



ACT Government

2003-2004 BUDGET

BUDGET ENHANCES ACT COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES

The Stanhope Government has announced a range of measures in the 2003/04 Budget to ensure ACT residents can continue to access quality community services and facilities.

The Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Bill Wood said the initiatives target students, pensioners, people in wheelchairs and human service workers and facilities.

Mr Wood said the Student Transport Program would be enhanced to meet the increased demand and costs of the service.

“The Government has a commitment to provide free school bus transport to families on low incomes,” Mr Wood said.

“Since the program commenced, there has been a considerable increase in the number of students eligible for free transport, as well as an increase in the cost of the School Term Ticket.

“An extra \$40,000 has been allocated in the Budget to meet the additional overheads.

“The Government would also extend the funding of free bus travel for students from families who have relocated as a result of the January 2003 bushfires.

“Some 200 students are accessing the Bush Fire Relief School Transport Scheme and this service will be extended for the remainder of the school year at a cost of \$22,000.”

Mr Wood said the Stanhope Government will provide an economic incentive for the drivers of Wheelchair Accessible Taxis (WAT) to encourage them to give priority to people in wheelchairs.

“A \$7.50 lift fee will be introduced to compensate drivers for the time cost associated with loading and unloading wheelchair customers.

“There are currently 17,000 wheelchair accessible taxi hirings by wheelchair customers per annum.

“It is anticipated that this initiative - provided at a cost of \$661,000 over four years - will cut waiting times, as well as improve the viability of WAT service and its ability to attract and retain drivers.”



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Inquiries: Tim Benson 6205 0300 or 0402 900 402

Mr Wood said \$245,000 in 2003/04, rising to \$262,000 in 2006/07, has been allocated in the Budget to compensate for price increases in the cost of electricity. This will ensure that electricity costs for ACT residents currently in receipt of an electricity rebate will continue to be maintained at their existing levels.

The Government has moved to ensure Canberra's essential community facilities are adequately maintained by allocating \$1.3 million over four years to the care and improvement of building infrastructure.

Mr Wood said his Department was responsible for 39 community facilities comprising community and neighbourhood centres and halls valued at some \$31 million.

"It is essential that these facilities are maintained to the best possible standard," Mr Wood said.

"Accordingly, the Government has increased capital funding for minor new works from \$263,000 in 2002/03, to \$415,000 in 2003/04. Annual repairs and maintenance funding will also increase from \$359,000 in 2003/04 to \$516,000 from 2004/05.

"The assets range in age from near new to approximately 80 years and are managed by community-based organisations through a five-year sublease with the Department.

"The funding will assist in meeting current building and safety standards, energy efficiency, and accommodation and comfort levels.

"Most of these facilities operate seven days a week and up to 16 hours a day, catering for a wide range of community activities. The funding boost will ensure that repairs and maintenance regimes are in accord to acceptable industry standards."

Mr Wood said that the Budget provides essential financial assistance to the community services sector by allowing it to apply the AIRC Living Wage Case decision to employees.

"The Budget allocation of \$1.92 million over four years is another example of the Government's commitment to provide wage justice to community service workers.

"The 2003/04 Budget continues the Stanhope Government's commitment to accessible quality community services and facilities for all Canberrans," Mr Wood said.

Statement ends