



ACT Government

Helping Canberrans break the poverty cycle

Embargoed until 1 May

The 2001-2002 ACT Budget will provide practical assistance to alleviate poverty in the ACT as well as supporting further research into disadvantage, ACT Chief Minister and Community Affairs Minister Gary Humphries said.

"Most people think of Canberra as an affluent society with little or no disadvantage. This is not the case," Mr Humphries said.

"The recently released reports of the ACT Poverty Task Group found that approximately 25,000 people in Canberra are affected by poverty and provided us with a greater understanding about poverty in Canberra and advice about ways we can address it."

The figures are based on the Henderson Half Average Poverty Line, which is \$457.76 weekly income for a single income couple with two children.

"Canberrans are more likely to fall under the poverty line if they are unemployed, unskilled, have a mental or physical disability or illness or other disadvantage. With this budget the Government will attempt to allow everyone to share the benefits of living in the Canberra community," Mr Humphries said.

"There are no easy solutions for many community issues like disadvantage and poverty, and while the ACT Government has a major role to play in addressing poverty, it cannot tackle the issue on its own. Great outcomes can only be achieved when the Government, the community sector and the broader community work together."

Mr Humphries said the Territory's strong economic position enables the Government to place an even greater focus on the needs of the community, in particular those of people who are most in need.

"A coordinated range of initiatives across the budget provide practical assistance to people in need. This is a fully integrated package of programs, aimed at strengthening the Canberra community.

"For example, money invested in innovation will create employment – and having an appropriately paid job is the best way to lift someone out of poverty. Similarly, early intervention initiatives are likely to have an enormous impact on the social wellbeing of people under the poverty line."

Mr Humphries pointed out that the ACT Government already provides a wide range of community services to assist people in need. These range from public housing, to health services, educational assistance and transport concessions.

"The 2001-2002 ACT Budget continues to support these programs, while providing additional funding for initiatives to specifically address poverty in Canberra and to do further research into

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disadvantage in the community. We are committing **\$450,000 over four years, with \$150,000 in the first year**, into undertaking research into the level of unmet need for community services.”

Initiatives in the 2001-2002 Budget to provide practical support include:

- \$2 million over four years to **extend public transport concessions** to include people who hold a Health Care Card ‘Low Income’ (providing assistance with travel costs for around 5000 Canberrans), and to support enhancement of the **Taxi Subsidy Scheme** (particularly helping people in wheelchairs to ensure they are not placed at an increased risk of poverty through a lack of transport).
- \$18.7 million over four years, with \$5.53m in the first year, to provide **free bus services for school children**. Free travel will be provided on school term days to and from school. \$7.98m will also be provided over four years to acquire new buses that will be required to meet the anticipated increase in demand.
- \$2.63 million on programs over four years, with \$500,000 in 2001-2002, to help redress the **‘digital divide’** between the information rich and the information poor. Key digital divide issues include low income, gender and age, access to computers, different language and cultural backgrounds, education and disability. The program will provide a package of measures to address priority areas, and will respond to the findings of the Digital Divide Taskforce.
- \$2.07m over four years, with \$500,000 in the first year, to **provide assistance to residents in public housing**. The program will link residents to employment programs and opportunities, as well as assisting with living skills such as parenting, family, computer skills and school tuition. It will link residents to clinical services such as community nursing and mental health, as well as support and advocacy services such as debt management, drug and alcohol services.
- \$400,000 over four years for **scholarships to the CIT** to enable financially disadvantaged students, including Indigenous students, to undertake studies. The scholarships will include both new and continuing students.
- \$839,000 over four years, with \$206,000 in 2001-2002, to establish a program to **support students at risk of early school leaving**, to improve transitions between education, employment and training activities for young people.
- \$498,000 over four years with \$120,000 in the first year for **home-based outreach for young people with special needs** to support young people aged 12-25 years with a mental illness, substance abuse problem, disability or behavioural problem to assist in their independence and wellbeing in the community.
- \$100,000 for developing a **demographic profile of the ACT’s multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities** to ensure the ACT Government has reliable and consistent data to better tailor services to Indigenous people and the multicultural community.
- \$642,000 over four years, with \$155,000 in the first year, for **integrated community based psycho/social rehabilitation** and early intervention services. The program will provide a community based partnership between the ACT Mental Health Service and Belconnen Community Services Inc. The program will support people who suffer from or who are at risk of suffering from mental illness, and is aimed at enhancing their participation in community activities to improve mental health.
- \$685,000 in 2001-02 for **crisis accommodation and management** (in addition to \$838,000 from the Commonwealth Government) to meet the increased costs associated with the

introduction of the SACS award, and enable service providers to maintain quality service provision at current service delivery levels.

- \$1.152m over four years, with \$240,000 in the first year, for providing short-term crisis accommodation for people at risk of homelessness, people with a mental illness or drug-related problem or who are intoxicated.
- \$2.576 million over four years, with \$1 million in 2001-2002, to **reduce dental service waiting times** for elective dental restorative treatment or for dentures. The program will support access to elective dental treatment within a reasonable time for the vulnerable members of the community.
- \$3.29 million over four years, with \$1.5 million in the first year, for developing a range of options, including **to meet the needs of older people immediately after discharge from hospital**. The program will fill a gap in the provision of health and support services for older people in the ACT.

Statement ends

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