



ACT
Government

Australian
Capital Territory
Budget
2020–21



Driving Canberra's Recovery
Social Inclusion Statement

Social Inclusion Statement 2020-21

Introduction

Canberra is Australia's most inclusive city. The ACT Government is committed to ensuring that Canberra remains the most welcoming and inclusive place to live. 2020 was a difficult year for Canberra. The COVID-19 pandemic presented many challenges for our community, including the effects of social isolation for some of our most vulnerable people.

Our resilience and focus on social inclusion and wellbeing supported our community through these challenges and has positioned us to come back even stronger. However, the impacts of COVID-19 have been felt more severely by some than others, and many people are still struggling.

We will focus on ensuring all Canberrans are included in, and benefit from, the economic recovery from COVID-19, action on climate change, and ongoing investment in health, education, housing and other services to meet the community's needs.

We have an ambitious agenda to address the challenges and build on opportunities facing the ACT in the coming year. The *Parliamentary and Governing Agreement* sets out a range of priorities the Government will deliver to improve social inclusion, equality and wellbeing. This includes considering the best administrative arrangements to provide a holistic and coordinated approach to social inclusion and equality.

The ACT Wellbeing Framework, the first stage of which was released last year, will play an important part in telling the story of our progress, and how that progress is being shared and experienced by different parts of our community. The Framework will help to guide the design and implementation of policy and decision-making into the future and make sure that inclusion features in every aspect of our recovery.

The 2020-21 Budget continues our efforts to support the community through the COVID-19 recovery with several new key initiatives to provide additional investment and support in priority areas. Everyone, regardless of culture, race, gender, sexuality, age or ability will be respected, valued, heard and empowered to meet their full potential.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans

The ACT Government recognises the need for a shared and collective approach to achieving quality life outcomes for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-28 was signed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body and ACT Government in 2019. It demonstrates the shared commitment of the ACT Government and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to work together to improve life outcomes and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Canberra.

Self-determination is the underlying principle of the Agreement, which is an ongoing process of choice to ensure the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community can meet their social, cultural and economic needs.

The Government has put in place a range of supports specifically to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans throughout 2020. The 2020-21 Budget makes significant investments to continue these supports and to meet important commitments under the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 and National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Further information on these budget initiatives are outlined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Budget Statement.

Housing and Homelessness

Housing is one of the key domains of the ACT's Wellbeing Framework. There is a fundamental relationship between an individual or family's housing conditions and their wellbeing outcomes.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic the ACT Government has put in place measures to support vulnerable Canberrans with housing security and costs. In the 2020-21 Budget we are extending

a number of these support measures and delivering several new initiatives to help people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, as well as those who just need support with housing.

The Government is providing additional funding to increase OneLink's capacity to manage emergency accommodation and support Canberrans who are experiencing or are at risk of, homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Government will also extend funding for three homelessness services that have been operating in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Mackillop House for women, Winter Lodge for men, and the Axial Housing program will receive additional grant funding to ensure continued support for people experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness.

The Early Morning Centre will be extended to provide services seven days a week. This will allow the centre to open on weekend mornings to provide essential homelessness services including food, shelter, health and social services to those in need every day of the week.

Community housing is being further supported through an expansion to the number of properties that can access assistance under the Affordable Community Housing Land Tax Exemption Pilot, from 125 to 250 properties. The scheme offers landlords a land tax exemption if they rent their properties at below 75 per cent market rate through an eligible Community Housing provider. Extending the pilot scheme will support Canberrans looking for affordable rental opportunities.

The Government will extend residential tenancy relief until 30 June 2021 for residential landlords who reduce rents by at least 25 per cent for tenants who have been impacted by COVID-19. This will provide more options for landlords and tenants to maintain stable and affordable rental agreements.

The Government has also provisioned funding to undertake policy design work for a \$50 million fund to improve building efficiency and sustainability for social and public housing, low income owner-occupiers and rental properties.

Children and young people

Children and young people were amongst the hardest hit by the COVID-19 pandemic, with many reporting significant deteriorations in their mental health and wellbeing associated with social isolation, financial stress and impacts on their short and long-term prospects to work, train or study.

The Government's COVID-19 youth support package delivered a range of mental health supports for young people, as well as incentives for businesses to employ new apprentices and trainees.

The 2020-21 Budget further increases mental health supports for young Canberrans with highly complex needs who are at risk of mental illness, criminalised behaviour and substance misuse. This will include an extension of the Adolescent Mobile Outreach Service (AMOS) - a community-based mental health outreach service which provides assessment treatment for adolescents aged 12 to 18 years.

The JobTrainer Fund is being delivered by the ACT Government in 2020-21 to provide free training places for job seekers, school leavers and young people in areas of skills need or employment growth. This is part of a \$1 billion national initiative between the Commonwealth, states and territories to support individuals into employment as Australia emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Government is also increasing the number of weeks offered to priority families accessing early childhood for three-year olds, from 40 to 48 weeks per year, to make sure vulnerable children in the ACT have access to a quality early childhood education.

Women

The first half of this year saw unprecedented challenges both locally and globally, starting with the horrific bushfire season, followed by the COVID-19 pandemic. We know from the growing body of evidence that during and after crises and disasters, women are adversely affected. While data in the ACT has been slightly more promising to date, women across Australia

have experienced increased economic insecurity due to their over-representation in the casual workforce and frontline services such as education and healthcare. We know that access to secure employment is critical during times of crisis. Also, the risk, prevalence and severity of domestic and family violence increases.

The ACT Government has committed to support gender equality in our community, including addressing the impacts of COVID-19 through the Second Action Plan 2020-22.

In the 2020-21 Budget we are continuing funding to the Canberra Rape Crisis Centre and Domestic Violence Crisis Service, to provide critical supports in responding to cases of domestic and family violence.

We are also continuing to fund the Health Justice Partnerships program. This program places legal help in maternity and early childhood services across the ACT to offer early intervention and support in domestic and family violence cases, primarily to pregnant women and new families.

Further information on these budget initiatives are outlined in the Women's Budget Statement.

Multicultural community

Canberra is a diverse community and we are proud of our achievements to make this city a place where everyone feels welcome. We are committed to meeting the changing needs of Canberra's multicultural communities. More than 26 per cent of Canberrans were born overseas and one in four people speak a language other than English, with the most common languages spoken being Mandarin, Vietnamese, Cantonese and Hindi.

We are a Refugee Welcome Zone and part of the global Welcoming Cities network, and welcome migrant and multicultural communities.

The ACT Government has taken steps to ensure that temporary visa holders do not fall through the cracks in Australia's support during the pandemic, and in 2020-21 will fund the extension of the Refugee, Asylum Seeker and Humanitarian program to the end of 2020-21. This will assist asylum seekers and temporary visa holders, and meet the increased need for support that has arisen as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ACT Government's Jobs for Canberrans program directly employed hundreds of Canberra residents to undertake essential work through the pandemic, with a particular focus on hiring people who were not eligible for the Commonwealth Jobkeeper and Jobseeker programs, such as temporary visa holders.

Canberrans with disability

The ACT was the first jurisdiction to fully implement the National Disability Insurance Scheme and continues to drive for positive outcomes for people with disability living in the ACT.

People with disability faced a great range of additional and unique challenges and risks during the COVID-19 health emergency. In some cases this included increased social isolation or more severe health risks associated with COVID-19.

The ACT Government has developed a specific ACT COVID-19 Disability Strategy and Action Plan to ensure people with disability, their families, carers and the disability sector are supported through the COVID-19 health emergency and during the post-emergency transition.

The strategy includes funding across two phases of action to provide a range of supports from additional advocacy through to training for sector workers and more personal protective equipment.

LGBTIQ+

The ACT Government has taken significant action to make Canberra the most LGBTIQ+ welcoming city in the country. This is being delivered now and into the future through the Capital of Equality strategy and its action plans.

The Government is continuing to support LGBTIQ+ Canberrans through funding to community services and grants that enhance social inclusion, along with a program of legislative reforms that protect the safety and rights of people with diverse sexuality, sex and gender.

Older Canberrans

Age-Friendly Canberra: A Vision for Our City is our vision and plan to ensure that older Canberrans are 'safe, secure and free from abuse and discrimination'. The Plan focuses on practical actions that make sure older Canberrans can stay socially connected, can access services, are free from abuse and are valued and recognised.

One example is our Age-Friendly Suburbs plan, which upgrades nominated suburbs' walkways and amenities to help keep older Canberrans active and moving in their local area.

Veterans

The ACT Government is committed to supporting all in our community who have served through the Australian Defence Force. Providing a sense of belonging and recognition for veterans is part of making Canberra the most welcoming and inclusive city in Australia.

The ACT Government will continue to support Veterans through a range of programs including the Veterans Grants program and the ACT Public Service's Veterans Employment program.

Carers

Carers are highlighted in the ACT Wellbeing Framework as a group with generally lower levels of wellbeing than the population in general. Carers faced additional challenges during the COVID-19 period, including increases in loneliness and levels of psychological distress. The ACT Government will continue to support carers by progressing the 25 actions in the *Carers Action Plan* under the ACT Carers Strategy 2018-2028, including services and supports for carers; recognition and awareness; inclusion; support for young carers; and workforce and skills recognition.