information to understand how interventions are working and reduces capacity for service improvement[[8]](#footnote-9)
* We need more investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination, including in community-controlled health, housing and education activities, and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural needs.
* Consultation bodies such as the Joint Community Government Reference Group need to be seen as key partners within the sector and appropriately resourced to undertake these functions. Key agenda items need to link the ACT Wellbeing Framework with commissioning reforms and commitments made with the sector in the ACT Social Compact.

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| Delivering commitments in the ACT Parliamentary and Governing Agreement |
| The Government should prioritise some of its commitments **under the** [**Parliamentary and Governing Agreement**](https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0003/1654077/Parliamentary-Agreement-for-the-10th-Legislative-Assembly.pdf) for this term of Government as they relate to supporting the community sector – these include:   * 1.i. Implement a program of zero-interest loans of up to $15,000 for households and not-for-profit community organisations to assist with the upfront costs of investing in: rooftop solar panels; household battery storage; zero emission vehicles and efficient electric appliances. The program will include an education and communications component about energy efficiency and the shift from gas to electric * 2.iii. Develop additional financial incentives to support greater ZEV uptake by businesses and the community sector * B.1.i. Working with the land owners and community organisations to deliver the MyHome proposal in Curtin * B.1.vii. In close partnership with the community and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body, supporting the establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled community housing provider   Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy   * 4.3 Deliver a purpose-built facility with the Gugan Gulwan Youth Aboriginal Corporation to better deliver essential services * 4.4 Support the development of sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations in areas such as child and family services, justice, housing and disability   First Nations   * 9.3 Establish a community controlled Aboriginal drug and alcohol residential rehabilitation facility and new family recovery programs * 9.4 Prioritise community controlled organisations to deliver First Nations services including with $1.5 million seed funding for Yerrrabi Yurwang Child and Family Service * 9.5 Return Yarramundi, Boomanulla and the Ngunnawal Bush Healing farm to community control * 9.6 Deliver new accommodation for Gugan Gulwan   Community Sector   * 5.1 Review and increase funding for the community sector to account for population growth, increased demand, and complexity of client need and increased cost of salaries and operation * 5.2 Establish a Technology Upgrade Fund for the community sector * 5.3 Insert a non-discrimination clause in all funding agreements between government and community organisations (particularly around equal access to services for LGBTIQ)   Community Facilities   * 4.1 Build a new community multi-purpose centre in Gungahlin Town Centre * 4.2 Revitalise Yerrabi Pond and foreshore * 4.3 Establish an all ages nature playground in the inner north * 4.4 Release 5 concessional sites to community groups over 4 years, with at least 2 in Gungahlin and 2 in Molonglo, and establish a $1 million annual grant stream in the Zero Emissions Fund for upgrades to Government owned buildings leased to community organisations and a $2 million annual upgrade fund for community owned buildings that are used by the public * 15.1 Build new community centres at Woden and Gungahlin * 15.2 Construct a large new multicultural events venue at EPIC for cultural performances and available for hire for large private functions, such as weddings * 9.7 Co-design a new library and community centre in the Molonglo Valley   Arts and creative industries   * 16.3 Upgrading Gorman House and the Tuggeranong Arts Centre * 16.4 Continuing grants provision and improving transparency through a new funding framework, in close consultation with the sector |

1. ACTCOSS, [*Factsheet: ACT Community Sector Snapshot 2023*](https://www.actcoss.org.au/publications/advocacy-publications/factsheet-act-community-sector-snapshot)*,* April 2023 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Cortis, N., Blaxland, M. and Adamson, E. (2021). [*Counting the Costs: Sustainable funding for the ACT community services sector*](https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2022-02/apo-nid316449_0.pdf), Sydney: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. Workplace Gender Equality Agency, [Gender pay gap data | WGEA](https://www.wgea.gov.au/pay-and-gender/gender-pay-gap-data), November 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Cited in the Industry Strategy 2016-2026: <https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/community-sector-reform/industry-strategy-2016-2026> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. *ACT Community Services Industry – Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis* (p. 16): <https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/Workforce%20Data%20and%20Community%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20April%202019.pdf.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. Australian Bureau of Statistics (June 2021), [Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2021](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/jun-2021#states-and-territories), released 21 September 2022 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
7. 2022 Australian Community Sector Survey (ACSS) unpublished data [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. Cortis, Blaxland and Adamson, *Counting the Costs: Sustainable funding for the ACT community services sector*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)