

## 9. BUDGET CONSULTATION

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### Introduction

In October 2003, the Government sought input from the community on the key issues for consideration in the 2004-05 Budget. This was followed by the release of a Budget consultation document, which provided an overview of the Territory's financial position to aid the discussion and debate on budget issues and priorities.

The Government also invited Standing Committees of the Legislative Assembly to participate in the consultation process. This offer was not accepted.

Sixty-two budget submissions were received by the ACT Government from a range of community, business, sporting, union and environmental groups.

### Headline Issues for Consideration

#### *Investing in People*

The general focus of the community related to **improving the quality of education, training, early childhood development and the promotion of healthy lifestyles.**

To improve the quality of education, the community requested funding to appoint additional staff, retain existing staff and provide further training to teachers. Requests were received for additional funding to reduce class sizes in Kindergarten to Year 3 in the non-government sector. In government schools, requests were received for additional funding to reduce class sizes in schools serving disadvantaged communities, for Years 4-6 and for high schools.

The community recommended the investment of new money in early childhood development programs, in the provision of support services for the carers of children, for the provision of offline programs within mainstream schools for students who cannot pursue their education in traditional programs and to expand and diversify alternative settings for students with severe behavioural difficulties.

The community called for improved mentoring programs for Indigenous Canberrans through the establishment of leadership training for indigenous college students and for an increase in the number of teachers to support Indigenous students.

There were requests for additional training for teachers in the techniques of defusing potentially violent confrontations and in identifying mental health conditions of students.

Teachers unions called for better remuneration of relief staff, more teacher classifications, and minimum levels of executive teachers. Other unions called for pay increase, increased pay points and increments, and career development arrangements.

The community proposed the establishment of a model to allow for teacher to transfer between TAFE and schools and the implementation of the 2002 Australian Education Union/ Canberra Institute of Technology Casual Teachers' Agreement.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative to enhance the quality of education in government and non-government schools and increase service levels to meet the access and participation needs of a growing number of students with highly complex needs;
- an initiative to support the conversion of casual teaching positions in the CIT workforce to contract and permanent teaching positions;
- for an expanded autism assessment program to provide intensive parent education and training programs to assist parents better understand autism and support their children;
- for greater support for people with disabilities with high and complex needs;
- extending the eligibility for membership of the ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme to include children under the age of 16;
- increased support to Indigenous students in government schools to enhance their engagement with learning and retention at school; and
- the provision of Indigenous Traineeships within Environment ACT to provide opportunities for Indigenous people to develop skills in land and natural resource management.

In addition the government considers that the community's concerns will be addressed by:

- ongoing funding from the 2003-04 budget provided to non-government schools for Kindergarten and Year 1-3;
- existing programs to reduce class sizes specifically targeted at classes from Kindergarten to Year 3;
- curriculum initiatives to provide comprehensive professional learning programs for primary schools in the Health and Physical Education Learning area;
- the continuation of professional and development opportunities for teaching and support staff in managing and teaching students with challenging behaviours or additional needs;
- the continued support of the Parents as Teachers program to provide individual support for parents in early years through home visits and groups sessions;
- existing initiatives to extend childcare centres to create 77 places in 6 centres by late 2004;
- continuation of training for early childhood educators in creative and innovative programs for children; and
- the opening of the Gungahlin Children's Centre, which provides an additional 90 childcare places.

The Government has also provided funding within the Appropriation Bill 2003-2004 (No.3) for:

- an initiative to establish two new child and family centres;

- an initiative to conduct a review of the child protection system in the ACT to determine the need for early intervention and support strategies;
- an initiative to allow for an immediate response to dramatically increased demand for intervention and support services in child protection; and
- for wage negotiations across clerical staff, teachers, police, nurses, and visiting medical officers.

Other general requests focussed on **increased funding to improve health, housing and education programs.**

Many of the submissions called for the ACT Government to invest more in social housing and to increase the supply of affordable housing by implementing the recommendations of the Affordable Housing Task Force. In addition, the community asked for the continued support of residential tenancies to ensure that vulnerable tenants gain access to suitable accommodation.

To maintain the quality of health services, the community requested a wider variety of mental health facilities, greater general practitioner services, counselling, and funding of new positions for outreach workers. The community also called for increased funding to undertake education on Type 1 and Type 2 diabetes targeted at children with diabetes, carers of diabetics and those in high risk groups.

Additional funding was sought for community-based programs to address long-term unemployment, underemployment and problem gambling. To respond effectively to the needs of young people, submissions requested a rigorous qualitative and quantitative evaluation of youth services and support for an expanded Suicide Intervention Project and additional funding for the 24-Hour Crisis Line.

The community called for an increase in the number of operational front-line police as well as the development of alternatives to custodial sentences, to keep people out of goal.

To protect community infrastructure, submissions proposed the establishment of an interest subsidy scheme to help schools and other community groups carry out building and maintenance work. The community also called for the rejuvenation of the Weston Creek region following the January 2003 bushfire.

The business community called on the Government to use debt financing to fund major public infrastructure to improve economic opportunities and enhance the prosperity and liveability of our urban areas. They also recommended the reduction of stamp duty on commercial conveyances.

The community requested the allocation of land and other facilities to Indigenous groups to develop cultural, recreational and healing centres across Canberra.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an increase in the supply of social housing to address issues of housing and rental affordability;
- an update to the Home Buyers Concession Scheme for low income earners;

- a reduction in land tax payable for residential properties;
- support for of aged people to remain at home and prevent inappropriate or early admission to nursing homes;
- a Social Plan initiative consisting of a Community Events Program; Community Engagement Initiative; Community Sector Funding Reform Initiative; Community Networking Grants Program; and renewal of community infrastructure and facilities
- an initiative to increase access to elective surgery and improve the management of emergency general surgery;
- an initiative to increase access to elective joint and eye surgery;
- expansion of renal dialysis services in the ACT;
- an initiative to improve access and increase services in the intensive care unit at The Canberra Hospital;
- additional community nursing and allied health staff;
- the establishment of a long-term program for people with dual disabilities and complex behavioural problems;
- continued operation of the Residential Aged Care Liaison Nurse;
- additional funding to cover the increasing cost and use of pharmaceuticals as a replacement to, or an aid in, more invasive procedures;
- an initiative to enhance general inpatient medical services at public hospitals;
- an initiative to enable the re-engagement of young men with the community and into positive relationships and pursuits;
- an initiative to further develop strategic suicide prevention strategies;
- increased support to at risk young people, including early intervention services;
- an initiative to extend the Newborn Hearing Screening Program;
- additional schools-based obesity projects and the expansion of the successful Tuckatalk in Schools Program to encourage behavioural change in children and families;
- an increase in subsidies to foster carers to ensure the provision of stable and adequate out of home care for children and young people;
- an initiative to address property crime with the provision of intensive responses to recidivist and high property offenders;
- enhanced support services for women diagnosed with breast cancer;
- the ongoing support of women's group to meet the Government's commitment to improving the status of women in the ACT;
- the ongoing support of the workers compensation hotline;
- the restructure of the Emergency Services Bureau including addressing capability deficiencies;
- an initiative to increase the number of operational front-line police;

- establishment of a dedicated unit to provide enhanced capacity to protect critical resources and create an ACT Government specific counter-terrorism policy;
- establishment of the restorative model within the criminal justice system;
- an initiative to establish a community-managed facility to provide a coordinated approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice programs;
- the provision of community based antenatal and postnatal care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their babies;
- a community development worker to assist with bushfire recovery activities in Weston Creek, Tuggeranong and rural communities of the ACT; and
- the operational requirement of a new 60 bed sub-acute facility at the Calvary Hospital Site.

In addition the government considers that the community's concerns will be addressed by:

- the 2003-04 budget allocation to expand the Rental Bonds Housing Assistance Program;
- the wide range of services and treatment options across the mental health sector and the new mental health initiatives announced in the last two budget rounds;
- the Government allocation of the 2002-03 Community Housing expansions funds to develop and provide an alternative housing model for adults with disabilities;
- existing programs including aged day care services in Belconnen, Tuggeranong, Weston Creek and the Inner South and a crisis and short term residential respite facility in Canberra;
- the provision of free general practitioner services and support for disadvantage young people at the Junction Youth Health Service at Civic;
- support provided to Diabetes Australia for the delivery of individual/ group education;
- the 2003-04 budget funding for additional accommodation for women with a mental illness together with short term respite places and outreach places;
- the existing Alcohol and Drug Program provided from the Canberra Hospital;
- Home and Community Care programs designed to reduce social isolation, such as home visiting services, aged day care centres and multicultural services;
- the establishment of a shelter for young aboriginal women, in partnership with Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service;
- the ongoing support of Lifeline to operate a gambling and financial counselling service;
- establishment of a Community Inclusion Board and Fund to assist the most vulnerable members of the community.

The government also provided funding within the Appropriation Bill 2003-2004 (No.2 and No.3) for:

- additional investment in social housing;

- an initiative to allow for an immediate and appropriate response to dramatically increase intervention and support services in child protection;
- an initiative to provide for the increased costs of contracting relief disability support workers;
- additional fire prevention crews for the summer period for rapid deployment to remote area fires;
- the recovery of the full cost of the new ACT Taxi Subsidy Scheme introduced from 1 July 2003; and
- provide funding for increased workers compensation premiums payable by Disability ACT.

Other major priorities were on **providing aged care and creating a culture of lifelong learning**. The submissions recommended increasing the range of ways and settings in which people can interact by investing in innovative models of community based learning and establishing links with educational institutions and private sector employers.

The community urged the Government to implement flexible employment options for older people, actively recruit mature people and advance employment and training for older people. The community sought funding to develop and trial personal development/self awareness courses for older people to reduce the incidence of isolation.

The community requested financial assistance to facilitate the transition of older people to more appropriate accommodation and requested further planning for new aged care facilities.

The community put forward proposals to improve the frequency and directness of ACTION bus services and the redevelopment of transport interchanges. The proposals identified a need for more flexibility in after-hours bus services and a review of school enrolments to determine the suitability of more direct bus services.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative to grow the community capacity of ageing Canberrans, fulfilling specific service gaps and promoting positive ageing;
- operational funding for the Powerhouse Glass Centre; and
- an initiative to recognise, value and promote the critical contribution of carers and their support needs.

In addition the government considers that the community's concerns will be addressed by:

- the Training and Adult Education program for improving training and employment access and opportunities for older people; and
- the programs undertaken by the ACT Public Service Human Resource Council including the review of flexible and transitional work arrangements and support to staff to enable them to make informed decisions on financial planning and retirement.

A key focus of the community was on **the establishment of a forum for examining cross-border issues in health, children's services, mental health, education, commercial trade and other services to overcome problems in service delivery.**

The community called for the ACT Government to work with the Commonwealth to develop and implement a comprehensive and adequately resourced plan to address the unmet need of older people with disabilities and work towards, the national health care and national child care reforms.

There were proposals for the Government to review the Turnaround program and the Fires Recovery Centre to deliver more flexible, holistic services that capitalise on the advantages of Government-community sector partnerships.

The business community proposed the establishment of a Commonwealth-ACT Ministerial Forum to establish a single contact point and approval process for all development projects in the ACT. They also called for the inclusion of a statement within the budget papers highlighting the key policy directions identified in the ACT Economic White Paper and the extent to which the Budget is consistent with these policy directions.

The business community also called for the Government to focus on a fiscal strategy of a balanced budget over the economic cycle. Submissions called for a reduction of taxes and for taxes to be brought into line with NSW. The business community also argued against the lowering of the Payroll Tax threshold.

Other submissions urged for greater transparency, usable budget information and the use of grant programs to encourage the development and provision of services. The community also proposed that all major statistical indicators, especially service utilisation statistics, include a gender-disaggregated component.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative to establish an ACT office of Film, Television and Digital Media to provide co-ordination, liaison, marketing and industry development initiatives for the local industry;
- an initiative to provide matching funds to the Commonwealth Government's commitment to implement the recommendations of the Report of the Contemporary Visual Arts and Craft Inquiry (the Myer Report) in the ACT;
- a study to determine the feasibility for developing work-based childcare facilities used by the ACT Government employees; and
- an initiative to provide business programs to assist businesses to start up, grow, commercialise and export.

### *Enhancing Prosperity*

The business community requested a financial commitment to **enhancing innovation through specialist business incubation strategies.** The community urged the Government to **develop partnerships with a range of research and development organisations and investigate the establishment of a National Centre for Medical Research.**

Additional funding was also requested for information, communication and technology initiatives for all schools.

The community proposed the development of a Government Outsourcing Code to encourage the involvement of local expertise, skills, services and products.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative to assist schools meet consistent system wide standards of technology availability and reliability and plan for infrastructure renewal and innovation;
- an initiative to provide the non-government school sector with a tied per capita grant, for student information and communication technology purposes;
- the provision of a safety net for school leavers, not already in post school study or training, guaranteed access to one year's post school training;
- an initiative to address the sharp increase in demand for apprenticeship and traineeship places in the ACT;
- improvements to school facilities;
- an initiative to enable the creation of a student digital passkey to permit students and their parents to securely and conveniently access a growing number of online services provided by schools and DEYFS; and
- the provision of wireless broadband connection for South Tuggeranong schools and broadband services for non-government schools.

In addition the government considers that the community's concerns will be addressed by:

- continuation of the incentive scheme for employers taking on unemployed people and apprentices in targeted skills shortage industries;
- the Roving Tutor program which provide free basic IT training to Canberrans;
- the funding for repairs and maintenance, minor new works and older schools refurbishments;
- the Information Technology Grants scheme to schools for discretionary use in upgrading computer and related equipment;
- continuation of initiatives that enable the expansion of information technology within schools, including the Laptop for Teachers program, the Schools Information Technology Capacity Upgrade in government schools and the Information Technology to Catholic Support Program; and
- initiatives to enhance outcomes for students potentially at risk of not achieving satisfactory education and training outcomes.

Generally submissions called for **transport improvements, more entertainment events and general promotions to attract major employers to Civic.**

The community called for a private public partnership for the city west re-development; the construction of the first link, Civic to Gungahlin, of Canberra's light rail system; innovation in tourism product and service delivery; and an ongoing financial commitment to a program of ACT international trade promotion.

There were requests for the refitting and refurbishment of the National Convention Centre and the establishment of a process for bidding on appropriate business events that can be hosted in Canberra.

There were calls for ongoing funding to enable the ACT to compete aggressively in the domestic tourism marketplace and in international campaigns. To ensure increase visitation during Floriade, the community asked for an expansion of events, and the development of innovative new displays. Requests were also received to start the Federation Line tourist tramway project. Other submissions asked for continued support for the Australian Science Festival and the Exhibition Park in Canberra.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- for expanded tourism development programs;
- a review of the ACT's planning and land administration system to significantly simplify the system and streamline approval processes;
- additional horticultural, cleaning and asset maintenance services for the city;
- an initiative to implement the Canberra Spatial Plan; and
- an additional 10 express bus services from selected outlying suburbs at peak hours on weekdays, to reduce travel time.

### *Focus on Sustainability and the Environment*

Submissions received focussed on a general increase in the overall budget allocation for environment and sustainability initiatives. This comprised additional funding to raise community awareness of key environmental issue, awareness of the community's environmental obligations and the need for behavioural changes with respect to water conservation, energy efficiency and transport options.

The community called for the development of a sustainable water strategy, conservation of all identified key resources and the promotion of independent research into the environmental needs of the ACT region. The community also called for enhanced waste management and further research into managing key biodiversity areas and managing threatened species in priority areas.

Additional funding was requested to implement the Greenhouse strategy and undertake energy efficiency improvements to Canberra's housing stock. Ongoing commitment was sought for weed control, feral animal control, bushfire recovery and the general restoration of parks and forests.

To encourage cycling, the community called for a commitment to amongst other things increase investment for road safety advertising campaigns and development of a new ACT cycling map.

The Government has considered the community's concerns and responded to these concerns by providing within the Budget:

- an initiative to enhance the role of the Office of Sustainability including assistance on specific sustainability initiatives such as water, transport and large infrastructure projects;
- funding for community engagement and support program aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the residential sector;
- an initiative to provide better catchment management measures to overcome the problems caused by the January 2003 bushfires;
- an initiative to bring together research priorities identified in the ACT threatened species Action Plans and ACT's components of national recovery plans, that are essential to conservation management and the long-term recovery of ACT threatened species, through partnerships with external research organisations;
- an initiative to address the engagement of the community in landscape renewal and revegetation from the January 2003 bushfire;
- expansion of the Community Fire Unit program by a further 20 new trailer units and the ongoing maintenance of the units; and
- commitment to the National Water Strategy.

The government also provided funding within the Appropriation Bill 2003-2004 (No2. and No.3) for:

- fire fuel reduction measures including additional access trails for fire suppression, fuel reduction by removal of vegetation, control burning and increased mowing;
- the design and preliminary works associated with the first stages of reconstruction of the Cotter Precinct and the restoration and enhancement of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve;
- the implementation of water efficiency strategy measures including a pilot water audit/tune up program; revised rainwater tank, showerhead and dual flush toilet rebate programs; and development of a community information and awareness program,
- the ongoing repair and replacement of fences damaged or destroyed by the January 2003 bushfires in areas managed by Environment ACT; and
- implementation of the recommendations from the Shaping our Territory Final Report (November 2003), including the international arboretum, the Stromlo, Cotter and Tidbinbilla areas and matters such as tree replanting and water management.

## Acknowledgements

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ACT Bush Fire Council  
ACT Churches Council  
ACT Council of Social Services Inc – ‘ACTCOSS’  
ACT Council of P&C Association Inc  
ACT Disability Advisory Council  
ACT Hospice Palliative Care Society Inc  
ACT Housing Advisory – ‘HAC’  
ACT Shelter  
ACT Sport  
ACROD Ltd  
Australian Education Union - ‘AEU’  
Australian Federal Police Association – ‘AFPA’  
Association of Parents and Friends of ACT Schools Inc  
Association of Independent Schools – ‘AISACT’  
Adult Learning Australia  
Arawang Primary School P&C Association  
Conservation Council  
Community IT Advisory Group – ‘CITAG’  
Canberra Schizophrenia Fellowship - ‘CSF’  
Community Housing Canberra – ‘CHC’  
Communities at Work & Canberra Refugee Support Inc  
Catholic Education Commission  
Canberra Business Council  
Council on the Ageing (ACT) – ‘COTA’  
Coalition of Community Housing Organisations of the ACT – ‘CCHOACT’  
Canberra Rape Crisis Centre  
Deakin Traders Association  
Diabetes Australia  
Family Based Respite Care Inc. – ‘FaBRic’  
Government School Educational Council  
Isabella Neighbourhood House – ‘IPNH’  
Job, Placement, Employment and Training (‘JPET’) Multicultural Youth Service  
Lifeline Canberra Inc  
Land Development Agency  
Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs  
Ministerial Advisory Council on Ageing – ‘MACA’  
Ministerial Advisory Committee on Women  
Ministerial Advisory Committee on Non-Government Schooling  
Motor Trades Association  
Maribyrnong Primary Parents and Citizens Association  
National Council of Women of ACT Inc  
Northside Community Service Inc  
Pedal Power ACT Inc  
Postgraduate & Research Students’ Association Inc

Property Council of Australia  
Property Owners Association of the ACT Inc  
Royal Blind Society – ‘RBS’  
SupportLink Systems – ‘SLS’  
The ACT Equestrian Association  
Trades and Labour Council of the ACT Inc  
Tourism Industry Council  
Toora Women Inc.  
UNIONSACT  
Volunteering ACT Inc.  
Welhenage, Mr Jaya  
Woden Valley Community Council Inc  
Women’s Electoral Lobby ACT - ‘WEL’ ACT  
Weston Creek Community Council  
Welfare Rights & Legal Centre – Tenants’ Union  
Without Prejudice – Joint Union Common Core EBA Claim - 2004  
Youth Coalition of the ACT  
Young Women Christian Association - ‘YWCA’ of CANBERRA