



ACT Government

2003-2004 BUDGET

ACT BUDGET ENCOURAGES CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND HARMONY

Through the 2003-04 ACT Budget the Government will continue to encourage cultural and social harmony and provide essential support to the ACT's multicultural community, Chief Minister Jon Stanhope said.

A demographic profile recently released on the ACT's multicultural communities reported that there are 66,700 people living in Canberra who were born overseas, and another 63,400 who had a parent born overseas.

"My Government is working hard to ensure all Canberrans are able to participate actively in our community life and can benefit from our cultural diversity," Mr Stanhope said.

"The 2003-04 ACT Budget supports ongoing activities such as the National Multicultural Festival and the Multicultural Grants Program.

"The Multicultural Festival is a highlight of the ACT's cultural calendar, and is an affirmation of the Government's and the community's commitment to multiculturalism. The 2003 festival was one of the most successful yet and we are building on that success by providing \$310,000 for the 2004 festival.

"The Multicultural Grants Program will receive \$100,000 next financial year to provide much valued assistance to multicultural community groups for a wide range of community projects, including participation in the 2003 National Multicultural Festival.

"We are continuing the Community Language Grants Program in this budget, with \$51,000 next financial year. The program provides extra resources for community language schools, which play a vital role in passing on languages and cultural traditions, and in helping young people from diverse backgrounds to maintain their cultural identity and heritage.

"As committed in the last budget, \$103,000 will be provided in 2003-04 to continue the Multicultural Community Radio Grants Program, which supports community radio stations broadcasting programs in community languages.

"As the demographic profile found, while most migrants in Canberra are proficient in the use of English, there are still 5,300 people in Canberra who do not speak English well or at all. This initiative will help ensure Canberra's non-English speaking community receives adequate information about a broad range of important community services."

Mr Stanhope said the Government will continue to support the Work Experience and Support program for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds who are having difficulty obtaining suitable employment.

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“The program provides a mix of formal training and work experience. The percentage of people gaining paid employment following the program has increased from 60 per cent initially to 75 per cent in 2002-03,” he said.

The Chief Minister said the Budget will continue to support the work of the Office for Multicultural Affairs. Key priorities for 2003-04 include:

- developing and implementing a Multicultural Action Plan;
- finalising and implementing an anti-racism strategy;
- supporting the work of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs;
- promoting and coordinating cross-cultural awareness training for ACT Government staff;
- providing support for businesses and skilled migrants potentially wanting to settle in the ACT;
- assessing qualifications gained overseas; and
- participating in a range of community meetings, events and functions.

“Overall, this budget progresses our commitment to maintaining our rich diversity and, more importantly, to establishing and maintaining Canberra as an inclusive and welcoming community in which all our citizens have opportunities to learn, work and grow,” Mr Stanhope said.

“In these troubled times, it is more important than ever to support cultural diversity. Recent world events, such as the terrorist attack in Bali, have highlighted the critical need for us to work together as never before to maintain the harmony and understanding between all our citizens irrespective of their cultural background.”

Statement ends.