



ACT Budget Bulletin

2025-26

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About ACTCOSS

The ACT Council of Social Service Inc. (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/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. We celebrate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and ongoing contributions to the ACT community.

ACTCOSS advocates for social justice in the ACT and represents not-for-profit community organisations.

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's 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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Executive Summary

While this budget is a small step forward for the ACT community it is also a missed opportunity to sustainably improve support for the most disadvantaged Canberrans. As the Treasurer emphasised in his budget speech, the ACT Government was in a tight fiscal position after providing significant emergency relief over the last half decade. In this context, it is understandable that the Government sought to find creative ways to generate new revenue in order to support the dual aims of improving services with balancing fiscal responsibility. To that end, the budget delivers a range of new revenue measures with much of these funds being diverted to improve the deficit. However, once the Government made the decision to increase revenue, it could, and should have focussed more resources on those who need them most.

This year's ACT budget provides only modest, targeted support for Canberrans doing it tough. It is delivered at a time when the Australian economy is showing signs it is starting a modest recovery from a half-decade of increasing household costs and inflationary pressure. However, these financial improvements are not flowing to those who need them most, and who suffered the most over the last five years. Progress in the national bottom line should not overshadow the damage from years of rising prices that left many Canberrans struggling to afford essential goods and services. For those on low incomes, the situation remains untenable. Wait times for public housing continue to lengthen, and an increasingly unaffordable rental market forces many to make impossible choices between food, healthcare, education, and utilities. As a result, emergency food services continue to see increased demand.

Changes in Revenue

The Government's decision to seek out new revenue sources has captured the news headlines following this budget. For the most part, the new revenue sources are targeted at businesses and higher income earners, which is appropriate. The new measures included \$205 million in new revenue over the forward estimates through a regressive new levy to support the public health system that would have applied to all ratepayers at a flat rate of \$250 annually. The health levy should have been more progressive. We were pleased to see the initial proposal revised following parliamentary opposition. However, the revised measure still includes a \$100, regressive, flat rate applied to all ratepayers. Although it's positive that it's limited to people who own properties, it does not differentiate between someone who owns an acre in Red Hill from someone who owns a one-bedroom flat in an outer suburb. They obviously do not have an equal capacity to pay. It's a concern that this may be passed on by some landlords to tenants despite Government efforts to limit this.

A further \$282m in revenue is expected to come from projected cuts to the public sector (with patient-facing healthcare and schools getting a pass). This is framed as a reduction in future expenditure growth. This represents a significant medium-term decline in administrative funding that we hope does not impact the public sector's capacity to deliver the services that Canberrans need.

Buried in the budget was also the regrettable decision to levy a charge on people who need a Working with Vulnerable People card. Government should not tax activities that it wants to promote, and many volunteers are students or retired and on fixed incomes. The last thing our community needs is a disincentive to volunteer. Together with Volunteering ACT, ACTCOSS successfully lobbied the Government to reverse this decision.

New Expenditure

In our submission to the ACT Government ahead of the budget, we called for a focus on four central priorities for greater equity:

1. Strengthening direct Government investment in **social housing and homelessness services**
2. Alleviating **cost-of-living** pressures for low-income individuals and families
3. Valuing the **community sector**
4. Supporting **self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**.

That submission reflected the insights and expertise of our members, who see the struggles disadvantaged Canberrans face each and every day.

Our preliminary finding is that this budget is one that provides some much-needed investment for disadvantaged populations in the ACT but leaves some significant issues under addressed. Our most substantial concern remains changes made to cost-of-living support. Support for energy costs is one of the strongest levers the ACT Government has to alleviate cost of living pressures. Despite some investments, we are seeing an overall reduction in utilities support compared to the previous budget. The permanent increase to the Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate of \$50 is positive, but won't change the status quo given it has been temporarily at this level since 2022. Similarly, the \$150 electricity bill support via the Federal Government's Energy Bill Relief Fund is half that provided last year via the National Energy Bill Relief fund which saw all Australian households receive \$300.

The budget also cuts the rent relief fund, a vital support for renters in crisis. This will increase financial pressure for some of the most vulnerable members of our community and likely increase the demand for social housing that is already over-capacity. The Government also failed to restore funding for ACT Shelter, threatening the viability of the ACT's peak body for housing justice.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the ACT budget appears to be a mixed result. On the one hand, we welcome investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) workforce initiatives, alcohol and drug rehabilitation services and the new Gugan Gulwan Centre. However, we remain concerned that much of this funding is only secured in the short-term, failing to meet ACTCOSS' call for at least five-year, service-focused investment. ACTCOSS and the ACCO sector welcomes raising the Age of Criminal Responsibility but we must

stress that effective, culturally appropriate support for youth is needed before implementation. We are concerned that current services are inadequate, as noted in the 2021 McCarthy report. The Government should prioritise these actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Despite these concerns, there are some bright spots in this budget that provide much needed support for vulnerable Canberrans. Notably:

- We welcome the **\$10m funding boost for the community sector**. The Government has listened to the community sector's call through the ACT for Community campaign and provided an important injection of funding that will enable the sector to continue to deliver essential services for Canberra.
- We also welcome the Government's articulation of how much is invested in our sector – approximately \$252m. This is a key figure that will enable us to track investment in the sector over time and is critical for future advocacy.
- We are pleased to see **investment in public housing** consistent with the Government's election commitments at least for this year, though we remain concerned that the current strategy leaves a disproportionate amount of heavy lifting for community housing providers.
- We welcome the **continued support for crisis services in the ACT**. This budget includes renewed investment in crisis support for family and domestic violence, new funding for youth mental health services and continuation of funding for food relief.
- We are pleased to see **investments in disability support services**. In particular, we welcome the modest funding to support community co-design to deliver on the Disability Inclusion Bill and continuity of funding for Foundational Supports.

The 2025-26 ACT Budget demonstrates some progress in the right direction for disadvantaged Canberrans, but not enough. It provides some meaningful support across a range of important areas including a renewed investment in the community sector. ACTCOSS welcomes the intent of these changes.

Ultimately the Government needed to raise revenue because of long-term increases in the health budget, and continued massive expenditure on acute care. Concurrent investment in upstream prevention, much of which is delivered through the community sector, is required to keep a lid on the health budget. The ACT Government will need to invest significantly more funding moving forward, especially with respect to cost-of-living and affordable housing, to provide long-term certainty and a secure future for vulnerable members of our community who are doing it tough.



Dr Devin Bowles
ACTCOSS CEO

Key Announcements

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

The 2025–26 Budget includes welcome investments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), alcohol and drug rehabilitation, workforce initiatives, and the new Gudan Gulwan Centre. However, most funding is short-term, offset, or delayed, failing to meet ACTCOSS's call for at least five-year, service-focused investment in ACCOs. The sharp drop in funding for community legal assistance services after 2025–26 also raises serious concerns. This funding impacts the Aboriginal Legal Service and a number of specialist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services within community legal assistance providers. Key priorities such as establishing Aboriginal community controlled housing also remain unaddressed. Without sustained, community-led investment, progress on self-determination and Closing the Gap will remain limited.

Key Measures

- **Implementing recommendations from the Long Yarn Report:** \$6.02m over three years, starting from 2026-27 (offset with \$5.80m from the Safer Families Levy, and \$0.21m from existing resources from the Health and Community Services Directorate). The Government will provide \$0.6m investment in the development and implementation of a 'violence is not our way' community and professional education program. The Government will provide funding to the following Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations:
 - Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation, \$1.65m
 - Yerrabi Yurwang, \$1.66m
 - Yhurwun Bullan, \$1.93m
 - WhISPers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Softball Corporation, \$0.18m.

(Budget Outlook p124; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Budget Statement p6)

- **Supporting a self-determined and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce:** \$2.36m over 4 years, offset with \$2.06m for a net cost of \$0.31m. The Government will address shortages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT health workforce, with opportunities in specialised and mainstream healthcare roles. This work, in line with the ACT Health Workforce Strategy and the Health Workforce Action Plan, will involve local actions aimed at eliminating systemic racism, creating career pathways, providing culturally responsive supervision, offering clinical placements and ensuring comprehensive support. *(Budget Outlook p130-131)*

- **Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Other Drug Residential Rehabilitation Operations:** \$5.2m over 3 years, offset with \$4.3m for a net expense of \$0.89m. The Government will provide funding to Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services to operate an alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation service. (*Budget Outlook p129*)
- **Better care for our community - Community and home-based palliative care services:** \$4.16m over four years, offset by expenses. The Government will provide funding to improve palliative and end-of-life choices and includes:
 - Expanding Leo's Place by two additional beds
 - Delivering better end-of-life support for First Nations people, including a Community Aboriginal Liaison Officer; and
 - Continuing and expanding the Palliative Medicines in Community Pharmacies program to up to seven ACT pharmacies. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 119*)
- **Supporting the ACT legal assistance sector:** \$2.48m for two years, with \$2.11m in 2025-26 and \$0.37m in 2026-28, partially offset by \$2.22m expenses. The Government will continue to support the community legal assistance sector including:
 - The Women's Legal Centre
 - Canberra Community Law
 - CARE; and
 - The Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT.

This funding will also build Legal Aid ACT's capacity to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse clients. (*Budget Outlook p148*)
- **Better community infrastructure – Supporting the new Gugan Gulwan Community Centre:** \$1.02m to support operations and maintenance of the new Gugan Gulwan Community Centre. This initiative will help sustain high-quality facilities and services, supporting the delivery of vital programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families. (*Budget Outlook p134*)
- **Climate Action – Improving Energy Efficiency for Canberra's Homes and Business:** \$15.78m over four years offset by \$176k in existing resourcing and \$15.55m in revenue from the Energy Saving Contribution Fund. As part of this action government will deliver free home energy assessments for eligible households and small businesses, support for apartment buildings to electrify, and culturally appropriate energy supports for First Nations households. This budget line item will also fund a Commercial Building Electrification pilot program to transition commercial buildings off gas. (*Budget Outlook p98*)

Children, young people and families

While this budget does not make a substantial investment in children, young people and families, it does deliver a modest range of targeted supports for disadvantaged Canberrans. These supports are headlined by \$7.3m over four years to improve access to primary care and bulk billing GPs. Equity of access to affordable healthcare is a critical issue for families in the ACT and this is a welcome investment to address this important problem. The budget also includes a suite of mental health supports directed towards families and young people. For example, \$9.46m to expand youth mental health services, \$1.46m to improve availability of autism assessments, and \$1.23m in perinatal mental health. There is also a renewed focus on programs that support people in unsafe home environments with a commitment of \$24.85m for family and domestic violence services and \$13.21m to improve out-of-home care services for young people.

Key Measures

- **Improving mental health care – continuing support for youth mental health services:** \$9.46m over 4 years, offset with \$8.6m for a net expense of \$0.86m. The Government will deliver on its commitment to continue to support a range of community-led youth mental health programs, including:
 - the MindMap Online Youth Navigation Portal
 - Stepping Stones
 - Youth Aware of Mental Health
 - WOKE - the dialectical behaviour therapy program.As part of this initiative, the Government will also provide funding for the ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Alliance. (*Budget Outlook p126*)
- **Baby Bundles – supporting vulnerable first-time parents:** \$1.02m over four years. The Government will provide additional and ongoing funding for Roundabout Canberra and will establish a program to deliver a baby bundle package to vulnerable families. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 119*)
- **Continuing autism spectrum disorder assessments:** \$1.46m over two years, fully offset by expenses. The Government will continue delivery of Autism Spectrum Disorder assessment services provided by the Child Development Service, which is the only publicly funded, no-cost, comprehensive multidisciplinary autism assessment service for children up to 12 years old in the ACT. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 121*)
- **Planning for a perinatal mental health residential mother and baby unit:** \$0.73m over one year to undertake a feasibility study for a six-bed perinatal mental health mother and baby unit. (*Budget Outlook, 67*)

- **Safer families – Supporting frontline family, domestic and sexual violence services:** \$24.85m over four years, offset with \$20.15m for a net expense of \$4.7m. The Government will increase investment in frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services in the ACT.
 - The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) will receive additional funding
 - There will also be funding for Victim Support ACT and DVCS to continue delivery of the Family Violence Safety Action Program
 - Funding for Canberra Police Community Youth Club will allow the continued delivery of the Solid Ground Program, providing early intervention support to young people
 - The YWCA Canberra will be funded to expand its Domestic Violence Support Service through the addition of two children’s specialist workers
 - Funding will also be provided for the continuation and expansion of the Women’s Health Matters Victim Survivor Voices Pilot
 - The Safer Families Assistance Program is also funded to continue in 2025-26. (*Budget Outlook p128*)
- **Better care for our community - more services at Belconnen Safe Haven:** \$1.91m over three years, offset with \$2.19m from funding for the establishment of Belconnen Safe Haven including *Better care for our community – developing the ACT Mental Health Workforce Strategy* funded in the 2022-23 Budget Review. The Government will also continue services at the Belconnen Safe Haven and expand operating hours of the service. Belconnen Safe Haven provides a safe space for people over 16 to access peer-led mental health support. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 120*)
- **Continuation of the Children and Young People Equipment Loan Scheme (CAYPELS):** \$0.34m in 2025-26, fully offset by expenses. The Government will fund the continuation of CAYPELS as a three day per week service providing free short-term loans of specialist paediatric equipment and assistive technology for children and young people with disability or mobility needs. (*Budget Outlook p59 and 121*)
- **Continuing Free Meals in Schools:** \$13.45m over four years, offset with \$0.9m from the 2024-25 initiative *Investing in public education – Continuation of Meals in Schools* for a net cost of \$12.48m. The Government will continue the Free Meals in Schools program following the pilot to provide breakfast and lunch for three days a week at five ACT public schools. (*Budget Outlook p115*)
- **Cost of living – Expanding the Future of Education Equity Fund:** \$0.6m over 2025-26. The Government will provide an expansion to the Future of Education Equity Fund by supporting an additional 1,000 eligible students in the 2025 school year through the Fund. Approximately 6,000 students will be supported with one-off payments. (*Budget Outlook p115*)

- **Free school camps at Birrigai:** \$3.27m over four years (fully offset from expenses and savings). The Government will expand the school camps pilot initiative by providing ongoing funding for every child in an ACT public primary school (years 3-6) to access one school camp each year. (*Budget Outlook p115*)
- **Improving mental health care – Perinatal Mental Health Safe Haven:** \$0.5m over two years. The Government will support birth parents and families experiencing perinatal mental health issues by providing additional funding to:
 - the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre
 - the Perinatal Mental Health Alliance. (*Budget Outlook p127*)
- **More support for out of home care:** \$13.21m in 2025-26, offset with \$3.35m for a net expense of \$9.86m. This investment will continue delivery of Extraordinary Residential Care for children and young people with disability and/or mental health conditions who cannot remain safely with their families and continue to fund six existing staff members for the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. (*Budget Outlook p128*)
- **Supporting our health workforce – improving affordability and access to GPs:** \$7.3m over 4 years, offset with \$0.50m of expenses and with \$6.5m of savings for a net expense of \$4.3m. The Government will provide funding to improve access to primary care and bulk billing appointments in the ACT, including:
 - a pilot grant program that provides funding to general practices that commit to bulk billing children under 16 years of age
 - funding for Drs4Drs ACT, a non-government organisation where medical professionals offer wellbeing support to their peers
 - As part of this initiative, the Government will also exempt income earned by GPs for bulk billed services from payroll tax liabilities from 1 July 2025. (*Budget Outlook p129-130*)
- **Continuing the Care and Protection Intensive List:** \$1.77m over four years (fully offset by expenses). The Government will support vulnerable Canberrans by providing ongoing funding for Legal Aid duty lawyers to attend cases before the Children’s Court Care and Protection Intensive List and continue to fund grants to low-income applicants who are seeking Legal Aid for a further two years. (*Budget Outlook p143*)

Climate, energy and environment

Despite rising utility costs, the combined ACT and Commonwealth energy bill relief has decreased in this budget — from \$1,100 in 2024-25 to \$950 in 2025-26. This \$150 reduction comes despite a permanent \$50 increase to the ACT's Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate, which has remained at the same level since 2022 under temporary, year to year measures. While permanency provides greater certainty, the rebate has not kept pace with rising energy costs and is unlikely to reflect the real increase in energy prices since 2018-19, when it was first set at \$654. ACTCOSS continues to recommend shifting to a percentage-based model and reviewing eligibility to ensure the rebate better targets those most in need.

While the extension of initiatives including the Sustainable Household Scheme is welcome, they continue to primarily benefit middle and higher income households, as many low-income households do not meet the borrowing capacity required to access it.

ACTCOSS commends the Government's commitment to accelerating energy upgrades for public housing — an important step towards energy equity and in line with our recommendation to fast-track the electrification of low-income households.

While this budget includes a series of welcome commitments, it has not made significant strides to advance energy and climate equity across the Territory.

Key Measures

- **Climate Action – electrification of public housing:** Total spend of \$21.78m over four years offset by \$10m in capital provision. Faster than expected delivery of an ACT government commitment to electrify and provide ceiling insulation for all feasible public housing will see spending for the program accelerated. Under the program eligible households will also have the cost of abolishing gas connections in their homes fully covered by the ACT government. (*Budget Outlook p97*)
- **Climate Action – improving energy efficiency for Canberra's homes and business:** \$15.78m in spending over four years offset by 176k in existing resourcing and \$15.55m in revenue from the Energy Saving Contribution Fund. As part of this action government will deliver free home energy assessments and practical support for eligible households and small businesses, support for apartment buildings to electrify, and culturally appropriate energy supports for First Nations households. This budget line item will also fund a Commercial Building Electrification pilot program to transition commercial buildings off gas. (*Budget Outlook p98*)
- **Climate Action – extending sustainable household scheme:** \$86.49m over three years offset by \$21.48m in loan repayments and revenue. The government will extend the Sustainable Household Loan Scheme by providing \$75m in low interest loans for battery storage, zero emissions vehicles and

chargers, ceiling insulation and energy efficient electric appliance. A 3% interest rate will apply to all loans from 1 July 2025. (excluding home energy support and owners' cooperation program loans) Rooftop solar will only be included as an eligible product for Home Energy Support Products. (*Budget Outlook p78*)

- **Cost of Living – targeted electricity gas and water rebate:** \$91.49m over four years. The government will permanently increase the rebate by \$50 to \$800 for eligible households. The rebate rate was set at \$654 in 2018-2019. (*Budget Outlook p80*)
- **Energy Bill Relief Extension:** \$32.23m in 2025-26 completely offset by Commonwealth funding. The ACT government will pass on a \$150 energy rebate that will be funded by the Federal government from 01 July 2025 – until the end of 2025. This rebate is only applicable to electricity bills. The federal government provided \$300 in energy rebates during the period 1 July 2024 – 30 June 2025. (*Budget Outlook p80*)
- **Sustainable Revenue – utilities network facilities tax:** \$9.1m increase in tax revenue over four years. The government will increase the utilities network facilities tax charged on the owners of network facilities in ACT by an additional 2.5% increase above the wage price increase from 2025 to 2027. This increase is described as a measure that will increase funds to sustainably deliver public services and infrastructure for the Canberra community. However electricity, and gas network providers are likely to pass on this increased cost to customers resulting in bill increases. (*Budget Outlook p88*)
- **Climate action – continuing the electrification of government assets –** capital investment of \$27.82m over two years and a net cost \$3.72m over four years. The Government will continue the Electrification of Government Gas Assets program, advancing the transition to net zero emissions. (*Budget Outlook p136*)

Community facilities and infrastructure

- **Better community infrastructure – supporting the new Gugan Gulwan Community Centre:** \$1.02m, for a net cost of the full amount. The Government will support operations and maintenance of the new Gugan Gulwan Community Centre. This initiative will help sustain high-quality facilities and services, supporting the delivery of vital programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families. (*Budget Outlook p134*)
- **Climate action – continuing the electrification of government assets:** Capital of \$27.82m over two years and a net cost \$3.72m over four years. The Government will continue the Electrification of Government Gas Assets program, advancing the transition to net zero emissions (*Budget Outlook p136*)

Community sector

The Government's announcement of an additional \$10 million in funding to the community sector over the next two financial years is an important investment. This investment is a response to sustained sector advocacy and provides short-term relief for the sector amid rising service delivery costs.

While it does not address historic underfunding due to lack of adequate consideration of growing demand, population growth and complexity of need, it provides the sector and ACT Government with time to rebalance funding to strengthen sustainability. As recommended in our budget submission, increased funding to account for increased costs should be permanent, with a clear commitment to ensure funding keeps pace with evolving need and rising demand.

The decision to impose an \$11 charge on volunteers requiring a Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) card was deeply regrettable. Government should not tax activities it seeks to encourage. At a time when community need is growing, the last thing we need is a disincentive to volunteer. Thanks to advocacy led by Volunteering ACT, supported by ACTCOSS, we welcomed the government's recent announcement to reverse this decision.

Key Measures

- **Funding Boost for Community Sector Organisations:** \$10m over two years as part of a funding boost to community sector organisations with funding agreements subject to Community Sector Indexation. This funding is to assist organisations to meet needs identified through the Sector Sustainability Project while the Government continues to progress community sector policy and funding reform commitments. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 123*).
- **Community Sector Indexation (CSI):** \$18.67m over four years, offset with \$11.14 million in expenses. The Government will apply CSI to relevant community sector funding for community organisations that deliver services through multi-year funding agreements. CSI is calculated using a ratio of 80:20 of wage increases and Consumer Price Index respectively. It also reflects the recent Fair Work Commission Annual Wage Review determination to increase the Social, Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Award by 3.5 per cent. CSI will be 3.35 per cent in 2025-26. (*Budget Outlook p59 and 120*)
- **Investing in public services – strengthening access to Canberra's service delivery:** This initiative was partially offset through the introduction of a new \$11 fee for individuals applying for WWVP registration for volunteer work, which resulted into an excepted offset revenue of \$3.88m over four years. It is anticipated this will be updated in the Appropriations Bills (*Budget Outlook p104*)

Cost of living and poverty alleviation

While some measures in the 2025–26 ACT Budget align with ACTCOSS recommendations, overall support falls short at a time when low-income households continue to face acute financial pressure.

Despite rising utility costs, the combined ACT and Commonwealth energy bill relief has decreased this budget – from \$1100 in 2024-25 to \$950 in 2025-26. This \$150 reduction comes despite the permanent \$50 increase to the Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate, an amount that has remained unchanged since 2022 under temporary, year to year measures. While making the increase permanent provides certainty, it does not improve the overall level of support as utility costs rise.

The conclusion of the Rent Relief Fund further compounds pressure on households already experiencing severe rental stress. ACT recipients of Commonwealth Rent Assistance have the highest rate of rental stress in the country.¹ It is disappointing that the Government has chosen to withdraw critical supports amidst persistently high housing costs and rising utility pressures.

Key Measures

- **Targeted Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate:** \$9.14m over four years. The government is permanently increasing the Electricity, Gas and Water Rebate by \$50 to \$800 to eligible recipients (around 40,000 households) in 2025-26. (*Budget Outlook p80*)
- **Energy Bill Relief Extension:** \$32.29m for 2025-26, offset from \$32.20m from the Commonwealth Government's Energy Bill Relief Fund. The initiative provides a rebate to eligible households of \$150 towards electricity bills from 1 July 2025 through to 31 December 2025. (*Budget Outlook p80*)
- **Conveyance duty concessions:** \$2.35m over four years (revenue forgone) to increase stamp duty concessions for first home buyers, pensioners, and people with disability. The Government is increasing the price threshold for the Disability Duty Concession Scheme from 1 July 2025. Price thresholds will be indexed annually. In 2025-26, the threshold will be \$1.02m. (*Budget Outlook p79*)
- **Expanding the Future of Education Equity Fund:** \$0.6m in 2025-26. The Government is expanding the Future of Education Equity fund by supporting an additional 1,000 eligible students in the 2025 school year. Approximately 6,000 students will be supported with one-off payments. (*Budget Outlook p115*)

¹ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: Part G Housing and Homelessness, Section 18 Housing](#), Australian Government, 10 June 2025.

- **Delivering food relief for vulnerable Canberrans:** \$1.5m over three years (fully offset from existing resources of the Health and Community Services Directorate). The Government will establish a Food Bank Fund to support food banks and community organisations who provide Canberrans with access to food relief and essential grocery items. The Government will also develop a Food Relief Action Plan to inform the implementation of this initiative in 2026-27 and 2027-28. This initiative extends previously funded support measures for people needing food relief, including the 2024-25 Budget initiative *Cost of living support for vulnerable Canberrans – emergency material, financial aid and food relief*. (*Budget Outlook p122*)
- **Cost of living – supporting community organisations:** \$2.68m over four years. The Government will fund a variety of programs to enable community organisations to provide support to vulnerable members of the ACT community. This includes funding for Crisis and Transitional Accommodation Program case management and wrap-around services for vulnerable women, and additional funding for:
 - Fearless Women
 - Scouts ACT; and
 - Kulture Break. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 122*)
- **Supporting our health workforce – Improving affordability and access to GPs:** \$7.3m over 4 years, offset with \$0.50m of expenses and with \$6.5m of savings for a net expense of \$4.3m. The Government will provide funding to improve access to primary care and bulk billing appointments in the ACT, including:
 - a pilot grant program that provides funding to general practices that commit to bulk billing children under 16 years of age.
 - funding for Drs4Drs ACT, a non-government organisation where medical professionals offer wellbeing support to their peers.
 As part of this initiative, the Government will also exempt income earned by GPs for bulk billed services from payroll tax liabilities from 1 July 2025. (*Budget Outlook p129-130*)
- **Modernising our traffic and parking systems:** In order to contribute to the cost of managing and maintaining parking infrastructure, parking and permit fees will increase by six per cent in 2025-26, which results in an expected offset revenue of \$3.96m over four years. (*Budget Outlook p105*)
- **Rent relief fund:** discontinuation of the Rent Relief Fund in the 2025-26 financial year. Last year (2024-25), the Government extended the operation of the Rent Relief Fund to assist vulnerable, low-income Canberrans experiencing rental stress or financial hardship, with an investment of \$1.64m.

Disability

We welcome the modest but important investments to help implement the Disability Inclusion Bill, funding for codesign and work to progress disability foundational supports. The budget also includes important investments in health care which support the ACT Disability Strategy.

Some gaps remain, particularly in funding for disability advocacy organisations without multi-year funding agreements, who are already operating beyond capacity amid major sector reform — a priority area ACTCOSS recommended the Government address in this budget.

Key measures:

- **Implementing the Disability Inclusion Act 2024:** \$0.99m over two years, with \$0.64m for 2025-26 and \$0.69m partially offset through existing resources within the Health and Community Services Directorate. This funding includes:
 - the development of disability inclusion plans and strategies by government directorates and agencies in consultation with people with disability
 - the establishment of a consultative panel to facilitate government engagement with diverse groups of people with disability; and
 - grant funding to ACT Disability Directed Cause and National Disability Services to support disability services system reform consultation (*Budget Outlook p59 & 124*)
- **Conveyance duty concessions:** \$2.35m over four years (revenue forgone) to increase stamp duty concessions for first home buyers, pensioners, and people with disability. The Government is increasing the price threshold for a number of schemes including the Disability Duty Concession Scheme from 1 July 2025. Price thresholds will be indexed annually. In 2025-26, the threshold will be \$1.02m. (*Budget Outlook p79*)
- **Support for Paralympic Sports:** \$1.51m over two years, with an offset of \$0.56m and a Commonwealth Government contribution of \$0.96m. The Government will support the delivery of a funding agreement with the Australian Sports Commission to support the establishment of a Paralympic Sport Unit and support the rollout of the national *Our Connection to Country* project through the ACT Academy of Sport. (*Budget Outlook p83*)
- **Continuation of the Children and Young People Equipment Loan Scheme (CAYPELS):** \$0.34m for 2025-26 (fully offset by expenses). The Government will fund the continuation of CAYPELS as a three day per week service providing free short-term loans of specialist paediatric equipment and assistive technology for children and young people with disability or mobility needs (*Budget Outlook p59 & 121*)

- **Continuing autism spectrum disorder assessments:** \$1.46m over two years, fully offset by expenses. The Government will continue delivery of Autism Spectrum Disorder assessment services provided by the Child Development Service, which is the only publicly funded, no-cost, comprehensive multidisciplinary autism assessment service for children up to 12 years old in the ACT. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 121*)
- **More support for out of home care:** \$13.21m in the 2025-26 financial year, offset with \$3.35m for a net expense of \$9.86m. This investment will continue delivery of Extraordinary Residential Care for children and young people with disability and/or mental health conditions who cannot remain safely with their families. This investment will also continue to fund six existing staff members for the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. (*Budget Outlook p128*)
- **Maintaining Inclusive Transport Services:** Spending of \$1.64m in 2025-2026. Government will support accessible transport needs of eligible Canberrans, by funding flexible public transport services during weekdays. This initiative is a continuation of previous government investment in the area. (*Budget Outlook p103*)
- **Supporting the new Southside Hydrotherapy Facility:** \$0.92m in the 2025-26 financial year, offset with \$0.66m and a net expense of \$0.61m. The Government will finalise construction and commence operations at the Southside Hydrotherapy Pool in Tuggeranong to provide improved hydrotherapy services for residents on Canberra's southside. The facility will offer a safe and accessible space for therapeutic exercise and rehabilitation, supporting individuals with mobility challenges, chronic conditions, and those recovering from injury. (*Budget Outlook p141*)

Education

The ACTCOSS budget submission recommended that the ACT Government make equitable access to education a priority within its education funding. High-quality early learning is vital for all children and is the foundation of a fair and equitable education system. However, rising costs in education have far outpaced support mechanisms, leaving many families struggling to meet essential expenses. Unfortunately, the budget includes only limited investment in new education initiatives, falling short of the recommended focus on equitable access. Notably, while the Future of Education Equity Fund payment has been extended to an additional 1,000 students, its value remains stagnant at \$750, the same as under the former Secondary Bursary Scheme, despite secondary education costs increasing by 72% since 2013. Addressing this disparity is crucial to ensure all students have access to the resources they need to thrive.

Key Measures

- **Continuing Free Meals in Schools:** \$13.45m over four years, offset with \$0.9m from the 2024-25 initiative *Investing in public education – Continuation of Meals in Schools* for a net cost of \$12.48m. The Government will continue the Free Meals in Schools program following the pilot to provide breakfast and lunch for three days a week at five ACT public schools. (*Budget Outlook p115*)
- **Cost of living – expanding the future of education equity fund:** \$0.6m over 2025-26, with a net of \$0.6m. The Government will provide an expansion to the Future of Education Equity Fund by supporting an additional 1,000 eligible students in the 2025 school year through the Fund. Approximately 6,000 students will be supported with one-off payments. (*Budget Outlook p115*)
- **Cost of living - free school camps at Birrigai:** \$3.27m over four years (fully offset from expenses and savings). The Government will expand the school camps pilot initiative by providing ongoing funding for every child in an ACT public primary school (years 3 – 6) to access one school camp each year. (*Budget Outlook p115*)

Family and domestic violence

The 2025–26 ACT Budget includes some welcome investments in domestic, family, and sexual violence services, with partial alignment to ACTCOSS' recommendations. Funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and the delayed implementation of the Long Yarn Report supports culturally safe responses, but the reliance on offsets and future-year spending limits immediate impact. Increased support for frontline services, including crisis responses and two new child specialist roles, begins to address chronic under-resourcing, yet falls short of community need.

While the budget provides short-term support for the community legal assistance sector, including the Women's Legal Centre, Canberra Community Law and the Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT, there is a steep drop in funding from \$2.11m in 2025–26 to just \$0.37m across 2026–28 highlighting a significant shortfall in resourcing essential legal services. Without sustained, long-term funding, the service system will remain overstretched and unable to meet the needs of those most at risk.

Key Measures

- **Safer families – supporting frontline family, domestic and sexual violence services:** \$24.85m over four years, offset with \$20.15m for a net expense of \$4.7m. The Government will increase investment in frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services in the ACT.
 - The Canberra Rape Crisis Centre, and the Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) will receive additional funding
 - There will also be funding for Victim Support ACT and DVCS to continue delivery of the Family Violence Safety Action Program.
 - Funding for Canberra Police Community Youth Club will allow the continued delivery of the Solid Ground Program, providing early intervention support to young people
 - The YWCA Canberra will be funded to expand its Domestic Violence Support Service through the addition of two children's specialist workers
 - Funding will also be provided for the continuation and expansion of the Women's Health Matters Victim Survivor Voices Pilot
 - The Safer Families Assistance Program is also funded to continue in 2025-26. (*Budget Outlook p128*)
- **Implementing recommendations from the Long Yarn Report:** \$6.02m over three years, starting from 2026-27 (offset with \$5.80m from the Safer Families Levy, and \$0.21m from existing resources from the Health and Community Services Directorate). The Government will provide \$0.6m investment in the development and implementation of a 'violence is not our way' community and professional education program. The Government will provide funding to the following Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations:

- Sisters in Spirit Aboriginal Corporation, \$1.65m
 - Yerrabi Yurwang, \$1.66m
 - Yhurwun Bullan, \$1.93m
 - WhlSPers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Softball Corporation, \$0.18m. (*Budget Outlook p124; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Budget Statement p6*)
- **Safer Families Funding (reprofiled funding):** A range of measures within the Safer Families initiative have had their spending reallocated from the 2024-25 financial year to the 2025-26 financial year. (*Health and Community Services Directorate ACT – Budget Statement C, 37*)
 - **Investing in public services – additional resourcing for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office:** \$8.07m over four years, fully offset with existing resources. The Government will provide continued funding for the Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Office to ensure the ongoing delivery of strategic policy objectives and program management in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence in the ACT. (*Budget Outlook p127*)
 - **Supporting the ACT legal assistance sector:** \$2.48m over two years, with \$2.11m in 2025-26 and \$0.37 million in 2026-28, partially offset by \$2.22m expenses. The Government will continue to support the community legal assistance sector including:
 - The Women’s Legal Centre
 - Canberra Community Law
 - CARE; and
 - The Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT.

This funding will also build Legal Aid ACT’s capacity to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse clients. (*Budget Outlook p148*)

Health

The 2025–26 Budget reflects a commitment to several priorities outlined in ACTCOSS' budget submission regarding improving access to healthcare, mental health services, and support for vulnerable populations. Key investments aligning with ACTCOSS' recommendations include \$1.91m over three years for more services at Belconnen Safe Haven, including peer-led mental health services, \$7.3m over four years for improving affordability and access to GPs and \$5.2m into supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Other Drug Residential Rehabilitation Operations through a dedicated alcohol and drug rehabilitation service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

There remain gaps in care, including lack of funding to improve access to timely and affordable public dental services, and sustainable funding for mobile clinics that provide wraparound support to Canberrans who cannot easily access health services due to homelessness and/or social marginalisation.

Reliance on offsets and short-term funding highlights a broader lack of sustained investment in critical health services, raising concerns about the long-term capacity to meet community needs effectively.

Key Measures

- **A levy to support the public health system²:** \$205m over four years, with a net cost of -\$205m. The purpose of the levy is to address increased demand in the public health system and a declining Commonwealth Contribution Rate to public hospitals. From 2025-26 to 2028-29, general rates bills for each rateable property (residential, commercial and rural) will include a \$250 Health Levy to address increased costs in the health system. (*Budget Outlook p86*)
- **Expanding the School Youth Nurse Program in ACT Public Schools:** \$1.35m over four years, with the majority of funding (~\$1.18m) scheduled for 2027-2029. This program ensures a School Youth Health Nurse is available in every high school, three days per week to provide one-on-one student consultations, educational health activities and support teachers to deliver the health curriculum. (*Budget Outlook p65*)
- **Improving mental health care – Perinatal Mental Health Safe Haven:** \$0.5m over two years. The Government will support birth parents and families experiencing perinatal mental health issues by providing additional funding to:
 - the Perinatal Wellbeing Centre
 - the Perinatal Mental Health Alliance. (*Budget Outlook p127*)

² The levy was not supported in parliament and subsequently altered following negotiations with the ACT Greens. The levy was reduced to \$100 for residential and rural property owners and remained at \$250 for commercial properties. The gap in spending was offset by a 2 per cent increase in payroll tax rates for large businesses with payrolls exceeding \$150m.

- **Planning for a perinatal mental health residential mother and baby unit -** \$0.73m in one year to undertake a feasibility study for a six-bed perinatal mental health mother and baby unit. (*Budget Outlook p67*)
- **Responding to health care demand and cost pressures:** \$717m over four years to invest in public health services and medical supplies. (*Budget Outlook p67*)
- **Better care for our community - community and home-based palliative care services:** \$4.16 million over four years, fully offset by expenses. The Government will provide funding to improve palliative and end-of-life choices and includes:
 - expanding Leo's Place by two additional beds
 - delivering better end-of-life support for First Nations people, including a Community Aboriginal Liaison Officer; and
 - continuing and expanding the Palliative Medicines in Community Pharmacies program to up to seven ACT pharmacies. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 119*)
- **Better care for our community - more services at Belconnen Safe Haven:** \$1.91 million over three years, offset with \$2.19 million from funding for the establishment of Belconnen Safe Haven including *Better care for our community – developing the ACT Mental Health Workforce Strategy* funded in the 2022-23 Budget Review. The Government will continue services at the Belconnen Safe Haven and expand operating hours of the service. Belconnen Safe Haven provides a safe space for people over 16 to access peer-led mental health support. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 120*)
- **Continuation of the Children and Young People Equipment Loan Scheme (CAYPELS):** \$0.34 million for 2025-26 (fully offset by expenses). The Government will fund the continuation of CAYPELS as a three day per week service providing free short-term loans of specialist paediatric equipment and assistive technology for children and young people with disability or mobility needs. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 121*)
- **Continuing autism spectrum disorder assessments:** \$1.46m over two years, fully offset by expenses. The Government will continue delivery of Autism Spectrum Disorder assessment services provided by the Child Development Service, which is the only publicly funded, no-cost, comprehensive multidisciplinary autism assessment service for children up to 12 years old in the ACT. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 121*)
- **Improving mental health care – continuing support for youth mental health services:** \$9.46m over four years, offset with \$8.6m for a net expense of \$0.86m. The Government will deliver on its commitment to continue to support a range of community-led youth mental health programs, including:
 - the MindMap Online Youth Navigation Portal
 - Stepping Stones

- Youth Aware of Mental Health
- WOKE - the dialectical behaviour therapy program.

As part of this initiative, the Government will also provide funding for the ACT Child and Youth Mental Health Alliance. (*Budget Outlook p126*)

- **More support for out-of-home care:** \$13.21m in the 2025-26 financial year, offset with \$3.35m for a net expense of \$9.86m. This investment will continue delivery of Extraordinary Residential Care for children and young people with disability and/or mental health conditions who cannot remain safely with their families. This investment will also continue to fund six existing staff members for the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. (*Budget Outlook p128*)
- **Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Alcohol and Other Drug Residential Rehabilitation Operations:** \$5.2m over three years, offset with \$4.3m for a net expense of \$0.89m. The Government will provide funding to Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services to operate an alcohol and other drug residential rehabilitation service. (*Budget Outlook p129*)
- **Supporting our health workforce – improving affordability and access to GPs:** \$7.3m over four years, offset with \$0.50m of expenses and with \$6.5m of savings for a net expense of \$4.3m. The Government will provide funding to improve access to primary care and bulk billing appointments in the ACT, including:
 - a pilot grant program that provides funding to general practices that commit to bulk billing children under 16 years of age
 - funding for Drs4Drs ACT, a non-government organisation where medical professionals offer wellbeing support to their peers

As part of this initiative, the Government will also exempt income earned by GPs for bulk billed services from payroll tax liabilities from 1 July 2025. (*Budget Outlook p129-130*)
- **Supporting our health workforce – resourcing for the ACT Government Analytical Laboratory:** \$3.58m over four years, offset with \$3.84m by cost recovery within government and with \$1.32m by revenue received through regulatory fees for a net saving of \$1.58m. The Government will provide additional resourcing for the ACT Government Analytical Laboratory (ACTGAL), which provides a range of services to protect and support the health of the community, including air quality monitoring, food and water analysis, and drug testing. (*Budget Outlook p130*)
- **Supporting our health workforce - supporting a self-determined and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce:** \$2.36m over four years, offset with \$2.06m from for a net cost of \$0.31m. The Government will address shortages of First Nations people in the ACT health workforce, with opportunities in specialised and mainstream healthcare roles. This work, in line with the ACT Health Workforce Strategy and the Health Workforce Action Plan, will involve local actions aimed at eliminating systemic

racism, creating career pathways, providing culturally responsive supervision, offering clinical placements and ensuring comprehensive support. (*Budget Outlook p130-131*)

- **Better community infrastructure – supporting the new Gudan Gulwan Community Centre:** \$1.02m, for a net cost of the full amount. The Government will support operations and maintenance of the new Gudan Gulwan Community Centre. This initiative will help sustain high-quality facilities and services, supporting the delivery of vital programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families. (*Budget Outlook p134*)

Housing and homelessness

A key recommendation in ACTCOSS 2025-26 budget submission was for the ACT Government to commit to a level of investment in social housing that is in line with the [Supply and Confidence Agreement](#), ensuring an increase in the proportion of all housing which is public and community housing, by the end of this term of government.

While this budget signals intent to meet the government's 2030 public housing target, ACTCOSS remains concerned about its achievability. As of June 2024, the ACT had 10,952 public housing dwellings.³ While the Government has committed to delivering 1,000 more, this appears to be less than half of what is needed to meet the 13,200 dwelling target by 2030.

Key Measures

- **Housing ACT frontline support and Social Housing Accelerator Program:** \$10.44m (fully offset by expenses and capital provision) for 55 new social housing dwellings under the Commonwealth Government Social Housing Accelerator program. In addition, the ongoing delivery of Housing ACT frontline services and allocation of any additional operating revenues to fund five additional frontline staff, operational expenses and the Growing and Renewing Public Housing Program. (*Budget Outlook p132*)
- **Housing Australia Future Fund Round 2:** \$75m, offset by round 2 of the Housing Australia Future Fund facility, and through funding provisioned in the 2024-25 Budget initiative *More public housing – Housing Australia Future Fund Facility (HAFFF) Stage 2*, resulting in a net saving of \$18.8m. The Government will construct 85 new public housing dwellings, to be leased to Community Housing Providers over a period of 25 years. (*Budget Outlook p132*)
- **Tenant Participation Grant:** \$140,000 over two years to support the participation of public and community housing tenants in social, educational and work-related activities. The government has doubled the annual funding for this grant (previously it was \$70,000 over two years). (*Budget Outlook p133*)
- **Investing in frontline homelessness services:** \$16.22m over four years. The Government will extend funding for existing specialist homelessness service providers to maintain current capacity levels and extend the existing funding boost for specialist homelessness service providers. (*Budget Outlook p133*) It appears that of this amount:

³ Productivity Commission, [Report on Government Services 2025: Part G, Section 18, Housing](#), Australian Government, Table 18A.3.

- \$11m is provided to maintain existing funding boost for the homelessness sector (*Housing Statement p8*). This funding boost was required to avoid an indexation cliff facing providers.
- \$5m over four years to support the continued operation of MacKillop House, the Early Morning Centre weekend service, Ainslie Lodge and Axial Housing.
- **Supporting homelessness emergency supports:** \$3.4m over four years. Continued funding for hotel accommodation brokerage, and trial an alternative approach to crisis accommodation, by establishing a program that utilises existing Housing ACT properties to provide short term accommodation to those who cannot be supported through other crisis options. (*Budget Outlook p133*)
- **Planning for more public housing:** \$4.82m in 2025-26. Funding allocated to Infrastructure Canberra to develop a plan to deliver over 1,000 additional public housing dwellings by 2030. This contributes to the Government's commitment to expand the Housing ACT property portfolio to 13,200 homes by the end of 2030. (*Budget Outlook p134*)
- **Increasing the Affordable Housing Project Fund:** \$24.43m over four years. Additional funding for the Affordable Housing Project Fund, provided to Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate and the Health and Community Services Directorate to help deliver the commitment of an additional 5000 public, community and affordable housing by the end of 2030. This increases the Affordable Housing Project Fund from \$80 million to \$100 million (*Budget Outlook, pg 74*).
- **Affordable Home Purchase Scheme support:** net cost of \$0.3m in the 2025-26 financial year, with \$0.29m of expenses and \$19,000 of forgone revenue. This initiative extends financial support to low-income homebuyers experiencing delays in the construction of their house and land packages purchased under the Affordable Home Purchase Scheme (*Budget Outlook p73*)
- **Affordable Housing Land Tax Exemption Scheme expansion:** net cost of \$4.25m over four years, with \$0.5m of expenses and \$3.37m of forgone revenue. This initiative increases the current property cap of the Affordable Community Housing Land Tax Exemption Scheme from 250 to 1,000 properties. The scheme helps make rentals more affordable for people on low incomes and gives property owners a full land tax exemption if they rent their properties to eligible tenants through a registered community housing provider at less than 75 per cent of the market rent. Increasing the cap will enable more property owners and eligible tenants to benefit from the scheme. (*Budget Outlook p73*)

- **Supporting more Build-to-Rent:** \$12.5m over four years. This initiative provides financial assistance for Build-to-Rent providers, in partnership with the ACT Government, to deliver new affordable rental homes in Build-to-Rent developments across the ACT. These homes will be rented to eligible tenants at less than 75 per cent of market rent. (*Budget Outlook p75*)
- **Climate Action – extending the sustainable household scheme:** \$86.49m over three years offset by \$21.48m in loan repayments and revenue. The government will extend the Sustainable Household Loan Scheme by providing \$75m in low interest loans for battery storage, zero emissions vehicles and chargers, ceiling insulation and energy efficient electric appliances. A 3% interest rate will apply to all loans written from 1 July 2025 (excluding home energy support and owners' cooperation program loans.) Rooftop solar will only be included as an eligible product for Home Energy Support Products. (*Budget Outlook p78*)
- **Climate Action – electrification of public housing:** Total spend of \$21.78m over four years offset by \$10m in capital provision. Faster than expected delivery of an ACT government commitment to electrify and provide ceiling insulation for all feasible public housing will see spending for the program accelerated. Under the program eligible households will also have the cost of abolishing gas connections in their homes fully covered by the ACT government. (*Budget Outlook p97*)
- **Climate Action – improving energy efficiency for Canberra's homes and business:** \$15.78m in spending over four years offset by 0.18m in existing resourcing and \$15.55m in revenue from the Energy Saving Contribution Fund. As part of this action government will deliver free home energy assessments and practical support for eligible households and small businesses, support for apartment buildings to electrify, and culturally appropriate energy supports for First Nations households. This budget line item will also fund a Commercial Building Electrification pilot program to transition commercial buildings off gas. (*Budget Outlook p98*)

Justice and human rights

The 2025–26 Budget includes \$6.4m over four years for implementing recommendations from the Sexual Assault (Police) Review and \$7.6m in 2025-26 for supporting ACT Victims of Crime. While these are positive steps, short-term funding may limit long-term impact.

ACTCOSS urges the Government to allocate dedicated funding to implement recommendations from the Independent Review into the Overrepresentation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People in the ACT Justice System. Despite some progress, overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people incarcerated in the ACT has worsened. Aboriginal-led, culturally safe legal, diversion, and rehabilitation services must be resourced to deliver meaningful justice reform.

Key Measures

- **More support for out of home care:** \$13.21m in the 2025-26 financial year, offset with \$3.35m for a net expense of \$9.86m. This investment will continue delivery of Extraordinary Residential Care for children and young people with disability and/or mental health conditions who cannot remain safely with their families. This investment will also continue to fund six existing staff members for the Bimberi Youth Justice Centre. (*Budget Outlook p128*)
- **Supporting the ACT legal assistance sector:** \$2.48m for two years, with \$2.11m in 2025-26 and \$0.37m in 2026-28, partially offset by \$2.22m expenses. The Government will continue to support the community legal assistance sector including:
 - The Women's Legal Centre
 - Canberra Community Law
 - CARE; and
 - The Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT.This funding will also build Legal Aid ACT's capacity to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as culturally and linguistically diverse clients. (*Budget Outlook p148*)
- **Offset - Government Response to the Sexual Assault (Police) Review Report:** Government savings of -\$0.36m in 2025–26, -\$0.13m by 2026–27. (*Justice and Community Safety Directorate - Statement D p28*)
- **Additional Magistrate for the ACT Magistrates Court:** \$4.37m over four years (fully offset by expenses and savings). The Government will provide funding to establish a 10th Magistrate in the ACT Magistrates Court and additional resourcing for the Director of Public Prosecutions, Legal Aid and the Coroners Court to help progress cases. (*Budget Outlook p62 & 142*)

- **Continuing the Care and Protection Intensive List:** \$1.77m over four years (fully offset by expenses). The Government will support vulnerable Canberrans by providing ongoing funding for Legal Aid duty lawyers to attend cases before the Children's Court Care and Protection Intensive List and continue to fund grants to low-income applicants who are seeking Legal Aid for a further two years. (*Budget Outlook p143*)
- **Enhancing Human Rights complaints management:** \$1.56m for 2025-26 (partially offset by \$0.83 million by existing resourcing within the Justice and Community Safety Directorate) to enhance the capacity of the ACT Government Solicitor's Office to reduce the workload under the Human Rights Act 2004. (*Budget Outlook p144*)
- **Justice reform – implementing the Sexual Assault (Police) Review Report (SAPR Report):** \$6.4m over four years, with \$5.25m offset from expenses and \$6.14m offset by expenses within the Health and Community Services Directorate (a saving of \$4.95m). The Government will implement a sexual assault advocate pilot as outlined in Recommendation 2 of the SAPR Report. This also includes funding for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for a Witness Assistance Scheme officer and an internal redirection of ACT Policing staff to support victim survivors. (*Budget Outlook p145*)
- **Justice reform – more support for the ACT Intermediary Program:** \$1.39m for 2025-26 (fully offset by expenses). The Government will continue the Intermediary Program in the Human Rights Commission which provides target services for vulnerable complainants, witnesses and accused persons in the criminal justice system. It will also provide funding to Legal Aid to support their engagement with the Intermediary Program. (*Budget Outlook p145*)
- **Justice reform – supporting ACT victims of crime:** \$7.6m for 2025-26. The Government will provide additional funding for the Victims Services Scheme and Financial Assistance Scheme program administered by Victims Support ACT to respond to an increasing demand for services and applications for financial assistance. (*Budget Outlook p146*)

Planning and transport

- **Improved Bus Services – maintaining inclusive transport services:**
Spending of \$1.64m in 2025-2026. Government will support accessible transport needs of eligible Canberrans, by funding flexible public transport services during weekdays. This initiative is a continuation of previous government investment in the area. (*Budget Outlook p103*)

Social inclusion

ACTCOSS welcomes the continuation of the humanitarian grants program, including the allocation of \$0.15m to the Acute Rental Support Coordinating Committee (ARSCC) to provide critical financial support to asylum seekers awaiting resolution of their claim for protection. However, the funding envelope has not changed and it remains as single year funding, despite consistent advocacy efforts across the sector. ACTCOSS is concerned that there is no new funding to address recommendations from the 2024 Inquiry into Loneliness and Social Isolation in the ACT.

Key Measures

- **Continuing humanitarian grants programs:** \$0.35m for 2025-26, offset with \$0.15m by expenses. The Government will continue funding the Australian Red Cross for the Family Settlement Assistance Grants Program and the Humanitarian Fund in 2025-26. This funding supports individuals and families arriving in Canberra after fleeing global crises, as well as providing financial assistance to refugees and asylum seekers for essential expenses such as housing and basic living costs. (*Budget Outlook p59 & 121*)
- **Supporting trans and gender diverse peer support services:** \$0.17m in the 2025-26 financial year, fully offset. The Government will continue support for A Gender Agenda to continue operating the Gender Pathways Peer Navigation Service. (*Budget Outlook p131*)

Thank you

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