



ACT Government

BUDGET 2006-2007

MEDIA RELEASE

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AN INVESTMENT IN EDUCATION, PUBLIC SAFETY AND HEALTH

The single-largest capital investment in ACT schools since self-government, funding for 60 new police officers and a range of new health programs and hospital equipment are the most significant initiatives of the 2006-07 ACT Budget, Chief Minister and Treasurer Jon Stanhope said today.

Other key initiatives include a \$10.4 million investment to reduce waiting lists for elective surgery and funding for new firefighters and emergency equipment.

Mr Stanhope said public schools would receive a record level of support in the 2006-07 ACT Budget.

“We will provide the largest injection of capital funding for our schools in the history of self-government, with \$90 million to be spent on upgrading school infrastructure over the next four years,” he said.

“It is already well documented that Canberra's students receive the best education in the nation. These upgrades will ensure that schools can provide the best possible learning environments for their students. The exteriors of schools and their grounds, as well as facilities such as science and computer labs and kitchens, will receive extensive upgrades.

“To ensure that these upgrades are maintained over time, an additional \$3 million in recurrent funding has been allocated from 2008-09.”

Other education initiatives in the Budget include:

- \$67 million for new schools, including \$45 million for the new school in West Belconnen, \$21 million for a new primary and pre-school in Gungahlin East, and \$1 million to conduct a feasibility study into a joint college and Canberra Institute of Technology campus in Gungahlin; and
- \$20 million over four years to provide state-of-the-art information technology in ACT schools.

Mr Stanhope said the 2006-07 Budget provided significant funds to increase the number of police officers, firefighters and emergency services volunteers in the ACT.

“The Budget provides funding for an additional 60 police officers, addressing a key area of community concern,” he said.

“The staffing level for the ACT Fire Brigade will be brought up to its optimum level for the first time in 15 years. Funding has been allocated for two recruit colleges in 2006-07, which will bring the number of firefighters in the Fire Brigade up to 335 — an increase of more than 30.

“Funding has also been provided to train and equip an extra 50 volunteer firefighters and 80 SES volunteers, in recognition of the vital contribution volunteers make to emergency services in the ACT.”

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Other emergency services' initiatives in the 2006-07 Budget include:

- \$3 million to purchase a number of new emergency response vehicles, including an Aerial Fire Fighting Appliance, a Heavy Fire Rescue Pumper, two Intensive Care Ambulances, a Super Heavy Tanker and a Lighting Tower Vehicle;
- \$700,000 to carry out upgrades at ambulance and fire stations and ACT Rural Fire Service and SES volunteer sheds; and
- almost \$5.3 million over the next four years to continue the Government's bushfire fuel reduction program across the ACT.

Mr Stanhope said the 2006-07 Budget continued the Government's commitment to further improve the ACT's health system.

"We have allocated \$10.4 million over four years to cut waiting lists for elective surgery and to increase the number of elective surgery procedures performed each year in the ACT. This funding will focus particularly on the type of surgery where patients are experiencing the longest waits — orthopaedics, urology, gynaecology, ear, nose and throat and neurosurgery," he said.

A further \$8.15 million will be invested over four years to improve the Territory's mental health system.

"We have allocated almost \$5 million over four years to increase the number of specialist mental health providers — including consumer and carer positions — and to provide supported accommodation for young people with serious mental illnesses," Mr Stanhope said.

"This new accommodation addresses a shortage of suitable options for young people, and provides an alternative to acute admission.

"A further \$3.15 million will be provided to promote mental health, and to focus on prevention and early intervention."

Other health initiatives in the 2006-07 Budget include:

- \$14 million over four years to ensure the accessibility of acute and community-based health care in line with identified growth in the ACT;
- more than \$29.3 million over four years to purchase, operate and maintain new Linear Accelerator machine for The Canberra Hospital's Radiation Oncology Department. A new machine will be added by 2008, with another added by 2012 to meet projected demand;
- more than \$3 million over four years to assist the ACT's participation on the National e-Health Transition Authority, allowing the secure and efficient exchange of important clinical and administrative data between healthcare professionals;
- \$440,000 to ensure staff safety by implementing the new radiation protection legislation expected to come into force in early 2007. This involves employing a specialist radiation safety professional and purchasing equipment to monitor non-ionising radiation;
- \$290,000 for equipment and increased security guard and wardperson coverage to ensure the safety of staff and patients at The Canberra Hospital; and
- \$1 million to fund a range of strategies focused on attracting and retaining health workers.

"Even in a challenging budget year, it's important that investments are made where needed. We have concentrated this year on the critical areas of health, education and public safety," Mr Stanhope said.