



ACT Budget: Caught in Cycles of Crisis

Analysis of the ACT Budget 2012-2013

Part 1 of 3

Overview and Media Releases

June 2012

www.youthcoalition.net

The Youth Coalition of the ACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional owners and continuing custodians of the lands of the ACT and we pay our respects to the Elders, families and ancestors.

We acknowledge that the effect of forced removal of Indigenous children from their families as well as past racist policies and actions continues today.

We acknowledge that the Indigenous people hold distinctive rights as the original people of modern day Australia including the right to a distinct status and culture, self-determination and land. The Youth Coalition of the ACT celebrates Ngunnawal culture and the invaluable contribution it makes to our community.

The Youth Coalition of the ACT (Youth Coalition) is the peak youth affairs body in the Australian Capital Territory and is responsible for representing the interests of people aged between 12 and 25 years of age and those who work with them.

The Youth Coalition works to actively promote the well being and aspirations of young people in the ACT with particular respect to their political, cultural, economic and social development. The Youth Coalition is represented on many ACT advisory structures and provides advice to the ACT Government on a range of issues related to young people and youth services.

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Budget Analysis Overview

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs and young people aged 12 – 25, acknowledges additional funding for child protection and youth justice in the 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget. However, Budget measures do not invest enough in early intervention and prevention for the most vulnerable young people and families in our community.

Although the objectives of the ACT Budget include targeted investments to reduce future costs and address chronic disadvantage, this has not resulted in a significant investment in community services to support young people and their families.

The Youth Coalition is particularly disappointed that the Children, Youth and Family Services Program has not received additional funding, as was urgently called for by the Youth Coalition and Families ACT in May 2012. The CYFSP funds a range of community-based services to support vulnerable children, young people and families with relationships, housing, finances, parenting, education, employment; and to prevent them from becoming involved with Care and Protection and Youth Justice.

The Youth Coalition's 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget Analysis is divided into three parts:

- Part 1: Overview and Media Releases (this document)
- Part 2: Expenditure Initiatives
- Part 3: Capital Initiatives

Some of the key initiatives and outcomes of the 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget are outlined below.

Workforce Development

The central focus of the Youth Coalition's submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget was Workforce Development, a critical issue for the youth and family support sector. We welcomed the commitment by the ACT Government to fund the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration Case, and called for strategies and resources to address workforce capacity and improve recruitment and retention in the youth and family sector.

Funding initiatives announced in the ACT Budget included:

- \$5.3 million over four years for retention and employment of additional frontline Care and Protection Services staff; and,
- \$0.6 million over three years to strengthen Care and Protection Services through professional and system development and practice improvements.

The Youth Coalition strongly supports the implementation of professional development and practice improvement for the Care and Protection Service workforce. However it is essential that this initiative relates to other existing workforce projects such as the Practice Framework which is being developed for the Children, Youth, and Family Services Program, and other workforce cultural competence development initiatives.

With ACT Government driving a significant change agenda across key areas of service delivery to young people and their families, we were disappointed that funding to address workforce capacity, recruitment and retention did not include further

investment in the broader youth and family support sector workforce. It is imperative that workforce development initiatives are also implemented for early intervention and prevention services, and secondary-level intervention services.

Community Sector Indexation

The Community Sector Indexation figure for ACT Government Service Funding Agreements in 2012-13 will be 3.25%.

However, organisations receiving over \$150,000 through the Community Services Directorate, Housing ACT, and the Health Directorate will be subject to an adjustment of 0.34% as a contribution to the 'Implementation of Equal Remuneration Case Outcomes and Related Community Service Reforms Initiative' (Community Sector Transition and Investment Fund). This will bring the Community Sector Indexation figure down to 2.91%.

Community Sector Viability

The Youth Coalition supported the submission to the ACT Budget from the ACT Community Sector Leaders Forum, which sought for the ACT Government to provide 'a one-off investment to community sector organisations in the order of 15% of the base of contracted services, separate to the recent commitment by the ACT Government to fully fund the Equal Wage Case for community sector workers, untied and in recognition of the significant and growing requirements placed on the sector.'¹

Initiatives announced in the ACT Budget included:

- \$1.4 million over three years for the implementation of the Equal Remuneration Case outcomes and related community sector reforms (amount represents the contribution of 0.34% adjustment from community sector indexation); and,
- \$4,478,000 over four years for Social and Community Services (SACS) Pay Equity Award.

The Youth Coalition again acknowledges the ACT Government's commitment to funding the outcomes of the Equal Remuneration Case, including the commitment to provide \$27 million towards funding its implementation. While we understand that this is to occur over eight years, it appears that only approximately \$4.5 million over four years, has been allocated in this ACT Budget.

The Youth Coalition continues to be concerned that demand for community services support is greater than capacity. This is particularly concerning for youth and family services when considering the continuing trend of increase in Child Protection and Child Concern Reports, and number of Community Youth Justice clients.

The Youth Coalition and Families ACT, the peak for family support services, called on the ACT Government in May 2012 to allocate further funding to the newly established Children, Youth, and Family Services Program (CYFSP). The CYFSP funds a range of community-based services to support vulnerable children, young people and families with relationships, housing, finances, parenting, education, employment; and to prevent them from becoming involved with Care and Protection and Youth Justice.

¹ ACT Community Sector Leaders Forum (February 2012) Submission to inform the development of the 2012/13 ACT Government Budget, Canberra.

Housing and Homelessness

With the private rental market in the ACT amongst the most expensive and inaccessible in Australia, many young people report difficulty in gaining entry to private rental properties, due to cost, availability and discrimination. The Youth Coalition's submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget called for more work to be done to address housing affordability, particularly for young people in the ACT.

The ACT Budget's key initiatives include:

- \$2 million for additional dwellings to address social housing needs; and,
- \$600,000 over two years for Implementation of Phase III of the Affordable Housing Action Plan.

The expansion of social housing and allocation of funds towards building additional dwellings is welcomed, however the Youth Coalition is concerned that young people will still be priced out of housing in the ACT. While recognising that income support and rental assistance is delivered by the Australian Government, we believe that the ACT Government needs to invest more in addressing affordable housing for young people, and supporting young people in accessing the private rental market.

We applaud the ACT Government for the reforms announced in regards to Land Tax, which will improve rental affordability in the market for dwellings with land values up to \$390,000.

The Youth Coalition notes that there is no funding listed for new expenditure under ACT Housing projects.

Education

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget expressed support for the Education and Training Directorate's Student Engagement Framework, in particular the view to include both vulnerable and less vulnerable young people in a holistic strategy. Tiers 2 and 3 of the Student Engagement Framework focus on responding to disengaged students using both internal and external programs and resources.

Key initiatives announced in the ACT Budget include:

- \$3.2 million over four years for the CIT Year 12 program and the Disabilities Support Area for students with complex needs.

Educational engagement plays a major part in keeping young people connected to their community, engaged in learning and social and emotional development. The ACT Youth Commitment clearly articulates that no young person will be lost from education, training or employment. The Youth Coalition is disappointed at the lack of funding allocated to initiatives to support vulnerable young Canberrans to effectively engage with education, in particular within schools.

The Youth Coalition is also concerned that the ACT Budget lacks further commitment of funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education and/or training.

Justice

The Youth Coalition submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget supported a significant investment in the actions to be identified in the ACT Blueprint for Youth Justice. The submission also called for programs to reduce recidivism and provide meaningful alternatives to detention, and exploration, piloting, and evaluation of Justice Reinvestment models.

We welcome the Budget announcement of \$5.5 million for initiatives in Youth Justice that will cover:

- Additional staff at Bimberi Youth Detention Centre (4-5 EFT);
- Specialist therapeutic services for young people already in the justice system;
- A community based mobile intensive support service; and,
- Targeted support with a brokerage component.

The Youth Coalition looks forward to working with the ACT Government around the development and implementation of these activities. We note there is significant work to be done in the area of youth justice, and anticipate the need for further investment in future actions to be identified under the Blueprint.

Early Intervention and Prevention

One of the financial objectives and key measures of the ACT Government's fiscal strategy is:

- To make targeted investments to achieve strategic objectives of economic growth, reducing future costs and addressing chronic disadvantage.²

In the submission to the 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget the Youth Coalition called on the ACT Government to resource the development of an early intervention and prevention framework that encompasses a whole of government approach to strategies and funding, and engages the broader community, including the child, youth, family support; health and education sectors.

Addressing the root causes of social disadvantage and vulnerability is a clear policy goal, both locally and nationally, and a common desire in the community service sector.

The need for greater recognition and intervention with young people early in the life of any problem, as well as the life of the young person, is clearly articulated in the National Youth Strategy, 2010³. However, many ACT services report that they often do not have the capacity and resources to work with young people and their families intensively at an early stage. This includes working specifically with children and young people at risk of coming to the attention of the youth justice system, experiencing homelessness, or disengaging from education, to 'turn off the tap'. It can also be seen as support offered early in the life of problem, for example, at first point of contact with police.

The Youth Coalition believes the Budget measures do not invest enough in early intervention and prevention for the most vulnerable young people and families in our

² 2012-13 Budget Paper No.3

³ Office for Youth (2010) National Youth Strategy, Australian Government, Canberra.

community. We are disappointed that no additional funding has been allocated to these vital community-based services.

Until we prioritise funding support for families prior to statutory involvement, we will see continuing pressure on consecutive budgets to allocate money to crisis responses.

Other Initiatives

The 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget contains a number of initiatives that will have a positive impact for young Canberrans. In addition to funding identified for Care and Protection Services and initiatives under the Youth Justice Blueprint, the Youth Coalition, the peak body for youth affairs in the Territory, welcomes:

- \$2 million for additional dwellings to address social housing needs;
- \$3.2 million over four years for the CIT Year 12 program and the Disabilities Support Area for students with complex needs;
- \$150,000 over three years for low-cost counseling and coordination of existing volunteer services provided by A Gender Agenda;
- \$485,000 over three years to build upon the Heart Foundation's Active Living Program;
- \$300,000 over three years for an annual Nightrider service for five weeks during the Christmas and New Year period;
- \$900,000 over three years to Street Law Outreach Legal Service for the Homeless; and,
- \$1.1 million over two years to extend the AMC Throughcare model beyond the end of an offender's custodial sentence with the aim of reducing their risk of re-offending.



MEDIA RELEASE

5 June 2012

Initial Response to 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget

The Youth Coalition of the ACT, the peak body for youth affairs and young people aged 12 – 25, acknowledges additional funding for child protection and youth justice in today's 2012 – 2013 ACT Budget. However, Budget measures do not invest enough in early intervention and prevention for the most vulnerable young people and families in our community.

'The objectives of the ACT Budget include targeted investments to reduce future costs and address chronic disadvantage,' said Director Emma Robertson. 'We were looking for investment in community services to support young people and their families, which has not occurred.'

Last week the Youth Coalition and Families ACT, the peak for family support services, urgently called on the ACT Government to allocate further funding to the newly established Children, Youth, and Family Services Program (CYFSP). The CYFSP funds a range of community-based services to support vulnerable children, young people and families to prevent them from becoming involved with Care and Protection and Youth Justice.

'We are disappointed that no additional funding has been allocated to these vital community-based services. The youth and family sector is already stretched. Until we prioritise funding support for families prior to statutory involvement, we will see continuing pressure on consecutive budgets to allocate money to crisis responses.'

Funding in the ACT Budget to support vulnerable children and young people includes:

- \$15.4 million over four years towards Care and Protection;
- \$5.3 million over four years for recruitment and retention of frontline Care and Protection staff;
- \$0.6 million over three years towards strengthening Care and Protection Services;
- \$5.5 million for initiatives in Youth Justice including:
 - Additional staff at Bimberi Youth Detention Centre;
 - Specialist therapeutic services for young people already in the justice system;
 - A community based mobile intensive support service; and,
 - Targeted support with a brokerage component.

For further comment please contact Emma Robertson on 0422 665 469



MEDIA RELEASE

6 June 2012

Some Good News for Young People, More Needed

The ACT Budget 2012-13 contains a number of initiatives that will have a positive impact for young Canberrans. In addition to funding identified for Care and Protection Services and initiatives under the Youth Justice Blueprint, the Youth Coalition, the peak body for youth affairs in the Territory, welcomes:

- \$2 million for additional dwellings to address social housing needs;
- \$3.2 million over four years for the CIT Year 12 program and the Disabilities Support Area for students with complex needs;
- \$150,000 over three years for low-cost counseling and coordination of existing volunteer services provided by A Gender Agenda;
- \$485,000 over three years to build upon the Heart Foundation's Active Living Program;
- \$300,000 over three years for an annual Nightrider service for five weeks during the Christmas and New Year period;
- \$900,000 over three years to Street Law Outreach Legal Service for the Homeless; and,
- \$1.1 million over two years to extend the AMC Throughcare model beyond the end of an offender's custodial sentence with the aim of reducing their risk of re-offending.

However many young people will continue to do it tough in the ACT, with issues such as housing affordability and homelessness, educational disengagement, and access to support services affecting their participation in the ACT community.

'More needs to be done in the area of affordable housing and access to private rental accommodation,' said Director Emma Robertson. 'Young people continue to be priced out of housing in the ACT. We need programs and initiatives that recognise the further disadvantage added by youth wages and income support levels.'

The Youth Coalition was disappointed at the lack of funding allocated to initiatives to support vulnerable young Canberrans to effectively engage with education, in particular within schools. Educational engagement plays a major part in keeping young people connected to their community, engaged in learning and social and emotional development.

The Youth Coalition continues to be concerned that demand for community services support is greater than capacity. This is particularly concerning for youth and family services when considering the continuing trend of increase in Child Protection and Child Concern Reports, and number of Community Youth Justice clients.

For further comment please contact Emma Robertson on 0422 665 469