



ACT Government

ACT families: the building blocks of our community

Embargoed until 1 May

The 2001-2002 ACT Budget provides considerable extra support for Canberra families, ACT Chief Minister and Community Affairs Minister Gary Humphries said.

"The family unit is the basic building block of our community – with strong, supportive families we can continue to build a strong society," Mr Humphries said.

"Families play a major role in providing a supportive environment for children, in caring for older people and in assisting others. This Budget helps assure Canberra families, in turn, get the support they need.

"There are more than 75,000 families in the ACT, and this number is expected to rise to 104,100 by 2021. Changes in society over the last decade have made significant changes to the traditional family.

"More couples are choosing not to have children, with the number of families without children projected to increase dramatically, from 25,600 in 1996 to 41,700 in 2021. Those choosing to have children are having them later in life and having fewer children.

"In more and more cases, both parents are working while their children are young. One-parent families are also expected to increase, from 12,800 in 1996 to 17,800 in 2021.

"All of these changes means families have changing needs. The ACT Government's economic and employment policies already support families' economic well-being, with our concentration on planning Canberra's future and building a sustainable industry base. In addition, the Government provides and maintains urban parks, sports and cultural activities and a full range of community services like childhood immunisation that assist families, particularly those with young children.

"Further, the Government works closely with the community sector to provide assistance to families with special needs, including parent support programs, advocacy, information and referral services, financial counselling, alternative education and through providing practical support and emergency welfare assistance.

The Chief Minister said the 2001-2002 budget builds on this support to provide even greater assistance to ACT families. Assistance for all Canberra families includes:

- \$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. \$7.98m will also be provided over four years to acquire new buses to meet an anticipated increase in demand.
- foregoing **\$10 million revenue a year**, to reduce the cost to Canberra families of car registration by \$58.

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- continuing development of a **Life Balance policy** for the ACT Public Service, recognising the need to support employees in balancing their work, family and other commitments.
- \$832,000 over four years, with \$220,000 in 2001-2002, for a **Parenting Services in Gungahlin** initiative to support young families living in the Gungahlin area. This will include providing extra clinical space and enhancing child health services through co-location and partnerships with other services.

Other initiatives to specifically help families with particular needs include:

- \$905,000 over the next four years for the next four years for a **Young Carers' Package** to provide assistance to young people who are caring for sick or disabled parents or relatives. It will assist with their education by providing additional tuition, school materials, counselling and in-home support.
- \$412,000 over four years with \$100,000 in the first year for **Sudden Infant Death Syndrome** support. It will provide family support, a safe sleeping education program, training for peer support emergency volunteers and an expansion of the existing bereavement support program.
- \$4 million over two years, with \$950,000 in the first year, to provide an **additional childcare facility in Gungahlin, and another elsewhere following an assessment of need.**
- \$939,000 over four years, with \$165,000 in the first year, for an early intervention program for **families with adolescents** that are experiencing family conflict or dealing with issues like substance abuse. The program will include high intensity family mediation and counselling and the capacity for ongoing follow-up to manage and prevent the escalation of family crisis.
- \$414,000 over four years, with \$100,000 in the first year, for the Smith Family's **Learning for Life program**, which assists children from low income families to complete their education. The program provides a financial scholarship and access to a support worker.
- \$2.22 million over four years with \$537,000 in the first year, for a coordinated and strategic approach to **managing family violence** in the ACT. This program has been developed through two pilot phases since 1998. It has resulted in changes to the management of family violence incidents, including a strongly interventionist police response, the creation of a specialised family violence prosecutor and the establishment of the perpetrator education program with fast tracking through the DPP, Courts and other agencies.
- \$336,000 over four years, with \$82,000 in 2001-2002, for an **Alcohol and Drug Family Skills Based Program for Parents**. This initiative supports families and friends of those affected by alcohol and other drugs. The program will provide for the implementation, in the ACT, of the NSW Family Drug Support Stepping-Stones skills based program.
- \$1.45 million over four years, with \$351,000 in 2001-2002 for early intervention to **prevent family breakdown, child abuse and neglect**. This initiative will strengthen measures for the protection of children, and take an early intervention approach to prevent family breakdown, child abuse and neglect.

- \$307,000 over four years with \$75,000 in 2001-2002 for a **Youth Connection Family Support** initiative, providing counselling and support services to some of the most at risk families in the ACT. The program will provide a specialised family counselling service for 60 at-risk families.
- \$200,000 over four years for a **conflict resolution service**, to enhance the wellbeing of families in the ACT, especially in their homes, by providing a mediation service to resolve neighbourhood disputes. The service will build on a trial project undertaken in Tuggeranong in 2000.

Mr Humphries said these initiatives build on the continuing programs announced last year, which include:

- **The Child and Youth Nutrition Program:** promoting healthy nutrition through the provision of school-based nutrition education and food skill development activities and the improvement of family eating habits.
- **Good Beginnings – Parents as Teachers:** a program empowering parents to give their children the best possible start in life through providing an early childhood parent education and family support program.
- **Healthy Families – Complex Need Project:** designed to address child health, family wellbeing and participation in the community, with a focus on home and community support for mothers and babies with complex or special needs.
- **Schools as Communities Program:** endeavoring to strengthen the family and community as a whole through the provision of strategic projects and partnership building between schools, families, community groups and business.

Statement ends

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